

Minutes



Employee Partnership Forum

Date: 11 January 2018

Time: 10am

Present: Councillor D Mayer (Chair), P Cockeram and Cllr Giles

R Davies (HR Manager), S Morgan (Chief Education Officer), B Burns (Health & Safety Manager), M Rushworth, (Head of Finance) A Garwood-Pask (Senior Finance Business Partner)

Union Reps:

R Hayward, R Dawkins (GMB), I Reese, P Garland (UNISON), M Rowland (ASCL), G Hawsworth (NASUWT), R Hughes (NAHT)

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillor G Giles, D Weare, T Wright, R Lewis, R Cornwall, A Every, D Rees, S Lock

2 Declarations of Interest

None

3 Minutes of the Last Meeting: 12 October 2017

Agreed:

That the minutes were agreed as a true record.

Matters Arising

Item 6 Pay Policy for Schools

Minutes to be corrected to read 'NASUWT formally objected to the lack of a 2% raise for teachers'.

4 Staff Code of Conduct

The HR Manager introduced the Staff Code of Conduct. A change had been made to the content to reflect the new Council values - Courageous, Positive, Responsible.

The NAHT Representative referred to Section 2.4 'Financial Inducements, Gifts and Hospitality' and asked for clarity for schools and teachers on acceptance of Christmas gifts. These should be dealt with by the individual Headteacher.

Under Section 4.5 (Social Networking Websites) the NAHT Representative asked what action the Council would be taking to support staff who were being abused via social networking. The Cabinet Member for Social Services was aware this was an issue for schools where parents had made comments on Facebook about individual teachers and there was a need to support and reassure the staff concerned.

The HR Manager referred to the Council's separate social media policy which would provide more specific support information on this issue. It was due for renewal soon but the HR Manager would accelerate the review process consulting with unions on the content and promoting as widely as possible in the Council newsletter, staff induction etc.

The Chair suggested signposting in Section 4.5 to the Council's Social Media Policy and reviewing the document to determine if there were opportunities to link other sections to the relevant Council policies.

Agreed

1. The Employee Partnership Forum agree the staff Code of Conduct.
2. The HR Manager to bring forward the review of the Social Media Policy consulting with Unions to go through the content.
3. The HR Manager to insert headers in the Code of Conduct to the relevant Council policies, (eg the Social Media Policy under Section 4.5)

5. **Health & Safety Update**

The Health & Safety Manager referred to the Health & Safety Update which had been circulated for information.

The GMB Representative (RH) had received a couple of calls from staff in relation to stress risk assessments. The employees had been invited to come in to undertake a stress risk assessment whilst on sick leave. This was felt to be punitive. There was an understanding that the assessment needed to be undertaken but not whilst the employee was on sick leave as this would lead to more stress and anxiety. The GMB representative (RH) suggested there should be better ways of managing the situation such as a combined appointment with Occupational Health or a discussion with the individual on their return to work.

The Health & Safety Manager understood the concern of the Union and that it was not the intention to call an employee in from sick leave to undertake a stress risk assessment. Each case would be looked at on an individual basis. The aim of the stress risk assessment was to get them back into the role not to cause further stress and anxiety. The Health & Safety Manager noted that

stress risk assessments do appear to work in terms of supporting people and giving them the additional level of care that they need.

The GMB representative (RH) concurred that that was the advice she had given her member and that she would contact the EPF if there were any further instances of staff being called in from sick leave to complete a stress risk assessment.

The NASUWT Representative (RT) suggested schools should be treated differently. He was aware that one member of staff had been invited to attend a meeting whilst on sick leave and was worried the pupils would approach them asking for details. If the location was not appropriate neutral ground should be offered for any meetings.

The NASUWT Representative (RT) asked if it was possible for staff to make self-referrals to Occupational Health. The form is usually completed by the Manager but there is nothing to prevent an employee asking to be sent to Occupational Health. The Health & Safety Manager noted that it was important for the line manager to be aware of what is going on. Employees would be supported to refer to their line manager if that was what was required. The GMB Representative (RD) suggested that self-referrals allowed employees to put issues in their own words rather than explaining it to their manager who would then write it in their own way. Also sometimes the stress might be caused by the manager so it was important to have an alternative route to follow.

The GMB Representative (RD) asked if teams had Health & Safety on their meeting agendas to which the Health & Safety Manager replied they should have. The GMB Representative (RD) also mentioned perhaps incorporating the new values as a standard agenda item for team meetings. It would be a wonderful opportunity to get the new values across.

The UNISON Representative (IR) asked if there were figures available on stress risk assessments and self-referrals. Health & Safety had figures on stress assessments but not self-referrals. The figures on the stress assessments and any other relevant figures would be brought to the next meeting of the EPF.

The HR Manager agreed to look at better promotion of managing stress in work via the staff bulletin etc. She explained that Beth would not be at the next EPF as she would be leaving on maternity leave. An appointment of an interim position had taken place. The Chair congratulated Beth on behalf of the Group and wished her all the best for the future.

Action

1. The Health & Safety Manager to arrange for figures on stress risk assessments to be brought to the next meeting
2. The HR Manager to look at ways to better promote the management of stress amongst the workforce.

6. **Items Raised by Union Representatives**

Pay Offer for Council Employees (UNISON)

The UNISON Representative (PG) re-iterated that the pay offer should come from central government and not be funded by cuts to services.

