

JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM

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

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

Representatives of Trade Unions: Mr. L. Bonni (GMB), Ms. J. Ballantine (GMB), Mr. G. Davies (Unison), Mr. T. Greaves (GMB), S. Greenslade (Unison), Mr. S. Newman (Unison) and Mr. G. Pappas (Unison)

Officers: Mr. T. Baker, Ms. M. Coles, Mr. M. Curtis, Mrs. T. Dickinson, Ms. E. Morgan, Ms. A. Phillips, Mr. R. Peters. Mr. M. Thomas, Mrs. G Williams and Mrs. S. Williams.

(a) Apologies for Absence –

These were received from Councillor M.J.G. Morgan, Mrs. S. Alderman (H.R.), Mr. C. Brown (ASCL) and Ms. S. Townsend-Ryan (Unison / Vice-Chairman).

(b) Minutes and Matters Arising –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 19th April, 2021 be approved as a correct record.

(c) Declarations of Interest –

No declarations were received.

(d) Trade Union Items –

None received at this time.

However, Mr. Newman (Unison) raised at the meeting the matter regarding social care staff and their claiming of mileage and the use of pool cars. He stated that during the pandemic, social care staff had been impacted due to ‘agile working’ and ‘hotdesking’ as they could only claim mileage from the offices they were using and not from their home and pool cars could not be used due to restrictions set for the pandemic. As a result, social care workers had to use their own cars in order to work, which was a concern also raised by Mr. Pappas (Unison) and Mr. Greaves (GMB), as well as the Chairman, who felt that there could be implications for staff car insurance, as well as additional costs to the Council in terms of mileage claims. Also, Mr. Newman said that the essential workers category had been removed for mileage claim rates.

The Head of Human Resources (HR) and Organisational Development replied that Human Resources and the local authority would support staff impacted by the pandemic financially or otherwise and urged them to report such issues to HR, which had been the consistent message throughout the pandemic to ensure that no one had been adversely impacted. Further, the Council's pool cars were being used by Waste Services during the pandemic in order to assist their staff in carrying out crucial waste management duties safely. Social workers could also claim any relevant mileage if travelling as part of the existing policy; this included any mileage as part of their travelling for work purposes, minus what would have been their normal commute to work. Similarly, if homeworking, staff could claim home working allowance via HMRC and this information had been widely cascaded.

Councillor Robertson asked if any staff had been 'left out of pocket' due to these issues, to which the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development replied that she was not aware of anyone suffering financially due to the issues raised and no contractual nor other terms had changed for staff around mileage claims which could give rise to any known detriment. Additionally, mileage could still be claimed by staff as part of their travelling for work purposes, less their normal commute to work and staff were encouraged to come forward if they felt that they had lost out financially around claiming mileage for work, as HR could assist.

After discussions between the Forum, Trade Union members, the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development and the Senior Legal Officer in attendance, it was decided that the issues raised by Mr. Newman should be addressed at a more appropriate level and would therefore be taken to the next Change Forum on 28th July in addition to the relevant Directorate Joint Consultative Forum, which was the normal course of action prior to raising it at this meeting.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the Trade Union items raised at the Forum be referred to the next relevant Directorate forum.

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

(i) Minutes of Learning and Skills JCF: 12th April, 2021

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Learning and Skills JCF on 12th April, 2021.

It was subsequently

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

(ii) Minutes of Learning and Skills JCF: 16th June, 2021

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Learning and Skills JCF on 16th June, 2021.

It was subsequently

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

(iii) Minutes of Social Services Consultative Forum: 18th March, 2021

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Social Services Consultative Forum on 18th March, 2021.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Social Services Consultative Forum be noted.

(iv) Minutes of Social Services Health and Safety Committee: 30th April 2021

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Social Services Health and Safety Committee on 30th April, 2021.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Social Services Health and Safety Committee be noted.

(v) Minutes of Visible Services and Housing Consultative Forum: 7th April, 2021

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Visible Services and Housing Consultative Forum on 7th April, 2021.

It was subsequently

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

(vi) Minutes of Visible Services and Housing Consultative Forum: 5th May, 2021

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Visible Services and Housing Consultative Forum on 5th May, 2021.

It was subsequently

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

Councillor Dr. Johnson suggested that, due to the size and number of such minutes, for future meetings of the Forum these be précised and 'flagged up' in some way so as to give Members more advanced notice.

(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:

- (i) Learning and Skills: 4th October, 2021
- (ii) Resources: TBA
- (iii) Social Services (meetings now moved quarterly) -
1st September, 2021 and 1st December, 2021
- (iv) Visible Services and Housing: TBA
- (v) Corporate Health and Safety Meeting: 25th August, 2021.

