

# West Suffolk Joint Staff Consultative Panel

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **West Suffolk Joint Staff Consultative Panel** held  
on  
**Monday 25 September 2017** at **3.00 pm** in **GFR-14, West Suffolk House,**  
Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

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| <b>Present:</b> | <u>St Edmundsbury<br/>Borough Council</u><br>(Employers' Side)<br>Cllr Bob Cockle | <u>Forest Heath District<br/>Council</u><br>(Employers' Side)<br>Cllr Ruth Bowman J.P.<br>Cllr Rona Burt<br>Cllr Stephen Edwards | <u>Staff Representatives</u><br>(Employees' Side)<br><br>Lizzi Cocker<br>Mark Johnson |
|-----------------|---|--|---|

**Substitutes  
attending:** Cllr Carol Bull

## 42. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor's Clive Springett and Patricia Warby (St Edmundsbury Borough Council – Employers' Side) and Claire McKenna, Jane Orton and Julie Roberts (Staff Representatives – Employees' Side).

## 43. **Substitutes**

Councillor Carol Bull attended the meeting as substitute for Councillor Clive Springett (St Edmundsbury Borough Council – Employers' Side).

## 44. **Election of Chairman for 2017/2018**

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Rona Burt be elected as Chairman of the West Suffolk Joint Staff Consultative Panel for the year 2017/2018.

45. **Appointment of Vice-Chairman for 2017/2018**

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED:

That Mark Johnson be appointed Vice-Chairman of the West Suffolk Joint Staff Consultative Panel for the year 2017/2018.

46. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2017 were accepted as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

47. **Apprenticeship Strategy**

The Panel received a presentation from the Assistant Director (HR, Legal and Democratic Services) which provided an outline of what had been achieved to date with the Council's apprenticeship programme. The presentation included case studies on the success of West Suffolk apprentices as well as information related to the amount of apprentices who went on to secure permanent employment with the Council and those that moved on to other employment or further education.

The Assistant Director then went on to explain how the introduction of the Apprentice Levy would have an impact on the Council's approach to apprenticeships. Organisations who pay a bill of more than £3 million per annum would no longer receive funding from the Government to pay for apprenticeship training, instead a levy of 0.5% (reduced by an annual allowance of £15,000) would be deducted from each Council monthly by HMRC and placed in a digital account. The money held in each Council's digital account would be available to take back and pay for training fees within 18 months and any money not spent within this time frame would no longer be available for use. However, in any month where training fees exceeded the digital funds the government could pay 90% of the overspend if the Council could pay the remaining 10%. Details of the anticipated Levy payments for St Edmundsbury Borough Council and Forest Heath District Council for the year 2016/2017 were outlined on page 10, Appendix A.

The Panel held a discussion related to the apprenticeship pay scheme as well as the support apprentices received from the organisation to which the Assistant Director responded to. Mark Johnson, Chairman of Unison, informed members that the union had an agreement with the Council that outlined the support they could provide to apprentices as well as expectations related to apprentice pay. The Chairman of Unison explained that he felt the agreement should be reviewed to take into consideration recent changes to the Council's apprenticeship programme.

In response to Members' questions relating to the future of the Council's apprenticeship programme, the Assistant Director explained that under the new Levy scheme the Council could offer degree level apprenticeships and had recently recruited one apprentice to a post of that level. The Panel were

also informed that other members of staff would continue to have the opportunity to take an apprenticeship.

There being no decision required, the Panel noted the report.

**48. Employer Pledge 'Time to Change'**

The Service Manager (Human Resources) presented Report No: JSP/JT/17/004 which informed the Panel of the Time to Change Employer Pledge for mental health that the Council, in conjunction with Unison, had signed and committed to on 13 September 2017. The Time to Change Employer Pledge had been led by Mind and Rethink Mental Illness and aimed to encourage organisations to sign a pledge of commitment towards supporting mental health in the workplace.

