

Staff Consultative Panel

Minutes of a meeting of the **Staff Consultative Panel** held virtually via MS Teams remote meeting platform on **Monday 3 July 2023** 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)

Donna Higgins

Birgitte Mager

Margaret Marks

David Smith

Phil Wittam

Substitutes attending for a full member (Employer's Side)

Jools Savage

Staff representatives (Employees' Side)

Lizzi Cocker

Robert Cooper

Paul Davison

Penny Mills

In attendance

Councillor Gerald Kelly

Susan Glossop

Portfolio Holder for Governance and
Regulatory

Substitute (observing)

84. **Substitutes**

The following substitution was declared:

Councillor Jools Savage substituting for Councillor Victor Lukaniuk (Employer's Side).

85. **Staff Consultative Panel: Terms of Reference (attached)**

The Terms of Reference for the Staff Consultative Panel, as contained within the Council's Constitution, were received and noted.

86. **Election of Chair: 2023 to 2024**

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 2023/2024, the Chair is required to be elected from the Employees' Side.

Resolved:

That Paul Davison be elected as Chair of the Staff Consultative Panel for the year 2023/2024.

87. Election of Vice Chair: 2023 to 2024

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 2023/2024, the Vice Chair was required to be elected from the Employer's Side. Therefore, it was proposed, seconded and

Resolved:

That Councillor David Smith be elected as Vice Chair of the Staff Consultative Panel for the year 2023/2024.

88. Apologies for absence

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

89. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

90. Declarations of interest

Members' declarations of interest are recorded under the item to which the declaration relates.

91. Workforce Data Overview (attached)

The Service Manager (Human Resources and Organisational Development) presented this item which provided a 'snapshot' of the West Suffolk Workforce Data as at 31 March 2023.

The Panel discussed the data presented which had shown that:

- within the last quarter there had been a rise in the headcount/FTE.
- the approval of the 2022 Pay Award had positively assisted with recruitment within the lower scale jobs.
- turnover levels had also reduced, along with short-term absence. However, long-term absence (those absent for over 28 days) had increased.

The Panel also discussed the particular challenges with absence within those service areas which required physical effort (ie the waste/operations service).

Officers explained the processes which were in place to identify any particular patterns, along with the ability to be able to offer redeployment support, if this was deemed to be an appropriate course of action.

92. **Fostering Friendly Guidance (attached)**

Councillor Gerald Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory introduced this item and explained that this Guidance set out the Council's support for employees who were undertaking the care of a child/children under a foster-care/kinship care arrangement with a local authority or an independent fostering provider. The Guidance aimed to offer employees the opportunity to work flexibly where this was compatible with the demands of their job. The Council's agile working guidance and parental policies also applied to foster carers.

The Panel expressed their support for the implementation of this Guidance, along with the monitoring of its effectiveness amongst foster carers.

93. **Introducing the West Suffolk Workforce Strategy 2022 to 2028 (attached)**

Councillor Gerald Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory introduced the West Suffolk Workforce Strategy 2022 to 2028. The Panel also received a presentation from the Director (HR, Governance & Regulatory) who explained that the Strategy had five workstreams and priorities which underpinned the ambitions of the Council in becoming an agile employer. The Council would continue to transform the way in which it worked in the coming period, together with its commitment to attract, train and retain a workforce which embraced equality, diversity and inclusion.

The five workstreams and priorities within the Strategy centred around:

1. **Skills and behaviours** – to continue to provide opportunities for staff to engage and learn new skills. To invest in continuous professional and personal development for all staff by offering in-house and externally commissioned development programmes.
2. **Recruitment and retention** – to focus on flexible and timely approaches to recruitment, embedding career pathways for succession planning, and continue to seek flexible opportunities in the way people want to work with a focus on service delivery.
3. **Health and wellbeing** – to continue to offer a range of health and wellbeing initiatives made available to staff and online health and wellbeing resources that can be accessed at any time. Wellbeing levels across the organisation continue to be positive and the results from the wellbeing pulse surveys have consistently shown that there was great team support and positive working relationships across the organisation and high confidence that people can get help when they need it, as well as high levels of interest in work.

The warning signs that need to continue to consider were personal resilience, workloads, stress management, opening communication or

connectivity with others to support these risk areas and physical health while working at home.

4. **Pay, reward and recognition** – Continue to find creative ways to support the employer offer, with the introduction of additional non-financial rewards such as staff recognition awards.
5. **Future planning** - With the continued commitment to apprenticeships, career pathways and promotion opportunities, now need to move forward into an exciting new phase of the Council's journey, capturing learning from its previous achievements, the pandemic and post COVID-19, to transform the way it delivers services in a new agile way.

The Strategy had also captured the learning from the Council's collective response to the COVID-19 pandemic and recognised the opportunities that this had provided to move towards an agile organisation, valuing new ways of working and enabling its staff to deliver their best work in different ways, with a strong focus on supporting health and wellbeing.

The Strategy also focused on how the Council would continue to reform the way that it worked to enhance the capabilities of its staff, development of an inclusive culture where leaders, at all levels, promoted a culture of personal responsibility and accountability and empowered an engaged workforce, where its staff could be creative, flexible and had the right skills to respond positively to any challenges ahead.

The Director also explained that to support managers at all levels to assist in coaching and supporting their staff and help delivery this Strategy, 'Leading Together' was the Council's overall leadership committee to 'building an engaged and energised workforce where different ideas were valued, ensuring that the Council supported, empowered and trusted staff to effectively deliver.

