

JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 19th April, 2021.

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

Representatives of Trade Unions: Mr. C. Brown (ASCL), Ms. M. Canavan (NEU), Mr. T. Greaves (GMB), Mrs. G. Hallett (NAHT), Mrs. L. Lancaster (NASUWT), Mr. G. Pappas (Unison) and Ms. S. Townsend-Ryan (Unison/Vice-Chairman).

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

(a) Apologies for Absence –

These were received from Councillor L.O. Rowlands; C. Davies (GMB), S. Greenslade (Unison), Mrs. S. Alderman and Mrs. S. Williams (Officers).

(b) Minutes and Matters Arising –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd February, 2021 be approved as a correct record.

(c) Declarations of Interest –

No declarations were received. However, Councillor Dr. Johnson wished to advise the Forum that he would be withdrawing for the agenda item on the Queen's Honours Process due to his views on the Monarchy and republicanism.

(d) Trade Union Items –

None received at this time; however, Mr. Pappas (Unison) wished to add that there were several items which constituted a 'work in progress' currently with Human Resources (HR) and these could be brought to this Forum at a later date.

(e) Minutes of Directorate Consultative Groups (For Information) –

(i) Minutes of Learning and Skills JCF: 8th February, 2021 (For Information)

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Learning and Skills JCF on 8th February, 2021.

No.

The Director of Learning and Skills provided an update on schools. She explained that schools within the Vale of Glamorgan had reopened after the Easter break. The reopening had run smoothly so far, with voluntary lateral flow tests being carried out on the majority of staff and with most test results coming back as negative. There was an extremely efficient reporting system in place for the results of such tests (for example, positive or negative).

Testing for COVID-19 would be extended to, initially, Year 10 school pupils and upwards, then on to Year 7 pupils and upwards.

The Director of Learning and Skills added there had only been a few, limited, cases of COVID-19 identified in schools within the Vale and the affected groups had undertaken self-isolation. For example, there had been a small outbreak at the Llandough Resource Base for speech and language which had gone back to the five 'feeder' mainstream schools. In order to overcome this issue, it was proposed that the resource base would be temporarily transferred to Llantwit Major. This would be done in consultation with the relevant parents and schools, with the transfer happening on 19th April, 2021.

The Officer also updated the Forum on an anti-facemask group which had been contacting schools within the Vale regarding children wearing masks at these premises. This had caused some concern among staff, but so far the system had operated effectively with most pupils continuing to wear face masks when required.

Councillor Robertson asked what proportion of staff at schools within the Vale had been vaccinated against COVID-19, adding that such staff should have been prioritised within the roll out of the vaccine. The Officer replied such data was not held at this time. However, school headteachers had reported to the Council that a large number of school staff had been vaccinated and this had increased confidence among teachers and other staff in actually being back working in school. Attempts to 'nudge' staff within schools to get vaccinated had only received mixed success.

Mrs. Hallett (NAHT) agreed that the majority of school staff were a lot happier and reassured due to the mass vaccination roll out. In terms of numbers of staff that were vaccinated, she estimated that roughly 60% of staff had been vaccinated, due to the age groups that they were in being already targeted. Consequently, those staff in younger age groups had not been vaccinated as yet.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development stated that, based on the age profiling that had been done since the start of April, approximately two-thirds of school staff (those who were over 40 years old and within the government age group timeframe who had consented to a vaccine) would have been vaccinated or were due to do so as the roll out continued.

No.

Councillor Robertson also wished to know what the levels of vaccine 'hesitancy' were among school staff within the Vale. The Director of Learning and Skills replied that there was no definitive information on this as yet but a small number of staff had been identified as not wishing to be vaccinated and where their work required face to face or close contact with other staff or pupils, advice had been sought with regards to employment law as vaccination was not compulsory.

The Senior Legal Service Officer added that such issues presented a wholly new challenge legally, with current legislation preventing persons being compelled to receive vaccination. The Welsh Government (WG) would no doubt be looking at such cases in light of the pandemic. However, currently, an individual's circumstances needed to be considered and legally it would be difficult to force staff to be vaccinated.

Mrs. L. Lancaster (NASUWT) stated that Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan Health Board had a 'reserve list' for persons to be vaccinated should persons not turn up for their vaccination appointment. It was suggested that Headteachers mention to staff about this reserve list in order to increase the numbers vaccinated.

Concerns around the anti-facemask group, previously mentioned, were also raised, as well as those staff and students who refused to wear facemasks.

The Chairman acknowledged the concerns raised around the anti-facemask group and general vaccine hesitancy, but added that both the Trade Unions and the Council had provided a consistent message countering these by encouraging staff and the wider public to get vaccinated and to wear facemasks.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Learning and Skills JCF be noted.

