

Staff Consultative Panel

Minutes of a meeting of the **Staff Consultative Panel** held virtually via MS Teams remote meeting platform on **Monday 15 November 2021** at **3.00 pm**.

Present: **Councillors**

Chair To be elected from the Employees' Side

Vice Chair To be elected from the Employer's Side

Members (employer's side)

Carol Bull

James Lay

Birgitte Mager

David Nettleton

Ian Shipp

Substitutes attending for a full member (employer's side)

Sara Mildmay-White

Staff representatives (employees' side)

Lizzi Cocker

Paul Davison

Penny Mills

36. **Substitutes**

The following substitution was declared:

Councillor Sara Mildmay-White substituting for Councillor John Griffiths (Employer's Side).

37. **Election of Chair: 2021/2022**

The approved Terms of Reference for the Staff Consultative Panel required that the Chair of the Panel be rotated between the Employer's and Employees' Sides. When the Chair was a Member of one side of the Panel, the Vice Chair shall be a Member of the other side.

In 2021/2022, the Chair was required to be elected from the Employees' Side and therefore, it was proposed, seconded and

Resolved:

That Paul Davison be elected as Chair of the Staff Consultative Panel for the year 2021/2022.

38. **Election of Vice Chair: 2021/2022**

The approved Terms of Reference for the Staff Consultative Panel required that the Vice Chair shall alternate between the Employer's and Employees' Sides.

As the Chair of the Panel was from the Employees' Side in 2021/2022, the Vice Chair was required to be elected from the Employer's Side and therefore, it was proposed, seconded and

Resolved:

That Councillor Birgitte Mager be elected as Vice Chair of the Staff Consultative Panel for the year 2021/2022.

39. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor John Griffiths (Employer's Side).

40. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 March 2021 confirmed as a correct record.

41. **Workforce Data Overview (Presentation)**

The Service Manager (Human Resources and Organisational Development) presented this item which provided a 'snapshot' of the West Suffolk Workforce Data as at 31 December 2020 and at 30 September 2021.

The Panel discussed the data presented. Since the last update to the Panel, it was noted that the staff turnover had increased to 10.46% (from 6.11%). This increase raised some concerns with the Panel, but the Service Manager acknowledged that the rise was not unexpected. The Panel asked whether it would be possible to break-down the staff turnover data to also show age and service area. Officers agreed to show this breakdown within future reporting.

The Service Manager also explained that during the last year, staff had 'stepped-up' their work levels within their service areas. However, there were concerns that this level of working was not sustainable over the longer term. Therefore, organisational restructures had been undertaken within some service areas, to provide for additional staff resources, along with the use of further creative ways of working.

With there being no decision required, the Panel **noted** the updates provided.

(Councillor Birgitte Mager joined the meeting at 3.15 pm, during the discussion on this item)

42. **COVID-19 Update (Presentation)**

The Service Manager (Human Resources and Organisational Development) provided the Panel with an update on how the Council was continuing to manage the effect of COVID-19 on its own workforce. The update covered the following specific areas:

- **Managing COVID-19 Data**

The Council's Staff Tracker system continued to be updated on a daily basis with information from managers who were reporting staff who were unwell, self-isolating/received positive Lateral Flow/PCR Tests, along with information provided by staff on their vaccination status.

Staff working in the Offices continued to be encouraged to undertake lateral flow testing twice a week. The twice-weekly lateral flow testing provision also remained in place at the West Suffolk Operational Hub.

- **Managing the Offices**

The Council was now operating its agile working practices (see item later on the agenda). Those activities which needed to be undertaken within the Offices, required staff to continue to maintain social distancing and mask wearing. Consideration was also being given to the pace of re-introducing further staff back to the Office. A number of desks still remained 'out-of-use' and a desk booking system had also been introduced to manage staff numbers within the Offices. There was also a small number of fixed desks, primarily for use by staff who were unable to work from home or other locations (for example, those roles which were office based; to support health and wellbeing; for those who had no suitable workspace at home). The proposed collaborative open space had not yet been introduced within the Offices, at this stage, to avoid large groups of staff/teams working in close proximity.

The Panel referred to the desk booking system and asked whether feedback would be received from staff as to its effectiveness. The Service Manager referred to the Annual Staff Survey, where there would be a section on returning back to the Offices and where that question could be particularly captured.

- **Furlough Job Retention Scheme (Coronavirus)**

It was noted that the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme had ended on 30 September 2021.

With there being no decision required, the Panel **noted** the updates provided.

