

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

31/01/2024

Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**), Ian Couper (**IC**), Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Tiran Straughan (**TS**), Dee Levett (**DL**), Mark Robinson (**MR**), Natalie Barrett (**NB**), Bryony Weist (**BW**), Caelan Ballard – notes (**CB**)

Circulation: Global

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

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Drew Betts.

2. Restructure Notices

Legal Team Restructure

The restructure proposal follows a resignation from the Legal and Regulatory Team Manager. The new structure proposed one Legal Manager & Deputy Monitoring Officer role, and the conversion of the vacant Legal Regulatory Team Manager post to a fee earning post which would report to the Legal Manager & Deputy Monitoring Officer. The proposal went to the Leadership Team and has now commenced consultation with members of the Legal Team. The restructure aims to provide greater resilience within the team. At the end of March next year, two trainee posts will have reached the end of their training period and will revert to one qualified lawyer post. There has been no feedback from the team so far. The consultation closes on the 20th of February.

Licensing and Community Restructure

The Licensing and Community restructure proposal includes the introduction of a Licensing Team Leader in place of one of the Senior Licensing Officers and aims to streamline the flow of reporting. The structure has been trialled for the past six months and has worked well for the team, and as such, consultation for a formal restructure is underway. The restructure does not propose any new staff. Concerns have been raised regarding two posts being re-evaluated, and this feedback is being considered. There is budget to accommodate a change in grade for these roles if the re-evaluation goes ahead.

Q: Is the Licensing Team Leader role being changed from a Senior Licensing Officer going to be graded differently?

A: It has been regraded as a grade higher than the Senior Licensing Officer. It will have a slight budget impact, but staff costs can be recouped through license fees which will result in the regrading being cost-neutral to the organisation.



Q: Under the new structure, does the remaining Senior Licensing Officer deputise for the Licensing Team Leader when they are away?

A: Yes, they will deputise for the Licensing Team Leader, this has been added to the Job Profile of the Senior Licensing Officer role.

3. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

4. NHC Update

- The budget for the next financial year is currently being reviewed and set. There are likely to be difficult decisions required for the 2025/26 budget, but nothing significant for the 2024/25 budget.
- The next round of elections is coming up in May. The Democratic and Electoral Services team will be looking for election staff, so any help will be appreciated.
- Other organisational updates were covered last week in the Staff Briefing.
- Customer Services are launching the new CRM system at the end of February, and there will be drop-in sessions on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday for the next two weeks. User guides will also be published.

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- The scheme for Shared Cost Additional Voluntary Contributions (SCAVC's) has been launched, and you can find out more about the scheme on the [SharePoint page](#). Additionally, there are webinars taking place regarding the new scheme and you can find out more and [book a place on the sessions](#) on the AVC portal.
- The Health Cash Plan has also been launched and was discussed in the staff briefing last week. You can read more about this scheme on the [Health Cash Plan](#) page on The Hub.
- Pay negotiations are progressing, and a date has been set for the regional pay briefing. Further updates will come following this pay briefing.
- A staff survey is being planned and will be launched in the next couple of months. Dates will be confirmed as soon as possible, and we encourage everyone to take the opportunity to have their say.

Q: Is there a limit on the number of people that can attend each drop-in session for the new Customer Services system?

A: There is no limit on the number of people who can attend a drop-in session. The sessions will act as a walkthrough and a show-and-tell. If one-to-one walkthroughs are needed this can be arranged through their managers, but user guides will also be available.

5. Employee Queries

Q: Is there an update available on the solar panels on the roof of the DCO? Any information on if this is reducing costs, or its efficiency would be helpful.



A: The solar panels are working well and are generating electricity to the DCO. Exact figures on how much energy is being generated will be provided by the next meeting.

Q: What is the progress on plans to install green energy systems such as solar panels into Royston Swimming Pool? Has this gone ahead?

A: The upgrades were due to go ahead, but the Council has now submitted a bid for £8 Million on the Decarbonisation Fund which will provide Solar PV for all our Leisure Centres, as well as an additional Solar Thermal power system for Royston Swimming Pool and heat pumps for all the Centres. The estimated total cost of these systems will be over £10 Million. The outcome of the bid is yet to be announced but is expected to provide savings that off-set the capital cost.

Q: The homeworking expense allowance is no longer covering the cost of broadband and additional expenses incurred from working at home. Are there any plans to review this allowance?

A: This was also covered in the Staff Briefing recently after a question was raised by the Conservative Councillors at the last full Council Meeting. The homeworking allowance is provided as a contribution to cover additional costs from working at home, rather than to cover broadband or other bills specifically. Currently there are no plans to review the amount as the budget will unfortunately not allow this.

6. IT Update and Queries

- At the end of the week, Harry will sadly be leaving the IT team. After the recent rounds of recruitment, two applicants were offered roles in the department and one has accepted, so IT will welcome a new member of staff soon.
- Reports have been circulated regarding the recent power outage. The outage was caused by a problem during maintenance on an uninterruptable power supply which supplies power to the DCO, it's servers and online systems. The power supply was shorted out which unfortunately caused some damage to it. The company providing maintenance has apologised and put mitigation steps in place to avoid this happening again.
- The new versions of Teams and Outlook have been released by Microsoft. IT does not govern when the new test versions are given to users, as this is an external rollout, so users are reminded that some issues or bugs may occur in the new versions of these applications. If issues do occur when using the new versions of Teams and Outlook, users are advised to switch back to the old versions of the applications.
- Councillors will receive the first wave of the Windows 11 testing as a Councillor laptop replacement program is due to begin soon, and Windows 11 will be installed on their new laptops. A tablet replacement program has also recently begun and all Councillors with tablets have been contacted.
- IT will be in the DCO this weekend and next weekend in preparation for reworking of the Council chamber to facilitate new microphone units as well as the AV solution which is going into Room 2 on Floor 1 of the DCO. More updates will follow on both projects.



- There will be work happening on Saturday 10th of February regarding the recent power outage, and an email has been sent out regarding this. So far, no feedback has been received from Service Managers outside of coordination with Careline's work.
- EV charging point and other power installations will also be installed on the 10th to minimise disruption for staff during the week.
- As reported in global communications, an Information@Work update will be going ahead this weekend.

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.

7. Building Services & Facilities Update

Q: Despite previous discussion and several global emails reminding staff to be considerate about eating strong-smelling lunches in the open-plan office, this still seems to be an issue. Is there anything that can be done?

A: When this occurs, staff should feel confident to politely suggest a colleague eats their lunch in the canteen area. As the office is an open-plan working environment, staff should respect their colleagues.

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 – 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):



**North
Herts**

Council

Christina Corr #4325 - Senior Technical Officer Revenues and Benefits

Claire Bernard #4323 - MSU Admin Support Officer

Andrew Betts #4282 - Contracts Officer - Waste Management

Louis Franklin #4262 – Digital Services Officer

Tiranan Straughan #4842 – Housing Policy Officer