

No.

JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 25th September, 2023..

Present: Councillor S. Campbell (Chair); Councillors J.E. Charles, M. Cowpe, W.A. Hennessy, S.D. Perkes and N.C. Thomas.

Representatives of Trade Unions: J. Davis (UNISON), G. Davies (UNISON), L. Bonni (GMB), J. Ballantine (GMB), J. Green (UNISON), G. Pappas (UNISON) and M. Morris (NASUWT).

Officers: T. Dickinson, M. Hudson and M. Thomas.

(a) To Receive Notification from the Trade Unions of the Name of the Vice-Chair –

AGREED – T H A T J. Davies be appointed to the position of Vice-Chair for the duration of the current Administration

(b) Apologies For Absence –

These were received from Councillor P. Drake, C. Brown (ASCL), M. Davies (UCAC), S. Alderman, G. Hallett (NAHT), P. Ham and T. Greaves (GMB).

(c) Minutes and Matters Arising –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 24th April, 2023 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) Learning and Skills JCF – 8th February, 2023

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Learning and Skills JCF meeting held on 8th February, 2023

No.

It was subsequently

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

(ii) Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative Meeting – 7th December, 2022

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative meeting held on 7th December, 2022

It was subsequently

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

(iii) Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative Meeting – 12th January, 2023

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative meeting held on 12th January, 2023

It was subsequently

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

(iv) Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative Meeting – 5th April 2023

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative meeting held on 5th April, 2023

It was subsequently

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

(v) Social Services Consultative Forum – 27th March, 2023

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Social Services Consultative Forum meeting held on 27th March, 2023

It was subsequently

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

No.

(vi) Social Services Consultative Forum – 2nd May, 2023

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Social Services Consultative Forum meeting held on 2nd May, 2023

It was subsequently

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

(vii) Social Services Consultative Forum – 8th June, 2023

The Forum considered the minutes relating to Social Services Consultative Forum meeting held on 8th June, 2023

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Social Services Consultative Forum meeting 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) Visible Services and Housing JCF – Meetings held first Wednesday of every month.

(h) Draft Digital Strategy (HHROD) –

The report was presented by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development. The purpose of the report was to provide an overview of the work undertaken to develop a new Draft Digital Strategy as part of the consultation process prior to its adoption. The Strategy provided an outline for the future way of working for the Council, setting out the vision of transforming the Council's digital culture based around four themes each of which had a number of commitments associated with each of them. The Strategy was the sum of a collaborative approach which included various external agencies as well as staff within the Vale of Glamorgan Council itself.

Following the presentation of the report, a number of queries were raised by Members of the Forum:

- Councillor Thomas asked about the Trade Unions' view on this Digital Strategy, to which G. Pappas (UNISON) stated that this was still a 'work in progress' and over 24 months training had been provided for front line service staff via the use of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) Learning

No.

Fund. This had been in collaboration with Human Resources within the Council who had assisted with the implementation of this training process. He stressed that it was important to have a joined-up system or approach in terms of the Digital Strategy and the training around it for staff, due to the Council not having the resources to be able to do this fully on its own.

- M. Morris (NASUWT) added that with regards to funding for teaching staff in terms of digital training they were currently undertaking bespoke digital courses as it was uncertain at this time that they would receive funding from the Wales TUC Fund.
- The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development asked Members of the Forum that if they had feedback that they wished to share outside of the meeting concerning the Digital Strategy, there was still time to feed back into the process.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the Digital Strategy be noted.

(i) People's Strategy (HHROD) –

The report was presented to the Forum by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, the purpose of which was for the Forum to consider the finalised report and appendices concerning the Strategy. It was noted that the Forum had previously fed into this Strategy and as a result this was the final review for the Forum in order to consider this finalised version.

It was explained that this Strategy would tie in with the following agenda items concerning the Draft Reward Strategy and the Vale of Glamorgan Council Attraction Strategy 2023-2025 and Forum Members would consider these together.

It was further explained that the Strategy had been put together in an accessible format i.e. through the medium of Welsh, the use of large print text, etc.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the People's Strategy be noted.

(j) Draft Reward Strategy (HHROD) –

The report was presented by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development to the Forum, the purpose of which was to seek Members' views and comments on the Strategy as part of the consultation process.

It was explained that within some professions within the Vale of Glamorgan Council there were still areas where pay disparities and challenges existed, particularly with the recruitment of certain kinds of professionals and specialists ranging from legal and financial officers through to social carers, cleaners,

No.

teachers and HGV drivers. As part of this, it was important to consider how best to attract, retain and reward staff within the Vale of Glamorgan Council going forward, including looking at base pay and grading but having to also balance this with considerations around affordability. Also, as part of rewards, it was important to engage with staff in order to ascertain what they wanted in terms of rewards, which had been achieved through various workshops, surveys and attendance at various workplaces such as schools in order to gain ideas and suggestions.

