

JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Minutes of a meeting held on 10th February, 2020.

Present: Councillor N.C. Thomas (Chairman); Councillors Dr. I.J. Johnson, M.G.J. Morgan, A.R. Robertson and L.O. Rowlands.

Representatives of Trade Unions: Mr. K. Armstrong (Unison), Mr. T. Greaves (GMB), Mr. G. Pappas (Unison) and Ms. S. Townsend-Ryan (Unison/Vice-Chairman).

Officers: Ms. J. Ballantine, Mr. L. Bonni, Mr. T. Bowring, Mrs. A. Davies, Mr G. Davies, Mrs. T. Dickinson, Mrs. P. Ham, Ms. E. Morgan and Mr. M. Thomas.

(a) Apologies for Absence –

These were received from Councillors Mrs. P. Drake and G. John; M. Canavan (NEU), L. Lancaster (NASUWT) and G. Southby (Unison).

(b) To Receive Notification from the Trade Unions of the Name of the Vice-Chairman –

RESOLVED – T H A T S. Townsend-Ryan be appointed to the position of Vice-Chairman for the duration of the current Administration.

(c) Minutes and Matters Arising –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 29th July, 2019 be approved as a correct record subject to the following amendment – Mr. K. Armstrong should be shown as a representative of Unison and not GMB.

(d) Declarations of Interest –

Councillors Dr. I.J. Johnson, A.R. Robertson and L.O. Rowlands declared an interest in respect of Agenda Item No. 12(ii) – Reshaping Services. 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.

(e) Chairman's Announcement –

The Chairman asked the forum to observe a minute's silence for the former Vale of Glamorgan Councillor Janice Birch, who recently passed away.

(f) Trade Union Items –

No items were received.

(g) Minutes of Directorate Consultative Groups (for information) –

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Learning and Skills held on 16th October, 2019; Social Services on 23rd May, 2019; Environment and Housing on 4th September, 9th October, 6th November and 4th December, 2019; and, presented as supplementary information, Social Services Consultative Forum from 6th September, 2019.

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

(h) Minutes of Corporate Health and Safety Meeting –

The Forum considered the minutes of the Corporate Health and Safety Meeting held on 23rd January, 2020. Mr. Pappas (Unison) queried the implementation of fire breaks as part of the remaining fire stopping work to be done in Council offices. The Health and Safety Wellbeing Manager replied that this work had now been approved. Mr. Greaves (GMB) also asked whether the related health and safety assessment had been completed, to which the Health and Safety Wellbeing Manager replied they would need to find out and reply to him.

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

(i) Dates of Future Directorate Consultative Groups for Noting –

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

- Learning and Skills: 26th February, 17th June and 21st October, 2020;
- Resources: TBA;
- Social Services: TBA;
- Visible Services: Meetings scheduled for first Wednesday of every month.

(j) Volunteering Policy – Verbal Update –

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development informed the Forum that the Volunteering Policy would allow Vale of Glamorgan staff to take one day off for volunteering within the Vale of Glamorgan community which would work out as one per leave year. This could be done on an individual basis or as part of a group event, for example World Oceans Day or National Recycling Day. She queried with the Head of Policy and Business Transformation whether this Policy had gone to the Insight Group, to which he replied yes. The Head of Human

Resources and Organisational Development went on to say that the information would be passed on to Trade Unions shortly.

It was

AGREED – T H A T the policies and procedures as outlined in the Volunteering Policy update be noted.

(k) Management of Attendance Update –

The Operational Manager Employee Services informed the Forum this was a report on the Management of Attendance figures for the Quarter 3 period (1st April to 31st December, 2019) and comparative data for the same period in 2018. This provided an overview of corporate absence. The 2019/20 performance outcome for Quarter 3 was at 7.63 days lost per FTE. This tied in with previously noticed trend where sickness increased over the second half of the year. Of particular note was the currently monthly figure of 7.63 days lost per FTE and the current end of year forecast for 2019/20 which was 11.1 days lost per FTE – which was against the annual target of 9.2 days lost per FTE. However, the Operational Manager for Employee Services pointed out that the increase was mirrored across other similar Local Authorities. He went on to inform the Forum around the data concerning days lost per Directorate as well as Appendices A and B to the report which drilled down to individual Directorates. This data had been disseminated via internal meetings, Directorates and Scrutiny Committees.

The Operational Manager for Employee Services highlighted that 75% of all absence was long term – this was defined as four weeks or more and as a result, this statistic needed to be targeted. This would include initiatives such as the review of the current Attendance and Wellbeing Policy as well as looking at information coming from the Scrutiny Committees such as a review of sickness as a result of musculoskeletal and mental health issues in order to help tackle these.

