

JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Minutes of a meeting held on 12th February, 2018.

Present: Councillor Mrs. J.E. Charles (Chairman); Councillors Mrs. P. Drake, B.T. Gray, G. John and N.C. Thomas.

Representatives of the Trade Unions: Mrs. S. Alderman (GMB), Miss. M. Canavan (NUT), Mr. G. Pappas (UNISON), Ms. L. Lancaster (NASUWT), Mrs. G. Southby (UNISON) and Mr. N. Stokes (GMB).

Officers: Mrs. A. Davies, Mr. G. Davies, Mrs. P. Ham, Mr. H. Isaac, Ms. E. Morgan and Mr. A. Unsworth.

(a) Apologies for absence -

These were received from Councillors A.D. Hampton and S.J. Griffiths.

(b) Minutes and matters arising -

AGREED - T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 16th October, 2017 be approved as a correct record.

(c) Declarations of interest -

No declarations were received.

(d) Trade Union items -

No items were received.

(e) Minutes of the Directorate Consultative Groups -

The minutes of the following Directorate Consultative Groups were received:

- Learning and Skills - 8th November, 2017
- Resources - 26th October, 2017
- Social Services - 1st November, 2017
- Social Services - 16th January, 2018
- Visible Services - 6th December, 2017.

It was subsequently

No.

AGREED - T H A T the minutes of the Directorate Consultative Group meetings be noted.

(f) Minutes of the Corporate Health and Safety Meeting -

AGREED - T H A T the minutes of the Corporate Health and Safety Meeting held on 22nd January, 2018 be noted.

(g) Dates of Future Directorate Consultative Groups -

AGREED - T H A T the following dates for Directorate Consultative Group meetings as detailed below be noted:

- Learning and Skills - 28th February, 2018
- Resources - 24th April, 2018
- Social Services - 21st February, 2018
- Visible Services - 7th February, 2018.

(h) Sickness Absence Report - April 2017 to September 2017 -

The Operational Manager (Human Resources) presented the report which provided an update on the sickness absence statistics for the six month period 1st April, 2017 to 30th September, 2017.

It was reported that the overall sickness absence rates (i.e. working time lost per full time equivalent (FTE)) over the period April 2017 to September 2017 was 4.45 total days (shifts lost) which indicated an increase in absence levels in comparison to 2016 of 3.76 days/shifts lost per FTE.

Members noted that 74% of all absence in April 2017 to September 2017 was categorised as long-term (i.e. over four weeks in duration) compared with 26% short-term absence. This showed an increase in comparison to last year where 69% of all absence was categorised as long-term compared with 31% short-term.

Stress continued to be the most common reason for sickness absence in the Council with the ratio of sickness absence relating to stress increasing from 24.1% to 28.8%.

Members were aware that in all cases of stress or anxiety, employees were automatically referred to Occupational Health for advice, offered counselling support and managers were offered training and support in completing stress risk assessments.

An Action Plan for improving the Management of Attendance was approved by Cabinet in 2015. It was advised that the momentum behind this Action Plan had been maintained over the past six months of the current financial year and an update on actions within the Plan were set out in Appendix B.

No.

The Care First Employee Assistance Programme was now fully operational having been launched on 1st June, 2016. Quarterly reports had been received and an update of the service was set out below:

- Care First Employee Assistance Programme continued to be promoted throughout the Council
- Quarter 2 (June 2017 to August 2017) of this year showed an increase in the number of face to face counselling sessions taking place and showed that the service continued to be used at a consistent level
- following promotion of other services provided by Care First, the lifestyle service for home and work had 44 users in Quarter 2 which was a significant increase on previous quarters.

Work was continuing to develop positive health and support mechanisms in line with the Acton Plan. Flu vaccinations had been offered to all employees during October/November 2017. At the time of the report, approximately 1,300 vaccinations had been administered to employees. In addition, positive health events had been planned for 2017/18. A Health Fair took place in October 2017 for employees based at the Civic Offices with a similar event being planned at the Alps Depot in the new year.

The new Managing Attendance at Work policy was implemented on 1st October, 2016 following a period of consultation and negotiation with the Council's Trade Union representatives.

Members would be aware of the importance of the new policy in reinforcing the responsibilities of all managers in the Management of Attendance, in emphasising the need to support employees who were unable to attend work but also to underline the need for both early intervention and performance management. Training and support on the new policy had been provided to all managers and this support would continue through the remainder of the financial year.

A review of the new policy was scheduled to take place with the recognised Trade Unions in December 2017. The half yearly increase in absence levels would be a consideration as part of that review along with any necessary actions taken.

Appendix D of the report provided a breakdown of the total days lost per full time equivalent for all Welsh authorities. For 2016/17 the Vale of Glamorgan Council had the third lowest absence rate (8.8 days per full time equivalent) across Wales. The average absence rate across all reporting Welsh Local Authorities was 10.3 days for 2016/17.

A Member queried whether a third recommendation could be added, which was for the sickness absence information to be reported to the relevant Scrutiny Committees on a frequent basis. This proposal was supported by the other Elected Members with the Trade Union representatives also in agreement.

