

Staff Consultative Panel

Minutes of a meeting of the **Staff Consultative Panel** held virtually via MS Teams remote meeting platform on **Monday 27 March 2023** at **3.00 pm**

Present:

Chair Birgitte Mager (Employer's Side)
Vice Chair Paul Davison (Employees' Side)

Members (employer's side)

John Griffiths
James Lay
David Nettleton

Ian Shipp
David Smith

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

Sara Mildmay-White

Staff representatives (employees' side)

Lizzi Cocker

76. **Substitutes**

The following substitution was declared:

Councillor Sara Mildmay-White substituting for Councillor Carol Bull.

77. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Carol Bull (Employer's Side) and from Carys Frost, Robert Cooper and Penny Mills (Employees' Side).

78. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

79. **Declarations of interest**

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

80. **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 31 December 2022.

The Panel discussed the data presented. Discussions centred around staff absence, where it was noted that short term absence had increased in the last year. However, absence overall, had remained stable.

The Panel also discussed the overall headcount of the Council, where it was noted that this had reduced over the last year. The Service Manager explained the vacancies which were currently out to advertisement, particularly those within the Housing and Operations service areas.

Following on from a question raised by the Panel with regards to the workforce data, the Service Manager confirmed that she could provide the Panel Members with a further breakdown of the quartile workforce data to highlight the particular queries raised.

A question was also raised in relation to the percentage of staff who were working from home. The Service Manager explained that there was no specific data available. However, the provision of this data would be further investigated.

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

81. **Domestic Abuse Awareness Guidance for Employees and Managers (attached)**

The Panel had received a copy of the Council's Guidance for employees and managers on domestic abuse awareness. The aim of the Guidance was to provide information about how the Council would tackle the issue of domestic violence and abuse and support those who were affected. The Guidance set out the rights of employees and also explained the support available to them. This would help managers to be confident about their role in managing and supporting employees. It would help employees to understand what support and help was available to them. It would help to foster an inclusive working environment in which everyone was treated fairly.

The Service Manager explained that the Council had been working to set up a network of eight Domestic Abuse Champions who had been trained to equip them with the skills to spread awareness among colleagues and act as a 'go to' person for information and support. The Champions held a drop-in event to meet and chat with staff and would also have a stand at the regular corporate staff induction sessions.

The Panel made reference to the forthcoming emergency alert which was to be tested by the Government on Sunday 23 April 2023, by sending out a text directly to mobile phones. Some concern was expressed around those individuals, who were in an abusive relationship and who were in possession of a second mobile phone, unbeknown to their partner. This was acknowledged and this would be highlighted by the Domestic Abuse Champions through their staff networks and through the Service Managers.

Councillor Carol Bull (who had been unable to be present at the meeting today) had raised a question in relation to page 3 of the Guidance, second paragraph, where it stated '*Where appropriate, reasonable additional*

measures will be taken by the council to protect the safety of those experiencing domestic violence and abuse while travelling between home and work ...'. Councillor Bull asked as to how this might be accomplished.

The Service Manager explained that the Council had a duty of care to its staff which covered all of those times, not just when the staff walked into the building. The duty of care would include manager support in situations where an employee may be travelling from another location, perhaps where they have moved out of their home or ensuring they were able to travel, making adjustments where necessary. This could mean a different work base or a manager being aware of the difficulties the employee may face in getting to and from work. The employer commitment was to recognise that each individual case needed different levels of support and ensuring that it was flexible and supportive to ensure the health and safety of the employee as much as possible.

The Panel commended the Council for the implementation of this initiative.

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

82. Pay Policy Statement 2023 to 2024 (Report number COU/WS/23/007 attached)

For information, the Panel had received a copy of Report number COU/WS/23/007, which related to the West Suffolk Council Pay Policy Statement for 2023/2024, which had been subsequently approved by Council on 21 March 2023.

The Pay Policy Statement included:

- a. The level and elements of remuneration for Chief Officers (senior staff).
- b. The remuneration of the lowest paid employees.
- c. The relationship between the remuneration of the highest and lowest paid employees.
- d. Other specific aspects of Chief Officer remuneration, fees and charges and other discretionary payments.
- e. The gender pay position.

The Council's ratio of the highest paid employee (April 2022) to the lowest paid (£20,812 per annum) contractual employee was 7.2:1. The Hutton Review of Fair Pay in the Public Sector 2011 recommended that the average pay ratio between the chief executive of most public sector organisations and the lowest paid member of staff was below 12:1. The Council also continued to pay above the National Living Wage.

For the period April 2021 to March 2022, the Council's gender pay gap was -2.56%, which showed that the average hourly rate of females was 2.56% more than the average hourly rate of males. The median gender pay gap was -4.72%.

However, it was noted that the Council's pay policies and structures would need to continue to be reviewed to ensure that it had due consideration to the following particular factors:

- a. The level of future Pay Awards.
- b. Increase in the National Living Wage (which was forecast to rise to around £11.16 in 2024).

The Panel then discussed the content of the Pay Policy Statement and asked various questions for clarification. One of the questions particularly raised, the Service Manager confirmed that there were six members of staff who were paid on the minimum hourly rate.

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

83. Dates of future meetings

The Panel noted the dates for future meetings, as listed below. All dates were Mondays starting at 3pm the venue will be indicated nearer the time:

- Monday 3 July 2023
- Monday 20 November 2023
- Monday 12 February 2024

The meeting concluded at 3.46 pm

Signed by:

Chair
