

## **JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM**

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> October, 2021.

Present: Councillor N.C. Thomas (Chair); Councillors P. Drake, G. John, A.R. Robertson and L.O. Rowlands.

Representatives of Trade Unions: J. Ballantine (GMB), L. Bonni (GMB), M. Canavan (NEU), G. Davies (Unison), T. Greaves (GMB), S. Newman (Unison), G. Pappas (Unison) and S. Townsend-Ryan (Unison / Vice-Chair).

Officers: T. Bowring, T. Dickinson, P. Ham, R. Peters. M. Thomas and S. Williams.

(a) Minute's Silence - David Amess, Member of Parliament –

The Forum observed a minute's silence in memory of David Amess, who served as Member of Parliament for Southend West.

(b) Apologies for Absence –

These were received from Councillors Dr. I.J. Johnson and M.J.G. Morgan, S. Greenslade (Unison), G. Hallett (NAHT), S. Alderman, E. Morgan and A. Phillips.

(c) Minutes and Matters Arising –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> July, 2021 be approved as a correct record.

(d) Declarations of Interest –

No declarations were received.

(e) Trade Union Items –

None received at this time.

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

**(i) Minutes of Learning and Skills JCF: 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2021**

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Learning and Skills JCF on 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2021.

It was subsequently

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

**(ii) Minutes of Social Services Consultative Forum: 8<sup>th</sup> June, 2021**

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Social Services Consultative Forum on 8<sup>th</sup> June, 2021.

It was subsequently

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

**(iii) Minutes of the Visible Services and Housing Consultative Forum: 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2021**

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Visible Services and Housing Consultative Forum on 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2021.

It was subsequently

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

**(g) 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:

- (i) Learning and Skills JCF – 7<sup>th</sup> February, 2022 and 8<sup>th</sup> June, 2022.
- (ii) Social Services JCF – 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2021.
- (iii) Visible Services and Housing JCF – 6<sup>th</sup> October, 2021.

**(h) Accommodation Strategy (HR) –**

The Head of Policy and Business Transformation updated the Forum on the Accommodation Strategy:

- The Council's position continued to be for its staff to work from home if possible;
- However, there was still a need for offices to continue to be used (such as for frontline staff) as service delivery continued to adapt, with changes made due to the pandemic, and the advice from Welsh Government (WG) was to look at utilising offices for both work and wellbeing going forward and to ensure that workspaces were fit for purpose;

- By surveying staff at various points of the pandemic, the feedback received had been overwhelmingly for staff to work a mix of both at home and in the office (the 'hybrid' work model), backed up by advances in remote working for Council staff via the significant investment in digital connectivity and devices;
- This was a 'now or never' moment to enable real change in the Council's accommodation strategy;
- The Accommodation Strategy would tie-in with reshaping of work practices, other strategic priorities, new ways of working and delivering services that were fit for the future i.e., to reinforce the importance of, and to increase focus on, customer service delivery;
- The Accommodation Strategy would also encompass how the Council could:
  - Reduce its overall accommodation portfolio, thereby reducing its carbon footprint as well as operating costs;
  - Support and manage staff in order to work differently in both office and home spaces;
  - Support services in new and innovative ways;
  - Finance the necessary changes; and
  - Ensure that the Authority moved 'at pace' in order to implement the above elements of the Strategy;
- Senior Officers had been allocated oversight of the Strategy over the following offices and buildings within the Council portfolio (with support from Human Resources (HR) and Policy and Business Transformation):
  - The Director of Learning and Skills would cover the Civic Offices; this would include Planning and Regeneration relocating to the Civic Offices (from the Docks), as well as Creative Rural Communities (CRC) relocating to the Civic from Cowbridge. Also proposed was the potential relocation of the PPE store from the Civic to the Docks Offices;
  - The Director of Social Services would cover the Docks Offices. This would become the Social Services 'hub' building, with a co-location of all the relevant teams 'under one roof' where possible and practicable; and
  - The Director of Environment and Housing would cover the Alps Depot. The Court Road Depot staff would relocate to the Alps, with A Block housing non frontline or administrative staff and B Block becoming the frontline, forward facing 'hub';
- The project would be progressed by project teams working on plans which aligned with the following principles:
  - 'Hybrid' working (a mixture of working in the office and at home) would become the default position, with greater flexibility in how buildings and workspaces were used, the inclusion of meeting spaces to host virtual meetings, printing facilities, 'well-being', breakout and collaborative spaces also to be included;
  - Offices would be divided into 'zones' where there would be a limited number of 'fixed' desks for staff, but there would also be 'home zones' in order to support a sense of belonging for teams. However, the zones would not prevent collaboration with staff in other offices, etc;
  - The need to reuse and recycle existing office furniture wherever possible; and
  - The removal of dedicated personal offices such as the Managing Director's.