An Elected Member stated that a more detailed version of this report had been presented at a recent Scrutiny Committee meeting and had been thoroughly discussed by Committee Members. However, it was also important to hear the input from the Trade Unions regarding this as well.

The Chairman voiced concerns around the high levels of non-work related issues impacting on work attendance as well as citing the issues around musculoskeletal problems such as staff having to deal with overloaded black bags as part of refuse waste collection. The duty of care that the Council and management had towards staff meant they needed to be alert to such issues occurring.

Mr. Pappas stated that the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development had put together a Wellbeing Group to help with the issues raised at this meeting. He also stated that in terms of front line services the main issues were around musculoskeletal and mental health or stress related issues. There was a slow but steady change or improvement in the work force culture in raising such issues, but other issues were also starting to emerge such as an aging work force.

Discussions concerning these issues were being held over at the BCRS and Depot facilities.

An Elected Member questioned how non-work related issues could be picked up within the work place environment. Mr. Pappas replied that in such cases where it was identified, people were signposted to the relevant teams or organisations. He added that this was all that could be done at present until the process changed.

The Chairman added that it was difficult for some people to seek help until issues had come to a head which could manifest itself in an increase in sickness or in the drop in work quality. It was necessary for management and other supervisory to be alert for such signs which could indicate stress or mental health issues within or outside the work place.

An Elected Member stated there was a need for greater awareness and promotion of people speaking to management and others regarding issues around health and wellbeing. The Health and Safety Wellbeing Manager replied that measures such as the Time to Talk Days had been promoted via StaffNet with staff participation within both the Civic and Dock Offices. The Elected Member responded by saying that it was also necessary to look at wider social media as well as StaffNet, such as Twitter or Facebook. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development stated that the Elected Member's suggestions around the wider social media would be taken on board and tablets would be provided in areas such as the Alps Depot and elsewhere in order for staff to access StaffNet or StaffNet Plus which could also raise awareness around mental health issues, wellbeing and persons they could contact about these. She also added that mentors would be trained and utilised by either GMB or Unison Unions as well as looking to increase break out spaces and areas for multi-faith worship.

Mr. Pappas stated that domiciliary care and the Alps were areas where there were insufficient mentors, and staff faced a variety of issues such as homelessness and illiteracy. There was a need to look at these issues in order to improve things. The Chairman agreed, stating it was important to look at corporate responsibility with regard to these areas. Mr. Pappas added that both GMB and Unison were working together in order to provide literacy, digital and numeracy courses for frontline services staff but needed Council help in order to increase the funding and roll out of this.

The Health and Safety Wellbeing Manager added that an Occupational Health Nurse would be going to the Alps in order to do health screening and this could provide an opportunity for members of staff to speak to an independent person. An Elected Member commented that staff may find it difficult to come forward due to pride and other factors, and that the Vale of Glamorgan Council should be more proactive in encouraging people to make contact regarding health issues. The Health and Safety Wellbeing Manager replied that, for example, posters had been put up in the Alps facility in order to get interest for attending the Occupational Health Nurse and thereby encourage people to come forward with any issues.

It was

AGREED – T H A T that the Management of Attendance Update be noted.

(l) StaffNet Plus Presentation –

The Operational Manager for Employee Services presented to the Forum this item and explained this had been previously discussed in July, but which had now gone live after an initial soft launch. He presented the front page which also accessed various key pages on the website, such as staff benefits. The Operational Manager for Employee Services added that this would be a means for employees to get quick access to key areas via any private device such as a smartphone or tablet in order to access information such as their pay slips and would provide a cheaper and more efficient way of viewing these – but, with the caveat that hard copies would be provided to those who struggled with IT and until such time as they were trained up. Other areas that could be accessed were health self-referral, staff benefits page which offered company discounts for all Vale of Glamorgan Council and Schools staff as well as accessing training and purchasing annual leave. It also provided a link to key Council policies and ‘Cycle to Work’ (in the near future).

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development also stated that Care First was also available online in order to provide easy accessibility for staff to access this at any time regarding issues around health and wellbeing. The Care First helpline was 24 hours.

It was

AGREED – T H A T the StaffNet Plus presentation update be noted.

(m) Matter Which the Chairman had Decided was Urgent –

RESOLVED – T H A T the following matter which the Chairman had decided was urgent for the reason given beneath the minute heading be considered.

