

## JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2023.

Present: Councillor S. Campbell (Chair); Councillors J.E. Charles, P. Drake, S.D. Perkes and N.C. Thomas.

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

Officers: G. Davies, T. Dickinson, G. Jones, R. Evans, and M. Thomas.

(a) Apologies for Absence –

These were received from Councillors M. Cowpe and W.A. Hennessy; M. Lewis-Davis (UCAC) and S. Townsend-Ryan (Unison / Vice-Chair).

(b) Minutes and Matters Arising –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2023 be approved as a correct record.

(c) Declarations of Interest –

No declarations of interest were received.

(d) Trade Union Items –

None received at this time.

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

(i) **Visible Services and Housing Trade Unions Consultative Meeting:  
5<sup>th</sup> October, 2022**

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Visible Services and Housing Trade Unions Consultative Meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2022.

It was subsequently

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

**(ii) Visible Services and Housing Trade Unions Consultative Meeting:  
2<sup>nd</sup> November, 2022**

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Visible Services and Housing Trade Unions Consultative Meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 2022.

It was subsequently

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

**(iii) Social Services Consultative Forum: 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2023**

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Social Services Consultative Forum held on 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2023.

It was subsequently

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

**(f) 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) Visible Services and Housing: 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday of every month;
- (ii) Learning and Skills JCF: 8<sup>th</sup> February, 2023 and 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2023.

**(g) Presentation: Stop Loan Sharks Wales –**

The presentation was provided to the Forum by the Client Liaison Officer from the Wales Illegal Money Lending Unit (WIMLU).

It was explained that the Wales Illegal Money Lending Unit had been renamed to Stop Loan Sharks Wales. This was done in order to raise awareness amongst the public and to provide a clearer message of what the unit actually did.

The Client Liaison Officer explained to the Forum that it was best to think of the unit as a specialist part of the Trading Standards Team. The unit covered all of Wales and was based within Shared Regulatory Services (SRS) at the Vale of Glamorgan Council. The unit was comprised of a number of investigators who gathered the evidence to assist in the prosecution of illegal money lenders (also known as 'loan sharks') and the Client Liaison Officers who combined victim support with awareness raising and training.

The definition of a loan shark was shared with the Forum, essentially someone who lent money without having the authorisation or regulation required by the Financial Conduct Authority. The characteristics of loan sharks was outlined including

targeting the provision of loans to vulnerable persons knowing that these would not be repayable, grooming behaviours, a lack of paperwork and the use of interest default charges such as the 'double bubble payments'. This was done in the knowledge that the victims of these would not be able to pay off the debt resulting in the loan shark taking control of their finances such as through their bank card or account. Subsequently, the 'business models' that were used by loan sharks were outlined, ranging from family, friends or neighbours through to faith groups, taxi drivers or even parents at the school gate.

The vulnerabilities and risk factors of those persons who become victims to loan sharks were outlined ranging from age, disability, mental health, poverty through to insecure accommodation. There were a number of barriers for people to come forward to admit to being a victim of a loan shark, ranging from peer pressure through to "not being a grass". Also, due to there being no paperwork involved, people did not know what they had paid and could also be subjected to veiled threats of intimidation or violence.

The Client Liaison Officer also shared with the Forum details on who referred cases on to the unit, such as Citizens Advice and also provided warning flags or key issues or signs to look out for, as well as outlining the contact details of Stop Loan Sharks Wales and also the free extensive training programme that could be provided to various people and groups such as had been provided for some Council frontline staff already.

Following the presentation, a number of comments and queries were made by the Forum.

Councillor Thomas asked about the scale of the problem around loan shark activity in Wales. It was explained that between 5,000 – 10,000 persons were regularly borrowing through a loan shark throughout Wales, which had increased due to the impact of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis with people having to borrow to make ends meet. It was also difficult to prosecute such cases but there had been some successes around charges for money lending but also around fraud and other related offences.