A key part of any successful strategy was its execution and everyone had a part to play in translating this Workforce Strategy into reality and, in the process, enhancing the Council's culture, including Strategic managers, all people managers, all staff and the Human Resources (HR) Team.

The measurement of the effectiveness/success of the Strategy would also be undertaken by various measures, including regular discussions with the Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory and with the Staff Consultative Panel, along with the undertaking of staff surveys and other engagement methods.

The Panel then had a detailed discussion on the content of the Strategy and the following comments/observations were made within the following specific areas:

Agile working and Health and Wellbeing of staff

- Ensuring that the organisation remained connected, whilst allowing the supporting of agile working to enable staff to maintain a work life balance and empowering them to have more autonomy over their work, where and when it was done. However, some concerns were raised around agile

working and the impact which this could continue to have on some staff. It was acknowledged, that since COVID, the workplace environment and interactions with colleagues had changed. The Council's agile working framework had been developed alongside other local authorities and it was important that the Council remained being an employer of choice. Agile working was not being imposed within the Council and it remained an option of choice as to how staff wished to work, as long as it was compatible with service requirements.

The Staff Representatives explained that the current system of having to book a desk to work in the Council offices could prove to be a barrier for some staff wanting to come into the office to work. Officers explained that the desk floor plate at West Suffolk House had been re-arranged and that booking desks was part of that system. It was acknowledged that, of course, there was a balance to be struck and that it may be decided to review this process in the future to assess its overall effectiveness. It was also suggested as to whether it was possible to monitor the desk booking system to see how people were working and where from. Officers agreed that this was a good suggestion to look at the data to see how people had been working and that Officers would liaise with the Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory accordingly.

In terms of ensuring the wellbeing of staff, the Council had various mechanisms in place, including Wellbeing Champions; the Employee Assistance Programme and Learning and Development Programmes. It was also asked whether it would be possible to promote the Council's volunteering scheme with the workforce and this course of action was supported. Also, the Council operated 'West Suffolk We Save' Employee Benefit Scheme. Further information on this Scheme was available on the Council's Intranet, but if required, further information could also be provided to the Panel, for their information. Reference was also made to the recent Clean Air Walk Day and that these types of initiatives could assist with interaction with colleagues. Officers agreed with this and stated that they would look to take this type of initiative forward.

Engagement/Inclusivity of Staff

- Ensuring that there continued to be an inclusive culture/workforce where everyone was respected.
- To ensure that staff continued to be engaged, particularly with the undertaking of staff/pulse surveys. Officers explained that it was acknowledged that the surveys could be seen to be aimed primarily at the office based staff, rather than with the operational staff and acknowledged the particular challenges with being able to engage directly with the operational staff. Therefore, it was proposed that Officers would liaise with UNISON, prior to the circulation of the next staff survey, to ensure that an appropriate approach was supported to allow engagement with the operational staff.

(Penny Mills (Employees' Side) joined the meeting at 3.48pm, during the discussion on this item)

94. **Workforce Strategy Priorities for 2022 to 2028 - Action Plan (attached)**

Following on from the above item, Councillor Gerald Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory introduced the Action Plan for the Workforce Strategy Priorities for 2022 to 2028. The Plan set out the priority actions in each of the five workstreams and monitored and recorded the progress of outcomes against those. This was a working document and was adaptable to change and review of how those actions were delivered.

The Service Manager (Human Resources and Organisational Development) further explained that this Action Plan was ambitious and would be presented to the Staff Consultative Panel for regular review.

The following key challenges within the Action Plan were particularly highlighted:

Skills and Behaviours

- Support and facilitate regular peer managers networking sessions, which brought the group of employees together and supported the training programme. Enable the learning from the training programme to blend with practical and best practice.
- Continue to maximise the opportunities the apprenticeship levy could offer to upskill the Council's staff in related subject that would offer movement across the Council's services.
- Deliver a yearly programme of interventions to support the development of Band 7/8 employees for future aspiring leaders, identified through the PDR process and to training and development.

Recruitment and Retention

- Creative recruiting to include effective use of recruitment methods to target specific applicants for 'hard to recruit' positions. Reduce advertising costs by using social media and other advertising methods.

Pay, reward and recognition

- Promote the range of non-financial benefits which make up the total employee offer, including agile working and work life balance policies. The Council's investment in learning and development and apprentice opportunities to upskill and retain staff. The Council's commitment to health and wellbeing of its staff being the utmost importance. Staff recognition through the Staff Awards.

Health and Wellbeing

- Support the health and wellbeing of the Council's staff. Work with the Service Manager (Operations) and UNISON to develop a varied wellbeing plan for the Depots, to include Men's Health Week and other events.
- Support and encourage staff to engage with staff network opportunities such as surveys, focus groups and encourage a culture where staff have confidence to have a voice and a safe space to share issues, concerns,

ideas and take responsibility and ownership with regards to health and wellbeing of themselves, others and the organisation.

Communications

- Prepare an employee friendly Workforce Strategy and ensure that such documents were reproduced to provide information and engagement.

95. **Dates of future meetings**

The Panel noted the dates for future meetings, as listed below. All dates were Mondays starting at 3pm:

- Monday 20 November 2023
- Monday 12 February 2024

The Panel also discussed whether to continue to hold these meetings 'virtually' or whether they would prefer to meet 'in-person'. The general consensus was to continue to meet 'virtually'. However, it was proposed that perhaps one meeting per year could be held 'in-person'.

Therefore, it was agreed for this to be discussed further at the next meeting of the Panel.

The meeting concluded at 5.12 pm

Signed by:

Chair
