

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a Meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee held via MS Teams on Thursday, 20 January 2022 commencing at 4.00 pm.

Members: Councillor David Cotton (Chairman)
Councillor Matthew Boles
Councillor Mrs Jessie Milne

**Representatives of
Union members:**

**Representatives of
Non-union staff:** Rachel Parkin
Amy Potts

In attendance: Emma Redwood, Assistant Director People and
Democratic Services
Andrew Warnes, Democratic & Civic Officer
Ele Snow, Senior Democratic and Civic Officer

Apologies: Councillor Mrs Jackie Brockway
James Deacon (Vice Chairman)

32 MEMBERS' DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

33 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee held on Thursday, 18 November 2021 be approved as a correct record.

34 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE

There were no outstanding matters arising.

35 UPDATE ON NATIONAL PAY AWARD - VERBAL

The Committee heard a verbal update from the Assistant Director People and Democratic Services regarding the National Pay Award. It was explained that the pay award was decided by the National Joint Council (NJC). The discussions were being held for the April 2021 pay award. The

Officer explained that the employers had offered a 1.75% raise, whilst the unions had pushed for a 10% rise. The 1.75% figure was rejected by the union side, with the three constituent unions, Unison, GMB, and Unite, having gone to ballot. Unison's ballot failed to get above the 50% threshold, with only a 14% turnout, and so would not proceed to industrial action. GMB had yet to report on the outcome of their result, and Unite's ballot had not closed at the time of this meeting. Members queried whether Unison could run another ballot in 28 days' time, though the Officer said this was not available for the April 2021 pay award discussions.

Similarly, Members of the Committee heard that the national employers involved with the NJC had not met, though a meeting date was planned for 31 January 2022 to discuss the April 2021 Pay Award. The Officer also mentioned that discussions were due to commence for the April 2022 Pay Award.

During this item, Members of the Committee raised concerns about the lower grade officers, and parish clerks not receiving a higher share due to their lower wages, in light of the recent news about the raise of inflation affecting those with lower salaries. The Officer responded that usually in these pay awards, that lower pay graded officers usually received a higher percentage of a pay rise.

The Assistant Director People and Democratic Services informed the Committee that an update would be provided at the March meeting, and she would inform the Committee of further information.

With no further comments or questions, the contents of the National Pay Award Update verbal update were **DULY NOTED**.

36 **SICKNESS ABSENCE UPDATE**

The Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services gave an update regarding sickness absences to the Committee. She informed Members that November/December 2021 had seen an upward trend of short-term sickness, and some absences due to COVID-19. There had been a number of longer-term absences in October/November due to planned operations and the recovery time afterwards, with these type of absence figures for December/January decreasing as staff members recover (to figures available at the time of the meeting). The Officer also highlighted that it was a cumulative five days per FTE for sickness absence for the 2021-22 year.

Regarding absences due to COVID-19, there had been an increase in these types of absences from December, and a sizable number signed-off in January. The Officer reported that some staff had tested positive, and felt well enough to work from home. Questions from Members of the Committee on COVID-19 included the effect of long COVID on absences. The Officer responded that the effect of this had been negligible, though it was mentioned that the Authority were still in the early days of knowing the full

effects about long COVID.

Members queried about the usage of vaccines and vaccine mandates. The Officer commented that for a very small number of officers, such as food inspectors for those going to care homes, vaccines were mandatory due to the regulations set by their industrial bodies. The Committee heard that there was no statutory backing for mandating vaccination against COVID-19, but that the Authority had made publications and internal advertising about getting vaccinated, and the benefit of being vaccinated, in addition to guiding staff about regular testing, and testing before going to the office.

There were also questions put to the Officer regarding staff working habits in the past few months, especially with working from home being more accessible than before. Specifically, whether it was easier to call in ill if staff had to come into the office most of the time than when mainly working from home. The Officer responded that this was not the best working practice for staff, highlighting that if staff were not well, that recovery and taking time off work were more beneficial for an ill Officer, and their work.

The Officer informed the Committee that an unannounced visit by the Health and Safety Executive on the day of the meeting showed the West Lindsey District Council were following the protocols and rules regarding COVID-19, and they were happy with the Authority's procedures. The Committee also discussed that following the recent news about the change in the COVID plans and guidance, including nearly all of the restrictions being taken away, some members of the public might feel that COVID had disappeared.

Councillor Jessie Milne also wanted to give her thanks and support to the West Lindsey District Council staff during this tough time, stating that she felt proud of them for 'flying the flag' during these last few months. Other members also complimented the work of WLDC staff during this time as well.

It was explained that there would be regular sickness absence updates included in the Work Plan for the Committee.

With no further comments or questions, the contents of the Sickness Absence Update report were **DULY NOTED**.

37 **WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY REVIEW**

The Committee considered the report from the Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services, regarding the review of the Whistleblowing Policy. This item was reported at the last Joint Staff Consultative Committee on 18 November 2021 with the agreement that it would return having taken into account all previous feedback. Recommendations in the policy were shown in black text, with responses from the Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services shown in red.

The Officer updated and gave answers to questions raised at the last meeting. These included a question about a Councillor whistleblowing about a member of staff, and the ensuing procedures. The Officer gave specific reference to the Member-Officer Protocol, and explained that if a Councillor had a concern, they should speak to the Assistant Director for that service area. Similarly, that if there was a whistleblowing about the Chief Executive, that the individual should speak to the Leader of the Council. Members also learned that if there was a whistleblowing concern about an Assistant Director, they should speak to the Chief Executive.

Members also heard that all the comments, in the light of these amendments, had been received from the Governance and Audit Committee, which were noted at the last Joint Staff Consultative Committee. It was mentioned that these amendments would go to the April meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.

Having been moved and seconded, it was unanimously

RESOLVED that:

- a) the amendments to the Whistleblowing Policy be supported and recommended to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee for formal adoption; and
- b) any future housekeeping amendments be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chairs of the Joint Staff Consultative and Corporate Policy and Resources Committees.

38 WORK PLAN

Consideration was given by the Committee to the work plan as published. It was noted there were additional items for upcoming meetings, such as the National Pay Update, Sickness Absence Updates, an update on the effect of the HGV Driver Market Supplement, and a Gender Pay Report.

It was noted in the meeting that it was Rachel Parkin's last meeting as a representative of the non-union staff, and as an employee at West Lindsey District Council. Members of the Committee thanked her for her service and wished her the best for the future. The Chairman stated that Rachel had given great support to him, and was a friend to the Committee.

With no further questions or comments from the Committee, the work plan was **DULY NOTED**.

39 TO NOTE THE DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The date and time of the next meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE – Thursday, 20 January 2022

Committee to be held at 4pm on Thursday, 24 March 2022, was **NOTED**.

The meeting closed at 4.33 pm.

Chairman