

JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM

At a Meeting of the Joint Consultative Forum held by Video Conference on Thursday, 10 June 2021 at 2.00 p.m.

Present: Councillors Karen Conaghan, Jim Finn, David McBride, Jonathan McColl and Iain McLaren; James Halfpenny (EIS); Paul Carey, Shirley Furie, David Scott and John Wagner* (GMB); Claire Mackenzie (SSTA); Val Jennings, Susan Shannon and David Smith (UNISON); and Margaret Wood (Unite).

*Arrived later in the meeting.

Attending: Victoria Rogers, Chief Officer – People & Technology; Malcolm Bennie, Chief Officer – Citizen, Culture & Facilities; Gail Macfarlane, Shared Head – Roads & Neighbourhood; Peter Barry, Chief Officer – Housing & Employability; Stephen West, Chief Officer – Resources; Angela Wilson, Chief Officer – Supply, Distribution & Property; Margaret-Jane Cardno, Head of Strategy and Transformation, Health & Social Care Partnership; Claire Cusick, Senior Education Officer – Pupil Support; Alison McBride, Strategic People & Change Manager; Louise Hastings, People & Change Partner; Raymond Lynch, Senior Solicitor; and Scott Kelly, Committee Officer.

Apologies: Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Claire Greer (GMB); Sylvia Chatfield, Head of Mental Health, Addictions and Learning Disabilities, Health & Social Care Partnership; Patricia Kerr, ICT Manager; and Leanne Galasso, People & Change Partner.

Councillor Karen Conaghan in the Chair

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

It was noted that there were no declarations of interest in any of the items of business on the agenda.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of Meeting of the Joint Consultative Forum held on 11 March 2021 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

Having heard the Chief Officer – People & Technology in answer to a Member's question concerning the item under the heading 'Trade Union Facility Agreement', the Forum noted the up to date position which was that agreement had been reached with all trade unions on amendments to the Agreement and that these had been approved by the Corporate Services Committee at its recent meeting.

Note: Mr Wagner entered the meeting at this point.

EMPLOYEE RELATIONS MONITORING: BI-ANNUAL AND ANNUAL UPDATE 2020/21

A report was submitted by the Chief Officer – People & Technology advising of the progress on employment relations matters for the period 1 October 2020 to March 2021 and annual analysis for 2020/21 across the Council.

Having heard the People & Change Partner in further explanation, the Forum agreed to note the contents of the report.

EMPLOYEE WELLBEING: ANNUAL UPDATE 2020/21 (COUNCIL WIDE)

A report was submitted by the Chief Officer – People & Technology providing detailed analysis on Council wide employee wellbeing and attendance for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

After discussion and having heard the People & Change Partner and the Chief Officer in explanation of the report and in answer to Members' questions, the Forum agreed to note the annual findings for reported absence for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021, and in particular:-

- (1) the decrease in Council wide sickness absence of 12,338 full time equivalent (FTE) days lost compared to the same period the previous year;
- (2) that work-related stress had decreased by 1%, that minor illness had decreased by 7.5% and that personal stress had increased by 5.5%; and
- (3) that a number of services had been restructured in Quarter 1 2019, and again in 2020, and so any historical comparisons should be considered as indicative and not an absolute figure.

TRADES UNIONS ISSUES

Long COVID (item requested by GMB)

The Forum heard from Mr Carey who described the effects of Long COVID on people, stressed its prevalence in particular demographic groups and emphasised that it would create challenges for all local authorities to address. He requested that the Council give consideration to its support for employees to help them to return to work.

Following discussion and having heard from the Chief Officer – People & Technology, the Forum agreed:-

- (1) to note that national guidance relating to this matter was awaited and that, in the meantime, the Council was following guidance issued by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) and the National Institute for Care and Excellence (NICE) to support employees and was also using its own employee support policies to facilitate phased returns to work and adjustments to duties where these were appropriate; and
- (2) to note that this matter would continue to be a standing item on the agendas of Conveners Group meetings and that, at an appropriate time, an update could be submitted to a future meeting of the Forum.

Employment Opportunities for Teachers in West Dunbartonshire Council (item requested by EIS)

The Forum heard from Mr Halfpenny who stated that there were increasing problems with teachers in West Dunbartonshire not being employed at a particular school and not having enough opportunities to secure a permanent contract, and that this was in contrast with neighbouring authorities who offered permanency after two years of employment and ring-fenced teaching jobs for their own probationers. Mr Halfpenny expressed concern that probationary teachers would not seek employment in West Dunbartonshire and requested that the Council give consideration to its workforce planning in this regard.

In response, the Senior Education Officer – Pupil Support stated that dialogue in relation to this matter was continuing with teaching staff, and with trades unions in terms of the LNCT Agreement. She provided current information on permanent posts which would be filled in August 2021 and also emphasised that fixed term contracts did offer a level of job security for one or two years and that all probationers were added to the local supply list which offered substantial opportunities of work. However, she stressed that there were not enough posts in West Dunbartonshire to allow all probationers to be offered permanent contracts and that those who became eligible for permanency, per SNCT Agreement, after two years were given priority for vacancies as they arose.

Following discussion, the Forum agreed:-

- (1) to note the terms of the discussion which had taken place in relation to this matter;
- (2) to note that the Senior Education Officer – Pupil Support was unaware of neighbouring authorities ring-fencing posts for their own probationers but would check whether such a practice was taking place; and
- (3) to note that discussions with the teaching unions on possible changes to the LNCT Agreement would continue.

The meeting closed at 3.00 p.m.

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