(ii) Minutes of Visible Services and Housing Consultative Forum: 3rd February 2021

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Visible Services and Housing Consultative Forum meeting on 3rd February, 2021.

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Visible Services and Housing Consultative Forum meeting be noted.

(f) Dates of Future Directorate Consultative Group for Noting –

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

No.

- (i) Learning and Skills: 12th April and 16th June, 2021.
- (ii) Resources: TBA.
- (iii) Social Services (meetings now moved quarterly) -
8th June 2021
8th September 2021
1st December 2021
(Meeting 18th March – minutes not yet approved).
- (iii) Visible Services and Housing: 3rd March, 2021 – cancelled; 7th April, 2021 (minutes to be finalised).
- (v) Corporate Health and Safety Meeting: TBA.

(g) Verbal update on HR Strategy (HR) –

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development updated the Forum on the Human Resources (HR) Strategy, stating that this had been drafted outlining the three key areas of work to be undertaken:

- Driving employee experiences;
- Redesigning for Responsiveness; and
- Striving for High Performance.

In terms of actions for the strategy these would entail, for example, establishing an 'Attraction Strategy' in order to attract people to work at the Council. For outputs, this would involve, for example, looking at the make up or 'diversity' of staff working for the Council.

The Officer also stated that HR were in discussions with the Directorates and Trade Unions around the strategy as well.

The HR Strategy would be drafted and out for ratification in the second week of May.

The Officer explained that the strategy could be called a 'People's Plan' or 'People's Strategy' as these had garnered the greatest support from the groups consulted with currently in relation to the strategy.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the update on the on the HR Strategy be noted.

(h) Verbal update on Wellbeing Survey (HR) -

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development informed the Forum that the closing date for the survey was now on the 23rd April.

The Officer subsequently explained that:

No.

- This Survey followed on from the one taken in 2020 which looked at the topics around wellbeing, communication, different ways of working, leadership, etc.;
- This previous Survey had identified overall high staff satisfaction with communication, leadership and staff preferring to have a 'hybrid' form of working moving forward (a mix of working from home and at the office);
- Furthermore, from the Survey in 2020, the Wellbeing Plan had been established, which included online fitness events, mindfulness and financial advice. This was accessible either live or recorded for all staff groups across the Vale;
- The new Wellbeing Survey in essence was the same or similar to the 2020 Survey in order to compare 'like for like' and therefore see how staff were now feeling about the same issues surveyed previously. However, the new Survey would also ask staff about the new wellbeing activities held online and to compare how they were feeling in the summer of 2020 with how they feel right now;
- There had been 1,400 responses for the Survey in 2020; so far, there had been 854 responses for the latest Survey. The aim was to reach the total responses received in 2020 or to go beyond this. As part of this, the deadline for the Survey had been extended, for example, Headteachers had asked for the Survey to be left open so that school staff would have an opportunity to complete this after the Easter break and the reopening of schools;
 - So far, from the responses collated, much of the results and metrics were the same as the 2020 Survey, such as on leadership. However, opinions on different of ways of working had seen some more definitive responses with some staff at least more firmly for either homeworking or returning back to the office on a more fulltime basis; and
 - The results of the latest Survey would be circulated once complete.

Councillor Robertson asked if the Council had an overall view about homeworking and new ways of working. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development replied that it would be the results of the Staff Wellbeing Survey which would inform the decision of Council on the new ways of working proposed, such as a 'hybrid' form of working, which was looking most favourable at present. It was likely that the new working environment would be quite different to what had gone before.

The Director of Learning and Skills stated that where staff did come into the office, this could involve a new approach, for example, the use of 'hot-desking' and looking at having areas within the office set up for 'agile working'. This would also include the option for staff to work at the nearest Council offices to their homes. Ultimately, the Council would need to look at the final results of the Survey before implementing significant changes.

Councillor Dr. Johnson stated it was important to look at the wide range of experiences and options collated from the replies to the Survey, with qualitative information being important in underpinning the more quantitative findings of the Survey. As part of this, staff who could not access this survey online needed to also be considered. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational

No.

Development replied that the Survey did have specific areas within it for showing specific, more 'qualitative' responses from staff.

Mr. Pappas (Unison) added that the small number of responses to the Survey from front line staff (such as Parks and Highways), indicated that both supervisors were not informing staff about the survey and that such staff did not have access to the technology to complete the Survey. Therefore, there should be two versions of this Survey – one electronic and the other a hard copy. The Officer replied that she would meet with Mr. Pappas to discuss these issues and possible solutions such as asking the Communications Team to produce hard copies of the Survey in order to better engage with such traditionally 'harder to reach' groups of staff. As part of this she would also be liaising with Heads of Service, Trade Unions and Headteachers in order to get greater staff participation and responses to the Survey, as well as encouraging staff to use their smartphones and the possible 'lending' of iPads or tablets in order for them to complete the Survey.

