

JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 29th April, 2024.

Present: Councillor S. Campbell (Chair); Councillors C.M. Cowpe, P. Drake, S.D. Perkes and N.C. Thomas.

Representatives of Trade Unions: L. Bonni (GMB), J. Davis (UNISON / Vice-Chair), G. Davies (UNISON), M. Davies (UCAC), T. Greaves (GMB), J. Green (UNISON) and G. Pappas (UNISON).

Officers: T. Baker, J. Ballantine, L. Boyland, T. Dickinson, E. Hannah, I. McMillan, M. Thomas and S. Williams.

(a) Apologies For Absence –

These were received from Councillor W.A. Hennessy, M. Canavan (NEU) and M. Hudson.

(b) Minutes and Matters Arising –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 29th January, 2024 be approved as a correct record.

(c) Declarations of Interest –

No declarations were received.

(d) Trade Union Items –

None received at this time.

(e) Vale of Glamorgan Staff Network(s) Updates –

The first update came from the Chair of the Vale of Glamorgan LGBTQ+ Staff Network (known as GLAM), L. Boyland, which included the following headlines:

- Regular, monthly meetings which included both in person and online for the network.
- Work with Cardiff and Rhondda Cynon Taff Councils around LGBTQ+ families, extended families and fostering and adoption opportunities.
- Lesbian visibility week.
- A focus on Pride Month, with the relevant details being shared, including with GLAM members and reaching out to them to see what activities they wanted.

- As part of the monthly celebration, awareness raising activities would be undertaken and it was intended that staff at the Vale of Glamorgan Council would get a lot out of this period.

Subsequently, an update was presented by a representative of the Abl Network (the disability staff network), E. Hannah, which included the following:

- The new logo design for the network had been completed and approved. It had been decided to put this wording into lower case as opposed to capitals in order to make it clear that the word was not an acronym and was the Welsh word for 'able' which reflected the network itself.
- The launch of the Abl staff network's webpage on Staffnet in the Spring, which included a support hub and resource bank for Council staff. This would be a soft launch, linked to a webinar, information and advice for staff.
- Abl was also still looking for interest from staff to be the Chair or part of the leadership team of the Network who had a lived experience of disability.
- The Network was also still looking for more members and allies.
- V. Davidson, the Operational Manager within Legal Services, would be acting as an Abl Champion.
- There had been positive feedback already about the Abl Network, which signified that it was welcomed, needed and wanted.

Following the update, Councillor Thomas asked if Abl had reached out to the Disability Champion, Councillor Hamilton. This had not been done yet but Councillor Hamilton would be contacted in due course.

The Chair liked the new logo and the use of the lower-case wording would help make it clear that this was not an acronym. The Abl representative agreed and welcomed the feedback from the Forum on the logo and the use of lower case for the wording.

Finally, the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development updated the Forum on the Diverse Staff Network, including the next imminent meeting of the Network at Ysgol Sant Baruc in order to discuss its work on diversity, anti-racism and to encourage members of the Network to become school governors in order for such bodies to be more representative of the communities and students they serve and for schools to become actively anti-racist. Further information on this matter and the wider work of the Network could be obtained via the head of service.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the Vale of Glamorgan Staff Network(s) Updates be noted.

(f) Minutes of Directorate Consultative Groups (for information) –

(i) **Learning and Skills Consultative Group – 26th February, 2024**

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Learning and Skills Consultative Group held on 26th February, 2024.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Learning and Skills Consultative Group meeting be noted.

(ii) Social Services Consultative Forum – 9th January, 2024

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Social Services Consultative Forum held on 9th January, 2024.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Social Services Consultative Forum be noted.

(iii) Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative Forum – 6th December, 2023 and 7th February, 2024

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative Forum held on 6th December, 2023 and 7th February, 2024.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative Forum be noted.

(iv) Social Services Health and Safety Committee – 14th December, 2023

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Social Services Health and Safety Committee held on 14th December, 2023.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Social Services Health and Safety Committee be noted.

(g) Dates of other Directorate Consultative Groups for Noting –

AGREED – T H A T the following dates for the Directorate Consultative Groups as detailed below be noted:

- (i) Learning and Skills – 10th June 2024.
- (ii) Social Services – 5th March 2024 (awaiting minutes to be approved).
- (iii) Visible Services and Housing – 1st May 2024.

(iv) Social Services Health and Safety Committee – 19th March 2024 (awaiting minutes to be approved).

(h) Presentation – Recruitment Update –

The Operational Manager Employee Services presented the update to the Forum, which included the changes and improvements made to the application process in order to look at new, different and appropriate means of encouraging potential staff to apply for jobs at the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

As part of the above, the Council was looking to adopt, wherever appropriate, the use of curriculum vitae (C.V.) as part of the application and recruitment process in order to move away from the 'one size fits all' approach previously used by the Council for its job application process and positions. For example, for Social Worker roles, C.V.s would be allowed as part of the initial application process, but with the requirement that applicants had all the essential qualifications for the role(s). If they passed the 1st stage, then candidates would be contacted via an informal chat and asked to complete a more detailed application.

There had been positive feedback from applicants on the new approach from applicants, with the initial application process (with the inclusion of a C.V.) taking only a matter of minutes to complete. This was reflected in an increased number of applications.