(n) Whistleblowing Policy –
(Urgent by reason of the need to have the item concerning the Whistleblowing Policy on the Agenda to be discussed by the Forum)

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development provided an update to the Forum concerning the draft Whistleblowing Policy. She explained that the Whistleblowing Policy had been in existence in one form or another since 2014, but since 2019 and in conjunction with Audit and the Staff Survey there had been a review to ensure individuals within the Council had an opportunity to raise issues. As part of this review, the new draft Whistleblowing Policy had been written – using a much simpler and easier to understand format in order that it was accessible to all, whether they be Council staff or Elected Members. As part of this a dedicated “Speak Out” telephone line and e-mail address would be available for Vale of

Glamorgan staff, Elected Members and others such as employees of a Local Authority school or School Governors and contractors. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development advised Members that the related process flow chart for whistleblowing would be distributed to them shortly.

An Elected Member stated this matter had been raised at the Audit Committee and the main comment there had been the need to include the process flow chart in the report and whistleblowing document.

Mr. Pappas stated the main issue around the Whistleblowing Policy was the reluctance of staff and others to come forward and he asked how this could be overcome. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development replied that this indeed was a difficult issue and was a common challenge for all businesses and other organisations. Key here was the need to co-operate with Unions over this in order to reassure staff and to reinforce the fact that they would be protected. She also noted that whistleblowing figures were relatively low within the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

An Elected Member, following up on the previous comment by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, asked what were the figures in terms of whistleblowing reports. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development replied that it was approximately 7 to 8 cases reported within the previous year but would circulate the actual figures to Members as soon as possible.

Another Elected Member mentioned that he believed that there were approximately 18 cases of whistleblowing over the last five years within the Vale of Glamorgan Council. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development replied and in order to add context that some of these were upheld but others were not, but she would distribute the relevant figures to Forum Members as soon as possible. The Elected Member replied that it would be difficult to assess the whistleblowing process without comparative data but going forward it would be useful to home in on figures generated via the anonymous line or e-mail address. He added that there was a potential concern around possible under reporting but in part this could be as a result of the present culture within the work place.

Mr. Pappas added that there would be staff concern around what would happen should they whistle blow as well as the level and quality of investigation undertaken as a result of a whistleblowing case.

The Chairman stated that there were some examples recently within the media where people were hounded at their work place as a result of whistleblowing. He also referred to page 6 of the draft Whistleblowing Policy, in particular around the discouragement of anonymous reporting and highlighted the need to provide support to staff as a consequence of this.

Finally, an Elected Member stressed the need for an ongoing discussion between Trade Unions and the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development in relation to this Policy.

It was

AGREED – T H A T the draft Whistleblowing Policy and update be noted.

(o) Updates –

(i) **Corporate Plan**

The Head of Policy and Business Transformation informed the Forum that the current Corporate Plan was now at the end stage and a new one would be introduced shortly. As part of this, it was important to look at how things could be done differently and move more towards a focus on outcomes rather than service activity. After the consultation in relation to this had been undertaken, the Council would be looking at a more integrated approach so that Directorates could see how they contribute towards the overall Council vision. This proposed new Corporate Plan would be reviewed by Cabinet shortly and then on to Full Council.

The Head of Policy and Business Transformation went on to speak about the feedback from the consultation process on the new Corporate Plan and the overall theme was that the Plan sounded good, but respondents were interested to see details on how this would be implemented. The Head of Policy and Business Transformation stated the actual implementation would be presented in the Annual Delivery Plan and this would be consulted on in March. He added that it was a useful process to review the Corporate Plan and to set ambitious goals. He also wanted to thank the Trade Unions for their input and support in this process.

(ii) **Draft Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24**

The Head of Policy and Business Transformation informed the Forum that the draft Strategic Equality Plan would set for the next four years (2020-24) the move to ten equality objectives aligned with the Annual Development Plan. The consultation process had involved various groups such as the Equalities Consultative Forum, Vale Youth Cabinet, New Horizons and Vale People First, as well as through online surveys and social media campaigns. The progress against each of the actions would be reviewed and reported every six months. As part of the consultation process and to tie in with the equality objectives, certain key areas had been highlighted such as improving access to disabled citizens, more accessible public transport and to consider the gender pay gap and any ethnic minority pay gap for the staff within the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

The Chairman spoke in relation to the Corporate Plan and the Strategic Equality Plan, stating that there seemed to be quite a low response rate that certainly did not signify a statistically significant number. The Head of Policy and Business Transformation replied that the online response was only one part of the consultation process so as well as taking onboard the comments

generated there, the comments made in the wider consultations such as with the Vale 50+ Forum, Youth Cabinet, etc. were also taken into account. He added it was important to have an ongoing conversation on issues raised with the public, for example climate change. This was also the same with the Equality Plan, such as consultation with the Equalities Consultative Forum. There would also be additional consultation with regard to the amended Annual Delivery Plan.