(g) Verbal Update Regarding GLAM and the Ethnic Minority Staff Network (HR) –

The Forum heard firstly from Matthew Curtis, the Chairman of GLAM, the Council's staff network for LGBT+ colleagues and their allies:

- The network first met in January 2019 and was designed to be high impact on the Council through its activities with as little a time as possible from members. Members were able to join a variety of workstreams to ensure they focus on the areas that matter to them;
- A steering group had been established with three of its members leading on the following three key workstreams or aims of the GLAM network:
 - Workplace impact: through influencing relevant policies and practices, progressing against the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index; and promoting opportunities for personal development;
 - Raising visibility and awareness of the issues that affected the LGBT+ community and to foster a culture of openness, where people felt able to be themselves and to meet their potential as well as raising the visibility of the Council as an inclusive and supportive employer; and
 - Provision of a social and supportive environment and 'safe space' for the LGBT+ community and its allies.
- Following the Annual Meeting of GLAM, an annual review and report was produced, reviewing the previous year's progress and setting the objectives for the next 12 months;
- Mr. Curtis set out the following achievements of the network:
 - The work undertaken to take the Council further up the rankings of the Workplace Equality Index, with the Authority going up 100 places between 2018-2020. Work around the latest Index would be submitted by September 2021;

- The establishment of a Support Directory which identified role models and places of support for the LGBT+ community;
- There had been 40 staff from the Vale of Glamorgan Council at the Pride Cymru parade and GLAM had helped to facilitate the first such event in Barry;
- The network also ensured that the voice of the LGBT+ community was heard by updating the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) on issues facing the community and contributing to the discussion on agile or flexible working practices resulting from the pandemic.

The Forum subsequently heard from Martine Coles, the Chairman of the Ethnic Minority Network (EMN):

- The network was formally started in March 2021 in order to support the Council to become an employer of choice for people from diverse communities;
- The network aimed to:
 - have a positive impact for colleagues from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities in the workplace,
 - raise overall awareness and visibility of its work,
 - provide a social and supportive environment;
- As in the case of GLAM, the EMN was open to staff from all different backgrounds, not just those with a minority ethnic heritage. Such allies were important in helping to effect change;
- The network had also been involved with the drafting of the Council's Culture Book and would be looking at the Welsh Government's Race Equality Action Plan in order to progress this and make it appropriate to all employees, with an emphasis on additional training for staff around anti-racism;
- There was due to be a 'refresh' of the network from 29th September, with the intention of having more effective communication via Staffnet and SLT and for members to be more active in promoting the network.

Following the updates, Councillor Robertson asked whether the identification of staff within the Council as belonging to an ethnic minority was a corporate or an individual decision. The Chairman responded by stating that staff could identify as they saw fit but the crucial point here was that the Council's aim of identifying staff from an ethnic minority background was in order to support them and to help combat discrimination. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development added that the current Council process for identifying staff from any minority background was not sufficiently robust, which would be rectified in Autumn with HR undertaking a 'mini-census' to record how staff self-identified. This would be done in collaboration with the diversity groups. It was agreed the most appropriate time to do this was in the Autumn as that fitted with the current progress of the Oracle project. Once this project was complete, more accurate reporting on all minority groups within the workforce could then be undertaken, which would help in terms of future recruitment,

etc. Both GLAM and EMN, as well as the Trade Unions, would help with the census and provide input.

Further, from Autumn, a training consultant would be brought in to help deliver learning as part of the cyclical management development sessions. It had been agreed that the Autumn session would focus on staff diversity within the Council, starting with senior management learning and cascading through the Local Authority.

Both Ms. Coles and Mr. Greaves (GMB) stressed the voluntary, self-identification, nature of recording ethnicity, sexuality and disability when applying for jobs, etc. at the Council, and the need to capture this data subsequently, if staff circumstances or how they identified changed and to make staff feel comfortable in order to do this.

Finally, Ms. Coles stressed the importance of the Race Equality Action Plan, its content and ensuring it was solution focused. It was suggested that the Action Plan be shared with Members of the Forum.

The Chairman and the Forum wished to thank Ms. Coles and Mr. Curtis for their updates and wished to offer support for their continued work, as well as recognising the need to improve the equality agenda throughout the Council.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the verbal update regarding GLAM and the ethnic minority staff network be noted.