Councillor Drake commented that with her work previously in the Trade Unions, she had seen money lending in an estate in South Wales where this had been countered by setting up a Credit Union. The Client Liaison Officer replied that the unit worked closely with Credit Unions and had helped to set up a "just missing out" loan which helped those who were not normally eligible for credit. Councillor Drake stressed the importance for people to be part of a Credit Union. The Operational Manager for Employee Services also mentioned the work done between Cardiff and Vale Pensions and local Credit Unions. An award had been won around promoting this as well as both bodies working closely with Stop Loan Sharks Wales. Work had also been done around promoting Credit Unions / Stop Loan Sharks Wales with schools where lesson plans had been developed on financial capabilities as well as being part of the schools' teaching resources. Stop Loan Sharks Wales did do a tour of Wales to launch the resources in several schools. The resources were now available on Hwb for all teachers to use for free.

The Chair felt that extending this awareness raising of loan shark activity to people on higher or medium incomes as well would be important due to the cost-of-living crisis and pressures on even those residents on higher wages.

Councillor Perkes stated it was really useful to see what the key indicators were around loan shark activities and warning flags for those persons that potentially were victims of loan shark activities. Due to this, support could then be offered to victims who could be dealt with sensitively and appropriately as well as signposting them to further relevant help.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the presentation on Stop Loan Sharks Wales be noted.

(h) People Strategy and Supporting Documents (HHROD) –

It was explained that the report went to Cabinet in February following extensive consultation and feedback, and then shared out again for a final consultation including with the Forum for further comment, prior to finalisation. Other areas consulted with were the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee, DMT and the various diversity groups within the Vale of Glamorgan Council as well as the Insight Board, the Older Persons groups and Headteachers as well.

The People Strategy covered a wide variety of areas relating to human resources, setting out the overarching strategic themes as well as encompassing more traditional HR elements of recruitment, attraction and retention, succession planning and engagement.

Other key areas of interest were around increasing the ability for staff to work in a hybrid, flexible or agile way, although this was not always possible due to the requirements of the Council i.e. frontline staff or where staff needed to deal with customers in person. This ensured a balance was reached between the needs of Council staff and also the needs of residents of the Vale of Glamorgan.

Following the presentation of the report, G. Pappas (Unison) stated that some staff had raised concerns over the seeming inconsistencies around the different ways of working between various departments, etc. and were looking at something that could be applied to the Vale of Glamorgan Council overall in a fair and equal way. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development accepted those comments and stated that she had tried to increase flexibility for all staff of the Vale of Glamorgan Council such as the use of “work and finish”. Due to the wide range of roles within the Council i.e. teachers and frontline staff including waste management staff, such measures had to be looked at based on these very different circumstances.

Councillor Thomas added that due to the complexity of the organisation, i.e. a mixture of customer facing and other back office type activities, meant that the People Strategy in conjunction with Human Resources and Trade Unions, had to

work together to achieve a balance in terms of work flexibility whilst meeting customer needs.

The Chair asked if, with regard to recruitment, the Council was looking at hybrid positions in terms of recruitment and retention and how it would deal with contracts that potentially would go hybrid in the future. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development stated that yes that was the case but there would be conditions around a specific place of work i.e. a place where staff would come in for meetings, teamworking etc. There were acute difficulties in recruiting in certain areas and professions such as HGV drivers, Social Care, Teaching, etc. The inclusion of hybrid and agile working as options in terms of contracts etc. offered people the chance to work outside the confines of Council buildings whilst still subject to coming into the relevant offices with regard to collaboration etc.

G. Pappas (Unison) referred to the recent All Wales Agreement on Pay, particularly with regard to Agency workers. He stated that Trade Unions had not been sited on this straight away. It was explained that the Council had also been caught off guard by this announcement and were not aware of the implications for care working. It was added that the use of Agency workers etc. for areas such as teaching as well as apprenticeships could be used to plug the gaps in staff shortages temporarily. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development would be looking at this in conjunction with Trade Unions at the local and All Wales levels through the appropriate forums.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T People Strategy report be noted.

(i) Culture, Engagement and Involvement – 2023 Onwards (HHROD) –

The Forum was informed that the new Culture, Engagement and Involvement Strategy would be built on and informed by a number of actions including the 2022 well-being survey of staff, New Local Listening Culture Proposal, Annual Delivery Plan Priorities, People Strategy, Public Participation learnings and best practice in Culture and Engagement.

As part of this strategy, it was important for the Council to build up its networks in order to better communicate a positive corporate culture, values and engage with the various staff groups. Also, the council needed to ensure that it recognised the impact of existing actions within the umbrella of employee engagement.

