

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

01/02/2023

Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**), Ian Couper (**IC**), Jo Keshishian (**JK**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Alice Ashbrook (**AA**), Christina Corr (**CC**) Dee Levett (**DL**), Mark Robinson (**MR**), Caelan Ballard – notes (**CB**)

Circulation: Global

Chair for Meeting: Louis Franklin (**LF**)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Andrew Betts, and from Rebecca Webb who was substituted by Jo Keshishian.

2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

3. Community Engagement Restructure Note

- There has been a proposal to reorganise the Policy and Community Engagement teams with the aim to make the service more streamlined and efficient. The proposal includes the deletion of one Grade 8 post and the creation of an additional Assistant post at Grade 6.
- Reallocated funding from this restructure and past restructures in the Legal department would also allow the creation of a new part-time Scrutiny Officer role, as per recommendation of the peer review. If agreed, the existing Trainee Policy Officer role would be managed by the Policy Officer. The proposal has passed the initial stages of reviewal by Senior Leadership and is now under Consultation, which will close on the 16th February.

4. NHC Updates

- Budget reports went to Cabinet on January the 31st and will go to Council on the 23rd of February. The reports explain that NHC have had to stretch budgets in the past few years and there are expected to be funding cuts in future years. Government have not yet announced when they will carry out a Funding Review. This means that for now, while the reports contain some proposals for saving, there are no significant staffing implications.
- The Government have provided a funding offer to the to build/acquire additional housing for Ukrainian and Afghan refugees. However, because there were many terms and conditions involved in addition to low funding, unfortunately it has only been possible to deliver some of the target allocation. North Hertfordshire's Housing Team as well as other registered housing providers such as Settle are working hard to assist in finding options for using the funding.



- Other topics recently covered at Council include the by-elections for Hitchin North division of Hertfordshire County Council, being held on Thursday 9th of February, as well as preparation for the District elections in May.
- At the end of last year, the Government published draft proposals for the new Ward boundaries. These proposals went to Council at the end of December and agreed to uphold parts of it, while strongly disagreeing with other parts of the proposal. Public consultation on the proposed Ward boundaries has now closed. Council now awaits the Boundary Commission to return with their final proposals within the next 3 months. These final proposals will be adopted by Government and will be used by North Hertfordshire Council beginning in 2024. The Council will confirm the intended changes to staff once notified. The Elections team will potentially need to find new polling stations in accordance with new Ward boundaries.

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- The Holiday Flex application window for 2023-24 has now reopened as of Wednesday 1st of February. Staff who wish to purchase additional leave in the coming holiday year are advised to make an application this month, with managers to authorise these requests in March so that payroll deductions can be set up and split equally over 12 monthly instalments beginning in April. Further information can be found on the intranet here: [Holiday Flex: buy more annual leave | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)
- Staff are encouraged to book leave before the end of March so that leave entitlement is not lost at the end of the leave year. Further information on carry forward arrangements can be found on the intranet: [Holiday Entitlement and Pay | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)
- As previously discussed in the most recent Staff Briefing, the next Personal Development Morning is on Friday 3rd February and will focus on NHC's Core Value of 'Adaptable'.
- Teacher's Strikes are taking place throughout February and March, and we understand that some staff may need to find alternative childcare arrangements, book time off work or work from home during these strike days. A global staff email was circulated yesterday advising staff how to book time off and discuss their needs with their managers during this time.
- The HR team is preparing for a new cycle of auto-enrolment into the Local Government Pension Scheme, which last occurred in April 2020. All staff who are not already enrolled in the Pension Scheme will be automatically enrolled. Message board reminders will be posted this closer to the time.
- The GP Helpline service was also discussed in the Staff Briefing on Tuesday 31st of January and there was a Q & A session with some helpful information. Staff who would like to learn more about the service are advised to read the January Staff Briefing Minutes which will be circulated soon.

5. Employee Queries

There were no employee queries.

6. IT Update and Queries



- In 2022, IT closed over 7,199 helpdesk tickets of which over 5,000 were incidents. This averages to IT receiving around 100 helpdesk tickets a week. IT hope that the number of these helpdesk tickets and IT issues will decrease over 2023 with the implementation on V3, as many of these issues have been related to Citrix.
- 75 users have now begun using V3 laptops, and another 50 users are already scheduled for their handovers this month. It is expected that some ad-hoc handover slots will also be available during this period.
- IT are in ongoing contact with all users who now have V3 laptops and are fixing bugs and small issues where they crop up. The only issues experienced so far with V3 have been very minor.
- Currently, IT have 65 active projects, with a further 56 completed since June 2022. 16 projects have been rejected, which includes those redistributed to the wider department.

Q: Will the identified small issues with V3, particularly with Tascomi, be fixed prior to the majority of staff moving to V3?

A: Currently there have been two identified issues with Tascomi on V3, and one is related to Excel file downloading. Workarounds have been created to address this problem. The other reported issue has only been experienced by one user so far and relates to the general documents from Tascomi not opening correctly. This is being looked into and IT endeavour to get this fixed as soon as possible. Unfortunately, the issue with Excel is a vendor issue which is why the only solution so far has been a workaround. Mark Robinson has a meeting with the vendor to address the problem and will also be engaging with the Service Manager within the next weeks.

7. Green Update

No Green Update for this SCF.

8. Building Services Update

- An email is due to be circulated globally, relating to tea & coffee provisions as well as office etiquette. The reminder will discuss the cleaning of desks and eating lunch in designated areas, meeting room etiquette and washing up of dishes out of consideration for other staff.
- We also request that staff do not move tables around in meeting rooms 2 & 3 on the first floor in the DCO.

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

9. Ideas/Suggestions

Q: There is some public interest in the provision of more allotment sites, as there rarely appear to be sites with availability in the area. The provision of more allotment sites would also encourage residents to take up environmentally friendly activities and encourage biodiversity in the area. Would the Council be able to increase the provision of allotment sites in the district?

A: Unfortunately, the Heritage Foundation own most of the allotments in Letchworth, and the allotments in Baldock were handed over to an allotment association which

means the Council has little direct control over it. However, the owners of the Baldock allotment have recently been in contact with the Master Planner for the town over talks to expand the allotments.

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

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