Other areas of recruitment, such as senior officers were also being reviewed in order that the Council could look at different ways of recruiting staff externally and to be 'one step ahead' of other competing local authorities in the job market. The Council's workforce consisted of diverse positions, roles, etc. and this needed to be considered from an equality perspective as well that each recruitment process was devised to suit the job – whether that be front line, professional, technical or senior roles.

On employee benefits, these were currently being reviewed and options included a 'one stop shop' for all such benefits, as well as reference made about the Shared Cost Additional Voluntary Contributions (AVC) Scheme (which applied to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) only, not school staff pensions) and salary sacrifice. Car lease / cycle to work schemes would also be in the pipeline for staff but would need to meet Project Zero requirements. Other benefits / services to staff referred to were shop discounts, a volunteering scheme and free will writing service.

Following the update, Councillor Thomas asked how information on these benefits could be cascaded down to staff via management and trade unions. It was explained that as part of this it was important to get unions involved to help disseminate this information and to have in place an effective communications plan to relay this information to both Council and School staff.

M. Davies (UCAC) asked about the long service award for staff within the Vale of Glamorgan Council and schools and how staff were made aware of their entitlement to it. It was explained that the way the award was communicated to staff had

changed over the last 18 months at the Vale of Glamorgan. For example, the £250 voucher provided as part of a member of staff's long service had previously had to be requested by them; now, the Council contacted staff affected when they hit 25 and 40 years of service (both Council and School employees). As part of this, staff would meet the Chief Executive and Leader and have a buffet in order to make the award process more interactive and engaging to long service staff.

Councillor Perkes followed up on the above query by asking how the Council reached out to its staff who were entitled to a long service award and may be retiring, in order to show that their work had been appreciated. It was explained that Human Resources reached out to them in order to see if they wanted to be engaged in this process. The process behind this could be looked at again, but in some cases, staff may not want to engage and have this attention.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development referred to the communications about this to staff, including developing the relevant webpage on Staffnet. Also, engagement with Schools and Council staff, both new and current, on what they would want in terms of benefits and on the relevant webpage. Furthermore, roadshows would be used to help inform staff on benefits and rewards offered by the Vale of Glamorgan Council. A key takeaway from this engagement was the importance of greater flexibility around work arrangements, with younger members of staff believing that they will have to work much longer than previous generations and therefore wanted a better work/life balance.

Councillor Thomas was concerned that not all Council and Schools staff were aware of the benefits, rewards and staff networks provided by the Council due to them working outside of the Council's central services and who may have hidden disabilities/disadvantages and asked how this information could be better disseminated. It was explained that the Council wanted the staff networks to be as autonomous as possible and for as much information as possible to come from them directly. However, the Council's Human Resources team would assist networks wherever possible. It was important for staff with the relevant lived experiences to decide how they engaged with the Council and staff networks. The Council had also undertaken surveys with frontline staff and other groups within the Council. The Councillor agreed that such communications should be led by the staff networks with the Council acting as support.

M. Davies (UCAC) echoed the comments made on the younger generation of workers' emphasis on flexible working arrangements, but such flexibility was not present in schools currently. Such flexibility was at the discretion of the relevant Headteacher and/or school governors. It was important for Human Resources to support and encourage work flexibility in order to help with teacher and related staff retention and such a focus should also be at the level of Welsh Government to address recruitment and retention issues in education.

The Abl representative stated that the network's webpage included staff benefits and rewards, plus advice and guidance.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development stated that greater work flexibility was also a challenge in social care and feedback from staff here also

indicated that they would value more flexibility, which was echoed by the Head of Resource Management and Safeguarding.

Based on the comments above, the Chair suggested that the Council, if it had not done this already, made a video or videos in order to get details on benefits and rewards across to potential recruits, new joiners and existing staff in the Council. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development would look into this and would update the Forum in due course.

The Operational Manager Employee Services added that it was important for the Council to promote the rewards and benefits it could provide in order to encourage people to apply for Council jobs and help offset the offer of more competitive salaries in other sectors. Also, it would be necessary to look at areas such as social care to see if these roles could be more 'flexible' to support people with their work life balance, etc. As part of this, the Council was currently reviewing the full end to end recruitment process in conjunction with ICT, Organisational Development and Learning, as well as Business Improvement to improve the process for efficiency and for a better experience for applicants, managers, etc. The relevant sub processes were also being looked at as well as other job areas, such as agency staff.

M. Davies (UCAC) stated that the Council needed to encourage potential applicants to look more at the relevant websites for education jobs advertised for Vale of Glamorgan schools. It was explained that the Council would continue to utilise the relevant websites and encourage people to use them, but more support was needed from Welsh Government to help advertise and encourage these as well. The advertising process was currently undertaken manually, but it was hoped that a more automated process could be used in future in order to feed job adverts onto the Council's website and elsewhere.

Councillor Cowpe referred to the challenges in making certain job roles more flexible, such as in education, and other roles where there were certain restrictions and understood that teachers and other school staff were unhappy as a result. It was important for schools to think 'outside the box' at where greater flexibility and work life balance could be achieved i.e. could administrative and planning work be undertaken at home, and she made reference to schools in England that held a 'flexible day' for staff.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the Presentation – Recruitment Update be noted.

(i) Date of Next Meeting –

Following discussions with the Forum, it was decided that in the interests of inclusivity and the availability of educational, other trade union and employee representatives and members of the Forum, the next meeting should be held sometime in September.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the date of the next Joint Consultative Forum meeting would be confirmed by the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer and disseminated to Members of the Forum at the earliest opportunity.