

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a Meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee held in the MS Teams on Thursday, 7 July 2022 commencing at 4.00 pm.

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

Representatives of Union members: James Deacon (Vice Chairman)

Representatives of Non-union staff: Amy Potts

In attendance: Emma Redwood, Assistant Director People and Democratic Services
John Bingham, Assistant Data Protection and Freedom of Information Officer
Simon Hunt, Health & Safety Co-ordinator
Michelle Thompson, Human Resources Manager
Andrew Warnes, Democratic and Civic Officer

Apologies: Councillor Matthew Boles
Councillor Mrs Jackie Brockway

1 TO ELECT A CHAIRMAN FOR THE CIVIC YEAR

The Democratic and Civic Officer opened the meeting and sought nominations for the position of Chairman. On receiving nominations and being voted upon unanimously, it was

RESOLVED that Councillor David Cotton be elected as Chairman for the 2022/23 Civic Year.

Councillor Cotton thanked the Committee for nominating him as Chairman and took the chair. The Chairman also stated that this was to be his last year as a Councillor, and was going to focus on ministry after his term of office has concluded.

2 TO APPOINT A VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR THE CIVIC YEAR

The Chairman asked for nominations for the position of Vice Chairman. On being nominated and voted upon unanimously, it was

RESOLVED that James Deacon be appointed as Vice-Chairman for the 2022/23 Civic Year.

3 **MEMBERS' DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

4 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee held on Thursday, 24 March 2022 be approved as a correct record.

5 **MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE**

The Chairman at this point welcomed Simon Hunt and Michelle Thompson, who were attending their first formal Joint Staff Consultative Committee meeting.

With no further comment, the Matters Arising schedule was **NOTED**.

6 **INFORMATION SHARING POLICY**

The Chairman invited the Data Protection & Freedom of Information Officer to present the first report, regarding the review of the existing Information Sharing Policy.

The Officer explained that the review of the policy follows the accountability of GDPR, and gave a framework for the Council and provision of services. The Officer stressed that though there were changes to the policy, it did not change how the Council was working. Members learnt that with the changes to legislation, this was more akin to housekeeping.

Bar one comment that liked the simplified version, there were no other questions or statements. Accordingly, having been moved and seconded, it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the amendments to the Information Sharing Policy be recommended to the Corporate Policy & Resources Committee for formal adoption.

7 **LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES POLICY**

The Chairman invited the Data Protection & Freedom of Information Officer to present the second report, which was a review of the Legal Responsibility Policy. The Officer explained that the policy describes the legislation that governed West Lindsey District Council, and highlighted the risks to staff and the organisation should the Council fail to comply with government legislation.

There were no comments or statements from the Committee on the policy. Accordingly, having been moved and seconded, with a unanimous vote it was

RESOLVED that the amendments to the Legal Responsibilities Policy be recommended to the Corporate Policy & Resources Committee for formal adoption.

8 **ANNUAL HEALTH & SAFETY UPDATE 2021-22**

The Chairman invited the Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services to present the third item of the meeting, which was the Annual Health and Safety Update 2021-22.

Introducing the report, the Officer stated that this was a significant past two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic effect. The Officer then highlighted the work conducted by the Health and Safety Co-Ordinator and others during the past two years. This included changes to the working procedures, building set up, and the co-operation of the ground floor tenants manning the reception. Reference was made to the newly opened central depot, with the Health and Safety Co-Ordinator having led the health and safety culture.

It was described that the Co-Ordinator had been seconded to local testing sites and conducted many risk assessments. This included working with the Trinity Arts Centre in implementing new working practices, the Display Screen Equipment assessments, and Working from Home assessments conducted by the Officer. It was stressed by the Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services the high amount of policy and procedure work conducted by the Health and Safety Co-Ordinator. This did include fire risk procedures at the depot and the Trinity Arts centre, and liaising with Managers at those sites and the Lea Fields Crematorium.

Regarding the following stages, reference was made to reviewing the Safety Champions programme, and a possible Health and Safety site on Minerva. In concluding the report, the Assistant Director stated that Work continued through the Lincolnshire Health & Safety Advisors group around property and waste to ensure a consistent approach to health and safety.

In response to a query about the figures from the Trinity Arts Centre, Members heard that these were 15 incidents classified as such for internal logs, and to build up data for reporting anti-social behaviour for example.