- It was vital that the changes associated with the Strategy were not 'done' to Council staff; hence the importance of the Accommodation Strategy Survey that had gone to Heads of Service and Operational / Team Managers in order to seek their and their teams' views on what they needed office and building spaces for. This would be in conjunction with Estates and the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) in order to see what could realistically be implemented and for oversight over costs, etc. This work was currently in progress and happening at pace;
- Communications were crucial to engage staff with this Strategy and the related new ways of working, and in order to demonstrate links with wider objectives and to present any early achievements.

Following the update, the following comments and queries were raised by members of the Forum:

- Councillor John raised concerns about the relocation of staff from Court Road to the Alps Depot, citing the issues around the increased volume of traffic generated on nearby roads as a result, thereby undermining the work done around Project Zero and he enquired if staff could be relocated to a more 'central' location within the Vale instead, such as Jenner Park in Barry. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development replied that the environmental impact of this relocation was being considered and that staff were being consulted on the move and alternative options i.e. having a small hub in Penarth or frontline staff to stay in a particular 'patch' in order to stop the need to go back and forth to the Alps. Also, office staff would only be required to go into the office 2-3 times a week, thereby reducing the numbers and frequency of those commuting to work every day. G. Pappas (Unison Representative) added that the Trade Unions were undertaking workshops with staff at the Alps regarding relocation and reiterated that working from home would help limit the impact of commuting to and from the depot. Following on from the Chair's query, the Unison Representative also stated that most LGV (Light Good Vehicles) drivers would be going to Barry, with any Council vehicles under 5 tonnes potentially being taken home by their drivers in order to avoid the Alps commute.
- Councillor Robertson asked where ICT would be located in future and described the challenges already experienced in accessing them directly due to the pandemic; he also referred to the relocation of the Planning Department and the costs that it could incur in both time and money, with the Chair also referring to Planning needing a lot of space in order to do its work. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development replied that she would look into the issues around accessibility and ICT. Regarding the Planning Department, the relocation costs (both financial and operational) had been considered as well as the benefits of relocating to the Civic Offices, thereby freeing up the Docks to become a dedicated Hub for Social Services.

It was subsequently

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

(i) Flexible Working Framework (HR) –

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development updated the Forum on the following:

- The flexible working arrangements had been put together following the feedback from the Wellbeing Surveys in 2020 and 2021;
- HR were looking at the best, most effective, way of applying flexible working to both hybrid and front-facing working arrangements;
- HR was working with the Trade Unions, the Director of Environment and Housing and the Head of Resource Management and Safeguarding, to formulate the flexible working arrangements; with a draft paper to be produced shortly and a framework agreed by March 2022 which will sit alongside the Accommodation Strategy on the future ways of working for staff.