The GMB Representative (RH) suggested combining Pay Offer for Council Employees (UNISON) and NJDC Pay Claim (GMB) as they were one in the same thing.

The GMB Representative (RH) had received information from the national employers and the GMB would be balloting all public sector employees January/February 2018 as to whether or not to accept the offer based on a staggered claim. Any offer was appreciated. There was an understanding that it had to be picked up by central government and also the burden on local government but pay had gone down in real terms.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services also noted that there was a discrepancy across Councils as well and that nationally this should be sorted out.

The HR Manager said she had contacted the GMB about the Equal Pay Audit, three years on from Job Evaluation. She will report back to the group in April.

Action

1. HR Manager to report back to the EPF in April 2018 on the outcome of the Equal Pay Audit.

Budget Implications (GMB)

The HR Manager explained that this Forum gave the opportunity for all unions to contribute to the process and the formal minutes of this meeting would be used as part of the process.

The GMB Representative (RH) expressed concerns around social care and the cuts. It was understood that Newport City Council was in a situation not of their own making with central government passing the problem to the Welsh Government and then onto local government. Hopefully there would continue to be conversations with members to see if there were alternatives. Potential outsourcing of domicile care should be considered very carefully as it has cost other local authorities more. The only way the private sector can meet decreasing budgets is to reduce member's terms and conditions.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services responded that the Council had been creative but two companies had pulled out and 1000 hours of domicile care had been lost. All Councils were struggling to put care packages together but if the Councils could work together it would be more effective.

The GMB Representative (RH) noted it was important to look at on costs as well as unit costs as they were added on. Private sector will not have the same central costs which added on to that.

The UNISON Representative (PG) added that he had members working in the private sector with conditions such as travel between minimal call times, 14 hour days, zero hour contracts. It must be appreciated that the difference in costs was down to the treatment of staff. The Cabinet Member for Social Services noted that every council tender now specifies that contractors pay employees travel costs, sickness and holidays.

The NAHT Representative raised the issue of a number of schools running at deficit budgets. The Head of Finance answered that Individual school funding figures would be produced February/March 2018. It was then up to the individual schools to match funding. This year they were set higher. The schools were drawing down on reserves. There was a £3m reduction in schools resources this year. It was not possible to say if there would be any extra money from government EAS as there had been in recent years. The Secondary school sector was particularly challenged. It was incumbent next year for schools to operate in an incredibly challenging environment as they would be using reserves. The situation would have to be assessed when that information comes to light.

The ASCL Representative stated that the schools usually get indicative budgets after the February half term. If the school needs to declare voluntary redundancies that time scale is critical to meet the process for the 31 August deadline. School had still not received any LEA money relating to grant funding from this year. The NASUWT Representative was aware of at least two schools which required an overdraft to bail out budgets.

The Head of Finance did not currently have the details regarding numbers of schools in deficit but believed there may be around 7 schools in this situation. Some schools may have a licensed deficit but it was difficult to see it coming to an end. The ASCL Representative noted that the difficulty was that the schools were required to set their budgets by 31 March but the figures were not available until mid-April.

The Head of Finance asked that if any individual unions had particular issues they wished to feed back on the papers would be drafted at the end of January 2018 so needed to be with Finance by then. Minutes of this meeting would be included for Cabinet consideration. Any feedback should be submitted by the last week of January to allow time for the Cabinet to consider.

Sleep-in Shift Pay Compliance Scheme (GMB)

The GMB Representative (RH) asked for an update on Newport's position with regards Sleep-in Shift Pay. The stance was to await the outcome of the MENCAP case. At the moment Newport pays above the minimum wage so would need to report to the HMRC but waiting for outcome. It affects around

30/40 members of staff. The deadline was 31 March 2018 for companies not paying national insurance.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services noted that previously sleep-ins were sleep-ins with a low level of care but now in many cases sleep-ins were not sleep-ins but working nights with sleep disturbed so that question should be asked – is it safe?

Working Time Directive: Daily Rest Period

The GMB Representative (RH) informed those present that a small number of members had been informed that the break from the end of shift of work to the start of another was 9 hours and not 11. They had been informed that this was council domestic policy. However, the EU Working Directive surpass this. The GMB Representative to raise with Heads of Service at the JCC on Monday 15 January 2018.

The Health & Safety Manager asked the GMB Representative to let them know outside the meeting of the instances where this was happening so the issue could be addressed.

7. Dates of Next Meetings:

- 10.00 am on 19 April 2018 in Committee Room 1
- 10.00 am on 19 July 2018 in Committee Room 1
- 10.00 am on 18 October 2018 in Committee Room 1

Employee Partnership Forum: Action Sheet

Item	Subject	Action by
4) Staff Code of Conduct	The HR Manager to accelerate the review of the Council's Social Media Policy, consulting with the Unions on content.	Rachael Davies, HR Manager
4) Staff Code of Conduct	The HR Manager to arrange for a signpost to be inserted in the Staff Code of Conduct to the Social Media Policy and to insert other signposts in the document to any relevant Council policies.	Rachael Davies, HR Manager
5) Health & Safety Update	The Health & Safety Manager to arrange for statistics on Council stress risk assessments	Beth Burns, Health & Safety Manager

	to be brought to the next meeting.	
5) Health & Safety Update	The HR Manager to investigate better ways of promoting the management of stress amongst staff.	Rachael Davies, HR Manager