(h) Update on Wellbeing Survey (HR) –

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development advised that:

- 1,166 responses had been received to the Wellbeing Survey conducted in May 2021, with the majority of respondents coming from the 'corporate' area of the Council, with nearly 50% of those currently working from home;
- A key part of the survey was to compare these current results on wellbeing with those from last year's survey. A majority of respondents felt that their health and wellbeing had been impacted negatively as a result of the pandemic. The 2021 survey had seen a greater margin of respondents who either viewed the impact of the pandemic more positively or even more negatively;
- HR had also reached out to schools and other educational bodies in order to get more feedback. However, it was acknowledged that schools had been 'overwhelmed' by the volume of surveys they had to answer and therefore it was challenging to encourage teaching staff to respond, which were comments also echoed by Mr. Pappas (Unison);
- 687 respondents were currently working from home, whilst 460 respondents were working from the office / place of work;

- The majority of respondents had indicated they would value a ‘hybrid’ form of working – a mix of home working / office working in the future when Welsh Government restrictions allow;
- HR would be looking to develop ‘safe-spaces’ within the Council’s offices in order to cater for staff who were suffering a negative impact from working from home;
- The majority of respondents strongly agreed / agreed with the statements below:
 - I am kept up-to-date and feel well informed regarding the Council’s response to the situation;
 - My manager is accessible and frequently in contact with me where I am currently working;
 - Where I am currently working I have what I need to perform my job safely and effectively;
 - My manager cares about my health and wellbeing and is there to support me as I need.
- There was an opportunity to look at how staff could feedback upwardly through other methods, such as the Learning Café;
- 947 of respondents felt the current ICT structure was sufficient to support home / remote working;
- The biggest challenges included social isolation, contact with co-workers and anxiety around the pandemic.

The Chairman and the Forum wished to add that it was important for the Council to carry on supporting staff in working differently due to the pandemic.

It was subsequently

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

(i) Modern Slavery Statement (HR) -

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development presented the draft Vale of Glamorgan Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement (May 2021):

- This encompassed the requirements of the ethical employment obligations as set out within the Code of Practice. A clear ‘gap’ had been identified in that there was no Modern Slavery Statement on the Council’s website, setting out the Council’s obligations and what it was working towards. This was particularly relevant, due to, in part, to the use of contractors or sub-

contractors by Council services. This had already been taken to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the Change Forum;

- The Policy would be communicated throughout the Council via e-Learning and collective training sessions to all employees and the SLT would monitor its effectiveness, review and report any significant changes to the Policy for determination by the Cabinet. In addition, the Council would appoint a member of the SLT to undertake the role and responsibilities of the Anti-Slavery and Ethical Employment Champion to support the Council's stance on unethical employment practices, modern slavery, human trafficking and other human rights abuses.

Following the update, Councillor Robertson asked if there had been any instances of modern slavery identified in connection with the Council. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development replied that she had not come across any such instances but would find out if this had happened previously and update Members.

Councillor Dr. Johnson explained that the statement was more about prevention of such instances of slavery. He also asked about the points raised concerning the Real Living Wage on the Statement, as he and his colleagues had queried this issue previously through full Council. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development replied that although no final decision had been made on the Real Living Wage, SLT had not push backed on this when the draft had come through, adding that the wages paid within the Council were quite near to meeting the Real Living Wage target at this time and it was important to progress.

Mr. Pappas (Unison) stated that the Trade Unions supported the Council becoming an accredited Real Living Wage employer and had also been campaigning in order to achieve this. He also cited the outsourcing and sub-contracting of cleaning contractors and others by the Council as having the potential of involving modern slave labour, with it being difficult for the Authority to identify such practices as well as carrying out Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks on contractors / sub-contractors. The Chairman agreed, stating that there should be a wider review or scrutinising of sub-contractors.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development replied that HR was working with Procurement in order to deal with these issues and were passionate in dealing with these effectively. She would take back the comments made at the Forum to HR and Procurement and would report back to the Committee.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the draft Modern Slavery Statement be noted.

(j) Update on iDev and e-Learning (HR) –

The Organisation Development and Learning Manager updated the Forum on the following:

- iDev. The Council's internal learning management system had seen developments in the following areas -
 - Due to the pandemic, the Council had seen a large increase in the use of this system, which had also been rolled out to school and educational staff;
 - Wellbeing services had also been rolled out to staff via iDev in response to the adoption of remote working and the pandemic;
 - With regard to more day-to-day functions, iDev also continued to provide mandatory training for staff, such as the Armed Forces Covenant and Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV). There were currently high levels of staff participation in completing such courses, with a 75% completion rate;
 - The 'It's about me' appraisal process had also recently started on iDev, which had been accompanied by a review of how to improve this process, such as looking to roll this out to external partners i.e. adoption services.

- Kickstart Recruitment. 37 people had been recruited via this scheme to the Council in 2021 (with another 30 'Kick-Starters' in the pipeline). The quality of the recruits had been such that the Council aimed to retain and develop the vast majority of these;

- Management development: the Council had been collaborating with Cardiff and Vale College in order to provide enhanced training in this area, such as diversity training and how to manage staff working from home / remotely; and

- Digital skills: the aim was to roll out training around this to Environment and Housing and to Social Care staff from September 2021 in conjunction with Bridgend College. This would help to raise confidence levels among staff in using digital technology such as with Teams and Office 365.

