

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a Meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee held in the MS Teams on Thursday, 23 November 2023 commencing at 4.00 pm.

Members: Councillor Mrs Jackie Brockway (Chairman)
Councillor John Barrett
Councillor Matthew Boles

Representatives of Union members: James Deacon (Vice-Chairman)

Representatives of Non-union staff: Brad Bishell

In attendance: Lisa Langdon , Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services, and Monitoring Officer
Lyn Marlow, Customer Strategy and Services Manager
Andrew Warnes, Democratic and Civic Officer

28 MEMBERS' DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

29 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee held on Thursday, 5 October 2023 be approved as a correct record.

30 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE

The Chairman invited comments from Members regarding the Matters Arising Schedule, detailing the actions agreed at previous meetings.

Members questioned the high percentage of staff absences due to back pain and whether it was just a small number of people or a recurring issue.

The Democratic and Civic Officer agreed to liaise with the Human Resources Manager to distribute the figures. Members also requested regular updates on detailed figures for sickness absences.

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

31 **REFRESH OF THE CURRENT COMPLEX, DIFFICULT AND DANGEROUS CUSTOMER PROCEDURE**

The Chairman invited the Customer Services and Strategy Lead to present the report, which was a refresh of the current Complex, Difficult and Dangerous Customer Procedure. The aim of the report was to commence the consultation process, and to seek the views of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee (JSCC), before proceeding to wider staff consultation, before final adoption at the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee. It was explained that Members would have further consideration of the final documentation at a future meeting, before recommending it for full adoption.

In her presentation, the Officer provided some background on the current procedure. She explained that the initial policy came into effect in 2007, with subsequent updates. The present review process had begun in 2019, however, the impact of COVID-19 and other issues had caused significant delays. An urgent review of the current procedure had therefore commenced and required consultation. The Officer clarified that though the procedure was in place, it needed improvement and greater clarity on the policy usage. The current procedure was over 30 pages, with the draft version of the report around 13 pages.

The Officer provided context to the situation for front line staff in the public service sector. Members heard that the Institute for Customer Service (ICS) had reported in 2022 that:

- 60% of staff reported abuse, but 52% of those felt it would not make any difference;
- 33% don't report because it happened too often;
- 47% reported that they felt unsafe at work; and
- 31% were considering leaving service sector roles

The Officer also presented updated statistics from July 2023, which reported sick leave had increased by 20% in the customer service sector. Members learned that attacking a service sector person was now an aggravated offence. The Police did not categorise reports of abuse from the public service sector. The Officer explained that she had corresponded with West Lindsey District Council's Management Team to apply pressure on separate crime statistics for abuse of staff. She attributed the issues to two main factors. The first was the economic situation, with genuine public concerns and queries. The second was the "Age of Anger", which had arisen from the effects of the pandemic and on social isolation more generally, causing some behavioural issues.

The Officer detailed the planned course of action to include:

- a new name for the policy, and amending the language used to be softer;
- less spotlighted focus on certain groups;

- a policy to support staff with internal procedure;
- a separate policy to support Councillors;
- a rebranded and relaunch of the new staff policy/procedure;
- regularly scheduled and relevant training, coaching and support for those working with customers regularly;
- created flow charts to understand the internal procedure;
- a new leaflet and dedicated website page for customers explaining the policy;
- the involvement of the JSCC in the creation of the staff policy/procedure;
- designed oversight from the Quality Management Board; and
- the establishment of Terms of Reference for the determination team.

The Officer continued her presentation to highlight the current situation following the initial stages of the review. Body cameras in the reception area had been implemented. Members learned that once the recording formally started, the camera took a snapshot of the previous 30 seconds of footage. There had been a recent revision of customer behaviour notices in the public spaces of the Guildhall to enhance clarity and effectiveness. A new pilot programme within Customer Services of a low-level incident reporting system had started, with 52 reports logged from May 2023 to October 2023.

