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JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 29th January, 2024.

Present: Councillor S. Campbell (Chair); Councillors J.E. Charles, P. Drake, W.A. Hennessy, S.D. Perkes and N.C. Thomas.

Representatives of Trade Unions: L. Bonni (GMB), J. Davis (UNISON / Vice-Chair), G. Davies (UNISON), M. Davies (UCAC), J. Green (UNISON), G. Pappas (UNISON) and M. Morris (NASUWT).

Officers: J. Ballantine, T. Bowring, L. Boyland, M. Booker-Southard, E. Hannah, G. Jones, M. Thomas and S. Williams.

(a) Apologies For Absence –

These were received from Councillor M. Cowpe, M. Canavan (NEU), T. Dickinson, P. Ham, M. Hudson and I. McMillan.

(b) Minutes and Matters Arising –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 25th September, 2023 be approved as a correct record.

(c) Declarations of Interest –

No declarations were received.

(d) Trade Union Items –

None received at this time.

(e) Abl Network Update –

The update was presented by a representative of the Abl Network, E. Hannah, which included the following headlines:

- The network had finalised a name for the disability staff network, to be known as 'Abl'. This was the Welsh word for 'able'. It was felt that it fitted in well with the names of the other staff networks, as a 'catchy', single word name that reflected the network itself.
- Abl was working with the graphic design team on a logo at the moment.
- Abl was also working on a Staffnet 'hub' page for the network.
- Abl was open to all disabled Vale of Glamorgan Council staff in terms of its

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membership, but also sought the involvement of 'allies' as well.

- The terms of reference for the network had been established, with a focus on providing support and information, influencing and involvement in Council policy and championing disabled staff in the workplace.
- Abl had had some interest for a chair or lead of the network, but this had not resulted in any appointments so far.
- Abl will be looking to hold a meeting in February to launch the logo and Staffnet page, and to appeal for a chair/co-chair to take the network forward.
- The aim was to officially launch Abl in March this year.

Following the update, Councillor Thomas congratulated the setting up of Abl, which was much needed, and he was interested in getting more information on Abl. He also urged Elected Members to become allies and supporters of Abl too.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the Abl Network Update be noted.

(f) Diverse Staff Network Update –

The verbal update was provided by the Chair of the Diverse Staff Network, M. Booker-Southard, which included the following headlines:

- All staff were welcome to join the network and support their mission in helping the Council become an employer of choice for people from diverse communities, encourage inclusivity and have a positive impact, such as on those staff from Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority communities. Elected Members and others were also welcome to be 'allies' and support the network.
- The network intended to meet sometime following Race Equality Week (5 – 11th February 2024), which involved raising awareness and activities to help address and understand anti-racism and race equality in the workplace.
- The network met on a half termly basis.

Following the update, Councillor Thomas stated that he was an ally of the network and urged Elected Members to become allies and supporters of the Diverse Staff Network as well. The Chair of the Diverse Staff Network agreed and encouraged both Elected Members and Trade Unionists to become part of the network as allies and sources of support.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the Diverse Staff Network Update be noted.

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(g) Vale of Glamorgan LGBTQ+ Staff Network –

The presentation was given to the forum by the Chair of the Vale of Glamorgan LGBTQ+ Staff Network (known as GLAM), L. Boyland, which included the following headlines of what had been going on with the network over the last 10 months as well as going forwards:

- Mission and Objectives: including raising awareness and knowledge of LGBTQ+, and to promote diversity, equity and inclusion within the workplace. This would be done through having a positive impact in the workplace, raising visibility and awareness and to provide social opportunities for GLAM Members and offering support.
- Highlights included planned activities and event attendance at gatherings such as Pride, a refresh and update of the GLAM webpage to include further information and support, through to enhanced communication via Teams, greater collaboration both internally with other networks and externally, as well as launching a new Allyship pack for all Council members to help support members of the LGBTQ+ Community.
- In terms of future plans, the network and Council were waiting on the results of the Vale's score on the Stonewall Workplace Index, looked to grow the network's membership, sought greater partnerships with other Local Authorities on LGBTQ+ families, extended families and fostering and adoption, planning events for LGBT+ History Month, and increased inclusivity and greater collaboration with the Youth Service's "I AM ME" project.

Following the presentation, Councillor Thomas asked if the network had been in contact with Penarth Town Council concerning the proposed 'Pride in Penarth' event. It was explained that there had not been direct contact between Councillor Garson (Penarth Town Council) and GLAM. However, the Councillor had reached out to the senior LGBT+ Champion (T. Bowring) and he would be arranging a meeting between GLAM and the Councillor in the near future. The Chair of the Vale of Glamorgan LGBTQ+ Staff Network was keen to support this, which would tie into the other similar events which GLAM had been actively involved in.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the Vale of Glamorgan LGBTQ+ Staff Network update be noted.

