

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

05/10/2022

Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**), Jeanette Thompson (**JT**) for agenda item 2, Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Ian Couper (**IC**), Emma Jellis (**EJ**), Andrew Betts (**AB**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Dee Levett (**DL**) Alice Ashbrook (**AA**), Caelan Ballard – notes (**CB**)

Circulation: Global

Chair for Meeting: Alice Ashbrook (**AA**)

1. Apologies

Debbie Hiscock

2. Licensing and Community Safety Restructure and Committee Meeting Consultation Update

Licensing & Community Safety Restructure

There is a proposed Restructure of Licensing and Community Safety, and the restructure plan has been sent to all staff who would be affected. The restructure proposal has come about following the resignation of the Community Protection Manager and has been trialled informally in the team since the Community Protection Manager left. The restructure would mean that some reporting lines are reduced. The aim of this is to increase communication efficiency within the team. This restructure proposes that the current Licensing Manager post absorbs the key requirements of the Community Protection Manager role. Therefore it is proposed that the Community Protection Manager role is deleted, and the Licensing Manager post is regraded and re-titled Licensing and Community Safety Manager.

This proposal is undergoing a normal consultation process. The individual and group consultation meetings for staff affected by the restructure took place on the 22nd of September and closes on the 24th of October.

Change to Committee Meetings' Start Times Consultation

The proposal and subsequent consultation regarding changing the start time of Committee Meetings and Town Talks has arisen following a request by councillors to change the start times of the Committee Meetings to a later time. Currently the Town Talks begin the informal meetings at 6.30pm and begin the legislative Committee Meetings at 7.30pm.

The proposal aims to increase community and public engagement by holding these meetings later in the evening, as they have not been well attended in the past.

The individual and group consultation meetings took place on the 21st of September and the consultation closes on the 24th of October.

The majority of Officers who would be affected have not been favourable to this proposal and there is concern that North Herts Council already start these evening

There was a discussion that included the potential end time of meetings and carrying out public consultation.

3. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

4. NHC update

- The consultation for a new Council Tax Reduction Scheme is underway, and the proposal has received good levels of feedback from members of the public. The consultation is due to finish soon, and then the next step will be the proposal going to Cabinet in December.
- The Inspectors report on the Local Plan came back at the beginning of September, and there will now be a special Cabinet and Council meeting in November to determine whether to adopt the Plan.
- The Budget process has begun now guided by the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy. The council is not expecting to need to make significant financial savings in this year.
- The Council is reviewing plans to regenerate Churchgate Shopping Centre now that it has been purchased.

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- There will be an update on the Pay Award later this month, or early November following the Union ballots. Our Unison Representative noted there was a fantastic turn out in the Unison ballots.
- In this month's edition of Insight, our spotlight is on 'Supporting Women in the Workplace'. The article is well-worth reading and signposts support available for all employees, as well as giving advice about how we can support female colleagues and women in our lives generally.
- We are holding a virtual kitchen event for World Menopause Day on the 18th of October. The event has been made virtual so it can be more inclusive and is accessible for staff who won't be in the office. Please join us online with a cup of tea or coffee. There will be some friendly faces there and we will be able to signpost Menopause related support, give advice, and share stories. Our Menopause Support guide can be found here: <https://intranet.north-herts.gov.uk/home/about-me/wellwork/working-health/menopause-support>
- World Mental Health Day is on the 10th of October. There will be a reminder on the staff message board of the support available, such as the Well at Work pages on our intranet, and signposting to resources such as NHC's Mental Health Support Service and our Mental Health First Aiders.

For more information about Mental Health, or to find out how to get in touch with our Mental Health First Aiders, please have a look at the pages linked here:

[Mental Health | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)

[Mental Health First Aiders | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)

5. Employee Queries

Q: Is there an update on the Council's Bulk Solar Panel Purchase Scheme?

A: We haven't got exact numbers yet but compared to the other surrounding Districts, we were leading in the number of Expressions of Interest, until St Albans overtook us.

Q: I'm aware that the amount of holiday we could carry forward into the next business year was changed due to the COVID19 lockdowns. Can you clarify how much holiday we can carry over this year?

A: At the start of the pandemic in March 2020, there was an amendment to the Working Time Regulations (WTR), which allowed additional annual leave to be carried forward due to increased workloads relating to Covid-19. This amendment covers employees until March 2023.

In addition, the Leadership Team recognise that the workload has continued to be significantly high for some teams particularly where resourcing issues have prevented individuals from taking leave and we are keen that nobody loses their leave.