Key areas included the provision of revised rewards by April 2024 in time for the new tax year, the incorporation of additional voluntary contributions for pensions for staff and the suggested implementation of a partial drawdown by Council staff of their salary before the monthly pay date. It was noted that all areas were up for review, and these were not definite suggestions, for example, with the possible drawdown of part of staff salary, consideration would be needed to protect individuals and only to draw out what they had accrued in order to avoid issues around finances etc.

The proposed new Rewards Strategy would be going to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) before the end of October 2023 and in the meantime further comment from the Trade Unions was being sought.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the draft Reward Strategy be noted.

(k) Vale of Glamorgan Council Attraction Strategy 2023-2025 (HHROD) –

The report was presented by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, the purpose of which was to inform the Forum of the Strategy which provided a long-term view on how to improve Council structures, learning and development of staff and other areas in order for the Council to be fit for the future and adapt at pace to developments in technology and new ways of working in order to achieve this. The Strategy set out how the Council would attract suitable candidates to Council vacancies and promote the Council as an employer of choice whilst taking an integrated approach to recruitment and selection. As part of the Strategy the activities undertaken in relation to attracting staff would be monitored in order to ensure they were making a difference to attraction and retention for the Council.

Following the presentation of the report and the related items previously on the People Strategy and Draft Reward Strategy, a number of questions were raised by the Forum:

- G. Pappas (UNISON) commented that the Reward Strategy was a good idea and stressed the importance of feedback from frontline staff in relation to this and the other related strategies raised at the Forum. However, he raised concerns around staff terms and conditions, pay structures and how these impacted recruitment and retention as well as overall services. In summary, although rewards were a welcome benefit to staff, pay remained

No.

an ongoing and vital issue for them. It was explained that this was a challenging and difficult review in terms of these strategies and their impact on workforce structures as well as the Green Book and Pay scales. However, work was being undertaken with Trade Unions in order to address these and it was important to note that gaps in pay etc could not be fully resolved without looking at all staff. It was added that the attrition rates for Vale of Glamorgan Council staff remained relatively low but this had to be seen in conjunction with the leaving and retiring of certain skilled key workers which posed a challenge for the Council going forward.

- On Councillor Cowpe's question on attrition rates and if these were worse or on a par with other local authorities it was explained that attrition rates were good in comparison to other local authorities but there were some emerging trends that could see a slight increase in attrition which centred around members of staff wishing to leave or retire earlier than expected. It was also noted, in terms of pay rates, that they were determined by the local authority within certain structures and the pay scales for the Vale of Glamorgan Council appeared to be out of kilter in relation to other neighbouring authorities. Although local authorities generally had similar grades and spinal points there were differences in terms of banding and pay scales and it was important for the Vale to look at new pay structures in order to future-proof its recruitment and retention of staff in light of competitive rates of pay.
- The Vice-Chair referred to the ideas provided by the focus groups as part of these reviews and what the cost implications of these would be going forward. It was explained that in terms of the Rewards Strategy there were no direct funds associated with it and all suggestions would be costed in order to ensure their feasibility. In terms of the Additional Voluntary Contributions (AVC) these would help to save money in the long run for both employer and employee i.e. help to provide savings as part of the overall funding of the Strategy concerned. This was due to them coming from staff pay and not from additional sources of finance and these would also prove more tax efficient. On the Vice-Chair's follow up question about the proposed drawdown in salary and whether this could generate additional administration costs for the Council, it was explained that this was being considered by the Council and if it was decided to be prohibitively expensive then it would not be undertaken.
- M. Morris (NASUWT) referred to teachers pay awards which were highly regulated and therefore there was not much room for manoeuvre. He also referred to some teachers leaving over the current year and asked if this had resulted in teaching posts being unfilled. The key issue around teachers leaving the profession was workload pressures and he felt that the Welsh Government (WG) was 'dragging its heels' on reviewing these issues. It was explained that the Vale did not have any vacancies at this time around teaching staff although it was noted that a number of headteachers had retired and there were challenges around recruiting their replacements. It was also explained that the key challenges in recruitment lay around Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) due to them finding jobs that were better paid and relatively easier in terms of the work carried out elsewhere.

No.