In response to a comment about the additional challenges of not primarily working in the Guildhall, the Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services emphasised that staff knew procedures. However, the organisation was still advocating for reporting accidents at home whilst working to facilitate equipment and precautions to keep employees safe. This was also relevant for Working from Home assessments, with the Health and Safety

Co-Ordinator describing one recent example of a staff member without the correct set-up.

With no further questions or statements, the report was **NOTED**.

9 **COVID19 STAFF SURVEY RESULTS - MARCH 2022**

Members of the Committee were provided with results of the fourth staff survey since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. This was introduced by the Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services.

This was an item deferred from the previous meeting. A specific shout-out was made to the Policy and Strategy Officer – Corporate Strategy and Business Planning for the analytical findings and presentation of the report. The Assistant Director then highlighted the positive message from the survey results and the good response rate of 66%.

Members heard that the results of this survey were considered by Management Team and by the Health and Safety Co-Ordinator. The Assistant Director stressed that previous surveys were conducted under more challenging scenarios without vaccinations and stability in the pandemic.

In going through the detail of the results, the Officer highlighted that no connection to the team result was at 10%, higher than previous surveys. It was then stated that this was possibly due to more effort earlier in the pandemic and the novelty of the situation. Conversely, there was recognition of high levels of self-reported higher productivity by staff.

Members' attention was then drawn to the newer questions in the survey focusing on future working arrangements. Results showed that more staff reported that they wanted to work from home more, and fewer reporters wanted to work in the office all the time. There was also an additional question about the Council's performance, with strong satisfaction ratings with the Council and its job performance. However, this was not comparable with previous surveys because it was a new question.

The Officer concluded to state that the high rating of satisfaction was brought into light with the first in-person Corporate Induction held since the Covid-19 pandemic, with triangulation of the staff survey results in line with the anecdotal evidence of the session.

Discussion on the report occurred, and Members drew attention to multiple points. In response to a comment about what officers miss, mainly social interaction, the Officer stated that work was being done to resolve this. This included opening up room bookings and allowing teams to come together for a team meeting and extra conversations. Regarding a comment about what officers were not missing, such as commuting and office noise, the Officer reflected the national picture of high fuel prices.

Responding to a comment about action placed on managers encouraging teams to get together, the Officer stated that the data has gone to Management Team. These results were passed along to Managers with teams expressing higher levels of a lack of social interaction.

In response to a suggestion by the Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services, Members and some officers gave tips for future surveys that could be conducted. These suggestions included leaving it for a few months, a study in Winter 2022/23, making the survey an annual item, and if Covid-19 made a significant resurgence.

Separately, in a query about Covid protocol in this item, the Officer stated that there were no legal requirements anymore for any restrictions. However, testing was recommended for anyone going into the Guildhall with positive tested individuals asked to stay away. It was also reaffirmed that absence due to Covid-19 was not included in sickness absence statistics and was treated differently by Human Resources and management.

With no requirement for a decision, details of the report were **NOTED**.

10 **ANNUAL ABSENCE UPDATE 2021-22**

The Committee heard from the Assistant Director of People & Democratic Services regarding the Monitoring of Sickness Absence for the whole of the previous financial year April 2021 – March 2022.

The Officer explained that the annual target figure for sickness absence was 7.0 per FTE, while the reported outcome for 2021/22 was 6.47 per FTE. The Officer reflected that officers' dedication had been amazing, with absences being lower than other neighbouring local authorities. However, the report had no benchmarking statistics and no Covid-19 related statistics.

The Officer also informed Members that the figure was 5.93 per FTE in longer term cases. This was described as a good year, with work conducted by the Human Resources Manager and the Human Resources team working with those who were off due to long term sickness. It was emphasised the work that had gone into resolve long term absence issues was of key focus by the Human Resources team.

The Officer informed Members that in Members heard that absences due to stress, anxiety and depression accounted for 31% of absences. Several approaches had been employed to help staff manage these issues, particularly due to the Covid-19 pandemic. These included trained mental health professionals providing support, increased communication to staff, the re-introduction of Corporate Inductions, Coffee mornings, friendly staff competitions and the virtual staff groups.

Longer term absence accounted for 66% of the overall yearly absence. The

Officer then highlighted that if you only counted short term absences, this resulted in 2.11 per FTE, with long term absences accounting for the vast majority of the issues.