Following the update, the following comments and queries were raised by members of the Forum:

- S. Newman and G. Pappas (Unison Representatives) raised concerns around the Health and Safety (H&S) aspect of the new working arrangements, plus the implications on the carbon footprint for the Council and Project Zero with staff's higher energy costs, due to working from home. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development replied that staff had been asked to complete a Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Home assessment questionnaire and the relevant equipment had been provided to staff. It was explained by the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager that where staff required additional help, virtual assessments have been provided. Issues around staff not receiving replies to their H&S feedback had been looked at and a more focused service had been the result. The Health Safety and Wellbeing Manager informed the Forum that not all staff had completed the questionnaire, there had been unnamed forms submitted, part completed, and instructions not followed. DSE home self-assessments had now become an MS form and they would be promoted periodically to staff. On greater energy use at home, this was being looked at, and staff had been made aware of contacting HR, etc. if they were having any issues with increased energy costs at home; but there had been no responses as yet. Also, staff had been advised to apply for the HMRC tax reduction for homeworking if required.
- The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development told the Forum that the principles and policies around flexible working would be brought to the next meeting of the Forum.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the update on the Flexible Working Framework be noted.

(j) Workforce Strategy and Draft Implementation Plan (HR) -

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development updated the Forum on the following:

- The Strategy and Draft Implementation Plan linked in with the Management Development Framework and Succession Planning (items that would be looked at later on in the meeting as well);
- HR were drafting this Strategy and Plan in conjunction with Trade Unions, looking at both the short term (for example, via the Tactical Group on Care) and the longer term aspects (i.e. the Strategic Group working with Social Services, looking at establishment figures and working with external partners to streamline costs and processes such as a shortened application process for Council jobs, whilst still enabling key data to be retrieved from them);
- This was tied into the following item at the meeting on Succession Planning, where a fuller update and discussion on this would be had.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the update on the Workforce Strategy and Draft Implementation Plan be noted.

(k) Succession Planning, Management Development Training, Diversity and our Recent Celebrations of Inclusion Week (HR) –

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development updated the Forum regarding Succession Planning and the Management Development Framework:

- The discussion paper from the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> October was included in the agenda. It informed the Forum that there were several learning and development initiatives running both internally and externally across the organisation to ensure that there was a mechanism which created links to ensure that the “right people were accessing the right opportunities at the right time” and the Council was effectively utilising the opportunities available to it;
- The Structure of the Learning and Development Frameworks for all staff, Manager and Senior Leaders for each level had a consistent approach aligned to eight elements:
  - Required Learning
  - Role Dependant / Optional Learning
  - Competency Framework Learning
  - iDev Catalogue
  - Learning Café
  - Qualifications and Professional Study
  - Coaching and Mentoring
  - Externally Supported Programmes.
- As part of the Council’s workforce plan, focusing on talent and succession planning had been highlighted as a priority, with three key areas where the Council should consider development in relation to talent and succession:
  - Youth employment
  - Talent / high potential
  - Identified successors.

- With regard to youth employment, the Council had improved its use of Apprenticeship Schemes available and also the Kickstart Scheme. Numbers of young people employed within the Council were disappointingly low, with only 4.14% of its total headcount under 24 years of age as of 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2021;
- In respect of talent / high potential, within the Directorates people had been identified as “talent” although some were also identified as successors for positions and there was also the open access high potential programme, with options for technical, behavioural and skills development. Secondments (both internal and external), placements and shadowing / work experience opportunities were also utilised. The Council would be progressing with this mix of measures and looking to receive feedback on them;
- Succession planning for senior posts and critical positions was ongoing with identification of likely successors also being progressed. Development options and employment opportunities were also available.

Following the update, the following comments and queries were raised by members of the Forum:

