

JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Minutes of a meeting held on 29th July, 2019.

Present: Councillors G. John, Dr. I.J. Johnson, M.G.J. Morgan, A.R. Robertson, N.C. Thomas and M.R. Wilson (Substitute for Councillor Mrs. P. Drake).

Representatives of Trade Unions: Mr. K. Armstrong (GMB), Mr. B. Evans (Unison), Mr. D. Eveleigh (GMB), Mr. T. Greaves (GMB), Mr. R. Hughes (Unison), Mr. G. Pappas (Unison) and G. Southby (Unison).

Officers: Mr. T. Baker, Ms. J. Ballantine, Mr. L. Bonni, Mrs. A. Davies, Mrs. A. Phillips, Mr. J. Rees, Mr. A. Unsworth and Mrs. A. Watkins

(a) Appointment of Chairman –

RESOLVED – T H A T Councillor N.C. Thomas be appointed Chairman for the duration of the current Administration.

(b) Apologies for Absence –

These were received from Councillors Mrs. P. Drake and L.O. Rowlands and M. Canavan and L. Lancaster.

(c) Notification from the Trade Unions of the Name of the Vice-Chairman –

RESOLVED – T H A T G. Southby be appointed to the position of Vice-Chairman for the duration of the current Administration.

(d) Minutes and Matters Arising –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 11th February, 2019 be approved as a correct record.

(e) Declarations of Interest –

Councillors G. John, Dr. I.J. Johnson and M. Wilson declared an interest in respect of Agenda Item No. 16 – Presentation on the Reshaping Services Programme. The nature of their interest was that these Councillors were Members of Town or Community Councils and had received dispensation from the Standards Committee to speak and vote on such matters.

Councillor M. Wilson also declared a personal interest which was in relation to his role with the Cardiff and Vale College and because he was a Governor for Victoria

Primary School. As neither represented a prejudicial interest, Councillor Wilson stated that he would remain for the duration of the meeting.

(f) Trade Union Items – Verbal Update – Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF) –

Mr. G. Pappas (Unison) informed the Forum of a refreshed Welsh Government Learning Fund scheme that had been created in order to help the development and learning of employees which may be appropriate for our workforce. Such areas of learning included reading and writing and also IT skills. This was important as not all staff would have the necessary skills so the Fund would be available to support and develop those staff with the most need. In addition, Learning Representatives would be sought in order to mentor those staff requiring support.

An Elected Member stated that there should be no barriers preventing Council staff to attend and so there should be a resolution policy place should something stop a member of staff attending.

In addition a Member queried whether there were ways to encourage staff to attend learning sessions and he suggested that the development of staff could be a subject for a regular report to the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee.

The Forum also considered that some staff would be reluctant to discuss their educational background, which was why Learning Representatives were being introduced in order to deal with the question of low self-esteem. It was suggested that this could be considered by Scrutiny.

AGREED – T H A T the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee be asked to consider if Members wished to receive a report around staff learning/educational standards.

(g) Presentation – CSSC Staff Benefit Scheme –

The Operational Manager Employee Services informed the Forum that staff of the Vale of Glamorgan would be eligible to join a benefit scheme provided by CSSC. Membership would require a monthly subscription fee of £4.25 which would allow scheme members to access a range of benefits and discounts including free membership of CADW and also discounts for tourist attractions.

The Forum was advised that membership was also available to Elected Members.

(h) Minutes of Directorate Consultative Group Meetings –

The minutes of the following Directorate Consultative Group Meetings were received:

- Learning and Skills: 6th February, 2019;
- Learning and Skills: 12th June, 2019;
- Social Services: 20th February, 2019;

- Environment and Housing: 6th March, 2019.

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

(i) Minutes of the Corporate Health and Safety Meeting –

The Forum considered the minutes of the Corporate Health and Safety Meeting held on 8th July, 2019.

An Elected Member highlighted the frequency that Corporate Health and Safety Group should meet, noting that previous scheduled meetings had been cancelled. In reply, the Operational Manager for Human Resources stated that the Group would usually meet twice a year, with the next meeting scheduled for January 2020.

A Member voiced concern in relation to the increasing use of mobile phones and apps. The Member highlighted that not all Vale of Glamorgan phones would have the correct apps available, and that further consideration should be explored. In addition, the Member also stated that the issue of staff safeguarding arrangements for pool cars also needed to be considered further.

With regard to the increase use of mobile phones by pupils in schools, the Health and Safety Officer stated that this was currently being addressed.

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Corporate Health and Safety Meeting be noted.

(j) Dates of Future Directorate Consultative Group Meetings –

AGREED – T H A T the following dates for Directorate Consultative Group Meetings as detailed below be noted:

- Learning and Skills – 16th October, 2019;
- Learning and Skills – 26th February, 2020;
- Resources – To be arranged;
- Social Services – To be arranged;
- Visible Services – Meetings scheduled for the first Wednesday of every month.

(k) HR Policy / Procedure Update – Tranche 1 (HR) –

The Operational Manager for Employee Services presented the first tranche of updated HR Policy / Procedure Updates. These included the following:

- Policy on Unacceptable Actions by Citizens;
- Social Media Code of Conduct;
- Violence at Work Policy and Guidance.