The Service Manager explained that the next step as part of the pledge would be to seek members of staff to become 'champions' in the organisation who would be committed to join the campaign and support the Council's commitment to help break down the stigma and discrimination related to mental health in the workplace.

There being no decision required, the Panel noted the report.

**49. Suffolk Workplace Wellbeing Charter**

The Service Manager (Human Resources) presented Report No: JSP/JT/17/005 which updated the Panel on the progress towards the Suffolk Workplace Wellbeing Charter. The Council had completed and submitted a self-assessed log of evidence (attached as Appendix B) in relation to the Charter's following standards:

- Leadership
- Absence Management
- Health and Safety
- Mental Health
- Smoking and Tobacco
- Physical Activity
- Healthy Eating
- Alcohol and Substance Misuse

For each standard there were three levels of achievement; Commitment, Achievement and Excellence.

From the cohort of Suffolk organisations listed on page 21, Appendix A, Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council were the first organisation to make a full submission which would be assessed by Public Health England in October 2017. The Service Manager explained that the Council were committed to providing support to the remaining organisations in the cohort towards completing their assessments.

The Panel held a brief discussion and asked questions of the Service Manager to which comprehensive responses were provided.

There being no decisions required, the Panel noted the report.

**50. Joint People Strategy**

The Assistant Director (HR, Legal and Democratic Services) presented Report No: JSP/JT/17/006 which informed the Panel of the Suffolk Joint People Strategy that the Suffolk-Wide Working (SWW) Organisational Development/Human Resources Group had recently been reviewing. The membership of the group was listed on page 53, Appendix A.

The Suffolk Joint People Strategy aimed to ensure that collaborative and joined-up working in the employment and people management arena would lead to an improvement of outcomes for the people of Suffolk. The Assistant Director explained that the group had recently supported some successful projects such as the application for Transformation Challenge Award (TCA) funding to implement the Suffolk Town Planning Apprenticeship programme.

It was explained to the Panel that in review of the collective HR strategic inputs and the group's progress over the past 12 months, the following objectives had been identified and applied to most or all of the partners:

- Attracting Skilled Resource to Suffolk
- Recruiting and Retention for Hard to Fill Roles

In previous meetings, all partners had raised similar issues and therefore the objectives covered common purpose and business benefits.

There being no decision required, the Panel noted the report.

**51. Update on Single Council**

The Assistant Director (HR, Legal and Democratic Services) updated the Panel on the progress of Single Council and explained that the Business Case would be going to both St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath Full Council meetings 26 and 27 September 2017 to seek approval.

It was highlighted that some members of staff would have concerns related to their employment if the Councils undergo the transition to become a single Council. The Assistant Director and the Chairman of the Future Governance Steering Group, Councillor Ruth Bowman, explained that the purpose of forming a single Council was not to make savings directly from employment and this would be communicated to staff again through staff briefings in October 2017.

The Panel held a brief discussion and asked questions of the Assistant Director to which comprehensive responses were provided.

There being no decision required, the Panel noted the update.

52. **West Suffolk Workforce Data**

The Service Manager (Human Resources) presented Report No: JSP/JT/17/007 which set out the West Suffolk workforce data for the period up to 30 June 2017. The report also provided a comparison between the data as it stood now and with that reported to previous meetings of the panel during 2016/2017.

Overall there were no significant changes to the data since the previous reporting period but the Service Manager did highlight that despite a small increase in staff turnover the figure was nothing to be concerned about. The amount of days lost for both short and long term absence had increased slightly however the average days absence per full time equivalent (FTE) was still significantly below the National Average for Local Authorities. The Service Manager explained that going forward they would expect the average age of employee's to decrease slightly due to the growth of the current apprenticeship programme and the introduction of the Suffolk graduate scheme.

There being no decision required, the Panel noted the report.

The Meeting concluded at 4.16 pm

**Signed by:**

**Chairman**

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