An Elected Member stated that it was important to have sufficient statistical data come out of this consultation as there needed to be both qualitative and quantitative information. Also, for both the Corporate Plan and the Strategic Equality Plan it was the case that the public would wholeheartedly agree with the statements made within, and ethos of, these Plans but the actual issue for this audience would be how they could be implemented.

Another Elected Member stated that it appeared the response rate for these consultations were less than 1% of the population of the Vale of Glamorgan. This could lead to potentially other issues that had an impact on the local population not being registered. The Elected Member went on to say that the Vale of Glamorgan had a rising elderly population and this would mean certain key issues being generated around public transport, particularly within the rural Vale. The Member also referred to a previous report which indicated a large increase in the older population by 2035 within the Vale. This would require greater consultation on the needs of older people within the Vale and to reach out to them.

The Head of Policy and Business Transformation replied that as part of the consultation and review of objectives it had been essential that concerns identified were relevant and that consultation had been undertaken with various groups including the Vale 50+ Forum. The Elected Member added that the key word or phrase now used in the Plans was sustainability and as part of this it was essential to making the rural Vale much more sustainable.

(iii) **Reshaping Services**

This provided the Forum with action updates for the overall process as well as specific projects by the Head of Policy and Business Transformation as well as the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development.

Mr. Pappas asked about the overall Reshaping Services process and whether it was making efficiencies and savings. The Head of Policy and Business Transformation replied that Reshaping Services had already made some significant pieces of change within the Vale of Glamorgan Council with financial savings, for example significant cost savings had been made recently through the establishment and launch of The Big Fresh Catering Company. Overall, Reshaping had resulted in savings of approximately £12m. He added that in terms of budgetary issues resulting from the Reshaping Services, these would be looked at by the Vale of Glamorgan Council in order to resolve where this was necessary and achievable. He

stressed the need to look to the future – in order to learn from the successes as well as those areas not so successful – and to look at next year with future-proofing and protecting key services over the next three to five years.

An Elected Member stated that a recent uplift from the Welsh Government needed to be looked at in the context of whether this was an ongoing, sustained, uplift year on year or a stand-alone one in terms of Welsh Government funding. He added that it would be useful for Trade Union representatives to attend Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny and Audit Committee meetings as this would help to give an alternative view on budgets and other financial aspects. He also added that the Vale of Glamorgan Council was in a fairly good financial position whereby areas of overspend were balanced by savings made elsewhere. The Elected Member agreed with the Head of Policy and Business Transformation about looking at priorities in terms of Reshaping Services and felt that the Trade Unions should feed into this.

The Head of Policy and Business Transformation stated that he and his team would continue to liaise with the Trade Unions and that further updates concerning Reshaping Services would be fed back to Cabinet.

It was

AGREED – T H A T the updates on Draft Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24, Reshaping Services and the Corporate Plan be noted.

(p) Review of the Joint Consultative Forum's Constitution –

The Democratic Services Officer advised the Forum there was a need to revise the Constitution for the Joint Consultative Forum in two areas:

- Paragraph 5.3 – that the wording “a Vale of Glamorgan Councillor” be inserted; and
- Paragraph 6.3 – that the number of Directorates indicated be changed from five to four.

An Elected Member also asked around the quorum as set out in the Constitution for the Forum as key Members of the quorum had previously had difficulties in attending. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development would look to assist the relevant Members to attend future Forum meetings.

The Chairman also asked that wording be added to Paragraph 5.3 regarding the Chairperson of the Forum being elected by all Elected Members, to which the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer stated he would arrange for this to be inserted.

It was

AGREED – T H A T the proposed changes to the Joint Consultative Forum's Constitution be endorsed subject to the inclusion in Paragraph 5.3 of a need for the Chairperson to be elected by all Elected Members.

(q) Future Meeting Dates –

AGREED – T H A T the Joint Consultative Forum meetings for 2020/21 be held on:

- 6th July, 2020;
- 12th October, 2020;
- 18th January, 2021; and
- 19th April, 2021.

The forum also wished to thank Mrs A. Davies for her service, as this would be the last time she would attend the Joint Consultative Forum due to her retirement in the near future.