An Elected Member stated that it was important to monitor the number of threats and cases of aggression shown to staff. In reply, the Health and Safety Officer stated that information could be obtained from Oracle and would be presented to each individual Directorate Consultative Group. In addition, the Health and Safety Group would meet every six months and would be provided with an update. Furthermore, the Chairman stated that it would be useful for the information to be provided to the JCF which should be sub-categorised by location and the type of threat experienced. Furthermore, Mr. Pappas stated that a lot of threats were unreported and would be down to the tolerance level of staff. He stated that what was being reported could potentially be the tip of the iceberg.

Mr Hughes (Unison) stated that there was no Council wide system that allowed information and concerns to be shared between departments internally, so staff in some sections would not have prior knowledge where aggression had previously been experienced. In reply, the Health and Safety Officer stated that work around this was ongoing with the Freedom of Information Team to see what information the Council could hold. In addition work was ongoing with ICT to build a new bespoke system.

Elected Members on the Forum expressed the view that zero tolerance would be difficult, but the bottom line was that staff should not be abused. Therefore, a piece of work around information sharing was necessary and further consideration of the policy required by Cabinet. In reply, the Operational Manager for Human Resources stated that the policy review process was in place and that as a working document, it would be refreshed and reviewed.

In relation to the Social Media Policy, an Elected Member stated that more information may be necessary so that staff could clearly appreciate their use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and possible pitfalls. The Member stated that more guidance for staff needed to be considered.

AGREED – T H A T the changes to both the Social Media Code of Conduct and the Violence at Work Policy as contained within the report be endorsed with it be suggested that further consideration be given around staff guidance in relation to social media. The Forum also extended support in relation to the “Unacceptable Actions by Citizens policy” which would be now proceeded to Cabinet and/or the relevant Scrutiny Committee for further consideration and determination.

(l) HR Policy / Procedure Update – Tranche 2 (HR) –

The Operational Manager Human Resources presented the report, which covered the following policies and procedures:

- Re-deployment;
- Grievance;
- Flexible Working Request;
- Career Break;
- Disciplinary Procedure.

Mr. Pappas, in relation to the Flexible Working Policy, stated that feedback for this had been positive and he asked whether the Council's current Flex time pilot scheme could be rolled out across the Council sooner. In reply, the Operational Manager stated that the pilot needed to be carried out over a six to nine month period across a number of Directorates and it was important for all issues / challenges to be considered beforehand.

An Elected Member, in referring to the Disciplinary Procedure, stated that it should be made clear whether the Policy related to a working day or simply a day of the week. In addition, it was suggested that a letter template that would be sent out to staff. In reply, the Operational Manager stated that these would be considered for inclusion in the management and staff guidance in support of the policy.

Mr. Pappas stated that it was important for all staff to have access to the new Policies referring specifically to Learning Support Assistants in schools and he asked that there needed to be a portal that covered all schools. In reply, the Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources stated that access to information was a challenge but this would be assisted by the rollout of Microsoft 365. In addition, the Communications Team was implementing a portal which would be self-serving meaning that staff would not have to go through the Headteacher. It was also the role of a school's Governing Body to ensure that policies were accessible to all staff.

AGREED – T H A T the Policies and Procedures as outlined in the HR Policy / Procedure Update – Tranche 2 report be endorsed.

(m) Alcohol and Drugs Misuse Policy –

The Operational Manager Human Resources advised the Joint Consultative Forum that the Council's Alcohol and Drugs Misuse Policy had been reviewed.

The previous Alcohol Policy included a statement forbidding the consumption of alcohol during working hours, including lunch / meal breaks. This had been in place since 2009 and had become embedded into the culture of the organisation. This statement remained within the revised Policy.

The reviewed Policy was approved by the Corporate Management Team on 4th July, 2019. The aim of the revised Policy was to promote the health and wellbeing of employees and to minimise the problems at work arising from the effects of alcohol and / or drugs. The Forum noted that any employee who was absent for treatment and rehabilitation as a result of an alcohol or drug-related illness would normally be regarded as being on a normal sickness absence. However, any individual found to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs at work or ignoring the Policy would be treated in accordance with the Council's Disciplinary Procedure. Where it became clear that an employee had a habitual or potentially serious alcohol or drug problem, the Council would normally offer help to support i.e. counselling and referral to the Occupational Health Service.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 required employers to assess the risks to health of employees and to take appropriate preventative or protective measures to remove or reduce the risks.

Having considered the revised Policy, it was

AGREED – T H A T the revised Alcohol and Drugs Misuse Policy be endorsed.

(n) Occupational Health Update –

The Health and Safety Officer provided Occupational Health information in relation to flu vaccinations, health screening, use of Care First and the Council's awareness raising campaign regarding the Menopause. In addition, the Forum received the number of appointments to the Occupational Health service.

It was noted that a new Occupational Health nurse had been appointed in January 2019 and had made a significant impact on the vaccination process, blood tests, health screening and some of the health surveillance requirements e.g. hearing tests.

