

Staff Consultative Panel

Minutes of a meeting of the **Staff Consultative Panel** held virtually via **MS Teamslive** remote meeting platform on **Monday 9 November 2020** at **3.00 pm**.

Present: **Councillors**

Chair David Nettleton (Employer's side)

Vice Chair Mark Johnson (Employees' side)

Members (employer's side)

Carol Bull

John Griffiths

James Lay

Clive Springett

Ian Shipp

David Smith

Staff representatives (employees' side)

Lizzi Cocker

Penelope Mills

Richard Smith

Substitutes attending for a staff representative (employees' side)

Paul Davison

18. **Substitutes**

The following substitution was declared:

Paul Davison was substituting for Julie Roberts (Employees' Side).

19. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Jane Orton and Julie Roberts (Employees' Side).

20. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2019 were confirmed as a correct record.

21. **Workforce 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 31 January 2020 and 31 October 2020.

The Panel discussed the data presented. It was noted that there had been an increase in the headcount, which was explained that this was mainly due to the recruitment of the new Civil Parking Enforcers.

It was also explained that the total days lost due to sickness had also reduced. It was acknowledged that this may be due to much of the workforce now working at home, which meant that they were able to work more flexibly around their sickness.

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

22. **COVID-19 Update (verbal)**

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

- **Managing Vulnerability**

There were a number of staff members who had been classed as clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable in response to COVID-19. During the second lock-down, the operational impact of supporting those staff in these categories had been significantly reduced in line with Government guidance and this meant that there were now only a small number who were unable to undertake their substantive roles (those clinically extremely vulnerable staff in operational roles only). Options were being investigated as to whether they could be safely re-deployed to other service areas. The Council continued to provide the necessary support for those staff, particularly with regard to their health and well-being and their Managers were in regular contact with them. Other members of staff who were able to work from home, were continuing to do so.

The Employer's Side asked whether it was known of those Councillors who were also classed as 'vulnerable'. Officers confirmed that this information was not currently available. It was noted that Councillors were undertaking the majority of their duties/meetings virtually, but this position may become more pertinent when addressing future ways of working.

- **Annual Leave Management**

Throughout this period, staff had been advised to take specified amounts of annual leave. This was to allow for services to effectively manage annual leave allowances, including being able to also plan for service recovery. It was important for staff to ensure that they took sufficient breaks away from work, particularly for those where work and home were no longer easily separated.

- **Furlough Scheme**

The Council had operated the Furlough Scheme for those staff whose work had stopped in totality due to the COVID-19 restrictions linked to income loss. However, opportunities were being undertaken to redeploy these staff into other service areas, where able to do so.

- **COVID-19 Testing**
The Council had been supporting staff in being able to get the necessary COVID-19 tests, as required. The Council HR Team had also introduced a 24/7 on-call service to particularly deal with staff outbreaks which occurred outside of the mainstream working hours.

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

23. **West Suffolk Workforce Strategy 2018-2020 (verbal)**

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**

Following the restructure of the Human Resources section in March 2020, this had resulted in subsequent changes to the delivery of Learning and Development. In addition, due to the COVID-19 restrictions, the service had also been very successful in transferring the corporate training programme to virtual learning, which had also provided other opportunities for the provision of learning, which may not have been previously considered.

Networking opportunities between the local authorities across Suffolk had also been really helpful, particularly when working through the pandemic.

- **Equality and Diversity**

The local authorities across Suffolk had also been working together to deliver Equality and Diversity programmes/training.

West Suffolk Council and East Suffolk Council had also been invited to join the Black and Asian Network at Suffolk County Council. This network supported black and Asian staff, enabling them to discuss and influence issues with key decision makers. It also provided an arena for individuals to raise concerns in a safe and confidential environment and an opportunity to update each other on local/national policy and developments.

- **Recruitment and Retention**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there had been a lot of emphasis placed on protecting people and jobs by using redeployment opportunities/secondments. This had also helped with the provision of additional resource for the supporting of the Council's priority services, particularly with the local businesses and the community response. This had also given staff the opportunity to enhance their skills in other service areas, which may not have been available previously.