(h) Minutes of Directorate Consultative Groups (for information) –

(i) Social Services Consultative Forum – 12th September, 2023

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Social Services Consultative Forum held on 12th September, 2023

It was subsequently

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AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Social Services Consultative Forum JCF meeting be noted.

(ii) Health and Safety Committee – 26th September 2023

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Health and Safety Committee meeting held on 26th September, 2023

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Health and Safety Committee meeting be noted.

(iii) Learning and Skills Joint Consultative Forum – 9th October, 2023

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Learning and Skills Joint Consultative Forum meeting held on 9th October, 2023

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Learning and Skills Joint Consultative Forum meeting be noted.

(iv) Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative Meeting – 1st November, 2023

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative meeting held on 1st November, 2023

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative meeting be noted.

(v) Social Services Consultative Forum – 13th November, 2023

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Social Services Consultative Forum meeting held on 13th November, 2023

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Social Services Consultative Forum meeting be noted.

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(i) Dates of Other Directorate Consultative Groups for Noting -

AGREED – T H A T the following dates for the Directorate Consultative Groups as detailed below be noted:

- (i) Social Services – 9th January, 2024.
- (ii) Visible Services and Housing – 6th December, 2023
- (iii) Social Services Health and Safety Committee – 12th December, 2023.

(j) Update on People Strategy Progress –

This verbal update was outlined to the forum by the Operational Manager Employee Services, which included the following highlights:

- A document had been developed to help inform and share the strategy with staff.
- Links had been developed between the People Strategy and the Reward Strategy.
- By developing the above synergies, this enabled staff and potential applicants to access useful information about the Council and benefits or rewards available. This would help to broadcast and promote the Council and its benefits to potential applicants for roles within the Authority.
- The Council had reached out to other organisations such as in the private sector (Admiral and Principality) to look at how they promoted their employment and benefits opportunities online.
- The Council was looking to set up discounts with local businesses for the benefit of staff. A 'pool' of local businesses who wished to participate in this benefits scheme was currently being established.
- The new look webpages concerning the benefits scheme and providing a comprehensive view of the positives for working at the Vale of Glamorgan Council, etc. would be presented to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) in late February of this year, and these would then be brought to the next meeting of JCF.

Following the update, M. Davies (UCAC) raised concerns about the current redundancy and early retirement policies for the Vale of Glamorgan Council, in relation to teaching and learning staff. Unlike other Welsh Local Authorities, the Vale of Glamorgan Council would not assist schools to help release teachers such as in cases of early retirement. Subsequently, teachers in the Vale felt they were being treated unfairly in comparison to teachers in neighbouring councils and this could be discouraging teachers to apply for jobs in the Vale. It was explained that the policies and schemes for other Authorities would be looked into in order to see what alternatives were available to the current Vale policies in place on this topic.

The Chair had recently spoken to some Council employees, who asked if the Council could look into supporting reduced Gym memberships which could benefit Council staff health and wellbeing. The Operational Manager Employee Services

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and the Health, Safety & Wellbeing Manager explained that discounts were available for gym membership, etc. at Legacy Leisure centres for Council staff. Following the Chair's suggestion, Legacy Leisure would be contacted to confirm this, and the need to publicise and provided better communications on these discounts to Council staff. Councillor Hennessy also confirmed that Council staff could get discounts at Vale leisure centres. The Chair stated that she would go back to the employees that she had spoken to in order to inform them of the discounts. Following M. Davies' (UCAC) question on whether the leisure centre discount applied to Vale teaching staff, it was confirmed that they too could claim a discount, using either their Vale of Glamorgan Council identification badge or their payslip as a form of identification.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the update on the People Strategy progress be noted.

(k) Initial Budget 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2028/29 –

This item was presented to the Forum by the Operational Manager – Accountancy, the purpose of which was to put forward the Council's budget proposals for consultation with various stakeholders, such as the Members of the JCF.

A short presentation was provided to the JCF, to accompany the report and to highlight the key areas for their consideration, including revenue budget headlines, the summary of the Vale of Glamorgan Council's five-year position (part of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2028/29), updated departmental analysis, the Council's saving proposals and summary, through to the use of reserves and the next steps in this budgetary and consultative process, leading to a final budget to be agreed by Full Council in March 2024.

The Council faced an extremely challenging budgetary cycle, due to continued inflationary and cost pressures i.e. increased demand for additional learning needs (ALN) support in schools and social care, as well as the Welsh Government Settlement and pay increase pressures. However, cost pressures had been adjusted and refined down from £38m to £21m. Areas for priority in terms of the budget and funding would be Social Care, Schools and Homelessness. Measures were being taken to ensure that the Council's finances remained sustainable and resilient i.e. remodelling Council Tax and fees and charges, as well as Tactical and Transformational savings which would need to be achieved i.e. remodelling of certain services, etc. Reserves would be used smartly and for specific areas such as Homelessness, Energy and to support Transformation.

