

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

11/01/2023

Present: Sarah Kingsley (**SK**), Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Andrew Betts (**AB**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Dee Levett (**DL**), Daniel Crowhurst (**DC**), Caelan Ballard – notes (**CB**)

Circulation: Global

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

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Ian Couper who was substituted by Sarah Kingsley, and from Mark Robinson who was substituted by Daniel Crowhurst.

2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

3. NHC updates

- The Consultation for a new Council Tax Reduction Scheme has now finished and received positive feedback from members of the public. The Scheme proposes to allocate the amount of Council tax payable through income bands, supporting those with the lowest incomes and stabilising the amount of tax people pay. The Scheme now awaits approval from the Council on the 31 January.
- Councillor allowances and election fees will also be decided at this meeting on 31 January.
- A report on the Churchgate Shopping Centre will also be going to Council, outlining the key stages of the Churchgate regeneration project. Plans for Churchgate have not yet been decided. An initial public consultation survey remains open until 5 February.
- Budget reports are being drafted for the Audit Committee and Cabinet Panel in January before the final budget is agreed at the Council at the end of February.
- The Finance settlement was positive, but inflation remains high and other costs also offset the settlement substantially.
- The Council is proposing an increase of Council Tax of 2.99% for 2023-2024.

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- The Workplace Bikes Scheme has been updated. Up to £5000 can now be spent on a bike, and the pay-back period has been increased to 18 months. More information and details on how to apply for the scheme can be found on the intranet: [Workplace Bikes | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)
- A Virtual Kitchen will run on 16 January providing a chance to catch reconnect with colleagues across the organisation.



- The MIND Mental Health e-learning continues to be accessible for staff on GROWzone. The e-learning provides information for staff on spotting signs of poor mental health, as well as ways to improve their own mental wellbeing and sense of stress at work.
- Personal Development Mornings will continue to run throughout 2023, and themes will focus on the Council's Core Values. The first themed session will take place on 3 February, focusing on the 'adaptable' value. More information and resources on this Development Morning will be sent out closer to the date.
- The Service Recognition and Retirement Scheme has been updated for 2023. The details of this update have been published on the Intranet and the staff magazine, Insight. The Buffet option has been removed, and in its place the monetary value of the Service Recognition Vouchers and the number of milestones has been increased. This update follows feedback from the recent Benefits Survey. For more details on this update please see the intranet page here: [Long Service Awards | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/intranet)

Q: How will the update to the Staff Service Recognition and Retirement Scheme benefit members of staff who have worked for the Council for over 30 years?

A: The Members of staff who have worked for the Council for 30 years or more will have received their 25 Years' Service Recognition Vouchers previously. HMRC rules state awards should be 10 years apart, which is why the council has opted to celebrate the Achievement of 10, 20, 30 and 40years' service as there is more opportunity for recognition. The achievement of 5 years' service will be recognised by an increase in holiday entitlement.

Q: There have been queries raised by members of staff who passed their 20 years' service milestone just before the scheme was updated and are concerned that they will now have to wait until they have achieved 30 Years of Service before they get their next Service Recognition Voucher. Will the Council honour members of staff who have just missed out on a Service Recognition Voucher, and where will the cut-off point be?

A: It can be difficult to introduce a new scheme because there will need to be a cut-off point somewhere. Given the feedback, we are reviewing whether there is another way to fairly apply the changes. However, the scheme update is hoped to be a positive change for the majority of staff.

4. Employee Queries

Q: Where can staff find information about redundancy pay?

A: If a member of staff is at risk of redundancy, they will be invited to an individual meeting during the consultation period, at which point they are provided with an estimate of their redundancy pay. If a member of staff is concerned about being made redundant, and they want to find out an estimate of their redundancy pay before their meeting, they can contact the HR officer assigned to the consultation, or email Hrhelp.

Q: Pre-pandemic there were office etiquette rules which advised that snacks and fruit are acceptable for staff to eat at their desks, but main meals and hot food should not be eaten at

desks within an open-plan office. Can staff be reminded that this rule still applies, and that hot food should be consumed elsewhere?

A: Yes, this office etiquette rule does still apply, and staff are advised to be considerate of the colleagues they share their office with. Ian Couper is due to circulate a reminder to all staff about general office etiquette, such as cleaning desks after use and washing cups after use, so this issue can be raised within that reminder email.

Staff are also advised that eating lunch away from their desks will have a positive impact on their wellbeing, and that the canteen in the DCO is open to all staff to eat their lunch or to take a break.

5. IT Update and Queries

- The testing of V3 has almost completed, with several departments successfully using V3 already. The testing phase is due to complete within the next month.
- Once the testing is complete, Customer Services will be managing the laptop handover booking process and the departments who have been using V3 during the testing process will be invited to book their handover slots. Customer Services will be phoning staff to book a handover slot, so staff are advised to check their work calls.
- Handovers will take place at DCO in the IT office and are not expected to take longer than an hour. During the handover, staff will give IT their current V2 laptop and will be provided with a replacement V3 laptop. Staff will also be shown some videos outlining how to use V3.
- There are currently 41 members of staff using V3 laptops and a further 50 are booked in for a V3 handover. During the next week, an email will be sent to staff detailing the current progress of V3 implementation.
- Staff will also be invited to join drop-in sessions on Zoom and Teams for the IT department to answer any questions staff have about V3.

Q: Will any identified issues with the V3 laptops be resolved before the main staff rollout?

A: Yes, we are hoping the current testing phase will identify any issues or bugs with V3 so that they will be fixed before the main staff rollout begins. Overall, the feedback we have had so far on the V3 laptops has been very positive, but we have made some small fixes.

6. Green Update

No Green Update for this SCF.

7. Building Services Update

No Building Services updates have been raised.

If anyone has any issues, please email these to 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

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

Claire Bernard #4323 - MSU Admin Support Officer

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

Alice Ashbrook#4235 - Licensing Officer

Louis Franklin#4262 – Admin Support Officer