Councillor Robertson echoed Mr. Pappas' comments that not all staff had the opportunity to work from home and wished to commend the work undertaken by the Council's refuse workers and other frontline workers during the pandemic. He asked if these were agency, temporary or permanent staff employed by the Council. Mr. Pappas replied that these were a mix of permanent and agency staff who covered sickness and holiday leave taken by more permanent workers in order to ensure that statutory services (such as refuse) could continue unaffected.

Ms. Townsend-Ryan (Unison/Vice-Chairman) felt that the hybrid model of working that could be undertaken by various staff (including Social Services) could burden staff with additional costs (such as extra electricity and heating used) as well as having to instal or upgrade broadband access at their homes. Also, for those who wanted to work partially or fully within a Council office they may not have a 'base' to go to or whole teams may be 'displaced' within the Council buildings due to the hybrid way of working.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development replied that firstly, she would be speaking with the Environment and Housing Department about reviewing the agency or temporary employment usage in order to understand whether the permanent headcount was correct and whether there was a need for more permanent jobs for staff. This would be undertaken in discussion with the Environment and Housing Directorate and in consultation with the Trade Unions. Secondly, concerning homeworking, staff could claim (via the HMRC website) a tax allowance for this. The Council and Trade Unions had shared this link with Union members and staff, with HR also consulting with the Trade Unions around homeworking and hybrid working once the results of the wellbeing Survey had been gathered. In particular, HR were aware that the WLGA had been in consultation with the Trade Unions regarding working at home and as a result could be looking at those staff who did not meet the tax threshold for the HMRC allowance and/or those staff who were suffering financial hardship. In terms of teams displaced, HR were not aware of any such instances and asked if Ms. Townsend-Ryan could provide any details about this.

No.

The Operational Manager Employee Services added that HMRC would be resetting tax codes for the new financial year and so staff would need to reapply for the tax allowance.

Ms. Townsend-Ryan (Unison/Vice-Chairman) felt that the £6 per week provided under the HMRC Tax Allowance was insufficient to cover homeworking costs.

Finally, Ms. Canavan (NEU) asked how the Trade Unions could share details of the Wellbeing Survey with staff. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development replied that she would forward the hyperlink for the Survey to the Forum, as well as it being available via iDev.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the update on the Wellbeing Survey be noted.

(i) Queen's Birthday and New Year's Honours Process (HR) –

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development explained that the Council had the ability to put through nominations of staff both for the Queen's Birthday and New Year's Honours lists. Currently there was no established process in place and so the new process would help to make applications for nominations accessible to staff via an online form on Staffnet.

The Council's Nominations Panel would be made up of a diverse range of groups from throughout the Council, such as GLAM (LGBT+ and Allies), the newly formed minority ethnic group, HR, Communications and the Trade Unions.

Councillor Robertson asked if there would be any representatives from the political groups on this Panel, to which the Officer replied that it was felt that at this time it would be better not to have a political representative on the panel due to the need for impartiality.

Mr. Brown (ASCL) raised an issue (echoed by other Members of the Forum, such as the Chairman and Councillor John), about the difficulty in isolating specific individual(s) for nomination for the Queen's Honours list when the focus should be on the collective efforts of Council staff and Schools, particularly during the pandemic.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development agreed with these sentiments, but stated that the process had to be initiated in order to encourage staff to make nominations and to not miss out on getting individual staff recognised on the Queens Honours list, particularly when other Councils and Health Boards were already undertaking this process.

The Chairman stated that it was good to have a firm process now in place for such nominations, but this had to be continually monitored and updated in order to stay 'relevant' and to keep reminding staff of this process.

It was subsequently

No.

AGREED – T H A T the update on the Queen's Birthday and New Year's Honours Process be noted.

(j) Update on the Culture Book (HR) –

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development informed the Forum that the latest, finalised draft of the Culture Book had been drafted by the Engagement Champions, with inputs from GLAM and other groups. However, the draft could still be amended, which included any input from the Forum.

The Officer explained the Culture Book was an evolution from the previous Staff Charter and would be a live, evolving, document accessible via Staffnet and from various devices, such as smartphones.

A key challenge was also to look at how to reach those staff that could not access the book electronically.

The Chairman wished to make the following comments on the Culture Book:

- The book needed to be more 'user-friendly' such as using less text and 'more plain English' to make it accessible to staff; and
- There was no mention on how the democratic process worked with Elected Members and the Council.

The Officer replied that they would take onboard the Chairman's feedback on the Culture Book and feedback to the Engagement Champions who had drafted the respective sections with their teams.

Ms. Townsend-Ryan (Unison/Vice-Chairman) also asked that any acronyms used within the document be explained.