- The Chair referred to the importance of succession planning whilst the previous post holder was in place, whereby they could reduce their hours in the interim but would still be available to share their knowledge to a successor.
- A Unison Representative emphasised the overall ‘aging’ of the Council workforce, with a majority of staff being over 45 years of age. This could have a significant impact on key services in the near to medium term future, such as reducing the capacity of grounds and waste management. He also highlighted the low number of UK citizens carrying out residential and domiciliary care compared to the number of overseas workers involved.
- The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development explained to the Forum that many organisations – within both the public and private sectors – had an increasingly aging workforce. This was acknowledged and often brought with it significant skill and experience. However, it was important to progress with implementing succession planning in order to attract and retain a talent pipeline, including younger employees, particularly in social care work. The Council also had to contend with competition from other organisations which could offer higher wages in key occupations, i.e. Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) drivers and 21st Century Schools. Succession planning would work hand in hand with mentoring in order to hand over key skills in order to develop either existing staff and / or new recruits. Also, the ‘Refer a Friend’ scheme had been successful in adding 3-4 more HGV drivers that would keep the relevant service(s) going.
- Councillor Robertson referred to contractors working on temporary contracts within the Council and if they were being canvassed on whether they wanted to become permanent staff. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development replied that due to the nature of areas such as waste management, there would always be a need for contractor or temporary roles within it. However, HR, in conjunction with the Trade Unions and Waste teams would be looking at whether it was necessary to increase the permanent headcount for such services based on operational need.

- On the issue which Councillor Rowlands had raised around the Council job application process and the difficulty for young applicants with limited or no experience in working within local government being able to successfully apply for such jobs, the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development explained that the job descriptions and application forms used by the Council were being reviewed in order to remove such 'blocks' i.e. the removal of references to previous Council experience where not essential.
- The Chair also wished to add that the drive by the UK Government to move to a high wage, high skilled workforce and economy would be a challenge for the Council, particularly when competing with the private sector in retaining or recruiting staff and matching wage levels seen elsewhere.

The Head of Policy and Business Transformation subsequently updated the Forum on diversity and the National Inclusion Week:

- Work had been done in conjunction with the Management Development Training Framework in order to include inclusion and diversity issues within it;
- The Council had marked National Inclusion Week (which ran from 27<sup>th</sup> September to 3<sup>rd</sup> October) with its promotion via press releases, on social media and elsewhere, including on Staffnet+ i.e. encouraging staff to join the Diverse Staff Network as well as through the Managing Director's weekly email and via local radio stations such as Bro Radio;
- Council staff had also started to add pronouns / descriptors on email signatures and identity badges;
- GLAM had also recently launched a new logo.

The Chair wished to emphasise how important inclusion and the Council's overall strategy for this was to the Forum.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the update(s) on Succession Planning, Management Development Training, Diversity and the recent celebrations of Inclusion Week be noted.

(I) Update on the Reshaping Programme (HBT) –

The Head of Policy and Business Transformation updated the Forum on the Reshaping Programme:

- The heart of this programme was to effect transformational change within the Council, by embracing new ways of working, and 'future-proofing' service delivery going forward. This also encompassed working differently with the community and partners, as well as how to use people, assets and financial resources more effectively and sustainably. This would be enabled through, for example, digital technology, supporting staff and partners to develop and learn, as well as effective communication, developing the organisational culture of the Council and via succession planning;
- Key Strategic Projects and Priorities included, for example:



- Creating a legacy for Vale Heroes
- Tackling climate change
- Tackling food poverty i.e. the Food Pod in Penarth and the work done with Third Sector partners in Llantwit Major
- Preventing homelessness i.e., a Task and Finish Group had been formed from the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee to look at how the Council dealt with homelessness and housing
- Implementation of the HR Strategy and Workforce Plan
- Greater integration of Health and Social Care, plus encouraging healthy lifestyles and wellbeing throughout the Vale
- Developing customer relations and service delivery by implementing the new Granicus Firmstep system for Customer Services
- Enhancing the use of digital technology, for example the Oracle upgrade project in Finance, HR and Payroll
- Supporting Schools with digital learning and other services, as well continuing modernisation through 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools
- Regenerating key sites
- Developing commercial activities, income generation and the investment strategy of the Council in order to ensure greater 'levelling up' within the Vale and to compete at the UK level to obtain such funding
- Greater engagement with the public around the recent Local Government and Elections Bill and the rolling out of the Insight Function (data led decision making) to both staff and then elected members (from 2022)
- A formal report on the Reshaping Service Programme would be going to Cabinet in November 2021.