43. **West Suffolk Workforce Strategy Update (Presentation/attached)**

The Service Manager (Human Resources and Organisational Development) reported on the following actions within the strategic priorities of the West Suffolk Workforce Strategy:

- **Learning and Development**

The Council had continued with the sessions that had been offered since last year, facilitated by Bailey & French. There continued to be excellent

attendance at these online sessions, with good participation and feedback. There had been three Autumn workshops, with Module 1 (Building Resilience), Module 2 (Building Team Cohesion) and Module 3 (Building Connectivity). These three areas were key to supporting agile ways of working, to ensure that we took care of ourselves and that we continued with a strong team ethic and the maintaining of relationships across the Council, something which became more challenging when working in different locations.

The Council had also introduced a new programme called 'Leading Together' which focused on its commitment to develop its managers, leaders and supervisors at all levels, supporting them to build their knowledge and skills. The Council needed its managers to help continue to build an engaged and energised workforce, where different ideas were valued, empowering and trusting in staff to deliver and being inclusive in all it did.

In early November 2021, the Council held its first Manager Peer Support Group (with 55 managers in attendance). This was a network set up for managers at all levels across the whole of the Council, up to Service Manager, to come together and form a networking group who could support each other. It also provided an opportunity to support good communication from the top down to a large number of managers, team leaders and supervisors.

In the Council's approach to embedding a learning culture, it had introduced 'Take time to Learn'. This approach focussed on continuous learning, encouraging staff to take responsibility and accountability for their own learning, as well as the corporate offer of training. All staff were required to commit a minimum of one hour learning per month to new skills, updating current skills, sharing knowledge and experience with others. This would be further embedded by discussion through the Personal Development Review (PDR) process and regular 1-2-1s to support staff on what training they had undertaken during the review period.

- **Agile Working**

Information relating to the introduction of the Council's agile working practices were circulated with the agenda papers (Staff Guide and Full Guidance documents). Like most public sector organisations, the Council had gone through a period of significant change. COVID-19 had enabled the Council to consider new ways of working and to take every opportunity to assess how agile working could be at the heart of transforming the way in which the Council delivered its services in the future. The aim was to improve service delivery by changing the way and where we worked (*'Work is an activity we do, rather than a place we go'*).

The Panel discussed the Council's agile working practices and asked for the views of staff. The Service Manager acknowledged that it was early in its introduction and that the staff reaction would be monitored closely. The principles of agile working were around new ways of working that were both business and individual driven and would change with the business needs. It was not a set arrangement and individual Teams would

review ways of working to ensure that they covered service needs, whilst promoting different ways of working for employees. Teams would consider what would work best for them, accepting that not all Teams would work in the same way, but at the same time, considering the wider corporate need. Establishing Team Charters could also help ensure that a Team knew what was to be expected of them.

The Panel also discussed the phrase '*Work is an activity we do, rather than a place we go.*' and wondered whether '*activity*' accurately reflected people's roles/tasks within the organisation. The Service Manager explained that the use of this phrase was to try to reflect all the work-related tasks that people undertook. The Panel also discussed that it would also be important to ensure that Councillors understood the Council's new agile working practices and how they could also receive the benefit from this way of working and this would be raised with Councillors accordingly.

A question was also raised by the Panel with regards to the difference between agile working and flexible working. Section 4 of the Staff Guide provided an explanation of the differences between these two types of working. The Service Manager also confirmed that homeworking would not be a contractual change to terms and conditions and staff would still be able to request formal changes to their working arrangements, in terms of formal flexible working.

- **Intern Programme**

An update was also provided on the recent Intern Programme (which consisted of five interns over a 12-week period). Some of the positive comments received from the Interns had also been circulated with the agenda papers.

Due to the changes in working practices/social distancing measures in operation within the Offices due to COVID restrictions, the Service Manager acknowledged that the Intern Programme had been much more challenging to implement this year. However, Officers had been coming into the Office to provide the necessary support for the Interns.

The Panel expressed their support for this Programme, although it was also acknowledged that this could be quite resource intensive for some services, to ensure that the full benefit of the Programme was provided.

- **Health and Wellbeing/Supporting the Workforce**

The focus on health and wellbeing of the staff continued to be embraced and the Panel were provided with an update on some of the health and wellbeing initiatives within the Council, which had centred around:

- Parent and Carer Support Group
- New Norm Support Group
- Financial Support Packages (including lending and saving schemes)
- Annual Staff Awards (due to be held on 14 December 2021)
- Domestic Abuse Awareness (now with six trained Champions)
- Staff Pulse Survey: Autumn 2021 (Information currently being collated)
- Desk Physio and Exercise / Pilates

With there being no decision required, the Panel **noted** the updates provided.

44. **Dates of future meetings**

The Panel noted the dates for future meetings, as listed below. All dates were Mondays starting at 3pm. The venues would be determined nearer to each meeting:

- Monday 31 January 2022
- Monday 28 March 2022

The meeting concluded at 4.25 pm

Signed by:

Chair
