

Staff Consultative Panel

Minutes of a meeting of the **Staff Consultative Panel** held virtually via MS Teams remote meeting platform on **Monday 12 February 2024** at **3.00 pm**.

Present: **Councillors**

Chair Paul Davison (Employees' Side)

Vice Chair David Smith (Employer's Side)

Members (Employer's Side)

Birgitte Mager

Phil Wittam

Margaret Marks

Staff representatives (Employees' Side)

Penny Mills

In attendance

Councillor Gerald Kelly

Portfolio Holder for Governance and
Regulatory

105. **Substitutes**

No substitutions were declared.

106. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Victor Lukaniuk and Donna Higgins (Employer's Side) and from Robert Cooper, Carys Frost and Lisa Moss (Employees' Side).

107. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

108. **Declarations of interest**

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

109. **Workforce Data Overview (attached)**

The Service Manager Service Manager (HR, Health and Safety, L&D and Payroll) presented this item which provided a 'snapshot' of the West Suffolk Workforce Data as at 31 December 2023.

The data presented had generally remained fairly stable over the last quarter. However, the Panel noted that long term absence (over 28 days) had continued to increase. The Officer acknowledged this and explained that the Council continued to operate a robust absence management process, particularly for those staff who were, unfortunately, on long term absence. The Panel requested for additional information to be included within future data reporting on long term absence (over 28 days) to include the age profile and a break-down of data via directorate.

Whilst discussing the data with regards to 'Full-time v Part-time', the Panel also requested for the data to be categorised into female/male.

110. **National Apprenticeship Week: 5 to 11 February 2024 (attached)**

The Service Manager (HR, Health and Safety, L&D and Payroll) presented this paper which outlined the Council's apprenticeship programme. Currently the Council had 38 apprentices on 19 different programmes. These covered three broad groups of:

- Existing employees that were on an apprenticeship programme to gain knowledge and skills to support them in their current role.
- Existing employees that were undertaking an apprenticeship programme to become registered/qualified for a new role.
- Apprentices who had applied for an apprenticeship role, which had been advertised externally.

The Council also had corporate apprenticeships and apprentice posts which were embedded within service structures as part of a career pathway arrangement and succession planning, along with staff currently undertaking apprentice training as an opportunity to upskill staff through accessing and spending the apprentice levy.

National Apprenticeship Week had been held from 5 to 9 February 2024 which had provided the ideal time to celebrate the value, benefit and opportunity that apprenticeships brought to the Council as an organisation. The paper explained that the theme for this year had been Skills for Life and listed the events which had been held during the week.

The paper also explained that as part of the Council's Learning and Development Review, it had been recommended to sign up to the Young People Charter, which was run at the time by Youth Employment UK, who were an independent, not for profit social enterprise founded to tackle youth employment. The charter framework aimed to support, inspire and recognise all employers who were committed to providing good quality opportunities for young people. The Council recognised the importance and potential of its young people and understood the need to support, nurture, develop and empower them to fulfil their aspirations and achieve their goals.

It was noted that Youth Employment UK had changed its offer to employers. However, the Council remained committed to the original principles of the Charter and using the principles as a guide, had established and committed to its own Charter, which had been signed by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive on 5 February 2024 to mark the beginning of National

Apprenticeship Week. Therefore, the five West Suffolk principles were based on:

- Creating opportunity
- Recognising talent
- Fair employment
- Developing people
- Youth voice

The Panel commended the Council on its apprenticeship programme and also recognised the value, benefit and opportunity that it brought to the organisation.

111. West Suffolk Workforce Strategy 2022 to 2028: Update (verbal)

The West Suffolk Workforce Strategy 2022 to 2028 contained five key workstreams:

1. Skills and Behaviours
2. Recruitment and Retention
3. Pay, Reward and Recognition
4. Health and Wellbeing
5. Future Planning

These workstreams were the pillars to the Strategy setting out the Council's priorities in each area and its approach to delivering on those priorities.

The Panel were informed of the Health and Wellbeing initiatives, events and awareness raising sessions which had been arranged throughout the year:

- March 2024: CPR and Defibrillator Training
- April 2024: Cancer Awareness
- May 2024: Mental Health Awareness
- June 2024: Stay Safe in Summer; Dementia Awareness
- July 2024: Alcohol Awareness
- August 2024: Importance of hydration
- September 2024: OCD
- October 2024: Menopause Awareness
- November 2024: Men's Health Awareness
- December 2024: How to improve your sleep

The following updates were also provided:

- There would be a second cohort of the Council's Aspiring Leaders Programme.
- The Future Senior Managers Programme was to be launched later in the year.
- Health and safety: Regular meetings had been scheduled of the Health and Safety Group, whose representatives were from across the whole of the Council.
- Gender pay 2022/2023: The Council's data had now been published and the Council remained in a strong position. This data measured the average pay for men compared to women. The data currently reflected that there was no pay gap within the Council.

112. **Dates of future meetings**

The Panel **noted** the dates for future meetings of the Staff Consultative Panel which had been provisionally arranged for the months of:

- July 2024
- November 2024
- February 2025

The draft Calendar of Meetings for 2024-2025 was subject to approval by Council on 20 February 2024. Therefore, these dates would be confirmed following that meeting.

The meeting concluded at 3.33 pm

Signed by:

Chair
