

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a Meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee held via MS Teams on Thursday, 3 September 2020 commencing at 4.00 pm.

Members: Councillor David Cotton (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Jackie Brockway
Councillor Mrs Jessie Milne

Representatives of Union members: James Deacon

Representatives of Non-union staff: Amy Potts

In attendance: Alan Robinson, Director of Corporate Services and Monitoring Officer
Ady Selby, Assistant Director of Commercial and Operational Services
Emma Redwood, People and Organisational Development Manager
Robert Gilliot, Waste and Recycling Team Manager
Katie Storr, Senior Democratic & Civic Officer

Apologies: Councillor Matthew Boles
Rachel Parkin, Home Choices Team Manager (Vice-Chairman)

9 REGISTER OF ATTENDANCE

Due to the more informal nature of the meeting and the limited number of people in attendance, the Chairman with agreement from the Committee, forwent the formal roll-call to confirm attendance. Apologies were noted, as detailed above.

The Vice-Chairman, in her absence, had a requested a short note be read out on her behalf, advising of the reasons why she couldn't be present as planned, and passing on her good wishes to the Committee during her absence.

The Chairman and all Committee Members in turn, wished the Vice-Chairman well, and requested that congratulations cards be sent at the appropriate time, on behalf of the Committee.

10 MEMBERS' DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest at this point in the meeting.

11 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee held on Thursday, 2 July 2020 be approved as an accurate record.

12 **MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE**

There were no outstanding matters arising.

13 **NEW OPERATIONAL DEPOT UPDATE**

The Committee gave consideration to a report which sought to update Members on the progress been made in regards to the New Depot Facility which had now received approval by both the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee and Planning Committee to proceed.

The report was supported by a short presentation given to the Committee by Mr Rob Gilliot, during which Members were reminded of the need basis for the new development, the chosen site, and the site layout. Members noted the much needed improved facilities this would afford the operative staff and of the numerous risk reduction measures, and future proofing which had been built in to the site. The Committee were shown both slides of the elevation views and the floor plans for the new facility.

It was noted that consultation had been undertaken with effected staff at every stage of the process, a depot Project Group was set up at the outset of the project and met on a regular basis to review progress, provide updates on key actions and milestones and set future tasks and deadlines.

Operational staff had been consulted and engaged at every stage via a number of different methods including team meetings, a new depot bulletin board, letters and a suggestion box. Staff had been encouraged to offer up suggestions and feedback on the plans and designs.

Relocation costs were under active discussion and consideration by the project group. Several options were being developed and staff would be fully consulted throughout the process. The Unions had also been updated and engaged throughout.

The update provided JSCC the opportunity to seek assurance that all relevant matters and views were being taken into consideration as the project developed and the completed site opened – currently scheduled for September 2021.

Debate ensued and all Members of the Committee welcomed the improved

conditions the new facility would see the operative staff have access to, all agreed that these improvements were well over-due.

In response to questions, the Officer confirmed that they had undertaken a profile of staff to identify who would most likely be effected by the change in location, and how for example non-drivers could be accommodated. Officers were at the very early stage of negotiations, and were beginning to work through some headline principles. Negotiations at a bespoke individual level would be undertaken later in the process. It was noted that all options were currently on the table. The Human Resources Manager concurred that there had been lots of informal consultation undertaken to-date and staff would continue to engage throughout.

It was also confirmed that paper collections, were only at pilot stage, did not require separate collections and therefore would not have an adverse effect on the depot. Again reference was to the future proofing which had been undertaken in the designing of the facility.

It was also confirmed the new facility did include a drying room.

Finally, in response to questions around the current sweeper vehicles, and where they would be housed, again officers confirmed this matter was still being looked at, and it may be that the current vehicles were replaced with a vehicle that could be used District Wide. Members were reminded why the smaller sweeper had been purchased originally and this need was no longer there.

The Committee indicated that they would welcome a further update report as staff negotiations developed.

RESOLVED that: -

- a) the progress report and presentation be received and noted; and
- b) A further update report be submitted to the Committee, as staff negotiations develop further.

14 **ANNUAL SICKNESS REPORT**

The People and Organisational Development Team Manager presented a report which detailed the levels of sickness absence for West Lindsey District Council for the year 2019/20 and 2020/21 year to-date figures, the headline being, that the 19/20 year's performance ended with average absence rate of 6.6 days per FTE, an improvement on the previous year.

Table 2.3 showed that that short term absence in 2019/20 accounted for just under half of the overall absence, with long terms absences accounting for 54% of absences. During 2019/20 (up to the end of March) 21.4% of

absence had been attributed to stress anxiety or depression.

Referring to Section 5 of the report, **Absence Split – Operational/Non-Operational based**, the information was still to be populated for 2019/20 and would be provided in a future update report. The same was applicable to Section 7.5 of the report, benchmarking, as data was yet to be received from counterparts.

As indicated at the outset of the People and Organisational Development Team Manager's presentation of the report, data had also been included for the four month period April to July of 20/21. An area that she wished to draw to Members' attention, and which was a concerning trend, was those absences relating to stress, anxiety and depression. In July of this year nearly, 70% of absences had been attributed to one of those factors and whilst August's figures had not been included, the trend was continuing with August's figures likely to be similar.

The People and Organisational Development team continued to work with departments to manage sickness absence. Communication had been sent to all managers and staff with details of the Employee Assistance Programme. Training was also being rolled out to managers so that they understood their responsibilities regarding managing mental health and had the tools to do so.

