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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM
ON WEDNESDAY, 9TH OCTOBER, 2024 AT 10.00 AM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Daniel Allen (Chair), Ruth Brown (Vice-Chair), Rhona Cameron and Claire Strong*

In attendance: *Helen Bylett (Learning & Development Manager), Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Rebecca Webb (HR Services Manager) and Sjanet Wickenden (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)*

UNISON: *Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews*

Staff Consultation Forum : *Louis Franklin*

Also Present:

There were no Members of the public present.

Reina Gendle attended as an observer.

8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 35 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Val Bryant.

9 MINUTES - 12 JUNE 2024

Audio Recording – 1 minute 52 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Claire Strong seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 12 June 2024 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

10 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 26 seconds

N.B. Councillor Ruth Brown joined the Zoom meeting at 10:03.

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be recorded.
- (2) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

11 SCF MINUTES

Audio recording 3 minutes 20 seconds

The Service Director – Resources presented the item entitled ‘SCF Minutes’, alongside the Minutes from the meetings of June, July, August and September 2024 and highlighted the following:

- The Staff Consultation Forum (SCF) had been successful in recruiting new members but there were still vacancies.
- The SCF Representatives could be contacted to raise employee queries and provide feedback at future meetings.
- There had been a request for Election staff in June and this was successful.
- The minutes detailed any current and ongoing department restructures.

In response to questions from Councillor Claire Strong, the Service Director – Resources stated that an additional two standing desks were going to be installed and the usage of these could be monitored through the desk booking system.

It was confirmed that the standing desks at the Council Offices were height adjustable.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum for June, July, August and September 2024.

12 HR INFORMATION NOTE

Audio recording – 7 minutes 19 seconds

The Human Resources Services Manager presented the Information Note entitled ‘HR Update’ and highlighted the following:

- There was a new Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for recruitment and this was shown in the table at paragraph 3.2 of the report.
- There were fewer vacancies in the period April to June compared to 2023.
- There had been 3 unfilled vacancies. These were, for the Senior Environmental Health Officer, IT Helpdesk Support Officer and the Information Officer.
- Work was ongoing with the recruitment team to fill these vacancies and two of the roles had now been readvertised as career graded positions.
- There would be a launch of the National Recruitment Campaign in November which would highlight a variety of Local Authority careers. The campaign will be supported by social media adverts and would run alongside the current recruitment branding.
- Staff turnover had been below 9% since April 2024.
- Union balloting was ongoing for industrial action regarding the national pay bargaining and an update was expected in late October.
- Since 2013 there had been 81 apprentices hired, of which 35 were employed after completing their apprenticeships and 19 were still working for North Herts.
- Two graduates had commenced employment with the Council under the National Graduate scheme, and they would be rotate between 4 departments, spending 6 months in each area.
- Positive feedback had been received for the new Learning and Development systems which was launched in July and included mandatory training modules as well as bite sized learning.
- A Digital and Data Academy had been launched alongside a specialist training provider and 20 members of staff had signed up for various courses.

- The September Inclusion group discussed the inclusion-based staff survey and neurodiversity in the workplace. They also marked National Inclusion week with a webinar, personal development morning and updated E-learning tools.
- Staff absences had decreased over the summer months and HR continued to support managers and staff absent with mental health or chronic health conditions.

The Service Director – Resources provided an update on the staff survey and highlighted the following:

- Staff members had received two feedback sessions on the survey results and work was ongoing with various groups to look at the consistency of the results and any trends from comments.
- The plan was to share action plans with staff in December or January highlighting general and specific actions.
- 2% of staff had responded to the survey stating that they did not feel safe in the workplace.
- 15% of staff felt that the organisation did not care about their wellbeing.
- Work was ongoing to address the work safety concerns, however as the survey was anonymous this was not straight forward. Staff had been reminded that help was available from their managers, senior managers and through emailing HR help.
- The survey highlighted that the Leadership team were thought of as inaccessible and work had commenced on addressing this.
- There would be continued use of the intranet to increase staff awareness and inclusion.
- There were positive responses regarding the Learning and Development offered to staff, however it was highlighted that staff felt that they did not have time to access it.
- 90% of staff said they would recommend working at North Herts Council.
- Flexible working was highlighted as the best working benefit although it was acknowledged that this was not possible for all areas of Council business.
- There would be feedback at staff briefings and to the Senior Manager Group with action plans expected to be in place from around January 2025.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Rhona Cameron

