

No.

JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Minutes of a meeting held on 22nd February, 2016.

Present: Councillor G. Roberts (Chairman); Councillors K. Hatton, A.G. Powell and Mrs. A.J. Preston.

Representatives of the Trade Unions: Ms. G. Southby (Vice-Chairman) (UNISON), Mr. K.J. Armstrong (UNISON), Mr. T. Greaves (GMB), Mr. C. Jordon (GMB), Mr. G. Pappas (UNISON) and Mr. A. Unsworth (GMB).

Officers: Ms. S. Alderman, Mr. R. Bergman, Ms. S. Clifton, Ms. A. Davies, Mrs. J. Hill, Mr. H. Isaac and Ms. E. Morgan.

(a) Apologies for Absence –

These were received from Ms. J. Davies, Mr. D.J. Dimmick (NASUWT), Mr. R. Hughes (UNISON) and Mr. N. Stokes (GMB).

(b) Declarations of Interest –

No declarations were received.

(c) Minutes –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 19th October, 2015 be accepted as an accurate record subject to the words “had since been replaced” being substituted with the words “funding approved to replace / repair the doors” as contained in the seventh paragraph of minute (c).

The Forum was updated on the issue of the fire doors at Barry Comprehensive School in that an Enforcement Notice had been received in November 2015 which stipulated a six month period for the necessary works to be completed. Furthermore, the Fire Service had carried out a three monthly inspection and was satisfied with the progress being made.

The Forum was advised that Cabinet had approved the amended Quorum for the Forum.

Feedback on the Corporate Car Pool Scheme was awaited.

(d) Minutes of Directorate Consultation Groups –

The minutes of the following Directorate Consultative Groups were received:

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Environment and Housing – 7th October, 2015
Environment and Housing – 2nd December, 2015
Learning and Skills – 7th October, 2015
Resources – 21st October, 2015
Resources – 28th January, 2016
Social Services – 20th October, 2015
Social Services – 26th January, 2016.

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Directorate Consultative Groups be noted.

(e) Dates of Directorate Consultative Groups –

AGREED – T H A T the dates of the Directorate Consultative Groups as indicated below be noted:

- Environment and Housing – 3rd February, 2016
- Learning and Skills – 10th February, 2016
- Resources – 28th April, 2016.

(f) Corporate Health and Safety Committee –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Corporate Health and Safety Committee held on 7th December, 2015 be noted.

(g) Management of Attendance Update –

The Forum received the latest draft of the Managing Attendance at Work Policy (updated December 2015).

It was reported that the document was being updated to address concerns raised by the Trade Union side.

It was reported that, when approved, the document would:

- Clarify issues around responsibilities and processes
- The policy document would manage absences that varied between short and long term.

It was reported that, subject to adequate training being provided and the agreement of the trade unions, the document would be implemented in the Spring .

(h) Care First Service –

The Forum were advised that Cabinet, to be held later that day, would be requested to note and endorse the procurement of an Employee Assistance Programme for

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use by all Council employees from 1st June, 2016.

The Forum was aware of the Council's increasing focus on staff engagement and attendance management over the previous 12 months. The positive engagement, attendance and, ultimately, performance of the workforce became ever more important for the responses to increasing financial constraints.

The staff engagement strategy commenced in June 2015 as a key part of the Council's Reshaping Services Programme and was now helping the Council to refine and improve approaches to issues such as internal communications, training and development and the continued involvement and engagement of the Council's employees.

Over the same period, improvements had been made to the Council's approach to the management of sickness absence, and in particular the robustness, regularity and focus of the performance management arrangements. It was anticipated that absence rates would fall below the corporate target of 9.00 days per employee at the end of 2015/16 and remain one of the best rates across Councils in Wales.

At the same time, however, there was an increasing awareness of the small, but nevertheless important increase in stress related absence within the workforce. Stress related absence, whether home or work related currently accounted for 32% of all absence, compared with 31% in 2014/15.

The Council's current approaches to managing stress related absence included the policy of immediate referral to Occupational Health, the conducting of risk assessments and the use of outsourced counselling services. The funding of counselling had increased from £20k to £40k over the previous two years.

As part of the continuing response to the above, Cabinet was recommended to procure an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) for access by all Council employees. This would provide a tangible benefit for all staff, help to improve attendance and be complementary to the Council's approach to staff engagement.

It was proposed to procure the EAP services from Care First with effect from 1st June, 2016.

The service was currently used by six other Local Authorities including Cardiff, Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Torfaen and Conway Councils. Reports from some of these Councils had been sourced and were all encouraging.