Concerning Covid 19 data, figures for people who contracted Covid-19 were kept separate and did not count towards sickness triggers.

The Officer stated that the data for West Lindsey District Council sat well in comparison benchmarking carried out with other neighbouring authorities.

Bar one Member's comment, advocating staff taking time off to manage cold and/or flu, there were no further questions or comments. With no need to take a vote, the report was **NOTED**.

11 **EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME - WLDC UPDATE**

The Chairman invited the Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services to present the sixth report, which was an information update and publicising the Employee Assistant Programme. With the programme in place since 2007, with Health Assured being the hired organisation, this was a confidential service that assists with different enquiries for staff. Members heard that though the Council don't get the information about the people, it does get the trends bar when harm might come to the user and/or others.

The Officer concluded by informing Members that there might be an update on this item when the latest figures of the programme are to be released.

Discussion occurred on whether the level of usage was high or low. The Officer stated that 19 people had called the programme, with 18 sessions booked, and 29 people using the application. One Member thought that with the large staff size, this was low, and that if it helped one, it was worth the cost of £8 per employee. Another Member commented that about 10% of staff who used it, and that it was lower in previous years.

In response to a statement about accessing and dealing with issues earlier on, it was highlighted by the Officer the examples of items that can be raised with the programme, and told Members' of a personal usage of the programme. The Human Resources Manager stressed that the benefits of the programme included being a 'bridge' to future appointments later on, and hoped for the 'normalising' of the programme.

The Chairman advised that the programme should be made better known to Councillors, and there was great opportunity for staff members to learn more about the programme.

With no need for a vote, the report was **NOTED**.

12 **JSCC - NATIONAL PAY AWARD UPDATE**

The Chairman invited the Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services to present the penultimate item, which was an update to the discussions for the National Pay Award for 2022/23.

Members learnt that following the accepted award of 1.7% for the 2021/22 pay award on 10 March 2022, the discussions for the current year's pay award were starting. The Officer stated that at a recent pay award discussion on the national level, there were presentations from Unison that specified the demands of the union, which was either an extra £2000 on each pay band or a rise to match the Retail Price Index of 11%. Members learnt that it was only Unison producing this context.

The Officer then explained that the demands to employers were more on the national minimum wage and the squeeze that a price rise could have effectively resulted in 'bottom loading' increases. The Officer then illuminated that at the national level, that refuse lorry driver would be earning slightly more than a refuse loader.

The Officer concluded her update by stating that it was not to be a quick fix. The Officer stressed it would take some time to resolve and that the situation might be better known when the Government released the Autumn Statement. In response to a query on the percentage band increase, should it be £2000 on each pay band, the Officer summated that it would be about a 10% rise.

With no further questions or comments, the contents of the report were duly **NOTED**.

13 **JSCC STAFF REPRESENTATIVE**

The Chairman invited the Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services to provide the final report, which was a verbal update on finding a new staff representative for the Committee, following the resignation of Rachel Parkin. Members heard that Simon Hunt, the Health and Safety Co-Ordinator, had come forward, with another officer expressing an interest in taking the role.

In response to a query about the numbers, the Officer stated that there could be 2 Staff Representatives and three reserve members. The Officer then remarked on the possibility of expanding the committee numbers and relying on the existing Representatives.

The Chairman then expressed that the new representative was necessary and was grateful for those that volunteered, recognising the time taken away from officers' day-to-day work.

With no requirement for a decision, the verbal update was **NOTED**.

14 **WORK PLAN**

The Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services informed the Committee that the workplan for the 2022/23 Council year would be populated as and when.

The Officer updated Members that an update on the employee assistance programme might come back to the September committee meeting, and so would an update on sickness absences for the first quarter of 2022/23.

A discussion was held on a final report on the new depot, with a request for issues that have arisen since it was opened. The Officer informed the Committee that she would ask the Operational Services Manager to provide a final update, including features that were and were not working, and any alterations to improve the new facility.

The Committee also heard that there would be a few updates in West Lindsey District Council policies at the end of the year by the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Officer.

With no further comments from Members of the Committee, the Work Plan as at 29 June 2022 was **NOTED**.

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

The date and time of the next meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee to be held at 4pm on Thursday, 8 September 2022, was **NOTED**.

The meeting closed at 5.08 pm.

Chairman