Following the update, the following comments and queries were raised by members of the Forum:

- The Chair cited the project from Milan that had recently won an award at the Earthshot Prize for its work around food waste 'hubs', as an example of a project which would be beneficial to adopt within the Vale as part of its Reshaping Programme.
- A Unison Representative also referred to the work being undertaken by Cadoxton School around recycling slightly 'bruised' fruit and vegetables in order to share with the nearby community. Primary schools were also providing vegetable boxes to families and staff at Cadoxton had been instrumental in working with other Councils in order to roll out similar projects within their areas too.
- The Vice-Chair added that another project was also providing produce to the Community in Barry twice weekly, where people could fill their bag with food for £4.
- In response to Councillor Robertson's question on the change of emphasis for reshaping, which had moved away from streamlining services and making them cost effective for local communities, the Head of Policy and Business Transformation explained that the move to a more holistic and transformational approach to services had been driven in part by Audit Wales review of the Reshaping Programme and to build on its success in making substantial savings by using this format to help the Council's overall Recovery Strategy, tackling food poverty, new ways of working, etc. A report on this

change in focus had gone to Cabinet earlier on in the year and would be shared with the Forum for their information.

- A Unison Representative commented on the need for accountability for Council run services and to move away from outsourcing or the 'Commissioning Authority' route, which had already been undertaken by other Councils. The Director of Learning and Skills however cited the Vale's 'Big Fresh' Catering Company as an example where an 'arm's length', Local Authority Trading Company had been extremely successful and had ploughed profits back into schools, through profit sharing and had made further development funding available for schools to develop healthy eating programmes, some of which extended into the local community. In addition, staff were transferred to the company under the same conditions as they were under the Council and Trade Union membership was welcomed. The Chair acknowledged Trade Union concerns around outsourcing, but the 'Big Fresh' model had been praised by Audit Wales, which other Councils wished to emulate.
- Another Unison Representative also referred to the Inclusion Strategy and the need for the Council to guard against complacency and 'blind spots' developing, leading to staff in minority groups not being listened to. The Chair again reiterated the importance of this Strategy to the Council and that the relevant networks were encouraging staff in minority groups or with special characteristics to share their aspirations and concerns.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the update on the Reshaping Programme be noted.

(m) Update on Project Zero (HBT) –

The Head of Policy and Business Transformation updated the Forum on Project Zero:

- The aim of the project was for the Vale of Glamorgan to be net zero in terms of carbon emissions by 2030 as part of Welsh Government's policy commitment for the decarbonisation of Wales;
- The project tied in with the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency made in July 2019;
- The project, as envisioned and undertaken by the Council, set the Vale of Glamorgan apart from other Local Authorities, due to its encouragement of local communities to think about net zero in addition to being a plan for the Council;
- The Draft Climate Change Challenge Plan detailed the high-level challenges and steps in order to meet net zero, as well as the work already undertaken to achieve the project's aims. The hyperlink to the Plan would be shared with the Forum;
- This was a wide ranging project looking at food consumption, waste, travel and raising awareness;

- Local schools were already leading the way on this agenda and there was much joint working as well as lessons to be learnt from what schools were doing within this area;
- The project's success ultimately rested on closer cooperation with schools, Town and Community Councils (TCCs), community groups and the wider public;
- A report on the project would be going to Cabinet in October;
- A Project Board and Project Support Team had been established in order to enable and underpin the activities required and with Senior Officers allocated for each of the challenges identified;
- Welsh Government (WG) had published a data collection framework in order to identify whether carbon use was being reduced;
- Connections had been made and information shared with the INFUSE Programme (Innovative Future Services).