Following the update, Councillor Robertson asked how many applicants there had been for the Kickstart Scheme, with the Organisation Development and Learning Manager stating that there had been 10 such applicants per role advertised, with the Council being 'ahead of the curve' with this type of recruitment. However, the numbers of applicants had dwindled over time, following this high point which had been as a result of redundancy / furlough due to the pandemic, as well as recent graduates leaving college. However, these numbers may rise again due to further graduates leaving college during the summer period.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the update on iDev and e-Learning be noted.

(k) Update on Oracle (HR) –

The Operational Manager Employee Services updated the Forum on the new Oracle system, explaining that the Council was looking to move over to the new system

within the next few months. As part of this, the relevant teams would be looking at removing any 'cleansed' data that would not be needed to transfer over to the new system. He then handed over to the Oracle Project Manager, who advised the following:

- Since February / March 2021, the implementation of the new Oracle System had gone through several phases, including:
 - A consultation with the providers of Oracle, in order to inform them on how the Council worked thereby ensuring that the system operated as required;
 - This would operate as a 'cloud-based' system so key legacy data and processes would need to be moved over to this new technology;
 - The project was moving from the design phase to testing, in order to see what it could actually do in a 'real-life' situation;
- The first 'go live' date for Oracle, would be its use by the Finance Department (in November 2021) and would later be rolled out to other teams, such as Payroll;
- The Majority of Council services would go over to the new Oracle system between November 2021 – April 2022. This would mean a wholesale redesign of the processes used (i.e. moving from paper based to digitally based processes and procedures) and a change in the nature of the roles undertaken by the staff using the new system, as well as extensive training of staff in order to use Oracle effectively between November 2021- April 2022;
- A similar exercise would be carried out for the Council's C1V service, although this would involve a separate and distinct system, offering such Customer Relationship Management (CRM) functionality as allowing C1V customer service officers to see the full history of a call / enquiry. This should be going live from October 2021.

Following the update, the Chairman asked how the new system being implemented within C1V would work with the proposed 'triage' system which C1V would be operating in conjunction with local GPs. The Oracle Project Manager explained that the new CRM system and related processes were being led on by the Operational Manager for Customer Relations and Cardiff and Vale University Health Board. He would liaise with the Officer in question and would update the Forum with a reply.

It was subsequently

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

(I) Update on Welsh Government NHS and Social Care Recognition Scheme (HR) –

The Operational Manager Employee Services advised the Forum of the Welsh Government NHS and Social Care Recognition Scheme, advising that:

- A total of 685 current staff had been selected to receive the £735 payment;
- This was a larger payment than the original £500 scheme, and would therefore enable the net payment, after tax, to be £500;
- Although this involved a wider catchment in order to cover Social Services staff, it did not include certain key related services staff within the Council, such as Flying Start;
- 28 leavers had been contacted for updated bank details in order to enable payment to be made during August / September;
- In July 580 staff received one payment, with 18 staff due to receive the payment in five instalments (July to November 2021), one request for a payment to be issued in September 2021 and four requests which missed the July payroll deadline and would now be paid in August;
- There were 82 staff outstanding and managers were contacting them for outstanding claim forms to be submitted;
- Approximately 3,200 claims were being handled for the Council's commissioned services;
- The majority of payments would have been made to the relevant staff by the end of July 2021, with such payments to be audited by Welsh Government (WG);
- The Council would be able to claim the money / payments back from WG in December 2021;
- The National Insurance numbers of those staff paid would be placed on a database, held by Data Cymru, in order to identify any accidental double payments to staff.

The Chairman asked what support was available for staff in order to complete the forms, to which the Operational Manager Employee Services explained that managers would be helping their staff to complete these forms, to print off hard copies if they could not complete them electronically, etc. Furthermore, the Council would over the next few months be contacting any staff who had not yet claimed their payments and if necessary contacting them via their home addresses.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the update on the Welsh Government NHS and Social Care Recognition Scheme be noted.

(m) Dates of Future Meetings –

Councillor Robertson queried the status of October's and January's meetings which were currently scheduled to be held remotely. The Democratic Services Officer explained that these had been provisionally scheduled as remote meetings due to the current uncertainty on when the WG restrictions on face-to-face meetings would be removed.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the JCF future meetings for 2021/22 be held on:

Monday, 11th October, 2021 at 10.00 a.m. (to be held remotely)

Monday, 17th January, 2022 at 10.00 a.m. (to be held remotely)

Monday, 4th April, 2022 at 10.00 a.m. (to be confirmed where it is held).