Discussion ensued and all concurred that it was not surprising that people were now feeling the mental impact of the current Covid situation. There had been an initial adrenaline response in the early pandemic, but as life continued to be affected, resilience was becoming jaded. The cumulative effect of the numerous changes to people's lives appeared now to be having an impact.

The situation would continue to be monitored closely and staff supported appropriately.

The JSCC Committee spoke of the tremendous effort staff had made to keep services going, acknowledging that many had been forced to WFH, whilst home schooling, or supporting elderly relatives for example. New working practices had had to be adopted at a quick pace and staff redeployed to essential services. The Committee considered it vital that staff continued to be thanked for their past and continuing efforts, with every individual be recognised.

The People and Organisational Development Team Manager ensured JSCC'S words of support and encouragement would be included in the latest rounds of the Corporate Update and Staff Communications. She also undertook to provide a further update to the Committee, in respect of sick absences in January 2021.

On that basis it was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) the levels of absence for the year April 2019 to March 2020 and also the absence figures for April, May, June, July 2020 year to-date be **NOTED**; and
- b) the Committee's thanks and encouragement be communicated to all staff; and
- c) a further update report be submitted to the Committee in January 2021.

15 COVID-19 STAFF SURVEY RESULTS

In order to gain a broader understanding of how staff had been affected during this time of uncertainty, a survey had recently been carried out across the organisation (office based staff) between June and July 2020. The report presented the key findings which could be used to help inform how best the organisation could support its staff and how the Authority might move forwards as an organisation.

The survey had been well received, with an overall response rate of 84% (177 responses). In summary, it was clear that the vast majority of staff felt well supported by their manager; that Management Team were trusted to make decisions in the best interests of staff and that the right amount of information was being disseminated across the organisation.

Of particular note was the level of comments praising the regular email updates from the Chief Executive. Staff remarked that these had helped to keep them feeling connected to the organisation throughout the pandemic.

Overall, staff had reported that they were satisfied with their current working arrangements and felt that they had the equipment they needed to work from home.

The majority of staff felt that their productivity had not been affected by the closure of the Guildhall. However, as would be expected under the current circumstances, there had been a number of challenges with staff feeling particularly concerned about balancing working from home with looking after children; social isolation and general worries about the job security and the impact of COVID-19 on their lives.

Whilst the majority of responses had been positive there had been an element of those who had responded who were dissatisfied or struggling. The People and Organisational Development Team Manager gave assurance that the data submitted for each question was available down to an individual level and each Assistant Director had been provided with a report outlining any particular concerns raised by their staff, with individual actions plans being developed.

It was noted that a number of new initiatives had been established in

response to the survey findings, for example, a high number of respondents had reported missing the social interaction provided by work. Virtual coffee mornings and lunch breaks had been established, along with a private Facebook Group for all employees.

A number of staff had reported needing an additional equipment and as result all had been encouraged to collect such additional equipment from the Guildhall, monitors, chairs keyboards for example, whilst having to complete a full DSE Assessment.

Assurance was again offered that where responses had been negative, these individuals would be worked with on a personal level.

Employees who sat on the JSCC suggested that the survey should be re-run, as it reflected a moment in time, and was before some freedoms and had been returned and when children were still at home. They anticipated that the results would likely be different, particularly people's views on returning to work, and shared their own current feeling, and that of colleagues they had spoken with.

The People and Organisational Development Team Manger advised that work continued in order to achieve some sort of phased return, capacity continued to be assessed and it was acknowledged that the general feeling seemed to be a split between home and office working would be the preference. That being said, the open plan style of the office and social distancing requirements were not a compatible combination. It was likely there would be a maximum of 30 desks available under current guidelines and these would need to be allocated on some sort of basis, service need and those unable to work from home. Furthermore, the Council's policies of hot-desking and agile working, didn't necessarily suit the "new world". These types of policies were giving rise for concern amongst some employees and added a further level of complexity and anxiety.

Referring to those questions which related to people's concerns or otherwise about returning to the office, it was noted that there were very mixed views and the Committee commented on how it captured the mixed feelings and conflicted emotions which currently existed in society. There was a view that confirming a new normal at the earliest opportunity would likely help relieve some anxiety, however it was also acknowledged that this was very much a moving feast with people's perceptions and views changing all the time. Concerns did not relate to a specific level within the organisation or role.

Management Team were undertaking a real drive to encourage people to reach out and chat. The work of the Recovery Group was outlined together with some of the considerations which were been investigated. Short term fixes would not suffice and changing guidance needed to be taken into consideration.

In response to comments regarding survey fatigue, employees who sat on the JSCC suggested that staff would be keen to undertake another survey

and it had allowed them to feel like they had a voice.

Following much debate it was

RESOLVED that:

- a) the results of the COVID-19 June-July Staff Survey be noted;
- b) a further survey be undertaken in coming months, with the results being reported to the Committee in January 2021.

16 **WORK PLAN**

The People and Organisational Development Manager presented the workplan which was currently up to-date

The workplan was therefore **NOTED** with the expectation of additional reports as agreed throughout the course of the meeting namely:

- an additional staff survey results report in the early new year or before; and
- a further depot update report as negotiations processed.

17 **TO NOTE THE DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting, Thursday 1 October 2020, was **NOTED**.

The meeting closed at 5.06 pm.

Chairman