



Minutes

Employee Partnership Forum

Date: 9 January 2020

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors D Mayer

In Attendance: Rhys Cornwall (Head of People and Business Change), Rachael Davies (HR Manager), Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance), Beth Burns (Health and Safety Manager) and Lisa Davies (Governance Officer) Peter Garland (UNISON), John Lane (UNISON), Gareth Hawksworth (NASUWT), Andy McDowall (UNITE) and Rowena Hayward (GMB)

1 Apologies for Absence

None

2 Declarations of Interest

None

3 Minutes of the Last Meeting:

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted as a true and accurate record.

It was noted that the GMB Union Representative referred to the Drug and Alcohol Testing Policy stating that the policy was not supported by the GMB Union.

4 Health and Safety Update

The Health and Safety Manager provided an update in relation to Health, Safety and Wellbeing across the Council for Quarter 3 from October to December 2019.

A number of RIDDOR reportable accidents and confirmed diagnosis of diseases that had been reported to the HSE. An updated was provided regarding HSE enforcement action and visits in addition to current projects being undertaken to improve the Health, Safety and Wellbeing of Staff. Revised policies and guidance documents are available for information

The GMB Representative raised concerns regarding the level of mental health issues with the Authority, asking about the level of training given to managers on how they identify and tailor an approach to mental health issues. The Health and Safety Manager replied confirming that the Authority run a mental health illness absence report, and issues around mental ill health and stress had previously been brought to an Employee Partnership Forum. The Health and Safety Manager explained that temporary adjustments, training and support are all on going mental health strategies supported by the Authority.

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The GMB Representative welcomed the useful statistics, asking for the report to be made available to the forum on a regular basis. It was asked, what the process for internal stress management was. The Health and Safety Manager confirmed that there is a wellbeing referral process; a questionnaire analyses the levels of stress being felt by the individual and if they are low was managed by the direct manager, or if the risk was high, it would be referred to the health and safety for a high level stress risk assessment. Control measures as discussed would be implemented by the person's line manager for them to manage, and if there were any ongoing issues, these would be re-escalated to Health, Safety and Wellbeing.

The Chair explained that mental health illness absence is taken seriously; managers have a duty to help staff members suffering from mental ill health ill.

5 Budget Proposals

The Head of Finance provided an update of the Budget Proposals.

The key context was the late draft funding settlement from Welsh Government due to elections. This meant that budget proposals were done based on projections for the RSG grant and this was then received a couple of days before the actual meeting. When it was received, it confirmed a much better position and Cabinet were updated in their meeting that they had 'flexibility' of some £7m. They are considering this now and will announce final budget decisions in their February meeting.

- Budget pressures for next year were c£13m
- This included schools funding increase of c£4.4m which is their calculated cost increases next year. The budget assumed the settlement would either carry on with existing education related one yr funding grants for teachers pensions/pay or make it permanent
- Savings of c£5m were included in draft proposals, split roughly 50/50 between those taken by Cabinet and those delegated to HoS for implementation. About 28 w.t.e. posts affected.

The Unison representative confirmed to the forum that the biggest feedback was regarding the budget proposal was around the changes to the car parking leaving only 50 bays for staff with the rest of the bays being pay and display. It was felt that staff who require their vehicle for work purposes will only add to the issue of parking at the Civic Centre. Feedback reflected that the car parking proposal would impact on moral and financially as the cost for pay and display would amount to around twelve hundred pound per annum. The Head of People & Business Change confirmed that the car parking situation was already an issue with 900 staff and only 220 parking spaces. The Faulkner Road car park is a public car park with around 41 thousand pound income. If staff need their car for work purposes there should be a space or vehicle parking provision for them.

HR & OD Manager confirmed that a Cost of Travel scheme had been launched, allowing staff to purchase a season ticket for travel, staff would be able to loan the amount of the season ticket from the Authority, paying back through payroll.

The Unison Representative commented on the budget saying that it was always welcomed where there were no cuts to services, understanding there was no easy targets.

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The GMB representative commented that they understood that local authorities had to make a reduction of staffing levels, which was a directive from Central Government. The Services currently being offered were at breaking levels, with Mental health awareness and staff under pressure, work load now being delivered by one person when previously by three people. It was understood that Cabinet Members had a difficult decisions around cuts from services such as Social Services and Streetscene. The Implementation of outsourcing services to Radis for Financial savings, but receiving no regular updates from the services on those savings. It was asked by the GMB Representative for an update before the EPF meeting.

Head of Finance explained that the reason for the overspending on social care was that the Authority used to only have significant budget pressures from adult's services, but over last 2-3 years the Authority had added children's services which was causing the demand on increases for that service. The Head of People & Business Change commented that it was an important point; more money would be going to that service. The GMB Representative acknowledged awareness of the demand on Child Services care increasing, but Information received was concerns on generic job descriptions and the delivery of services with the reduction to the number of staff doing same job and fewer professionals to deliver those services. The HR & OD Manager asked the GMB Representative for more detail on what the concerns were for the generic job description. The GMB Representative confirmed management level and merging professionals. The HR & OD Manager confirmed that the Play Hub was Regeneration and Housing and not Social Services.

The Unison Representative commented that pressures on staff came from changes In rota and long hours which could cause a higher risk of absences through stress.

The Head of People & Business Change confirmed that the situation in Newport was that a large percentage of the budget goes on 'People' – Social Services and Education

The GMB Representative asked the EPF Officers when would the second report be made available to the trade unions. The Head of Finance confirmed that the Leader would announce then the report would be available. The Head of People & Business Change confirmed that the report would say what happened in draft form, Feedback would go with the partner's feedback

The Head of Finance advised the Union Representative that feedback would be welcomed, but the feedback was not just only about what was there that they did not like but also about what else they might feel needs to be there in proposals

The GMB Representative asked the Officers for a break down of cost for agency staff for the last 4 - 5 years and the length of time the Agency staff had been employed for with a breakdown of departments.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting