

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a Meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee held in the MS Teams on Thursday, 23 January 2025 commencing at 4.00 pm.

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

Staff Representatives: James Deacon (Vice-Chairman)
Brad Bishell

In attendance: Lisa Langdon, Assistant Director People and Democratic (Monitoring Officer)
Ele Snow, Senior Democratic and Civic Officer
Molly Spencer, Democratic & Civic Officer
Lynne Thomsett, People Services Manager

Apologies: Tom Duffield, Supervisor - Waste & Recycling
Amy Potts, Programme Manager

9 MEMBERS' DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

10 MINUTES

On being put to vote it was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee meeting held on Thursday 5 September 2024 be confirmed as an accurate record.

11 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE

The Democratic and Civic Officer informed Members of the Committee that there were no matters arising to report.

12 REVIEW OF THE WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

The Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services explained the report presented the revised Whistleblowing Policy, which had last been reviewed in April 2022. The policy aimed to promote high standards, good behaviour, transparency, and accountability. The proposed revised version of the policy had been to the Management Team (MT) and Wider

Management Team (WMT) for comment. Feedback was that the policy was a good comprehensive policy and understandable.

Upon being shared at the briefing for this meeting, comments had been returned such as concern over the name of the policy and the connotations that 'Whistleblowing' would perceive, as well as clarity regarding the user and their need for further support including protection from harassment/victimisation for employees who raised a concern.

The Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services explained that she had been in contact with the Communications Manager, who confirmed that preventing people contacting or speaking to the media was not in line with the Council's policy, and therefore this section had been updated in the Whistleblowing Policy. It was also confirmed that the revised policy covered all the data protection and GDPR requirements in a simpler form, which made the policy easier for readers to process and understand.

The Chairman thanked the Officer for her presentation of the policy and invited questions from the Committee. It was stated that the policy was clear and concise, though there were concerns about who would be responsible for dealing with whistleblowing complaints and ensuring impartiality when complaints were dealt with internally. For example, if a concern was raised against a member of senior management, would that be investigated internally. It was explained that the Monitoring Officer would be aware of any whistleblowing concerns made, and it was usual practice for internal management to handle such concerns. Should the concern involve a member of the Management Team, they would not be able to investigate the concern themselves. The Council had access to Legal Services at Lincolnshire County Council who could be utilised if needed, or it might be that another external advisor could be sought depending on the circumstances. It was clarified that the updated Whistleblowing Policy was not to replace the usual complaints policy, standards regime, or HR policies.

In response to a question regarding the inclusion of specific examples within the policy, it was agreed that this should be avoided to prevent potential whistleblowers from feeling their complaints were not valid under the Policy and therefore should not be raised. It was suggested that it would be better for complainants to log their concerns and be redirected to the correct procedure or policy rather than be deterred by specific examples in the Whistleblowing Policy itself which could result in a concern not being raised at all.

It was noted that the policy (Section 9) lacked a space for users to provide feedback on the process, which was deemed crucial for inclusion. It was agreed that a section on feedback would be added to indicate feedback was welcomed regarding the application and administration of the policy and that any feedback should be directed to the Monitoring Officer.

Enquiries were made about how the policy would be communicated to staff. A discussion took place regarding staff awareness and understanding of the

policy, and it was agreed that an optional webinar would be appropriate, allowing staff to participate in a Q&A session. Additionally, a release would be made on the internal staff Minerva page.

It was mentioned that a change of policy name was discussed at Chairs Briefing, but due to legal requirements, the term "whistleblowing" must be retained (Section 1.2) to ensure protections under the legislation are maintained. This was understood, and the Committee noted the amended title on the policy document. The importance of the Management Team knowing how to respond to such reports was emphasised.

There was a query about whether the policy applied to Councillors and if they should follow the same guidelines. It was confirmed that the policy (Section 1.7) allowed for reporting arrangements for Councillors and members of the public. It was emphasised that the purpose of the Whistleblowing Policy was to comply with legislation protecting staff, ensuring they could raise concerns without fear of victimisation or harassment.

The Chairman stated that individuals raising whistleblowing concerns were very brave and that the policy could be revisited later if needed. Support was expressed for the idea that people should not be prohibited from speaking to the media, with an emphasis on the responsibility of providing accurate information. It was suggested that media training might be necessary as media coverage could be distorted, and that many officers who had dealt with the media might not have understood how their words were taken out of context. It was warned that identifying other officers when speaking to the media could have left individuals open to litigation. It was added that part of the pre-employment online training for WLDC covered media and social media, and this training was revisited regularly.

Having been moved, seconded, and on being put to the vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the revised Whistleblowing Policy be **recommended** to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee for approval.

13 **STAFF SURVEY 2024**

The People Services Manager introduced the paper and explained that the annual staff survey was available for completion during October 2024. The results indicated that overall job satisfaction was high among many staff members, with several expressing pride in working for WLDC and appreciation for the support received from colleagues and management. Employees agreed that they understood the council's vision and priorities and knew what was expected of them at work. They felt motivated to perform well in their job and felt valued and recognised. Overall, staff were

satisfied with their working arrangements.

However, staff expressed concerns about the adequacy of meeting room technology and the effectiveness of the office space configuration for agile working. Notably, 75% of employees indicated that they would recommend West Lindsey District Council as a good place to work.

It was noted that the introduction of the 'neither agree nor disagree' option in the 2024 survey, following staff feedback, had impacted the results when compared to the 2023 survey. This option allowed respondents to choose a middle ground if they did not have a strong opinion either way. Although this option provided some insight, further work was needed to establish why many respondents chose this answer.

The People Services Manager added that actions had been taken to ensure Officers who worked in locations outside of the Guildhall or worked antisocial hours were included, such as text message communications, site visits to their places of work, and use of QR codes. Replying to a question raised in the Chairs Briefing, it was stated that revealing the working base locations of the respondents would impact anonymity.

The People Services Manager shared a presentation with the Committee which summarised questions asked in the staff survey, a 2023/24 comparison and the positive and negative differences between the years.

When comparing the 2024 and 2023 responses, they focused the following points:

- 'The Council communicates well with staff'.
- 'At work, my opinion seems to count'.
- 'I feel the council cares about my health and well-being'.

It was expressed that there was a desire to engage with staff to find out what they would like to see more of. It was noted that higher engagement was expected, given the level of communication with staff through channels such as Minerva, corporate updates, and weekly staff emails. Concern was also expressed about the -23 difference regarding the statement, 'I am treated with dignity and respect at work.'

Concerns were raised about the survey's anonymity, which made it difficult to identify the areas from which responses originated. Previous Committees had noted issues with the level of engagement from depot staff compared to office-based staff, and the anonymous nature of the survey meant it was challenging to ensure that depot staff were heard. The need for increased staff engagement and deeper analysis of the details was emphasised. It was suggested to investigate the origin of responses, noting that engagement levels might be lower both within West Lindsey and on a national level. It was noted that although individuals were not identified, when texts were sent to depot staff in the morning, approximately five additional forms were completed that day. A second text sent at 15:30 resulted in about eleven

additional forms. It was noted that high volumes of the same feedback from one particular location would serve as evidence of an issue. It was highlighted that if respondents were asked to state their job, they might not be honest due to fear of being pinpointed or identified. In response it was suggested to include an additional box for the 2025 survey to ask if respondents would like follow-up contact, and all members of the committee agreed.

Disappointment was expressed that only 51% of West Lindsey's staff had participated in the survey, and it was stated that action needed to be taken to increase the figure. It was also noted that various questions on the survey were not relevant to certain staff, with an example given of questions related to working from home not being applicable to depot or Trinity Arts Centre staff. It was agreed that the wording of the questions would be changed to accommodate the feedback given. It was proposed that if the neutral option be retained, it could be accompanied by a free text box for additional comments. This was agreed to be a good addition.

With no further comments or questions, the results of the Staff Survey 2024 were **DULY NOTED**.

Note: Councillor M. Boles left the meeting at 4.54pm

14 **WORK PLAN**

With no comments or questions the work plan was **DULY 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, 27 March 2025, via MS Teams, was **NOTED**.

The meeting closed at 5.01 pm.

Chairman