A Member commented that Occupational Health appointments had increased by around 20% and he queried the capacity of the Service and the waiting list while suggesting that this may be an issue for consideration by the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee. In reply, the Health and Safety Officer stated that there had been a lot of new referrals, with 30 new referrals the week previous. This was an increasing challenge and needed to be looked into further. Furthermore, the Operational Manager stated that stress was the main reason for referrals and he alluded to the use of the Management of Attendance Policy and the fact that staff were able to self-refer. The Forum considered it important to send a reminder to staff and asked for further information regarding sickness levels.

Having considered the Occupational Health Update, it was

AGREED –

(1) T H A T the Update on the Occupational Health Service be noted.

(2) T H A T it be recommended for the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee to consider the issues behind an increase in Occupational Health referrals.

(o) HR Employee Services Update –

The Operational Manager Employee Services provided an update on the following:

- E Recruitment;
- Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS);
- Cycle to Work Scheme;

- E Payslips.

In terms of the E Recruitment system, the Operational Manager stated that the new system was more digitally orientated and had replaced the previous system which was considered inefficient. The new system allowed better access for applicants and also offered a more streamlined service for managers. All information would be processed digitally and so it removed the need for paper copies. The system also allowed for automatic e-mails to be sent to applicants informing them that their application had been securely received.

In relation to the Disclosure and Barring Service, the Forum noted that as an Umbrella Body, the Council could process and submit applications to the DBS on behalf of other organisations. By using the Council's online DBS system, results could be back in as little as five days. It was hoped that by offering the service to outside organisations income would be generated for the Council and help alleviate some cost pressures.

In relation to Cycle to Work, the Forum noted that this was being reintroduced and would be offered to staff with payment taken directly from their salary but this would result in a reduced tax and National Insurance contribution. Halfords had been chosen as the Council's partner, but staff could also use other retailers. One concern in relation to the Cycle to Work was the impact on those staff on the National Minimum Wage and so a discount of £90 for a £150 bike was available.

With regard to E Payslips, the Operational Manager advised that at present over 1,600 staff would already access their payslips via the Oracle system. A new IT system was being created for use via the web as well as the Cloud, and also an external portal would be developed to allow access for all staff, seven days a week. The new system would be similar to the banking websites and would be encrypted and require the input of a secure password.

AGREED – T H A T the HR Update on E Recruitment, Disclosure and Barring Service, Cycle to Work Scheme and E Payslips be noted.

(p) Presentation and Update on the Following: Staff Engagement, Reshaping Services and Corporate Plan –

The Business Improvement Manager provided an update on staff engagement, Reshaping Services and the Corporate Plan.

In respect of staff engagement, the Forum was advised that over 1,000 staff had taken part in The Big Conversation 1 and a second exercise would be undertaken within the next few months. In addition, Council wide engagement groups had been developed in order to redefine objectives around communication, skills, reward and recognition and inclusivity. Furthermore, local engagement and innovation groups were being established with briefing sessions to commence during September. Also joint Corporate Management Team / Staff Engagement Group would be held during November.

In terms of the Reshaping Services programme, the Forum was advised that since 2016, the programme had achieved savings of £14.399m. In terms of progress during 2019/20, the Forum was advised that an Asset Programme Board had been established and a Digital Programme focusing on Microsoft 365 was being rolled out. In addition, income generation and commercial opportunities was an important area.

With regards to the Corporate Plan, the Business Improvement Manager stated that the Council was progressing on implementing a new Corporate Plan for 2020. At the heart of the Corporate Plan would be the Well-being of Future Generations Act which would be key when considering how services would be delivered and how decisions were made and scrutinised. The key themes of the new Corporate Plan would include the following:

- Shaping a Council fit for the future;
- Being part of a proud community;
- Supporting and caring for those in need;
- Encouraging good health and wellbeing;
- Respecting and valuing the environment;
- Looking and planning for the future;
- Providing opportunities for all.

Mr. Hughes (Unison) stated that after 10 years of austerity the Council was facing significant budget deficits and staff had experienced a 30% fall in wages and unfortunately challenges for the future remained the same. Mr. Hughes raised the issue of recruiting new young staff members and the struggle to replace experienced staff. Mr. Pappas stated that things were “tough” and the Council was close to seeing a drop in services. The Vale was still better than most authorities, but it was important to recognise the input by Occupational Health particularly for the increase in the number of staff going off with stress. He added that some services were at breaking point and something needed to change.

The Chairman stated that the proportion of the Council’s budget spent on Education and Social Services would likely increase, so there was only so much that could be done before there was an impact on services.

An Elected Member stated that Reshaping Services was the Council’s response to budget restrictions imposed by both UK and Welsh Governments. This, the Member stated was a political choice, so it was important to receive feedback from the Trade Unions of what was happening. These issues needed to be reported back to Cabinet in order to ask the question of what would be delivered from the Council’s Corporate Plan.

Subsequently it was

AGREED – T H A T the update on staff engagement, Reshaping Services and the Corporate Plan be noted.

(q) Future Meetings of the JCF –

AGREED – T H A T the JCF future meetings for 2019/20 be held on:

14th October, 2019

10th February, 2020

both to commence at 10.00 a.m. in the Council Chamber.