

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

07/06/2023

Present: Ian Couper (**IC**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Andrew Betts (**AB**), Dee Levett (**DL**), Mark Robinson (**MR**), Caelan Ballard – notes (**CB**)

Circulation: Global

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

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Anthony Roche, Rebecca Webb, and Vicky Kent.

2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

3. NHC Update

- An advert has been published in the process of recruiting an additional Service Director on an 18-month, fixed-term basis, and can be offered as a secondment. This role was created to generate capacity in the Housing, Environmental Health and Planning departments. The post went through the consultation process with those affected.
- The Local Elections which took place on the 4th of May and the Council is continuing with a joint administration continuing between Labour and the Liberal Democrats.
- Cllr Alistair Willoughby has been appointed as Executive Member for Communities and Partnership following the Local Elections, the only change to the Executive Members (Cabinet). A list of Executive Members and Deputies was published in Insight.

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- The next Inclusion Group meeting will be held next Tuesday on the 13th of June and will be focused on the Halo Collective. All are welcome to attend.
- The HR team have launched a new Job Profile document which merges Job Description and Person Specification documents into one, making the format clearer and easier to read. This new document is being introduced gradually and the new document format will be used in future Job Evaluations.
- There are two Business Partners joining the HR team, Natalie, and Bryony. The new starters will bring HR back to its full capacity since Laura left the organisation in April and Gail, the current HR Business Partner, is due to retire in July.
- All are encouraged to take part in the Personal Development Morning being held this Friday and to use the time to develop personal learning.
- This month's edition of Insight has now been published, focusing on Carer's Week 2023 exploring wellbeing guidance for carers and carer's rights at work.



- A workshop focusing on 'Building Resilience and Maintaining Confidence' will be held tomorrow, on Thursday the 8th of June 2023. Staff can enrol themselves into the workshop via GROWzone.

4. Employee Queries

Q: When the Government reformed public service pension schemes in 2014, it introduced transitional protections for older members. In December 2018 in the McCloud case, the Court of Appeal ruled that younger members of the main public service pension schemes have been discriminated against because the protections do not apply to them. Following consultation in 2020, the Government proposed to remove age discrimination from the LGPS, ensuring members would not receive a lower pension because of the reforms. The new LGPS draft regulations are due to come into effect in October 2023. How will the new regulations effect members of the pension scheme who did not receive transitional protection when the LGPS moved from final salary to career average in 2014?

A: Communication surrounding the new LGPS regulations will be published in due course, and any questions staff have about the new regulations can be answered.

Q: The bike sheds outside the DCO have recently become inaccessible due to vehicles parking in front of them. May all be reminded to please be considerate of staff who travel to work by bike, and park in a way which does not prevent access to the bike sheds?

A: An email will be circulated to remind service areas which have access to the car park that vehicles should not obstruct the bike sheds or prevent access at any time.

Q: The [Staff Discounts](#) page on the intranet states that all council staff and their partners are offered concessionary rates of 50% off all NHC Leisure Facilities, including membership prices. A normal peak membership (including unlimited gym, swim, classes, and sauna use) at North Herts Leisure Centre in Letchworth is £46 a month (totalling £552 per year), but for staff it is discounted to £23 per month (or £276 per year)

A member of staff said that they were paying £78.20 per month for a joint account with their partner, while being told this was the discounted rate for both parties at 50%. Can any light be shed on why is this happening, and can anything be done to resolve it?

A: All council staff are currently entitled to concessionary rates of 50% off NHC Leisure Facilities, which covers Hitchin Swimming Centre, Archers Health & Fitness Club, North Herts Leisure Centre, Letchworth Outdoor Pool, Fearnhill Sports Centre and Royston Leisure Centre. Partners of staff are also offered a discount for pay-as-you-use (casual use) of facilities, but not for casual fitness/gym use. This discount can be used for an employee and their partner to go swimming on a pay-as-you-use basis.

In the case of the specific instance raised at the meeting, they had been offered a discounted joint membership (i.e. cheaper than two full price memberships), but it was cheaper still to pay for one half-price membership (for the employee) and one full-price membership (for the partner). The leisure centre had identified this and offered to back-date the cheaper price.

The current partner discount will end at the end of March 2024. This will be clarified by the Leisure team who will be able to communicate the correct rates across all NHC Leisure Facilities.



Q: As of next year, the concessionary discounts for NHC Leisure Facilities will no longer apply to the partners of staff. Why is this, and will staff be notified at this time?

A: The new Leisure contract begins on the 1st of April 2024, and a decision has been made that the current concessionary discount for partners of NHC staff will cease. Staff have been notified of this through the recent Insight article, and it was raised at SCF last month. As per the update above, the partner discount does not apply to memberships, there will be no impact on regular direct debit payments from the change.

Q: As part of the Benefits review in January, the Long Service Awards were updated, aiming to increase the number of recognition milestones for service at North Herts Council. Staff are now entitled to an award for 5, 10, 20, 30 and 40 years of service, and there is no longer an award for 25 years of service. There was some concern about how this change would affect staff who had more than 20 years of service but less than 25 years of service when the scheme launched and would miss out on their 20 years' service award. HR proposed a compromise for the affected staff which would involve offering the opportunity to bring forward the 30 years of service award to the 25 years milestone instead. Has a decision been made regarding this proposal?

A: After considering the feedback received from affected staff, it has been decided that we will go ahead with the compromise (i.e., being able to bring forward the 30 years to 25 years). The concerns of staff are recognised, and while it is not a perfect solution, the update to the Long Service Award milestones has increased the number of milestones that staff can receive and should not leave anyone worse off. Furthermore, members of staff who achieved 25 years of service just before the Long Service Awards were updated will receive awards for their 25 and 30 years of service.

5. IT Update and Queries

- IT have recently been short staffed due to multiple vacancies in the department, but recruitment for these positions is underway. A job offer has been sent to one applicant following interview.
- In addition, a new 12-month, fixed-term role as an IT Helpdesk Support Officer is being opened to allow the IT department to keep up with demand.
- The new starter process is going live as of the 14th of June and will increase efficiency by combining multiple starter forms into one document. Further communication about the new starter process will be shared during the next Staff Briefing. A new leaver process is also underway.
- The V3 rollout is still progressing and is now around 50% complete, with 216 laptops switched over. IT are continuing to contact staff to have them added to the rollout as availability arises. Staff are reminded to ensure they are contactable during their work hours so that they do not miss calls from IT regarding their V3 handovers.
- IT would also like to remind staff to update their MiCollab status when they are unavailable, as many staff have had their status set as 'available' despite calls going straight to answerphone.

6. Green Update

No Green Update for this SCF.

7. Building Services & Facilities Update



- Pending consideration by Leadership Team, a survey will be launched to gather staff consensus about replacing the current drinks machine on the ground floor canteen with a new drinks machine.
- Depending on the option taken this may also provide an alternative to the request to provide milk across all fridges in the DCO. It was felt that this would generally be impractical and could lead to a lot of wastage.
- Capacity to replace the current snack vending machine will also be raised to the Leadership team in the upcoming months.

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 – 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

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

Louis Franklin#4262 – Admin Support Officer

Vicky Kent #4396 – Community Protection Apprentice