Following the update, the following comments and queries were raised by members of the Forum:

- The Chair raised the issue of the Council's motor pool needing to go fully electric as part of net zero and would there be additional electric charging points within the Vale's car parks. The Head of Policy and Business Transformation stated that the Council was looking at both individual car use and that of the Council's. It was still not economically viable at this time for the Council to go fully over to electric vehicle use; however, grant funding to support the move towards hybrid and electrical vehicles continued to be sought. The Council would also need to look at the location and provision of electric vehicle charging points, which would also include locating them at schools.
- Councillor John stated that due to increased road traffic within the Western Vale, it was important to provide alternative, convenient, transport in order to reduce this, such as a railway station at St. Athan and the ongoing implementation of 'Active Travel' (i.e. walking and cycling to work, school, shopping and accessing services).
- Regarding the issues raised by a Unison Representative around staff working from home and increased domestic energy use, the Head of Policy and Business Transformation explained that the WG data collection framework would help the Council to assess both direct carbon emissions and indirect emissions, such as through increased working from home by Council staff. Property Services had started to look at such emissions already and would share its initial findings with WG, as well as seeking specialist advice.
- Councillor Robertson sounded a note of caution however, citing the limits and challenges to increased cycling and walking to work and elsewhere as well as the less carbon neutral features of electric vehicles (i.e. their batteries). The Chair replied that no solutions to carbon emissions were without some drawbacks, but it was important to limit and reverse their increase and harmful effects.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the update on Project Zero be noted.

(n) Update on Oracle (HR) –

The Oracle Project Manager (in conjunction with the Operational Manager Employee Services) updated the Forum on the new Oracle system:

- The new Oracle system would be ‘cloud’ based, standardise information storage and retrieval, improve work processes and make savings in terms of costs and its environmental impact (i.e. moving away from paperwork and paper based systems);
- Referring to the Plan that had been shared with members of the Forum, steady progress was being made in implementing the new Oracle system, with movement already moving away from the ‘Orchestrate’ phase on to the ‘Preparation’ phase with testing of the new system’s functionality starting in November 2021;
- Finance were due to on 15<sup>th</sup> November to undertake a ‘rehearsal’ by moving data over to Oracle in order to test its functionality and its ability to cope with the resource intensive nature of financial services;
- Payroll and other services would go live on the new system from April 2022, following on from Finance and SCM transition fully on to Oracle in December 2021. This would significantly change the way Council staff would access payslips and bank leave;
- From December 2021 up until March 2022, there would be steady transition from the old to the new system, with both being run in parallel in order to make sure if key systems such as payroll were working effectively.

Following the update, the following comments and queries were raised by members of the Forum:

- A Unison Representative stated that the Trade Unions would be working with the Operational Manager Employee Services in order to reach out to the small numbers of staff who could not access payslips and other services digitally and asked how staff could be helped with accessing services under the new Oracle system. The Oracle Project Manager acknowledged that the changes would impact those staff who were less ‘tech savvy’, in particular those front facing workers who did not use information technology as part of their work in the Council, and that this relatively small group would need to be helped and if necessary, for payslips and other key documents potentially to be printed off and sent out. Furthermore, legacy data and systems would still be archived and kept for 7 years.
- In response to the Chair’s comments that some of the issues certain staff faced were due to them having literacy and other issues which impacted their ability to be trained and to access digital technology, a Unison Representative explained that there were training programmes in place to help staff with digital technology in order to build up their confidence and upskill (and the Trade Unions were working with the Culture and Community Learning Manager and the Director of Learning and Skills around additional community/

adult education within this area), but for those staff over 60 years old such classroom based training and using digital technology could be too daunting. This meant that such staff could not access Epay or other cloud-based services going forward. The Operational Manager Employee Services suggested the possibility of such staff having individual training instead which may deal with this problem. The Oracle Project Manager suggested that he could also get involved in digital training with harder to reach groups going forward too.

