

## Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

05/04/2023

**Present:** Anthony Roche (**AR**), Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Chris Jeffery (**CJ**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Vicky Kent (**VK**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Andrew Betts (**AB**), Dee Levett (**DL**), Mark Robinson (**MR**), Caelan Ballard – notes (**CB**)

**Circulation:** Global

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

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### 1. Call Recording Note – Chris Jeffery

From Monday 24<sup>th</sup> of April, the Customer Service Centre will begin recording outgoing calls using a system called Red Box. The Data Protection impact assessment has been signed off, and the Privacy notice on the Council website will be updated. Telephone notices will also be updated before the 24<sup>th</sup> so that customers will be aware that they are being recorded. This is an industry standard and ensures protection for the Customer Services team to deal with any issues or complaints that arise. The call recordings will also be used for enhanced quality monitoring and will be accessible by the team leaders. This notice is to ensure that all staff across the Council are aware that their call will be recorded if a member of the Customer Services team calls them, until the call is handed off or ended. Customer Services accept are accepting comments and questions about this new implementation until Wednesday the 19<sup>th</sup> of April.

**Q:** Can it be clarified whether internal calls will also be recorded?

**A:** All outgoing calls from members of the Customer Services team will be recorded. If a member of staff were to call the Customer Services team, this call would not be recorded as it did not originate from Customer Services.

**Q:** Members of staff from all over the organisation sometimes wish to speak to Unison or HR in confidence, particularly if they are experiencing a problem at work and are seeking advice. Will the call recording system prevent these conversations from being private?

**A:** Customer Services staff can request for their manager to deselect the call recordings function via the Red Box mobile workstation settings. This will stop calls from being recorded and enables staff to make confidential phone calls where it is necessary. Call recording will be switched back on after the conversation has taken place.

**Q:** If a member of staff wanted to make a private phone call to HR about a problem they were having within their team, they would need to inform their manager and request the call recording function is switched off. Will this call recording system make it unnecessarily difficult to privately speak to HR or seek advice on the phone?

**A:** It is important for the Customer Services team to be aware there are other ways of contacting HR, including through our HRhelp email inbox, which would eliminate the issue of call recording. HR are able to meet individuals face to face if they do not want their manager to be aware they are seeking support from HR. Unison can also be contacted privately through their email inbox.

## 2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Ian Couper and Debbie Hiscock.

## 3. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

## 4. NHC Update

- The next local elections will be taking place next month, with the list of candidates now published. This list of candidates is available on the modern.gov website.
- As staff will be aware, there was a fire outside the main entrance to the District Council Offices. The fire was very minor, fuelled by a wooden palette with cardboard and carpet underlay stacked on top and then doused in petrol. The fire itself was put out quickly, without any damage to the building, but the doors were blocked off while Police carried out their initial investigation. The Police investigation is ongoing, and an appeal for information will be put out with some CCTV photos of the unidentified suspect. The CCTV photos will be circulated to staff to help Police gather more information in the ongoing investigation.
- Staff must remain vigilant about the security of the DCO while the Police continue to investigate. This vigilance should include not holding the door open for people without checking their staff ID.

**Q:** In response to the fire, have security measures like new CCTV cameras been considered?

**A:** There are ongoing conversations about our existing CCTV cameras and whether there is a need for more. Currently there is a CCTV camera outside the building reception which is there to protect members of staff working in Customer Services, and CCTV cameras covering the small carpark at the rear of the DCO. The GDPR implications of having CCTV film everyone who walks past the DCO also have to be considered.

## HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- An email was circulated last week about the launch of the new employee benefits and wellbeing platform – [North Herts-Be Well](#). Staff are encouraged to register and explore the platform as there are a variety of features on offer. North Herts-Be Well includes an Employee Assistance Program, fitness videos, a recipe catalogue, as well as a mindfulness platform called [Be Calm](#). Feedback on the Be Well platform is welcome and can be directed to [hrhelp@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:hrhelp@north-herts.gov.uk).
- The new Annual Leave scheme began on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, and changes include the additional leave linked to the 2022 pay award, and some increases in leave entitlement for some grades.
- iTrent is currently experiencing some glitches where holiday balances and annual leave bookings are not displaying correctly. Our payroll provider is aware of this and are working on resolving these errors as soon as possible. Staff will be notified when an update is available.



- There was also a reminder in the latest edition of Insight focusing on Regular Performance Reviews (RPR's). Traditionally, appraisal meetings would have been carried out around April every year, but RPR's can happen at any point during the year and discussion around RPR's should be ongoing and covered in one-to-one meetings between staff and their line manager.
- The next Personal Development Morning will take place on Friday the 14<sup>th</sup> of April with the focus being our organisational value 'Together'. An informal tea and cake morning will take place on the first-floor meeting rooms 1 & 2 in the DCO. Staff are encouraged to come along, have some cake, and reconnect with colleagues!

**Q:** There was recently an update email about the new Employee Assistance Program which mentioned an introductory benefit on the platform where staff are able to access 3 months of free Wellbeing Calendar Studio Sessions. If there is good staff uptake on this offer, would continuing staff access be a possibility?

