

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

05/07/2023

Present: Ian Couper (**IC**), Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Shaun Greaves (**SG**), Stephanie Blunt (**SB**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Vicky Kent (**VK**), Dee Levett (**DL**), Mark Robinson (**MR**), Caelan Ballard – notes (**CB**)

Circulation: Global

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

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Anthony Roche and Andrew Betts.

2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

3. Restructure Notices

• Conservation and Development Restructure

A proposed restructure in the Conservation and Development team is currently under consultation and will close on the 6th of July. The proposed restructure involves the creation of two new posts, including a Principal Planning Officer who would lead Enforcement and Conservation officers. The creation of this post would allow for more direct line management, as these officers currently all report directly to the Development and Conservation Manager. The proposal also includes the creation of an additional Enforcement Officer post. It is suggested that the addition of this second post would create more capacity for the Planning Enforcement team as there is currently only one Enforcement Officer. The proposed restructure has been met by staff with mostly positive feedback, including a comment that the creation of these posts could increase efficiency within the service area. However, a comment was raised during the Consultation Opening Meeting that Conservation and Enforcement are quite different and may not be best managed together.

• Strategic Planning Restructure

The Strategic Planning and Enterprise team also opened consultation for a proposed restructure on the 21st of June. The proposal includes the reduction of reporting lines to the service manager. This would be achieved through the creation of two 'teams' within Strategic Planning, who will report to the two Grade 11 Principal officers. The Grade 7-10 officers and the Planning Technician will report to one of the two Grade 11 officers. This will support the other Grade 11 Principal Officer to move from 37 hours to 24.5 working hours per week in line with an agreed Flexible Working Request. No redundancies are proposed as part of the restructure, and the proposal has received no negative feedback. The consultation period closes on the 6th of July.



4. NHC Update

- The Council is back in its usual meeting cycles after the Local Elections, having now held Cabinet Meetings and discussed annual reports.
- The Leadership team has been reviewing Essential Learning, agreeing what constitutes essential learning and reviewing where Essential Learning is not being completed by staff.
- The Leadership team have also been reviewing the Gender Pay Gap report for 2023, which has indicated positive progress compared to the Gender Pay Gap report for 2022. The Leadership team will work with the Inclusion Group to form an action plan which will allow progress to continue in closing the pay gap.
- There has been a proposal that NHC trials a meeting-free day each week on a Friday. The proposal includes staff who do not work full-time, suggesting that they can allocate an appropriate time during their working hours as a meeting-free period. The proposal also encourages staff to consider the meetings held during the rest of the week; whether a meeting is strictly necessary, if a gap can be implemented between meetings so staff can have a break from meetings, or even where meeting durations can be cut down to allow staff to prioritise other tasks. Feedback on the proposal may be sent to the SCF inbox.

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- The Holiday-Flex window will open once again in August, offering staff the ability to buy an extra week of annual leave. A reminder about the scheme will be covered in Insight. More information can be found on the intranet here: [Holiday Flex: buy more annual leave | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)
- Insight will also cover upcoming training sessions, including the next RPR briefing session, New Starter Briefing and Financial Wellbeing Sessions.

5. Employee Queries

Q: Following updates to the Long Service Awards, 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. Feedback has been mostly positive, but a few concerns have been raised about how the change will affect long-serving staff who were between Service Award thresholds before the updates were implemented. Recently, a few concerns were raised that some staff feel they have also missed out since previous updates to the Long Service Awards, as the amount given for each of these long service milestones used to be lower, and some staff were also taxed on the Awards they did receive. Can any clarification be given around these concerns?

A: The concerns recently raised affect a small number of long-serving staff, who would only have received £100 for their 25 years' service award. These awards may also have been subject to tax at the time, so these members of staff feel that they were awarded quite a small amount in comparison to the value of Long Service Awards now. The Leadership Team will look at these concerns and determine how they can be addressed.

Q: On NHC job adverts, there is a section displaying benefits available to staff working at NHC – 'Benefits at a Glance'. In a submission into the SCF inbox, a job advert posted



by another Local Authority was compared to our own, suggesting that the advert's format could be utilised to draw in more applicants. Is there anything we can incorporate from this job advert format into our own, to help NHC job adverts gain more attention?

A: While the contents of the advertised staff benefits are similar between these job adverts, there is a difference in the style of language used by the other Local Authority, which could read as warmer and more welcoming. HR intend to continue using the current list of staff benefits as they are currently advertised, but some of the language may be refined.

Q: At the JSCC meeting on Wednesday 5th July, Cllr Strong gave a useful suggestion about the use of positive language and how this can be utilised in job adverts to create more engagement. An example given was the waste post advertised recently and the social media advert for the role, which communicated essentials from the Person Specification using tick marks, however Cllr Strong asked if the current format of the job advert would necessarily attract people to click and read the job advert in full?

A: While the job advert is entirely reflective of the role, we agree that the benefits of the role should be the primary focus of the job advert, above the salary of the role, and the advert will be updated to reflect that. Going forwards, other job adverts will similarly include a primary focus on staff benefits.

Q: There seems to be a mismatch between the staff benefits listed in the 'Benefits at a Glance' section which includes about 15 staff benefits, and the full list of staff benefits on the 'Information About the Job' document included in each vacancy post, which only includes about 8 staff benefits. Is this something that could be updated to better inform applicants of the benefits they would be offered if they work for NHC?

A: Yes, this is something which will be updated, and the 'Information about the Job Document' is currently under review. Applicants should be made aware of as many staff benefits as possible at that point in the recruitment process.

Q: Following on from the Building Services updates in the last SCF meeting about the replacement of the drinks machine in the ground floor canteen, have there been any updates on this or the associated costings?