In terms of online engagement StaffNet, this was quite antiquated and “clunky” and there were differences in terms of school staff being able to access such information. Due to this there was a need to create a wider common communications channel. Also, there was a need for further discussions and comments from staff regarding the Engagement Strategy, including feedback from schools.

The aim was to roll out the new Engagement Strategy and feedback concerning it with other performance appraisal processes, such as #itsaboutme as well as tying in

with the Welcome to the Vale programme for new members of staff when they joined the Council.

Following the presentation of the update Councillor Perkes asked how negative feedback that was provided was dealt with and addressed adequately. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development advised that some negative feedback had been given as part of the process which was acknowledged and was dealt with informally in conjunction with Trade Unions. If required such issues may need to go through a formal process such as grievance procedure. However, the focus for HR was to resolve these informally with the collaboration of the Trade Unions.

Councillor Thomas stated that the ultimate aim for this strategy was for Council staff themselves to be in a position to tell the public how good the Vale of Glamorgan Council was to work for. As part of this, satisfaction overall appeared to be good among Council staff and the current work undertaken by the Council to improve recruitment should also benefit the situation.

The Chair stated that a central part of the strategy should be that 'happy workers were good workers'. The Chair also talked about the Hwb network and issues on accessing emails and other communications on this. She asked if these issues could be passed on to the relevant bodies to deal with.

G. Pappas (Unison) stated that the principles of engagement and co-operation with the Trade Unions and the Council were good and indeed ground-breaking. Again, engagement remained a hard and challenging process, particularly with frontline staff and schools, which was the case for both HR and Trade Unions. He added that changing the culture and re-engaging following Covid 19 was essential but would be a challenge.

The Chair stated that it was important to maintain and improve engagement such as through questionnaires and feedback from staff. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development stated that the HR Team had done a lot of work around raising awareness with Oracle as well as offering support to Social Care workers. Also, HR had been involved in improving the health and safety aspects for staff.

G. Hallett (NAHT) stated that morale was low in schools i.e. due to budgetary constraints and the new curriculum. Staff were not aware of StaffNet and in general the Council needed to improve feelings of inclusion with school staff. HR were acutely aware that morale as a whole had dipped despite their best efforts, particularly in light of issues with resourcing, pay challenges, etc in the public sector. Furthermore, the media portrayal of public sector work was also extremely negative. These posed significant challenges, but it was important for the Council to be open about these in order to address them effectively.

Councillor Thomas stated that Elected Members generally supported Council staff and officers and tried their best to counter the negative view of public sector workers among the public. It was important to stress that Local Authorities worked to benefit the communities which they served. Those areas unpopular with the public such as

higher Council Tax were due to inflation and other pressures outside the Council's control although the Council Tax for the Vale remained relatively low. It was important to stress that the Local Authority was not the public's enemy.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the update on culture, engagement, involvement – 2023 onwards be noted.

(j) Welcome to the Vale (HHROD) –

The Welcome to the Vale, the Council's approach to induction, was based on feedback from staff regarding the Council's induction process. It was also shaped around the principles outlined in the Council's Staff Charter. The induction package currently sat on i-Dev so as to be separate from the StaffNet website.

The Welcome to the Vale induction home page had a number of tabs covering various areas such as about the Vale, workplace compliance and various other sections such as the work of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and raising awareness, etc around Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV).

New staff were also encouraged to provide feedback on the induction training in order to inform the Welcome to the Vale package going forward.

During the pandemic the induction process was undertaken online, but as the Authority came out of the pandemic setting there were greater opportunities now for face-to-face induction and training in order to encourage collaboration and build relationships across the various Directorates with new inductees.

Following the update, G. Pappas (Unison) stated that the Welcome to the Vale package was a great improvement and asked if some additional web pages could be added concerning Trade Unions and other relevant links. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development replied that she would look into adding these pages on to the Welcome to the Vale web page.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the Welcome to the Vale verbal update be noted.

(k) Update on the Establishment of a Disability Network (HHROD) –

A verbal update was presented by a co-ordinator for the Vale Communities for Work who was also involved in the staff disability group.

There were three key elements to the Disability Network – Employment Support, GMB Workplace and Hidden Disability.

In part this Network had come about due to the need to have more accurate information on staff needs (particularly those staff with disabilities / hidden disabilities) and to help encourage employability within the local jobs market for people with disabilities. Since 2014 the number of workers within the Vale of Glamorgan Council workforce had declined and there was a realisation and a push for greater recruitment and retention, including staff with disabilities.