**A:** Unfortunately, budgets will not allow for a continuation of these free sessions past the first 3 months. If a significant amount of feedback is received about these sessions, this staff benefit can be reconsidered but currently the budget cannot stretch any farther.

## 5. Employee Queries

**Q:** Some staff feel they fall in a gap between the two new Service Award thresholds and are unhappy with the current proposals. Is there an update available on the proposed changes to the Service Awards?

**A:** A proposal has been emailed to those that will be affected by the changes to the Service Awards and will fall in the gap between the two new service milestones. Positive feedback has been received regarding this amendment. If there are staff that wish to provide feedback, they are encouraged to reply directly to the email which details the new proposal.

**Q:** An officer had tried to sign up for the Sustainable Warmth Scheme and had an appointment with a surveyor on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January. However, the officer was still waiting on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March for an update and was asked not to chase or contact the company because they were overloaded. Is the Sustainable Warmth Initiative being successfully implemented and running as planned?

**A:** Staff are recommended to send any queries on the Sustainable Warmth Scheme to the SCF email inbox, [SCF@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:SCF@north-herts.gov.uk), so that they can be forwarded on to the appropriate officer who will be able to look into this matter and properly advise.

**Q:** Many horse-riding schools have closed down in North Hertfordshire due to the Cost-of-Living Crisis. This will unfortunately prevent many people from getting into horse-riding unless they own horses themselves. Are there any plans to support the very few riding schools which remain open?

**A:** Although there are currently no plans to finance riding schools, Central Government offer financial support for businesses, available in the form of grants and financial schemes. The riding schools will have to apply for these schemes and grants directly. The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Network and Hertfordshire County Council are also able to offer support signposting and advice on finances.



**Q:** Staff used to have access to a mindfulness app, but this has now ended after one year. Are there plans to renew the staff subscription, given how popular it was?

**A:** The new benefits and wellbeing platform, [North Herts Be Well](#), includes a mindfulness provision called [Be Calm](#), which offers very similar resources.

**Q:** Recently there was discussion around dropping full-time working hours from 37 hours per week to 35 hours per week for the same pay, which is being trialled in a study led by the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Is this something that may be considered or trialled here? If so, how will this affect staff who work part-time hours?

**A:** The 35-hour work week trial is not being currently considered at NHC. Trade Unions requested employers consider this change in the 2022 and 2023 Pay claims, but this is not something the National Employers have agreed to, and is not part of the pay offer put to the Trade Unions at this stage.

**Q:** Following the recent fire outside the DCO, can it be clarified whether there are only Fire Marshalls and First Aiders in the office on an ad-hoc basis?

**A:** The plan going forwards is that there should always be at least one Fire Marshall and First Aider in the office on any working day. There is a need to continue recruiting staff to volunteer and train to become First Aiders to ensure that there is always cover in the DCO, and so far, around 3 members of staff have newly volunteered to undergo the training. Discussions are ongoing about how methods of contacting Fire Marshalls and First Aiders can be improved, and a phone tannoy system is being considered.

## 6. IT Update and Queries

- An email was circulated this morning regarding the recent Virgin Media outages, as well as some proposals from IT which could mitigate the effect of future outages. V3 users commented that they were still able to access some programs on their laptops despite the outage, which was positive.
- The IT text alerts were able to notify staff of the outage and give an estimate for updates. Staff can sign up to receive these text alerts by logging an IT ticket on the [IT Helpdesk](#) with the subject line 'IT Text Alerts' and provide a mobile number.
- IT are also exploring other ways to contact staff in the event of an outage, including on the Microsoft Teams Global chat, or using the Gov Notify service which would not require internet connection.

## 7. Green Update

No Green Update for this SCF.

## 8. Building Services Update

- Open water containers (bottle and paper cups) have been left in the toilets on the 1st and 4th floor on a few occasions. Whoever is doing this, is asked to remove them in future. HR/ Property Services can be contacted for support with any issues.



- The Council provides sanitary items in the women's toilets with an 'honesty' box. Those using the items are reminded to add a contribution to the honesty box.
- The need for staff safety also must be reiterated, and staff must be vigilant and not let anyone inside that they do not know. The need for this policy was increased last week when the office reception was closed off and members of the public were admitted through the back door, presumed to be staff, and were then left to wander in the DCO.
- When leaving the DCO please wait for the door to shut behind you as this prevents damage to the door and prevents tailgating. When the door is pushed too hard it will stay open for a long time which is a security concern.
- If you don't recognise a member of staff coming into the office, just ask if they have ID. Checking staff ID on entering the office is acceptable, especially with the majority of staff homeworking no one is likely to know or recognise everyone.

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

## 9. Ideas/Suggestions

None

## 10. AOB

We welcome Vicky Kent as our newest SCF staff representative, and also give our grateful thanks to Mark Melliush who is retiring after 40 years of service at the Council. He will be missed, and we wish him a wonderful retirement.

## Chair for next meeting – Christina Corr

### 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 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

**Louis Franklin**#4262 – Admin Support Officer

**Vicky Kent** #4396 – Community Protection Apprentice