Mr. Greaves (GMB) also wanted to feedback on the Health and Safety element of the Culture Book as this needed more detail and specific wording added.

The Chairman finally wished to remind the Forum that the Culture Book was a live document that could be regularly amended and updated in order to remain relevant and accessible to staff.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the Culture Book be endorsed with the suggestion that the comments and feedback provided by the Forum be considered as part of the final document.

No.

(k) Verbal update on Oracle (HR) –

The Operational Manager Employee Services outlined the following to the Forum regarding the new Oracle system:

- The Council was on target to go live with the new, cloud-based, system in November 2021;
- The current system would be out of licence from January 2022;
- The new system would focus on five workstreams, such as Finance, HR and Payroll;
- Key legacy data would be migrated from the old system to the new one;
- Due to the cloud-based nature of the new system, the Council would be looking to integrate it with other software used by the Vale;
- In order for staff to gain a better understanding on how the new system works, a number of workshops were being undertaken around key areas such as Finance, HR and ICT;
- The new system would be built around the Council's requirements;
- In the next few weeks, the system would go through its 'first build' stage in order to see how it works. The results would then be shared with the Council and Schools; and
- Staff who were working on the new system currently would continue to do so once it had gone live in order to retain their expertise and to 'upskill' other relevant staff. Ideally, this group would eventually form a first line of support for other staff.

The Chairman asked about the issue of cascading information from supervisors down to staff about this new system and other matters and what could be done in order to improve this situation. The Operational Manager Employee Services replied that this was already being looked at in conjunction with the Trade Unions, such as holding face to face sessions for staff in order to raise awareness of the new system, but this faced challenges due to the ongoing pandemic and alternative means of disseminating information and training on this would also need to be looked at (such as virtual training).

Mr. Pappas (Unison) explained that the jointly funded training (supplied by the Council and the Welsh Government) at locations such as the unit at Palmerston, could not be used yet due to the pandemic, but once social distancing restrictions had been relaxed then these could be used for raising awareness about the new Oracle system.

The Chairman agreed that the challenges around face to face training would require virtual and other means of upskilling staff, although Councillor Robertson felt that with the roll out of the COVID-19 vaccine there could be greater opportunities to hold face to face training in the near future.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the update on Oracle be noted.

No.

(I) Verbal update on Social Care Payments (HR) –

The Operational Manager Employee Services outlined the following to the Forum regarding the latest Social Care Payments:

- The Council was currently waiting on Welsh Government (WG) to share with it guidance on how to implement the payments (once received, this guidance would be shared with the Forum);
- This process would probably take 7-8 months to implement;
- Although there would be similarities to the previous payment made to front line and social care staff, there were key differences in that the amount would be £735 this time (£500 previously, which had not factored in tax deductions) and that the range of staff to receive this extra payment had increased which raised questions over which staff and departments were eligible or not; and
- Some contingency funding would also be available to cover any shortfalls in the WG funding of the Social Care Payments.

Mr. Pappas (Unison) said that the way the payment was allocated could be divisive in that certain groups of staff would not get it. Councils and Trade Unions would need to do a lot of work on this. These concerns were echoed by Councillor Dr. Johnson who had been approached by concerned staff, adding that a note on the eligibility criteria for which staff would receive this payment would be useful and should be disseminated to all Council staff.

The Chairman stated that the proposed allocation of payments left a lot of uncomfortable anomalies.

Councillor Robertson pointed out that temporary or agency staff working on front line services (such as clearing up fly tipping) had been excluded from the previous £500 payment.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development explained that agency/temporary workers who were not providing social care would not be eligible for such payments, stressing that previously agency/temporary workers had been paid the additional payment if they worked in a social care capacity. She advised that Councillors would be provided with a note concerning the eligibility criteria so that they could explain this to any Council staff who may approach them.

Mr. Pappas (Unison) stated that workers who could not socially distance had received a 10% uplift in their pay and that the Trade Unions attempts for this to be given to all staff had not been successful.

The Operational Manager Employee Services explained that for the latest payment, WG guidance was for agency or temporary staff that had worked 6-9 shifts or had worked for the Council for 12 weeks would be treated as permanent staff and receive the additional payment. He added that the Council would be

No.

carrying out extensive work to calculate the payments for all staff that were assessed as eligible.

Mr. Pappas (Unison) asked about those frontline staff who were treated as self-employed and whether they would be eligible for the extra payment. The Operational Manager Employee Services responded that they would be eligible as long as they met the necessary criteria.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the update on Social Care Payments be noted.

(m) Date of Next Meeting –

AGREED – T H A T the date of the next Joint Consultative Forum meeting would be confirmed by the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer and disseminated to Members of the Forum at the earliest opportunity.