- Councillor Robertson added that although this was only a small minority of staff which would be impacted by the implementation of Oracle, that their needs should be addressed too and that they should receive paper copies of their payslips, etc. Both the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development and the Operational Manager Employee Services agreed that hard copies could be provided to staff if required and also commented on the challenges faced in getting some staff to engage with digital training, etc.
- The Vice-Chair stated that many of those frontline staff who did not have access to Epay or other digital services would welcome any help and training that could be provided on accessing key documents digitally.
- M. Canavan (NEU) added that HR and others needed to engage in a variety of ways in order to reach out and to help staff struggling with the Council's digital technology and avoid a 'one size fits all' approach.

It was subsequently

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

(o) Management of Absence (HR) –

The report was presented by the Operational Manager Employee Services, which provided the Forum with attendance figures for the half yearly period 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2021 and comparative data for the same period in 2020. The key points raised were:

- The target figures for this year had not been changed, due to the pandemic;
- The overall figure for sickness absence per FTE, compared with the same period in the previous year, showed an increase (4.95 days lost per FTE) and were also over the monthly target, as well as being higher than that of the previous quarter;
- The overall figures could have been impacted by the majority of staff still largely working from home, and a reduction in short term sickness as opposed to long term sickness increasing;
- The winter period would also be a factor in any potential increases in sickness absence;
- Environment and Housing Services had jumped from under their target for sickness absence to over their target from the last quarter to the most recent one, with local managers and HR monitoring this situation in order to resolve it;
- However, for the same period(s), Learning and Skills had gone from just over target to on target over the last two quarters;

- Absences against the pandemic code was 8<sup>th</sup> in reasons for absence during this period, with 4% of absences up to September 2021. With the improvement of the pandemic situation and the roll out of the vaccine, it was expected absences against this code would potentially reduce going forward;
- Given the return to similar levels of absence prior to the pandemic, it would be important to ensure that the management and review of absence levels was increased over future months, both at CMT (Corporate Management Team) and within individual Directorates;

Following the update, the following comments and queries were raised by members of the Forum:

- Following on from the Chair's query on any issues encountered by staff requiring help from the Council's Occupational Health Team, the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development stated that the Occupational Health Team had been doing an outstanding job under very difficult circumstances due to the pandemic and were being proactive in offering help and support to staff. Whenever possible, the team were offering face to face support at the Alps and Court Road depots for staff who could not access Staffnet, etc., a point also echoed by a Unison Representative.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the report be noted.

(p) Senior Leadership Team Structure Update (HR) –

Senior Officers in attendance withdrew from the meeting when this item was discussed and therefore did not take part in its discussion.

A copy of the report presented to Cabinet on 13<sup>th</sup> September, 2021 was provided to the Forum and presented by the Operational Manager Employee Services:

- The Review of the Senior Executive Leadership Team Structure had gone through both Cabinet and Full Council where its proposals and recommendations had been approved;
- From November 2021, the proposed changes would be subject to a wider consultation (i.e. with staff and Trade Unions);
- The current post of Managing Director would be removed and replaced with the post of Chief Executive;
- The posts of Director of Corporate Resources and Director of Place would be created.

Following the update, the following comments and queries were raised by members of the Forum:

- Councillor Robertson reiterated his concerns that the timing of the senior management changes was inappropriate due to the current financial

constraints on the Vale of Glamorgan Council and were unnecessary due to the current excellent performance of the Council.

- Councillor John felt that the changes were necessary as previous cuts to senior management had left huge gaps in the management and running of the Council. The role of Chief Executive reflected similar roles held in other Local Authorities and the new Director roles would assist the Managing Director / Chief Executive, whose role increasingly involved meeting with WG and other bodies on key issues, such as climate change.
- A Unison Representative added that the Trade Unions understood the need to 'future proof' the Council by implementing the senior management changes proposed but this needed to be balanced with additional resources and support for front facing services who were currently overstretched.
- Finally, the Chair added that the new senior management roles fitted in with the various changes that the Council were implementing such as the Reshaping Services agenda.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the report be noted.

(q) Date of Next Meeting –

AGREED – T H A T the date of the next Joint Consultative Forum meeting would be Monday, 17<sup>th</sup> January, 2022 at 10.00 a.m.