

## Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

02/11/2022

**Present:** Jo Dufficy (**JD**), Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Mark Robinson (**MR**), Andrew Betts (**AB**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Brenda Downie (**BD**) Dee Levett (**DL**) Alice Ashbrook (**AA**), Caelan Ballard (**CB – notes**)

**Circulation:** Global

**Chair for Meeting:** Christina Corr (CC)

---

### 1. Apologies

Anthony Roche & Ian Couper

### 2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

#### Consultation to change the start time of Committee Meetings and Town Talks

Jeanette Thompson attended the last meeting to discuss the Consultation for changing the start times of Committee Meetings and Town Talks. This consultation has now ended and concluded with the decision **not** to go ahead with the proposed change to the start times of Committee Meetings and Town Talks. Instead, some actions have been decided to increase public engagement and attendance of these meetings.

### 3. NHC and HR updates

#### **NHC Update**

- There has been an update to our SCF Staff Representatives; Emma Jellis will sadly no longer be a staff rep. We thank Emma for her contribution to the group over the years and welcome Claire Bernard who Emma has kindly nominated in her place.
- There will be an Extraordinary Cabinet Meeting this evening (Wednesday the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November) in relation to the local plan. This evening the Inspector's Report from September will be presented. The final version of the Local Plan will also be requested so that it can be presented to Council for the recommendation for it to be adopted.
- At another recent Extraordinary Cabinet Meeting, it was agreed by Waste Management that the Council will move to purple bin collections every 3 weeks, as part of the Service Change in 2025. This change will avoid an increase in costs and honour the Council's commitment to the Climate Change Emergency.
- The Consultation for the Council Tax Reduction (CTR) Scheme for 2023/24 has now closed, with just under 500 responses. The vast majority of respondents were in favour of the proposed changes to the scheme. The Council's CTR Scheme reduces the amount of council tax a person must pay if they are eligible for CTR. Since 2013 the Council has been required to set a local CTR Scheme, which has not changed very much. This year however, the Council is proposing to move to a banded scheme which will award a discount based on the household income – making the scheme fairer,



especially for those with a lower income. It will also be easier for the Council to administer. The proposal will go to Cabinet in December for recommendation to Council in January.

- Staff will have received a Pay Award update yesterday, on Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> November, via email. We are happy to confirm that the Pay Award has been agreed as a flat rate pay increase of £1,925 on each pay point. HR is in the process of putting this through payroll, and once we have confirmation on when this will be run, it will be announced globally to staff.
- Now that our Values have been refreshed, you will see the new graphics both online and around the Council Offices. Our values underpin processes such as RPR's and the Staff Recognition Scheme.
- The way we treat Covid-19 sickness absence will shortly be updated. In 2020 the LGA issued guidance to Councils to discount Covid-19 absences from absence management procedures, which the Council has been doing until now. The LGA withdrew that guidance in early 2022 and therefore, from November, Covid-19 absences will no longer be discounted from our Attendance Procedure.

**Q:** Do we have the figures for how many staff members have been off with Covid in 2022, and for how many days?

**A:** These figures can be provided to the group on request.

**Q:** Will the implementation of this new Covid Absence process disadvantage staff who cannot work from home in their roles, like Civil Enforcement Officers for example?

**A:** The attendance procedure has clear trigger points, but the manager has discretion on what action to take when the procedure is triggered. The attendance procedure will be applied on a case-by-case basis, and managers will receive HR advice to ensure fairness and consistency.

### **Wellbeing Update**

- We held a Menopause Virtual Kitchen event in mid-October, which was well attended. Due to the engagement, we are looking to repeat this at a later point. We have also updated our intranet pages giving information and advice about the Menopause.
- This month's edition of Insight will be released soon, and we have an article in that about Men's Health with various support signposted.
- Wednesday the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2022 is Stress Awareness Day, and there is a lot of various support signposted on the intranet for recognising and managing stress.

## **4. Employee Queries**

**Q:** There have been a few queries as to whether there will be a change to the price limit for bikes as part of the Workplace Bikes scheme, in accordance with current inflation. Is the price limit for bikes going to be increased?



**A:** Our Workplace Bikes salary-exchange initiative is currently being reviewed as part of the Benefits Review. There will be some further information about updates to staff benefits at the Staff Briefing tomorrow, Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> November. We can confirm that as part of this scheme, the price limit for bikes, as well as the duration for pay-back will be increased.

**Q:** Can we expect to receive back-pay from the Pay Award in November or December's pay?

**A:** We are doing what we can to process the pay award for November's pay, but we are awaiting confirmation from our payroll provider.

**Q:** The Pay Award agreement also includes an additional day's Annual Leave. When will this additional day of Leave be added?

**A:** The additional day of annual leave will be applied when the next annual leave year begins, which will be in April 2023.

## 5. IT Update and Queries

- IT Services are currently developing a new digital strategy, recognising that the way staff are working, and the way Customers interact with the Council has changed considerably in the last few years. The new strategy hopes to further support flexible working for staff, as well as customer engagement.

**Q:** The cyber-security information and resources that were sent out to staff were really useful, as there were a lot of really simple and easy-to-follow tips on avoiding phishing, both in and out of work. Would it be possible to create a webpage on the Council's public website with information and resources about phishing and cyber-security?

**A:** It is a good idea, but there would need to be careful consideration around the advice the Council gives its customers about phishing and cyber-security, as it is a difficult subject to advise on and could potentially lead to more queries with Customer Services than it would solve. However, the Council could have a webpage signposting the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) for information and advice on cyber-security.

**Q:** In a previous SCF meeting, the cost of using Zoom versus Teams for meetings has been mentioned. Could we move these SCF meetings to Teams going forward?

**A:** If the SCF members would like to move to Teams for future meetings, that would be fine and would not be difficult to arrange. The only thing we would need to remind staff of is that they would need to ensure they join these meetings outside of Citrix.

## 6. Green Update

No Green Update for this meeting.

## 7. Building Services Update

- The faulty EV charging unit is being replaced on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> of November.
- Committee Rooms 2 and 3 are now one large room, seating 24 people. You will need to book room 2 to use these two joined rooms together, as room 3 has been temporarily removed from the bookings list. Bookings for room 3 will not be accepted.

If anyone has any issues, please email these to [propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk)

**8. Ideas/Suggestions**

None

**9. AOB**

None

**Chair for next meeting – Louis Franklin**

**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](mailto:propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk)

Alternatively, you can send any issues to the SCF inbox - [SCF@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:SCF@north-herts.gov.uk)

**Representatives (and extension):**

**Claire Bernard** #4323 - MSU team

**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