Subsequently it was

No.

AGREED -

(1) T H A T the report and the half yearly sickness absence figures provided in Appendix A be noted.

(2) T H A T progress in relation to the Action Plan as attached at Appendix B, be noted.

(3) T H A T Cabinet consider the Forum's recommendation for the sickness absence figures to be reported to the relevant Scrutiny Committees on a frequent basis.

(i) 2017 Employees Survey - Initial Feedback -

The Operational Manager (Human Resources) provided the Forum with an update on the Council's Staff Engagement Strategy and initial outcomes of the Employee Staff Survey undertaken during November 2017.

It was reported that progress continued to be made in implementing the 15 supporting actions and commitments within the Staff Charter. To date some 9 out of the 15 commitments had been delivered with a further 4 making good progress. A full summary of actions against each of the 15 commitments was given at Appendix A.

Key highlights were as follows:

- the new Corporate Management Team/Staff Engagement Group had now met on a regular quarterly basis in order to review the progress of the Charter and to ensure that its aims would be reflected across all service areas
- a bi-monthly Employee Recognition Scheme was now up and running to promote the work and achievements of employees and teams
- progress had been made to improve the effectiveness of staff communication and particularly through the bi-monthly NewsNet new vehicle including questions to the MD
- efforts to improve communication with non-office based staff were a continued focus of the Communications Working Group
- the Council's new Management Development Framework had now been implemented and using the half-yearly management development sessions as a main delivery mechanism
- the Council's award winning Leadership Café was now in its third year of operation and supported by the appointment of the Council's new Organisational Development and Training Manager
- the new appraisal programme had resulted in over 95% participation rate for the first and second year of its operation
- preparations were in place for the first Annual Employee Awards evening on 8th June, 2018; this was a sponsored event and would be held in the Jenner Park function room
- the use of the Council's new Employee Assistance Programme continued to see steady growth.

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One of the main mechanisms for reviewing the effectiveness of the Staff Charter was the Annual Employee Survey.

In 2016 over 40% of the Council's workforce responded to the survey with an overall positive response rate of 71%.

In November 2017, the Employee Survey was repeated with the results being currently assessed. The initial assessment had indicated the response rates were higher (at 57%) and the overall positive response rates had increased to 74%.

A copy of summary analysis was attached at Appendix B. A full report would be shared at the next meeting of the JCF and would help shape employee engagement throughout 2018.

Having considered the report it was

AGREED - T H A T the contents of the report be noted.

(j) Reshaping Services Update -

The Head of Performance and Resources referred to the highlight report that was available on the Council's website for all staff and that was a standing item on the agenda for consideration by the JCF. It identified the number of projects that were ongoing and provided an update on each project.

Mr. Pappas of UNISON asked for an update on the Space Project. In reply, the Head of Performance and Development advised that an update would be provided at the next meeting of the Forum.

Mr. Pappas citing the recent collapse of Carillion, stated that he had concern regarding the outsourcing of the Vale Catering Services. In reply, the Director of Learning and Skills commented that the Council would not be outsourcing the service, but rather creating a Council Trading Company.

Mr. Stokes of GMB, in referring to Reshaping Services Project S16 - Building Services - Cleaning and Security Services, which had savings planned of £50,000 for 2017/18 and £100,000 for 2018/19, commented that this area did not have a budget from which money could be saved. Mr. Stokes stated that if this service area had to make savings then no one would be employed and he queried how savings would affect this service. Mr. Stokes also commented that the Council should be looking on money spent on luxuries before reducing budgets to services. In reply, the Operational Manager (Human Resources) stated that these comments would be fed back to the Change Forum. Mr. Stokes also raised that the unions were not being provided with the full details of proposals.

A Member referred to Project S1 - Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion, and raised concern that this budget was being reduced at a time when demand for the service was increasing. The Member also raised particular concern of children being

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affected in the longer term and he highlighted the impact from the reduction to the number of children supported by Educational Psychologists. The Member stated that this could lead to children experiencing problems further down the line and lead to placements out of county which were extremely expensive. In reply, the Director of Learning and Skills stated that she shared the Member's concern and that Council staff were working on the area of additional learning needs, but from the point of view of sustainability, with savings found in other areas of the Learning and Skills Directorate. The Director added that the Council did not have the level of funding to keep the service the same, so the Council had to look to change the way that this service was delivered. Furthermore, there was also a concern regarding an increase in the number of children with autism and behavioural issues, which was a growing trend across Wales and so the Council had to consider ways how to manage increased pressures. This was why the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee had highlighted the cost pressures to Cabinet, requesting that additional funding should be made available which would help avoid costly out of county placements.

In reply to a query regarding progress around community asset transfers and Town/Community Councils, the Head of Performance and Resources advised that services/assets had not been transferred because large scale budget savings had not yet been made. There would be opportunities for Town/Community Councils to provide local services or contribute to ensuring that these services continued to be provided, with each application considered on its own merits.

Subsequently, it was

AGREED - T H A T the contents of the report be noted.