- Councillor Perkes asked whether the issues around staff leaving were included in exit interviews and if any themes had been identified. It was explained that it was not always possible to conduct exit interviews, although there appeared to be certain common issues raised such as base pay and lack of development opportunities.
- G. Pappas (UNISON) stated that pay was a fundamental part of this issue and it was necessary to look at the whole structure around pay. Staff struggling with issues around pay may not take up rewards as money was already tight and in turn this could impact the retention of staff. It was explained that it was important for the Council to improve its rewards structure whilst acknowledging base pay remained an issue. However, this had to be balanced with the affordability element which made a significant review of pay quite challenging, but the Council was open to take further feedback and ideas from Trade Unions.
- The Chair asked about the deadline for this consultation process. It was explained that this would be the second week of October. The subsequent survey would be shared with Members should they require it.
- Councillor Thomas raised the issue of the ongoing impact of austerity on local government budgets as well as that of WG which had led to additional pressures. It was also important to look at areas such as the benefits and opportunities for further flexible working if appropriate. He added the Vale of Glamorgan Council was a relatively small authority with a budget that was also limited to some extent. As part of this process, it was important to talk to schools and youth services such as the Youth Action Group as well.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the Attractions Strategy be noted.

(I) Draft Vale of Glamorgan Annual Self-Assessment 2022/2023 (HHROD) –

The Forum was informed by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development of the work around the Annual Self-Assessment, for their consideration and comment. In essence, the Self-Assessment report was a statement of how well the Council was doing tied in with the requirements of the Annual Development Plan. Various feedback including that of Elected Members and Trade Unions had been taken into account, with the overall outlook being good. In addition, consultation on the Annual Self-Assessment had been referred to the Governance and Audit Committee as well as the five Scrutiny Committees for consideration prior to returning to Cabinet and then referral for final endorsement by Full Council.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the Draft Vale of Glamorgan Annual Self-Assessment report be noted.

No.

(m) Review of the Joint Consultative Forum's Constitution (HHROD) –

The report was presented to the Forum by the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer with the purpose of the Forum reviewing the proposed changes to the Joint Consultative Forum's (JCF) Constitution in order to seek agreement and subsequent endorsement by Full Council.

The amendments to the Constitution were outlined to the Forum which in essence would ensure that should the local Council employed Trade Union and employee representatives not be available to attend the Forum then provision could be made for regional representatives to attend instead. This would cover situations where representatives within the employment of the Council were either not available to attend or pending the election of a local representative, which would mean that an alternative representative from the relevant regional Trade Unions or employee bodies could attend the Forum instead and thereby ensure there was as much attendance and participation by as many and as wide ranging employee representatives and Trade Union members as possible.

Following the presentation of the report, Councillor Thomas stated that this amendment to the JCF Constitution would help to solve some of the quorate issues that the Forum occasionally faced and wished to endorse the recommendation suggested, which was agreed by the Forum as a whole.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the suggested changes to the Joint Consultative Forum's Constitution be agreed and these be forwarded to Full Council for consideration and approval, with the inclusion of these changes concerning the membership of the Joint Consultative Forum in both the JCF and Full Council's Constitutions.

(n) New Supply Teacher Framework Details (OMHR) –

The Forum were introduced to the new Framework guidance concerning supply teachers and temporary workers in education, which would provide an updated framework for the next 4 years.

As an outline to the Forum each local authority would have their own 'zone' which would be supported by a number of external agencies to ensure the provision of suitably qualified temporary education workers and supply teachers. These agencies had been preapproved to ensure they provided a suitably qualified and experienced level of service to schools. It was added that should issues occur with the agencies then potentially they could be removed and replaced.

The key aim of this new framework was to help schools avoid high agency costs and related fees although it would be up to the schools to decide whether they wished to use the service or not.

As part of the system, a new Education Booking platform had been provided, with Welsh Government (WG) contacting each local authority in order to encourage

No.

schools to apply to use this new booking system. Subsequent updates and developments on the improvement or streamlining of this new booking system would be provided to local authorities, schools and the Forum itself.

Following the presentation of the report a number of queries were raised by the Forum:

- M. Morris (NASUWT) noted that the new booking system launched by WG had not been sufficiently pushed by them in order to get schools on board, despite the fact that this new system would be an ideal solution in improving the booking process. He added that schools had previously been charged significant amounts for supply teachers and this would be a solution to help minimise that. It was explained that further updates would be provided to schools and on how supply teachers could use the system in order to access details concerning pensions etc. It was also added that some local authorities were already trialling this booking system prior to a full roll out.
- Councillor Thomas stated that the new framework and booking system sounded like a good idea to help minimise agency costs etc for local schools, as well as providing additional security and safeguarding for supply teachers which made for a much more safe and reliable system. He also stated that this concept could be expanded to include care and social staff. It was explained that the new system would help to ensure that monies involved in the process would be passed on to the supply teachers rather than being moved into agency costs.

It was subsequently

AGREED - T H A T the new Supply Teacher Framework be noted.

(o) 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.