

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

06/09/2023

Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**), Ian Couper (**IC**), Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Vicky Kent (**VK**), Dee Levett (**DL**), Daniel Crowhurst (**DC**), Caelan Ballard – notes (**CB**)

Circulation: Global

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

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Christina Corr, and from Mark Robinson who was substituted by Daniel Crowhurst.

2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

3. NHC Update

- A consultation process is being held with Deputy Chief Officers - those who report to Service Directors, about how their pay is set. Pay will either be set by Chief Officer rules or by the Green Book rules, which determines pay for the rest of staff. The Trade Union have been made aware of these meetings.
- Meeting Free Fridays were publicised with staff which has effectively resulted in a soft-launch. We have sought feedback from Councillors. If after considering that feedback (as well as continuing to seek comments from staff), we go ahead with a formal launch then there would be an initial 6-month trial period. Any new feedback about Meeting Free Fridays is very much welcomed.

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- Details on flu vaccinations will be available in Insight and the intranet. This year, the standard process of vouchers being issued will not be followed, instead anyone who wishes to get the vaccine and is not covered by the NHS can reclaim the expense on iTrent. Winter flu vaccinations will begin in October.
- The next Personal Development Morning will be held this Friday morning and does not have a theme. Managers should have some information from Helen Bylett, and IT are also offering a bitesize training session on the morning.
- As mentioned in the Staff Briefing earlier, staff are reminded of the features available on the [North Herts- Be Well](#) platform, as well as the GP helpline. As National Suicide Prevention Day approaches, some signposting and support is available on the platform as well as on the staff intranet.

4. Employee Queries

Q: There is a list of countries the European Commission have recognised as having adequate protection for homeworking. Are staff able to work from home while temporarily staying in another country which is not on this list?

A: Queries of this matter are dealt with on a case-by-case basis, dependant on a variety of factors such as the job role, which country it is, and how long the individual plans to stay abroad for. IT restrictions and internet usage would also be factors to consider. Issues of this matter should contact hrhelp for guidance.

Q: A member of staff has been working overtime for months due to staff shortages but cannot have this change to their contract made permanent. Is there a procedure in place in which annual leave can be gifted to staff working overtime long-term?

A: There is no policy in place to support the gifting of annual leave as retribution for overtime. However, any concerns or queries about long-term overtime can be raised to HR and discussed confidentially.

Q: Physical panic buttons have been used in departments where staff regularly take calls from members of the public which can be distressing or can become verbally abusive. Would there be resources to implement a similar panic system for staff taking calls who are working from home?

A: In most instances, when receiving a verbally abusive call while working from home, staff are advised to just hang up. Managers should also be made aware of these incidents immediately via a phone call, Teams message or email. Councillors are also holding ongoing discussions about panic systems for members of staff who may encounter abusive or threatening behaviour in the community. There are systems in place to monitor and ensure the safety of staff who deal with the public while alone, such as Lone Working Risk Assessments as well as measures for specific community-based roles such as body worn cameras and systems to dial into.

Q: Is there any update on the pay increase negotiations?

A: There is no update yet, but the unions are meeting later this month, and an update is likely to follow. When any update is available it will be communicated to staff, and once an award is agreed, this will be processed by payroll as soon as possible.

5. IT Update and Queries

- The final stages of the V3 rollout have been reached with the remaining staff now booked in to receive their new laptops. The next phase of the project will be removing any remaining Citrix desktops, and the Councillor rollouts.
- IT are also looking at starting an upgrade to Windows 11.
- The IT development team have been left very short-staffed due to multiple staff leaving the organisation, so currently this team are operating on critical issues only. The recruitment process for new team members is ongoing.
- IT has had some new additions recently; a new IT Helpdesk Officer, Salman, has joined the Helpdesk team and Amber has joined Jacqui's team in IT as an Information & Asset Officer. Recruitment is open for another Helpdesk officer and an IT Helpdesk apprentice.



- The new starter form is in place on the IT helpdesk and has received positive feedback. The new form notifies all service areas needed to set up new starters, so has added some efficiency to the process.
- Managers are also reminded to give IT as much notice as possible about starters and leavers as possible. New laptops must be built, and user profiles set up for starters which takes time, and IT not being notified about leavers can leave the Council open to buying licenses they then cannot use.
- As mentioned previously, IT have worked with HR to arrange drop-in training sessions about different software packages. The first session is on Friday 8th of September and will cover OneDrive. Staff are welcome to attend.
- In the future, more of these drop-in sessions will be planned to coincide with personal development mornings.

Q: Are the drop-in sessions just virtual, or will there be opportunities to attend in person?

A: Currently these sessions are just being hosted on Teams, but if there is sufficient demand for in-person sessions this can be explored further.

6. Building Services & Facilities Update

- The new coffee machine has arrived and has now been installed! The machine also makes delicious tea and hot chocolate, and all drinks are 25p per cup. Staff are reminded to read the instructions before using the machine for the first time.
- Two office tidy-up days have been scheduled for Tuesday 26th September and Friday 29th September, aiming to clean up a lot of items that have been left in the office as well as preparing the third floor for letting. Staff are encouraged to participate in the tidy-up by filing and decluttering their team space.

Q: Have the Council received any interest in letting the third floor?

A: There has been very high interest in the space, so the Council will be moving ahead with letting the space. Due to the continued level of homeworking, the space is not really needed and letting it will generate more income and reduce the Council's carbon footprint.

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

7. Ideas/Suggestions

None

8. 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

Louis Franklin #4262 – Admin Support Officer

Vicky Kent #4396 – Community Protection Apprentice