Following the presentation, G. Pappas (UNISON) stated that the budgetary proposals reminded him of the measures taken during the period of Austerity and he did not want Council Services to undertake 'knee-jerk' restructuring and savings or cuts as had been done in 2016. Trade Unions would need to play a role in this process and consultation and the various stakeholders of the Council

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needed to work together in order to meet this challenge. The Operational Manager – Accountancy stressed that there needed to be a strong focus on Transformational work and savings, due to Tactical saving not being practicable or sustainable in the long term. This required a considered and sustainable approach by the Council, its Directorates and Services in terms of reshaping and not a knee jerk response.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the Initial Budget 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2028/29 be noted.

(I) Reshaping: The Next Phase of Transformation (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet on 18th January, 2024 was presented by the Director of Corporate Resources for the consideration of JCF concerning the next phase of the Council's transformational change programme, Reshaping.

A presentation was given to Members of the JCF, under the following headlines:

- The current context for Reshaping, including key influences around budgetary challenges, linking in with the Council's strategy (Corporate Plan) and exploring the five themes of transformation (Service Transformation, Digital, Target Operating Model, Strengthening Communities and Economic Resilience).
- Target Operating Model, which provided a bridge between the Council's Corporate Plan for 2025/30 and how the Council would operate in order to deliver this strategy.
- Service transformation, which would apply the principles from the target operating model to individual services or combinations thereof. Examples could include including greater community and third sector engagement, a review of Adult Social Care models and to revisit the council's neighbourhood and countryside approaches.
- Strengthening communities, i.e. redefining relationships with third sector, Town and Community Councils and others.
- The Council's digital approach and how this could drive innovation and efficiencies across the Council.
- Economic resilience, in utilising the Council's funding (for example, Transforming Towns, Levelling Up and Shared Prosperity) to invest to create sustainable places and good jobs.
- The delivery approach to be taken for the next phase of Reshaping (including the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Cabinet and the relevant steering groups and boards).
- Next steps: including facilitating conversations with SLT, Cabinet and the establishment of the relevant boards through to the allocation of resources and reporting arrangements in order to support this process and to produce a report to Cabinet in February 2024.

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Following the presentation, G. Pappas (UNISON) referred to the importance of culture and people as part of Reshaping in order to achieve longer lasting positive change, particularly in light of previous efforts to reshape and restructure at the Council which had not resulted in the kind of cultural change expected, with the culture and ethos in the workplace reverting back. The Director of Corporate Resources explained that previously there had been a focus on delivery of reshaping and change, but not enough emphasis on post implementation. For this round of Reshaping there would be a stronger focus on establishing more permanent cultural change. As part of this, Reshaping was very much tied into the Corporate Plan which would help to deliver outcomes for residents and Council staff. Staff surveys ensured that staff could participate in restructuring and improving the business culture of the Council as well as providing them with a sense of 'buy-in' to the process.

G. Pappas (UNISON) also stated that due to the limits on resources and resilience within the Council, it was important to break down 'silos' between services and directorates.

Councillor Thomas commented on the pressures that the Council faced in terms of its statutory obligations and services it must fulfil, i.e. Social Services and Education and having to do 'more with less' in light of insufficient funding from the Welsh and UK governments. He felt that the report did not refer to 'Invest to Save' but appreciated that the Council, although keen to implement this, would find this challenging due to budgetary constraints. It was stressed that modest but effective funding, etc. was being utilised for Invest to Save.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T Reshaping: The Next Phase of Transformation reference and appended report be noted.

(m) Cardiff and Vale Pension Fund Annual Report 2022/23 (OM/ES) –

The Cardiff and Vale Pension Fund Annual Report was presented by the Operational Manager Employee Services in order to update JCF on the progress of the Fund. Headlines included:

- Cardiff Council was the Administering Authority for the Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan Pension Fund which formed part of the national Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) for England & Wales.
- 41 other active organisations and 'Admitted Bodies' also paid into the Fund.
- The total value of the Fund decreased by 2.1% over the year with a valuation of £2.635 billion as of 31 March 2023, compared to the previous year end valuation of £2.693 billion. This was the first time the Fund had experienced a decrease in years, which was as a result of several factors, including global inflation and slow growth in China, as well as the ongoing war in Ukraine and domestic financial pressures.
- The funding level ration increased to 98% compared to the previous level of 96%, which was an impressive increase for a pension fund.

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- A significant amount of the Fund's assets was pooled into the Wales Pension Partnership (WPP), which included the pension funds of the other Welsh Local Authorities. This helped to manage the investments more effectively, and this collective approach helped during a time of economic uncertainty and volatility.
- There was a drive to move more of the pension funding into low carbon investments.

Following the update, Councillor Thomas commented that unfortunately the key drivers and influences on the Fund came from external sources outside the JCF and the Council's control.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the Cardiff and Vale Pension Fund Annual Report 2022/23 be noted.

(n) Date of Next Meeting –

AGREED – T H A T the date of the next Joint Consultative Forum meeting would be confirmed by the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer and disseminated to Members of the Forum at the earliest opportunity.