The main elements of the service are set out below:

- The provision of telephone counselling services for employees on a 24/7 basis for 365 days per year and through immediate access to a team of counsellors accredited by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP);
- Whilst the above is mainly a telephone service, face to face counselling can subsequently be offered subject to clinical assessment and clinical need. The

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- service is offered regardless of whether the issue is work or home related and can be accessed immediately and at the convenience of the employee;
- The provision of a general telephone information and advice service for employees available between 8.00 am and 8.00 pm Monday to Friday. This service is offered through a separate team of information specialists and can include, for example, advice on a spectrum of issues including debt management, divorce, benefits and childcare issues. Such issues can often be a precursor to stress and subsequent sickness absence. Access to this service will therefore have significant benefits;
 - The provision for the above services to be accessed by managers to seek advice and support on health and sickness issues relating to their own staff. This will be enormously beneficial and would help complement current Occupational Health and Human Resource Services;
 - The provision of an online and interactive website and mobile app (Zest) as a personalised health and personal fitness portal including advice on exercise, weight, diet and general health issues. As indicated, this can be customised for individual employees and used to monitor and incentivise health improvements;
 - The provision of an online resource (Lifestyle) containing regular information, advice and articles on general “life” issues ranging from relationships, childcare and consumer rights, through to stress, health and fitness. This will complement the work of the Council’s Occupational Health Unit and help to support regular “positive health promotion” events;
 - Other aspects of the service include the provision of regular management information on the use of the EAP by service area and contents. This again would be helpful in refining the Council’s Occupational Health and Safety Strategy and ensuring the relevance of related interventions.

The cost of the service was currently £2.02 per employee would mean an annual cost of approximately £11,000. This figure was based on the total employee headcount across the Council, including schools.

The cost would reduce to £1.78 per employee once the total client base for the service across all organisations under the Welsh Framework Agreement in Wales reached 60,000 employees. This would mean a reduced annual cost of approximately £9,000.

It was intended that the service would replace the Council’s current counselling service as currently provided through a contract with Cardiff Council. If the Cabinet endorsed the proposals then the current provision would be terminated following the issue of three months’ notice as per the requirements of the contract.

It was intended that the service be procured on a three year contract from 1st July, 2016 and be reviewed closely during that period.

Having considered the report, it was

AGREED – T H A T the proposals be noted.

(i) Update on Staff Engagement Strategy –

The Forum was provided with an update on the Council’s Employee Engagement Strategy.

Following the staff briefing sessions over the summer, work had continued in the shaping of four related engagement products as summarised below:

	Product	Lead
1	Expectations of my manager	Reuben Bergman
2	Seeking my views	Hayley Selway
3	Keeping me informed	Shelley Bellamy
4	Developing my skills	Helen Scarrett

The products were being developed by employees who expressed an interest following the 65 summer briefing sessions, and who attended follow up workshops.

The strategy was being managed through eight different phases, all leading to the design of a new “employment relationship / contract” in April 2016 and subsequent implementation.

Completion of Four Mini-Conference

All four mini-conferences had been held during November 2015 and all had been well attended by employees from across all Directorates.

The sessions were led by the officers as shown above and all introduced by the Council’s Managing Director. The engagement level for each session was high, as was the continuing interest in attending further meetings to help refine the proposals.

Each session was prepared on the basis of the results from an employee questionnaire and then subsequently designed in order to gather and discuss views and shape proposals.

Presentations to Corporate Management Team

Presentations had now been made to the Corporate Management Team in accordance with “phase 5” of the project plan.

All presentations had been extremely well presented and were indicative of a desire to continue to the development of the new “Vale Contract” and to ensure improvements in the key areas as set.

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The attendance and contribution of Trade Union colleagues throughout the process had been extremely useful and much appreciated.

Based on the outcomes of the four Corporate Management Team presentations, work was now continuing throughout February and March 2016 to bring all the themes and proposals together with a view to shaping the new Employment Relationship / Contract by the end of the financial year.

AGREED –

- (1) T H A T the issues set out in the report be noted.
- (2) T H A T the continuing engagement approach be endorsed.

(j) Corporate Assessment –

The Forum received a presentation on the Corporate Assessment by the Head of Performance and Development.

All Councils were subject to a Corporate Assessment every four years and the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Corporate Assessment would commence on 14th March, 2016.

It was confirmed that a pre-meeting with Trade Union representatives would be held on 16th March, 2016.

AGREED – T H A T the contents of the presentation be noted.

(k) Corporate Plan –

The Forum received details of the proposed Corporate Plan for the Council.

The draft Corporate Plan had been endorsed by Scrutiny Committee (Corporate Resources) and would be reported to Cabinet later in the day with a view to the document being ratified by Council.

Having considered the presentation, it was

AGREED – T H A T the contents be noted.

(l) Feedback on Policy Development –

The Forum was provided with an update in relation to the current position of HR Policy Development as at 25th January, 2016.

AGREED – T H A T the current position on the HR Policy Development be noted.

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(m) Proposed Timetable of Meetings for 2016/17 –

Following consideration of the proposed meeting dates for the 2016/17 municipal year, it was

AGREED – T H A T the proposed meeting dates as listed below be agreed:

4th July, 2016
17th October, 2016
13th February, 2017.