Therefore, the carry forward leave arrangements are as follows:

- At the end of **March 2023**, carry forward will be limited to the lower of **148 hours** (or the pro-rata equivalent of 4 weeks for part-time staff) and the amount you carried forward in March 2022 (although if that is less than your weekly contracted hours then you can carry forward 1 week)
- At the end of **March 2024**, carry forward will be limited to the lower of **74 hours** (or the pro-rata equivalent of 2 weeks for part-time staff) and the amount you carried forward in March 2023 (although if that is less than your weekly contracted hours then you can carry forward 1 week)
- At the end of **March 2025**, the normal policy of a maximum of **37 hours** (pro-rata equivalent of 1 weeks leave for part-time staff) carry forward will apply in line with the Holiday policy.

For more information please see our intranet page explaining Holiday Entitlement and the carry-forward policy here: [Holiday Entitlement and Pay | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)

Q: Now that many employees are coming back into the office a few days a week, we have received some complaints from employees who are buying milk for their hot drinks, and say it is being used or even emptied without their permission. Could the council provide milk for employees, or post a reminder to employees?

A: We will remind staff that the Council do not provide milk so they will need to ask others before using milk from the fridges. Some employees may not realise other employees are buying the milk and bringing it in and believe the Council provide the milk.

Q: Some employees are having issues making calls with MiCollab. Now that employees are working from home more often, does the Council have any plans to provide employees with work phones to make calls with?

A: If MiCollab is not working please check your call settings within the application and make sure you are calling others using your 'DeskPhone' extension number. If issues continue log a call with the IT Helpdesk.

When MiCollab is functioning correctly there is little need for a separate work phone. Providing work phones would be cost prohibitive.

For more information on setting up and using MiCollab, please see the guides on our dedicated intranet page: [Telephones | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)

6. IT Update and Queries

- IT increased the number of Citrix servers available by 20% last month, hoping to improve the performance of the system. IT are still aware of some speed issues, particularly with the log in process and will continue to investigate these issues as well as implementing changes to improve performance of the Citrix system as a whole.
- The IT team are still identifying and fixing a few minor errors with MiCollab, as well as some program icons not appearing in the start menu in Windows.
- IT also recently conducted security penetration testing on some employee laptops, and plan to update staff with the findings later, but are very happy with the security of our laptops.
- IT are still developing the new V3 Laptop Project. The team would ideally like to test for errors and security issues in every team when V3 is implemented, and Mark Robinson will be contacting Senior Managers at a later point to ask them to nominate someone from each team who is willing to have their devices tested.
- There were some significant issues with laptop slowness last month which affected many users. Identifying the problem was quite complex and took longer than the team expected but the issue has now been fixed. Mark would like to remind employees to report issues with their laptops as they arise so that the team can identify and solve the issue more quickly for all users.
- Finally, IT are looking at how they can improve communication with users across the Council, such as setting up a text alert system or global emails, depending on the nature and severity of the problem to be addressed.

Q: There appeared to be a problem with MiCollab for a short time, where the user status was greyed out for everybody. Can you update us on this problem and whether it has been fixed?

A: This has now been fixed, and we believe the error was due to an update. If anyone else experiences problems with MiCollab please report it to the IT team via the IT Helpdesk.

7. Green Update

No Green Update for this SCF.

8. Building Services Update

We would like to remind all staff to leave meeting rooms clean after themselves as a consideration towards other employees, as we have recently had issues with old cups being left in meeting rooms and the meeting rooms being used to store belongings. After meetings, please take your cups with you and either put them in the dishwasher or wash them in the sink. Paper cups should be disposed of in the recycling bins provided.

If anyone has any issues, please email these to propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk

9. Ideas/Suggestions

None

10. AOB

None

Chair for next meeting – Andrew Betts

Have something to say?

If you have an issue that you think should be brought to the attention of the SCF, please contact any SCF representative via phone, email or in person. They will raise your issue at the next meeting. You will not be identified unless you want to be.

Issues relating to property e.g., broken lift, non-flushing toilets, etc. must always be reported to Property Services in the first instance: propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk

Alternatively, you can send any issues to the SCF inbox - SCF@north-herts.gov.uk

Representatives (and phone extension):

Christina Corr #4325 - Senior Technical Officer Revenues and Benefits

Andrew Betts #4282 - Contracts Officer Waste Management based at Buntingford

Alice Ashbrook#4235 - Assistant Licensing Officer

Louis Franklin#4262 – Admin Support Officer