In response to questions, the Human Resources Services Manager stated that:

- The turnover rate was reasonable and the rate had remained steady, other than just after Covid.
- Details of the turnover for other Local Authorities would be circulated outside of this meeting.
- The Mental Health First Aiders were part of the ongoing preventative work to assist staff before a crisis.
- Information was available on the Hub regarding occupational health and signposting to external agencies.
- The E learning modules had been updated and included spotting the early signs of mental health issues and to raise staff awareness.
- Timescales were not attached to the survey questions, if was therefore unclear if the results related to specific incidents or were from historical events.
- The survey was anonymous, and staff have been encouraged to discuss any safety concerns with their managers or the HR team.
- Public facing staff were provided with support as well as training and development tools.

- Mental health support was also available through the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).
- There should be a hand over during a notice period to ensure the continued smooth running of the department.

In response to questions, the Learning and Development Manager stated that:

- There were no figures relating to the usage of the Mental Health First Aiders, however they were in use and provided support and signposting, HR were only involved when their input was necessary.
- There were 10 Mental Health First Aiders, who had regular team meetings.
- New staff were made aware of the existence of Mental Health First Aiders.

In response to questions, the Services Director - Resources stated that:

- The survey was anonymous, details surrounding the 2% of staff who did not feel safe in the workplace had been reviewed but were also still being reviewed to identify future actions.
- The HR team supported staff when specific incidents occurred, the EAP also offered in the moment support.

The SCF Representative stated that any cases on the Portal system would turn red and be reassigned to a manager when overdue and that the Council were supporting '#servicewithrespect' which had been featured in a recent email circulated to all staff and Councillors.

13 DISCUSSION PAPER - COACHING

Audio recording – 33 minutes 18 seconds

The Learning and Development Manager presented the Discussion Paper entitled 'Coaching' and highlighted the following:

- That coaching and mentoring skills were development techniques based on the use of one-to-one discussion and used to enhance skills.
- Mentoring involved putting information and ideas into a person to increase their knowledge.
- Coaching pulled out the knowledge, skills and thoughts of an individual and provided a space to assist their progress, building confidence and improving relationships.
- Coaching was nonjudgmental and gave the individual the space to think and explore their options.
- Coaching had been established for over 10 years at North Herts Council. The in-house coaching network were qualified through the Institute of Leadership (ILM) and were required to take part in supervision and continuing professional development.
- Coaching was a key leadership and management tool used to support the performance of an organisation or individual and was an alternative to traditional training methods.
- Coaching was a development tool to support people thinking through challenges and opportunities.
- Some examples of suitable coaching situations were highlighted in the report.
- Coaching and mentoring provided a cost-effective method to enhance skills.

In response to questions from Councillor Claire Strong, the Learning and Development Manager stated that coaching was available to anyone who required it and that the Senior Leadership Team were great supporters of coaching.

RESOLVED: That the Committee commented on and noted the Discussion Paper on Coaching.

14 SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

Audio recording – 39 minutes 22 seconds

The Chair led a discussion on future topics for the Committee to consider. The following Members took part in the discussion:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Rhona Cameron
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Ruth Brown

The following points were made as part of the discussion:

- The use of the Council building compared to the staff attending would be a good topic.
- A discussion on Trade Union disputes and equal pay could be considered.
- The action plan from the staff survey could be included.
- After the discussions today, staff mental health should be considered.
- Neurodiversity would make a good discussion paper.
- Could flexible working be discussed at a future meeting.

In response to points raised in discussion, the Service Director – Resources advised that:

- The forum was specifically for HR related matters and the occupancy of the building would be better suited at a different forum.
- It was unlikely that the action plan from the staff survey would be ready for the January meeting but could be available for the March meeting.

In response to points raised in discussion, the Human Resources Manager stated that:

- An equal pay review was carried out every 3 years and was due in 2025.
- There were currently more females than males employed by the Council.
- The details of the Gender Pay Gap for 2024 would be presented to the Committee when available.

The SCF representative informed the Committee that there was currently an inclusion audit taking place.

The Chair confirmed the topics of 'Mental Health' and 'Neurodiversity in the Workplace' for the next meeting of the Committee and this was agreed with Members present.

The meeting closed at 10.48 am

Chair

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