

**WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL**

MINUTES of a Meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee held in the MS Teams on Thursday, 8 September 2022 commencing at 4.00 pm.

**Members:** Councillor Matthew Boles  
Councillor Mrs Jackie Brockway  
Councillor Mrs Jessie Milne

**Representatives of Union members:** James Deacon (Vice Chairman, in the Chair)

**Representatives of Non-union staff:**

**In attendance:** Emma Redwood, Assistant Director People and Democratic Services  
Andrew Warnes, Democratic and Civic Officer

**Apologies:** Councillor David Cotton (Chairman)  
Amy Potts, Senior Project Support Officer

**16 MEMBERS' DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**17 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee held on Thursday, 7 July 2022 be approved as a correct record.

**18 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE**

The Assistant Director of Democratic and People stated that this Matter Arising would be discussed as part of agenda item 5b, the Employee Assistance Programme Update.

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

**19 JSCC - SICKNESS ABSENCE UPDATE**

The Vice Chairman, in the Chair, invited the Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services to present the first report of the meeting, which was

an update to the Sickness Absences as a mid-year update.

The Officer explained that the sickness absences stood at 1.97 days per full time employee (FTE), which the Officer stated was a bit higher than in the previous year at the same time. There was further clarification that the 1.97 per FTE was in line with previous years. The largest proportion of the absences were long-term in nature.

Discussion ensued on the level of Covid related illnesses and the absences generally. Members also referenced cases in care homes, and in the local community as well. In response to a query about Covid cases, the Officer clarified that in the 2020/21 and 2021/22 years, it was noted that officers were working through the illness, but that in the previous six months, there had been an increase in the number of staff taking sickness absence due to Covid.

Responding a query about the rise in sickness absence in June, the Officer explained that a rise in colds and coughs rose earlier in the year, which suggested that illness was more prevalent in the community. It was also explained by the Officer that there was to be monitoring of Covid-related absences would transpire in the next six months.

With no further questions or comments, and with no need for a vote, the contents of the report were duly **NOTED**.

## 20 **EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Vice Chairman, in the Chair, invited the Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services to present the second report, which was an information update and publicising the Employee Assistance Programme.

This was an item discussed at the last meeting, with this update including the latest usage figures of the 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 do not get the information about the people, it does get the trends bar when harm might come to the user and/or others. The Officer explained that the programme signposted to a whole array of issues, which included webinars and budget sessions, and had personal experience of the software.

The Officer explained that there was no wide usage across the organisation, but considered that even a small number using the system was beneficial. The Officer then explained that she expected the usage to rise in the coming few months, and referenced the standing Matters Arising, there was a Cost of Living Working Group now in place at the Council, with a webpage featuring signposts of support and links for all to use.

The Officer explained recent case studies of stresses caused by an increase

in public demand of non-Council responsibilities, and the unpleasant, rude experiences made towards staff. It was stated that the use of the programme would potentially assist in alleviating those worries and angst caused to officers.

Discussion ensued, and Members drew on different points, including on current situations locally and nationally with the cost of living crisis, past working conditions, and other employers' practices. Conversation was also had on the changed practices coming from working in the office to working from home, and the effect that a nasty experience could have on an officer. Members also drew up recent personal experiences due to the cost of living and budgeting issues. It was also suggested the financial advice aspect is advertised more regularly to officers.

In response to a line of questioning about the Council's responsibility, Members learned that this was a separate confidential advice service, which was to signpost officers to the organisations or places that could assist, and that the Council had no liability, in a way that this was a leading provider. Members also heard that it was paid in a flat fee of £2000 per year.

In an answer about tangible support, Members also heard about the Westfield Health support that was accessible to officers at a discounted rate. This was an external provider, providing different support including insurance policies.

In response to a query about assisting employees working from home, and where the Council could host a lot of officers during the winter, the Officer explained that this was related to the National Pay Award. In explaining the lead up to the current pay award process, the Officer explained that the previous increase of the pay award should have come into effect before April 2021, and was not agreed until 28 February 2022. This was fortunate, as the increase came into effect in March 2022, before the National Insurance rise.

The Officer explained that a similar situation was occurring this year, with the Unions having placed their request on 6 June 2022, with the employers putting their final offer at the end of July 2022. Members heard that the unions had not accepted that offer, and were in consultation until 21 October 2022. Any increase would be backdated, but the Officer emphasised the importance of an expedient decision.

It was also mentioned by the Officer that the Council could not organise its own pay bargaining, as it was signed up to the national process, and stated that the situation was unlikely to be resolved soon.

The Officer then moved to explained that the Council were looking at placing more desks into the Guildhall space, and were preparing to encourage staff into the office, but not mandating a return back to pre-Covid working practices.

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

21 **NATIONAL PAY AWARD UPDATE**

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

The Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services explained that all of the relevant material was discussed in the previous item in response to a query from a Member.

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

22 **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 also stated that with no pressing reports, and that no decisions were to be made before the next Committee meeting on 6 October 2022, there was a suggestion that the next Committee meeting was likely to be cancelled. The Officer explained that she would liaise with the Democratic and Civic Officer to arrange a possible cancellation, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Committee.

With no further comments from Members of the Committee, the Work Plan as at 31 August 2022 was **NOTED**.

23 **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, 6 October 2022, subject to a possible cancellation, was **NOTED**.

The meeting closed at 4.35 pm.

Chairman