

## JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> April, 2022.

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

Representatives of Trade Unions: J. Ballantine (GMB), L. Bonni (GMB), G. Davies (Unison), T. Greaves (GMB), M. Morris (NASUWT) and G. Pappas (Unison).

Officers: V. Davidson, T. Dickinson, A. Phillips and M. Thomas.

(a) Apologies for Absence –

These were received from S. Alderman, M. Canavan (NEU), C. Davies (GMB), Councillor P. Drake, S. Greenslade (Unison), P. Ham and S. Williams.

(b) Minutes and Matters Arising –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 14th February, 2022 be approved as a correct record.

(c) Declarations of Interest –

No declarations were received.

(d) Trade Union Items –

None received at this time.

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

(i) **Minutes of Social Services Health and Safety Committee: 26th January, 2022.**

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Social Services Health and Safety Committee on 26th January, 2022.

It was subsequently

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

**(ii) Minutes of Visible Services and Housing Consultative Forum: 2nd February, 2022.**

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Visible Services and Housing Consultative Forum on 2nd February, 2022.

It was subsequently

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

**(iii) Minutes of the Visible Services and Housing Consultative Forum: 2nd March, 2022.**

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Visible Services and Housing Consultative Forum on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2022.

It was subsequently

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

**(f) Hybrid Working Strategy**

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development updated the Forum on the strategy, whose aim was to take forward the existing flexible working policy and the other new ways of working resulting from the pandemic (in conjunction with new technology) into the 'new normal' (such as implementing 'agile' and 'hybrid' ways of working). As part of this, the strategy would outline how the Council would implement hybrid and other new ways of working whilst ensuring that the needs of local residents continued to be prioritised and were met in the most effective way by staff. Hybrid working was based on the concept that "work was an activity that we do and how we collaborate, rather than a place we go".

Furthermore, the strategy would also address greater flexible working for staff within frontline services who, due to the nature of their roles and the need to be at various fixed location(s), could not participate in more hybrid forms of working. For example, the Council was engaged with trade unions in order to see if more flexible working processes could be implemented for waste management teams and certain elements of that had already begun with the use of 'job and finish'.

It was also important to highlight that a key principle of the strategy was that the Vale of Glamorgan's communities and citizens come first.

The Council was also engaged with key stakeholders, such as its diversity groups / networks (Diverse and GLAM networks) to ensure the strategy had the right focus and addressed the key areas for all staff.

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

- On the issue raised by members of the Forum concerning the Unite trade union having been unable to as yet to directly get involved with the consultation for this strategy, it was explained that although they had a representative allocated to this Forum, due to their relatively small size, workloads and more limited resources they had been unable to participate fully with the Forum nor the strategy. However, a copy of the strategy had been sent to them for their comment and review and it was hoped that a direct, face to face meeting could be set up with Unite in order to get their views on the strategy. The Chair wished to stress that the input from Unite and the attendance of their representative at this Forum would be of immense value.
- Councillor Dr Johnson pointed to the high-level nature of the details provided within the strategy document and how its principles were set out and queried how these would be cascaded down / implemented 'on the ground', including the need for discussions and negotiations between staff and line management as part of ensuring that staff had as much flexibility in their work as possible. It was explained that management would be receiving specific guidance on the issues raised by the Councillor as part of the finished strategy, including how staff could be supported. The high-level nature of the document reflected the need to get the key principles correct first, and the guidance document would be brought to the Forum once finalised and in a more detailed format. Negotiations or discussions between line managers and their staff on the various ways of working would be taking place, which sometimes could be challenging, and would need to balance the needs of both service users and staff, a caveat also echoed by the Chair. Councillor Dr Johnson further added that trade unions needed to be involved in such discussions in order deal with any issues and to support staff.
- G. Pappas (Unison Representative) cited the example of the staff at Court Road where changes to where and how they worked had been something of a 'culture shock' to staff with their routine taken away, resulting in staff struggling and becoming frustrated and unhappy. What was needed, which was also echoed by the Chair and Councillor Morgan was a greater effort in order to consult and engage with the staff involved on the changes made and to do so in a more effective way to help with this shift in work culture, as well as to manage people's expectations and to 'keep the door open' on further consultation with staff and trade unions over the strategy and changes to work practices.
- On Councillor Robertson's query about trade union involvement in communicating the changes of working practices to staff as part of the strategy, it was explained that both face to face meetings (i.e. attending the Alps and Court Road depots) and the use of remote means (i.e. Microsoft Teams) were used on a regular basis to communicate to staff about these changes as well as addressing these at the annual trade union meeting and ongoing collaboration with HR.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the Hybrid Working Strategy be endorsed.

(g) Vale of Glamorgan Council People Strategy 2021-2025

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development updated the Forum on the strategy, whose aim was to set out what the Council wished to be in terms of its work culture and working environment.

Central to the strategy was the following 3 key themes:

- 1 Redesigning for Responsiveness
2. Driving Employee Experience
3. Striving for High Performance

Human Resources (HR) had felt that the strategy should be called a 'People Strategy' as this better reflected the nature of it.

HR had been working with the diversity networks, as well as various other groups internally, such as trade unions, Head of Services and Directors in order to develop the strategy.

Underneath the main strategy, there were a number of supporting strategies such as hybrid working, recruitment and attraction as well as reward and benefit.

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

- Councillor Dr Johnson asked when the supporting strategies would be available to consider. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development stated that the Hybrid working document was a supporting strategy as was the Strategic Workforce Planning Strategy, which documented the implementation plan. These had already been brought / discussed today. The Recruitment and Attraction Strategy had been drafted and was now in the process of being reviewed. This strategy was especially important due to the growing difficulties in filling staff vacancies which both the Council and other organisations were encountering and the need to adopt new methods of recruitment / retention, i.e., updating job descriptions and personal specifications (such as moving away from stipulating previous local government experience, where it was not necessary), adopting new ways of advertising jobs and to look at best practice from other organisations. The Recruitment and Attraction Strategy would be brought to the Forum in the near future and a draft of it would be shared with Members of the Forum once it was ready.
- Councillor Robertson welcomed the strategy and felt this was a common sense document and hoped its aspirations could be translated into practice.

- The Chair added that the Council, as part of this strategy, must ensure that it continued to look at being more diverse, inclusive and to encourage people with protected characteristics. The Vale of Glamorgan Council lead the way in many areas in comparison to other authorities, and this strategy would help to bolster this position through its proposals, processes, actions and policies as well as by reinforcing inclusivity.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the Vale of Glamorgan Council People Strategy 2021-2025 be endorsed.

(h) 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. This would take place following the local elections and the Annual Meeting of the Council.