A: Much of the expected costings was discussed in the previous SCF minutes. It is currently under consideration that the drinks machine is set up on a 'free-vend' system one day per week, and users will be charged 25p per drink they make during the other 4 days of the week. Previously, the option for the drinks machine to operate entirely on a 'free-vend' system was considered, but exact cost estimates for this have been very hard to calculate as the cost would greatly depend on the amount of use. Instead, it is proposed that to begin with, the machine will run on a free-vend system one day per week, which will likely be a Wednesday.

This will be a trial period in effect and will allow the estimation of costs for the drinks machine to operate on a free-vend system throughout the week. The survey will take place once the trial period has ended and cost impacts through demand have been considered. The replacement drinks machine will be much better than the current and will provide higher quality coffee regardless.

Q: When is the next pay increase due?

A: Staff pay increases are negotiated nationally, and the next pay increase is currently unclear. The Union has been balloting strike action because the National Employers and the Unions haven't yet agreed on a percentage increase. The Union's pay claim for



2023 includes a 12.7% increase, an additional day of annual leave and a 2hr reduction of the working week. The offer then put to the Union by the National Employers was a fixed increase amount of £1,925 per pay point, as well as a 3.88% increase on pay points above the NJC pay scales. The ballot was closed on the 3rd of July, so an update should be available soon. However, when the pay increase does come through, it will be backdated to the 1st of April for everyone.

Q: The Visitor Services Assistants within the Museum are expected to wear a uniform which includes a thick polo shirt. When the air conditioning unit was broken last year, the VSA's were allowed to wear their own clothes at work due to the heat. The air conditioning unit has now been fixed and so the VSA's are not allowed to wear their own clothes again this summer. Approaching the hottest time of the year once more, could there be provision for a water cooler for the VSA's who are required to wear their uniform during the hot weather?

A: This query will be looked into with the Service Manager so that a resolution can be reached.

6. IT Update and Queries

- From time to time, IT carry out internal phishing campaigns as part of a security analysis and the results feed back to the Leadership Team. An internal phishing campaign was carried out on all 487 IT users recently, but 17 users opening the email attachment and 6 clicking on the link within the attachment.
- This would be very compromising if it was an external malicious attack, which could then cascade into a ransomware attack on the Organisation. The campaign demonstrated that users need more learning surrounding cyber security and safety, as well as a learning need surrounding the mechanisms in place for phishing emails to be reported to. All the users who opened the email attachment have been assigned training. This training will be monitored and 30 days after the training, IT will contact these users again to check if they have any other learning need regarding cyber safety to be supported.
- However, 67 users did report the phishing email which was very positive. The more often users accurately report spam and phishing messages on Outlook, the stronger and more secure the system will become by identifying spam and phishing messages through pattern, which will mean the system will then begin pulling these messages from people's mailboxes automatically.
- The internal phishing campaigns will be conducted again sporadically and will include different styles of phishing as part of the due diligence required to maintain cyber safety.
- IT are currently conducting a tablet refresh and have been contacting staff to get their tablets replaced and updated. The next wave of tablet refreshes will be next year.
- IT have also been busy contacting users about their mobile phone contracts and sim cards, with the aim to reduce the amount of technology needed to communicate at work. The implementation of the V3 laptops has meant that users can do not need to use a mobile phone to make 'soft phone' calls on MiCollab. IT are also working with Benefits to try and remove the need for a physical desk phone, the aim being to allow recordings to work through laptop audio calls. Over time, these changes will save the organisation £2000 per quarter on mobile phone contracts.
- Staff are also asked to hand in any work phones or tablets they do not use so that these devices can be reallocated.
- IT have had a new IT Helpdesk Officer join the team, and other vacant posts are being prepared for the recruitment process.



- Sadly, IT's other Application Support Officer, Indy, is leaving the organisation, so IT are working with HR to consolidate the two vacancies in the same job role. Several vacancies within the IT team have left a strain on the service which may affect service speed.

Q: Would topics like phishing and cyber security come under essential learning as part of the current review?

A: Yes, phishing, cyber security, GDPR and other topics like auditing should come under essential learning. There is potential to increase the amount of essential learning surrounding these, but currently the IT team are more focused on supporting specific training needs in these areas where they crop up during events such as internal phishing campaigns. We are also considering an annual refresher for the phishing module.

Q: There have recently been some issues with Info@Work which IT have been working to resolve. Do you have any updates on this?

A: The root cause of the current issues with Info@Work were unclear, so IT reached out to the vendor who has provided a workaround solution which has been implemented. For context, selecting the 'View' button on a file on Info@Work crashes the server for everyone. IT have implemented a fix which stops the server from crashing in this manner, but to view a file, users should instead select 'Launch'. IT are working hard to build new servers for the upgrade which is meant to be happening later this year, and looking to see if the upgrade can be accelerated forwards which will allow laptops to move to the new version of Info@Work which is currently unsupported.

Q: Are there any updates on the fixes IT is working on for Tascomi?

A: This fix is still being worked on, and since Tascomi is functional, it has not been a high priority fix, though IT is continuing work on it.

7. Green Update

No Green Update for this SCF.

8. Building Services & Facilities Update

- The women's toilets each have an honesty box with sanitary items available for anyone who wants one, however, sanitary items are continually being taken with no money left in the honesty boxes. Please ensure that if you take a sanitary item that you leave some money in the box to support this provision.

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

9. Ideas/Suggestions

Q: Inclusion Group recently covered some amendments made to Job Profiles regarding disability access, which received some really good feedback. SCF and the Inclusion Group may be a good place to get feedback after the updates to the Benefits at a Glance document, so could these updates be shared at the next meetings?

A: Yes, this can be organised.

10. 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

Louis Franklin#4262 – Admin Support Officer

Vicky Kent #4396 – Community Protection Apprentice