

Staff Consultative Panel

Minutes of a meeting of the **Staff Consultative Panel** held virtually via MS Teams remote meeting platform on **Monday 18 July 2022** at **3.00 pm**

Present: **Councillors**

Chair To be elected from the Employer's Side

Vice Chair To be elected from the Employees' Side

Members (employer's side)

Carol Bull

John Griffiths

James Lay

Birgitte Mager

David Nettleton

David Smith

Staff representatives (employees' side)

Lizzi Cocker

Robert Cooper

Paul Davison

Penny Mills

55. **Substitutes**

No substitutions were declared.

56. **Election of Chair: 2022/2023**

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 2022/2023, the Chair was required to be elected from the Employer's Side. Therefore, it was proposed, seconded and

Resolved:

That Councillor Birgitte Mager be elected as Chair of the Staff Consultative Panel for the year 2022/2023.

57. **Election of Vice Chair: 2022/2023**

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 Employer's Side in 2022/2023, the Vice Chair was required to be elected from the Employees' Side. Therefore, it was proposed, seconded and

Resolved:

That Paul Davison be elected as Vice Chair of the Staff Consultative Panel for the year 2022/2023.

58. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ian Shipp (Employer's Side) and from Carys Frost (Employees' Side).

59. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

60. Workforce Data Overview (verbal)

The Service Manager (Human Resources and Organisational Development) presented this item which provided a 'snapshot' of the West Suffolk Workforce Data as at 30 June 2022.

The Panel discussed the data presented. Since the last update to the Panel, it was noted that the staff turnover had again increased to 14.02% (from 11.07%). This position continued to be monitored carefully, along with trying to find more creative ways of recruiting new staff.

The permanent headcount had also slightly reduced, some of which had been due to the transferring of service provision to another public authority. The Panel asked whether it would be possible to receive further information around the age profile of staff within each service area. The Officer confirmed that this information could be provided to the Panel accordingly.

Total days lost due to absence had also increased since the last update to the Panel. Some of the short term absences were due to the latest increase in COVID-19 cases, as was also being seen nationally. Short term absence continued to be recorded by Managers and monitored on a daily basis.

The Panel also discussed the use of agency staff within the Council's workforce. The Service Manager explained that, in some service areas, it was now starting to prove challenging to find agency staff, particularly within the Operations/Waste service. The Service Manager also outlined to the Panel where agency staff were currently being used across the Council's services.

The Panel also noted that the Council was also continuing with its agile and flexible working framework.

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

61. West Suffolk Workforce Strategy Update (verbal)

The Service Manager (Human Resources and Organisational Development) explained that the Cabinet had now approved the new West Suffolk Workforce

Strategy from 2022 to 2028 (which was available to view via this link: [West Suffolk Workforce Strategy 2022 to 2028](#)).

The Strategy outlined the Council's commitment to work together to deliver its vision and to develop a future focused workforce plan to help to deliver against its Strategic Framework, whilst building a diverse and inclusive workforce that reflected and understood the communities that it served.

The Strategy outlined how the Council would deliver services in a changing and challenging environment focusing on how it attracted, retained, rewarded, nurtured and developed its staff, through five key workstreams:

- Skills & behaviours
- Recruitment and retention
- Reward and recognition
- Health and well-being
- Future planning

The success of the Strategy would be measured through annual reporting processes, as well as through regular dialogue in Leadership and Senior Management Team, workforce planning, future employee surveys / pulse surveys and the Joint Negotiating Committee. The Portfolio Holder for Governance and the Staff Consultative Panel would also be regularly updated on progress against the workstreams. The Panel were also provided with the specific areas of focus and challenge which would be addressed within the Strategy.

The Staff Representatives referred to the recruitment and retention challenges, specifically within the Waste/Operations service. The service historically experienced high turnover of staff. The service also did not seem an area which attracted younger people as a potential career opportunity, although the service had previously managed to recruit some apprentices. The Service Manager acknowledged the issues around the recruitment and retention of staff, in what was a very challenging working environment. It was explained that it would be difficult to make any adjustments to the salaries of the staff, being part of the National Job Evaluation Scheme. However, there were other ways in which recruitment and retention opportunities could be further addressed by the service.

The Panel expressed their general support for the implementation of the new Strategy.

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

62. **Managing Menopause at Work Guidance (verbal)**

The Service Manager (Human Resources and Organisational Development) informed the Panel of the guide which was being made available for employees and managers with regards to the managing of the menopause at work. This was also being supported by the Council's Employee Assistance Programme through webinars which were planned for October 2022, which was World Menopause Month.

The Panel particularly supported this course of action.

With there being no decision required the Panel **noted** the verbal report provided.

63. Employee Benefits - Tusker/Salary Finance (verbal)

The Service Manager (Human Resources and Organisational Development) informed the Panel of a new offer which had been added to the Council's Staff Benefits Scheme from Tusker Direct Ltd, who were a major provider of leased car schemes in both the public and health sectors. Under the scheme, staff would have access to a range of brand new cars that came complete with motor insurance, servicing, road tax, maintenance, replacement tyres and RAC breakdown cover, for a fixed monthly amount.

However, it was particularly noted that as this was a salary sacrifice scheme and was subject to HMRC legislation, where an employee's salary could not drop to lower than the National Minimum Wage, once the contributions were made each month.

Salary Finance was an organisation who provided responsible finance solutions through:

- *Loans repaid through salary* – which provided loans at affordable rates, with higher acceptance than the banks.
- *Money Insights* – this was a range of tips and videos, as well as tools such as a budget planner, savings calculator and free credit score information. This had included webinars for staff to link into and more recently, a number of short videos regarding energy prices explained, together with a guide of how to navigate increased costs of living.

Cushon was an organisation who provided savings and investment schemes.

The take-up of these types of schemes had proved to be very popular with employees.

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

64. Job Evaluation Panels (verbal)

The Vice Chair of the Panel just wanted to make an acknowledgement as to how successful the Job Evaluation Panels had been working recently within the Council when undertaking the evaluation of jobs.

65. New Learning Management System (iLearn) (verbal)

The Service Manager (Human Resources and Organisational Development) provided a short demonstration of the new learning management system called iLearn. This system was provided by Skillsgate, which held all of the Council's mandatory training and a huge online library of e-learning topics to enhance employee skills. Course topics, over a range of skills, personal development and lots more were accessible anywhere that was access to the internet. Staff could also choose to complete additional training, which

supported the Council's Take Time to Learn culture, with staff taking responsibility for their own learning. The system would also hold the 'Watch & Go' videos and health and safety training in the future, so all of the e-learning would be available in one place. Consideration was also being given as to how this new type of learning could also be deployed to the staff who were working within the Depot locations and who did not have direct access to the internet.

The Service Manager explained that staff were given one hour per month to undertake their own learning. Managers were encouraging their staff to take that time and this was also being raised at Team Meetings and at Personal Development Reviews (PDRs).

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

66. 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 14 November 2022
- Monday 16 January 2023
- Monday 27 March 2023

The meeting concluded at 4.26 pm

Signed by:

Chair