Members were then provided with an overview of Health & Safety reports, which totalled 22 incidents since May 2022:

- May 2022/April 2023: ten incidents
- May 2023: one incident
- August 2023: one incident
- September 2023: two incidents
- October 2023: six incidents

Members heard there were regular engagement events with the Police. These interactions followed up on 'not responded' incidents at West Lindsey District Council's facilities. This was further assisted by equipping the Customer Service Team with SIA licence qualifications. These officers were trained to deal with challenging customers and Members learned that the staff could not physically handle the customer. There was a requirement of Police intervention, and an invitation to leave being presented in front of a Police Officer, along with multiple attempts for an individual to be asked to leave the premises.

The Committee learned more collaborative engagement with the Jobcentre Plus had been launched, as the Authority handled the registration and welcomed the public. This action tied with additional coordination with the Communications team to create a consultation plan. Finally, there was to be a two-day training event for frontline staff, which emphasised resilience, with sessions to decompress and talk about their experiences.

In concluding her presentation, the Customer Services and Strategy Lead

explained an agreed upon multi-services approach in principle. A meeting was scheduled to discuss joined-up approaches, especially with shared customers. These included daily multiple approaches or extended hours dealing with the same customer. The Officer informed the Committee there was further planned consultation with the relevant teams and team managers.

Discussion ensued, and Members drew on multiple points from the report and presentation. In response to a set of queries about the Police response, the Officer explained that the Police would likely be dealing with another matter and expected the Authority to be able to manage the issue internally. There was a push for a meeting with the local Police to begin a dialogue and find a way to improve the situation.

Members heard that the current situation included two-hour waits for a Police response and a lack of Police attendance at an incident at the Trinity Arts Centre. The Officer emphasised that she was pressing for Police action and wanted to assure staff of the Authority's support.

In response to a series of questions about staff training in managing customers and their behaviour, it was explained that all new staff went through a training process, starting with listening to calls, and were supported by senior officers throughout their development. The Customer Services and Strategy Lead assured the Committee that staff training included resilience and that the last refresh included training on difficult customers.

In reply to a query about SIA training, Members learned that the six-day course covered various topics, including first aid and conflict management. This training supplemented regular anti-terrorism training and body language interpretation sessions. The customer services team regularly reviewed these topics. Members also heard that the team would restart internal training using scenario experiences of possible situations in early 2024.

Moving on to the legality and usage of body cameras for reception staff and whether signage was sufficient, Members discussed the viability of the cameras being on all the time and the legal necessity of directly informing people that the camera was always recording. The Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services explained that provisions to amend the signage were possible.

Members also learned about the procedure for those escorted out of the building. In the post-action follow-up, it was up to the Determination Team to review the circumstances and apply the most appropriate avenue for future contact to be made by the customer, such as by email, telephone, or pre-arranged appointment. Bans on contact had also been used. In response to a question about why the Authority could not throw out individuals causing disruption, Members learned that it would open the Authority to possible charges of assault. The Customer Services and Strategy Lead explained that training was scheduled to manage drug and substance abuse users

who access the services in the Guildhall. Members also gave their own experiences and knowledge of related incidents.

Members commented on Officer and Member relationships, with some giving their own experiences as Elected Members and the issues surrounding Members' behaviour in the past and in hypothetical situations. In response to a query about how staff might deal with undisciplined Councillors, the Committee heard the Member-Officer Protocol, which laid out the standards of behaviour expected between Members and Officers. The Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services explained further review of the possible imbalance between Officers and Members could be considered. A training session on this topic for Elected Members was scheduled soon. She also explained that using corporate induction sessions for new staff to explain the different situations could help improve Officer-Member relationships.

With no requirement for a vote, the report was **NOTED**, and confirmed that the Committee had provided comments.

32 **WORK PLAN**

The Customer Services and Strategy Lead informed the Committee that her report would return to the Joint Staff Consultative Committee in due course.

A Member of the Committee requested a report on apprenticeship levies. Members heard that the Democratic and Civic Officer would liaise with the Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services to determine the timescale and delivery of the report.

With no further comments from Members of the Committee, the Work Plan was **NOTED**.

33 **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, 19 January 2024, was **NOTED**.

The meeting closed at 4.58 pm.

Chairman