- **Staff Awards 2020**

To build on the success of the Apprentice of the Year Award, launched in 2019, three new Staff Awards had been introduced for 2020:

- Exceptional Contribution Award – to be given in recognition of an employee who had displayed an exceptional work ethic and made an outstanding contribution to the work of the Council.
- Teamwork Award – to be given in recognition of a team who had displayed exceptional teamwork skills, demonstrating excellence throughout their work together and who worked collectively to achieve positive outcomes in the delivery of the Council’s values and strategic priorities.
- Well-being Colleagues Champion Award – to be given in recognition of an employee who had consistently and actively helped to develop and support their team(s) or colleagues or had supported the well-being of others.

Nominations for these Awards had been submitted throughout October and would be scored in November, with the winners being announced in December.

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

(Councillor John Griffiths left the meeting at 3.37 pm, during the discussion of this item, and re-joined shortly thereafter (see below)).

24. **Health and Well-being Update (verbal)**

The Assistant Director (Human Resources, Legal & Democratic) provided a presentation to the Panel, which explained the staff health and well-being activities/support/events, which had been particularly pertinent during the on-going situation with the COVID-19 pandemic and resultant changes to the working environment. These included the following:

- Parents Support Group
- Access to Employee Assistance Programme
- Psychological First Aid Training
- Domestic Abuse Awareness Raising and Upcoming Training (to coincide with White Ribbon Day on 25 November 2020)
- Men’s Health (November 2020)
- World Mental Health Day (10 October 2020)
- Well-being Pulse Survey
- Well-being Managers Toolkit and development of an employee toolkit
- Joint Pain Advisor Training
- Well-being Champions and Mental Health First Aiders
- Occupational Health and Counselling support
- Staying connected – well-being events

The focus on the health and well-being of the staff would continue to be embraced moving forward.

With there being no decision required the Panel **noted** the presentation.

(Councillor John Griffiths re-joined the meeting at 3.45 pm, during the discussion on this item)

25. **Organisational Development (verbal)**

The Assistant Director (Human Resources, Legal & Democratic) provided a presentation to the Panel, which explained the work being undertaken to address the future ways of smarter and flexible working.

This process had involved organisation wide sessions which had addressed the areas of:

- Well-being and resilience
- Working in new ways, barriers and opportunities
- Relationship building and re-connecting
- Building future resilience
- Leadership from 2020 onwards

Various staff workshops had identified the following five workstreams for future development:

1. Re-designing the office of the future and safe workplaces
2. Exploring the future of the workforce and ways of working
3. Health and well-being
4. Digital
5. Public access and ways to engage with the community

The Council had also recently launched an Organisational Charter which set out eight principles of working remotely:

1. Creation of a clear separation between work and personal time
2. Virtual meeting etiquette
3. Connecting with others (well-being support, communication)
4. Staff being able to work more flexibly and smarter
5. Transparency and trust
6. Meetings with purpose
7. Team alignment
8. Upholding of values and behaviours

However, there also continued to be on-going challenges with remote working, particularly around:

- Risk of digital burnout
- Definition of productivity
- Re-alignment of priorities and setting the direction around future ways of working
- Planning the long term change in how we work, particularly around future workplace culture
- Work intensification and the longer term impact on well-being
- The move to working in a virtual workplace culture
- Achieving the balance between work and home life and its practicalities

Further organisation wide sessions would be arranged with staff around cultivating positive mindsets, fulfilling creativity and potential and boosting accomplishment. Further work would also be undertaken around the

changing role of leaders/managers to ensure that they had the skills to effectively manage a remote workforce.

The presentation also set out the short term actions which would need to be undertaken to ensure the development of an inclusive workforce, along with the actions which would need to be undertaken with regard to the longer term aspect of the Workforce Strategy.

The Panel supported the work being undertaken with regard to future proofing the workforce. It was also acknowledged of the huge amount of work which had been undertaken to keep the Council operating during the pandemic. The Panel also supported the work on the changing role of managers within a virtual workforce, as managing staff virtually could be challenging and managers should be provided with the necessary training/skills to be able to do this effectively.

It was also noted that services were facing different challenges and that this would also be addressed within the future organisational development and the Workforce Strategy.

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

26. **Dates of Future Meetings**

The Panel noted that the next meeting would be held on Monday 29 March 2021, starting at 3.00 pm. The meeting platform/venue for this meeting would be confirmed nearer the time.

The meeting concluded at 4.20 pm

Signed by:

Chair