Work was undertaken with the Vale Adult Services Team in order to help support their clients and Vale of Glamorgan Council staff with disabilities and to use these measures as best practice and to encourage further recruitment. These measures had been started before Christmas and were now getting back on track.

It was important to get the message out to staff on the new Disability Network via the Council's communication system such as the Chief Executive's weekly updates.

The key aim of the Network was to build up a strong support mechanism for staff with disabilities in conjunction with the other Vale of Glamorgan Council diversity networks.

With the formal set up of the Network, there would be a need to establish its Terms of Reference, collaboration with Human Resources and Trade Unions as well as undertaking work around the issue of neuro diversity and other disabilities.

Following the update, Councillor Thomas referred to work that he had previously done with a group supporting people with neuro diversity issues, in particular around Job Centres in order to get them interview ready. He asked if there was any scope to re-institute this in relation to the Council due to it previously being stopped due to funding issues. It was explained that the Communities First Team had received money from Welsh Government and had reached out to other bodies, such as around the use of the Shared Prosperity Fund. This would be part of a support package to help people with disabilities get into work such as with the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

Councillor Perkes also referred to work that had been done by Council officers to help people with autism in similar conditions to get job ready.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development stated that some schools did have facilities for pupils with neuro diversity and HR were working with these to help pupils gain future careers with the Vale of Glamorgan Council such as via the Big Fresh Company and C1V. She also referred to some managers within the Council approaching HR for adaptations to support the staff who faced various neuro diversity issues and other disabilities. Also the Council's Wellbeing Champions were assisting in breaking down the barriers and taboos around neuro diversity.

The Chair referred to various diversity and LGBTQ champions and suggested that there should also be a neuro diversity champion. It was explained that yes, a champion from Elected Members and / or Senior Leadership Team around neuro diversity issues would be helpful. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development added that once the group was fully set up they could



approach HR or Elected Members to see if they wanted to be a champion for neuro diversity and other disability issues moving forward.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the verbal update on the establishment of the Disability Network be noted.

(I) Oracle Fusion Update (OMHR) –

The verbal update was presented by the Operational Manager Employee Services, who informed the Forum that the system was now live thanks to the tremendous efforts made by all the participants within the project such as staff from HR, Payroll, Finance and Communications.

In terms of the challenges faced with the implementation of the system, a number of issues had already been ironed out, with the older system now coming to the end of its life.

As part of the 'go live' for the system, the Council had undertaken a number of roadshows, meetings, etc. at the Civic Offices, the Alps, Docks offices and elsewhere as well as holding online sessions including with school staff in the Vale.

A key feature of the Oracle system was the launch of the payroll function but it also had a broader reach and other functions had been rolled out.

A lot of work had been undertaken around the backup via the old system which worked in parallel with the new one. In terms of payroll, Vale of Glamorgan office staff plus teachers had slowly been rolled onto this new system and once completed, the old system would be turned off.

The Operational Manager Employee Services presented to the Forum the new Oracle Fusion dashboard and home page which provided a number of details and tabs that staff could access, such as 'my public information', family and emergency contacts, etc. It was noted that a number of personal details could be edited by the officers themselves including gender identity and a record of any disabilities.

Managers could also look at staff details directly without contacting HR and did not have to wait for certain reports as real time data could be sought from the new system.

I-Dev provided learning on how to use Oracle Fusion for Elected Members and Council staff.

Following the update, G. Pappas (Unison) stated that it was good to see that Oracle Fusion had finally gone live and was impressed with its functionality which would be extremely useful for both management and staff. It was important to get staff buy-in to using the system and asked how the Oracle Champion system was working. It was explained that the Oracle Champion system was currently working well, and a

number of Council and teaching staff had been asked to become Champions or first points of contact regarding difficulties or questions around the new Oracle Fusion system. It was important that these Champions were kept up to date on any new practices or functions on the system, as well as ensuring that Champions were replaced if they should leave or change roles.

The Chair asked if the use of Oracle Fusion could be linked in with the Welcome to the Vale induction package and that training could be provided to inductees around Oracle as part of the mandatory training modules. It was explained that yes this could be included as part of the new starter process with the relevant link added via the Welcome to the Vale site.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the Oracle Fusion verbal update 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.