

## EMPLOYEE FORUM

6 September 2017

Present:

Member representatives:

Mr A Archer, Ms C Gwyther, Councillor R Owens and Councillor M Williams.

Staff representatives:

Ms H Buck, Mrs A Dooner, Ms M Gianuzzi, Ms D Hughes and Mr P Norman.

Union representatives:

Ms J Jones and Mr J Lewis (Chair, Pembrokeshire Branch of Unison).

(NPA Offices, Llanion Park, Pembroke Dock: 11.30am – 1.00pm)

**1. Appointment of Chair**

It was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that Mrs A Dooner be appointed Chair for the ensuing year.

**2. Appointment of Deputy Chair**

It was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that Mr A Archer be appointed Deputy Chair for the ensuing year.

**3. Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor P Harries and Councillor P Kidney (Member representatives).

**4. Introductions**

Each person introduced themselves to the rest of the Employee Forum.

**5. Disclosures of interest**

There were no disclosures of interest.

**6. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 11 February 2015 were presented for confirmation and signature.

It was **AGREED** that the minutes of the meeting held on the 11 February 2015 be confirmed and signed.

**7. Matters arising from the minutes**

Minute 11 – The Living Wage

The Chief Executive reported that the Authority had implemented the Living Wage as a supplementary living allowance as recommended to the



Personnel Committee, rather than as an Accredited Employer. No particular problems had been experienced, and any issue with pay scale values which resulted was being addressed at a national level.

**NOTED.**

**8. Members' Priorities for the Future**

Authority Members began by expressing the view that this was a valuable forum for staff and Members to meet and hoped that meetings would continue to be held regularly. Staff agreed that the forum was useful and it was noted that staff at the centres had welcomed the opportunity to meet with Members at the recent Study Tour to Oriel y Parc, Newport and Castell Henllys. It was also felt that joint staff/Member training events were useful in this regard, as were the presentations given by staff to the Authority and its Committees, particularly the Operational Review Committee. However it was in more informal settings that greater engagement could take place, and it was suggested that consideration could be given to Members being invited to staff meetings in future.

With regard to priorities for the future, one Member noted that their thoughts were reflected in the plans and policy reports adopted by the Authority. They took a broad view of their responsibilities across the range of services and activities undertaken by the Authority.

One Member went on to raise the issue of the potential relocation of the Authority's headquarters from Llanion Park to County Hall in Haverfordwest. He stated that he had been present at a meeting when this possibility had been raised, however as a Member of the Authority he was unaware that such discussions were taking place and felt that staff ought to know. The Chief Executive replied that in the current financial climate, discussions were ongoing with many organisations regarding different ways of working, however many of these would never lead to firm proposals. With regard to potential relocation of the offices, Pembrokeshire County Council (PCC) had asked some years ago if the Authority was interested in occupying space at County Hall, however when the costings were looked at, the scenario was not viable. Following discussions with Members at the Support Services Working Group, officers had asked PCC to put forward an approach that would be financially viable for the Authority, however nothing had been received. Therefore there was currently no proposal to discuss with either Members or staff.

Staff were unaware of the matter, although some rumours had been circulating, and asked that now the issue had been raised that all staff be reassured that there were currently no proposals, to avoid unduly worrying them. The Chair of Unison in Pembrokeshire asked for



consultation with staff as early as possible if there were any firm proposals.

**NOTED.**

## **9. Sickness Absence**

Staff reported that they had seen information that the PCNPA sickness rate was higher than many other NPAs and that mental health absences had been high. The Personnel Manager explained that this information was reported in the Health and Safety Annual report, and that rates at all local authorities in Wales were at similar level. The variation from year to year seemed to relate to levels of long term absence, and in a small organisation if one person was absent for a long time this could have a large impact on the figures; the PCNPA 2016-17 absence for mental health reasons (stress, depression etc) was largely one long absence. There was discussion of various factors which might impact on absence levels – funding regime in England, workforce profile in terms of age, in terms of proportion of manual workers, etc The Personnel Manager commented that it was important to remember that older workers on average do not have more absences however longer term, critical illnesses tended to be more prevalent in older people.

Some staff noted that sickness absence in their small teams was low as colleagues did not want to let the team down by taking time off work as it created additional pressure. The Personnel Manager stressed that managers did not put any pressure on staff to work when they were unfit to do so. There was some discussion regarding the means to cover staff sickness without using zero hours contracts for cover. Contingencies were being put in place which included staff working across sites.

Members concluded by saying that the Authority's sickness figures were below the average for the public sector as a whole and there was no pressure to drive down figures.. The Personnel Manager explained that trying to reduce sickness was an overall benefit to the organisation and to staff, in that no-one wants to be unwell. In response to a question, she confirmed that the Authority provided a 24/7 telephone helpline in addition to a confidential external counselling service that were both free to staff.

**NOTED.**

## **10. Work-Life Balance**

Following on from the previous discussion regarding the difficulties of providing sickness cover, some staff had raised the issue that working additional hours in order to cover absences etc was sometimes difficult for them to manage. The Personnel Manager explained that there was national interest in part time working or variable hours contracts and it



was worth remembering that these suited some staff, for whom they were a positive choice, but there would be others who might prefer more or more set hours.

Those staff who had come to the Authority from the private sector believed that the work-life balance in the public sector was much better. Staff valued the ability to work flexibly, and it was noted that there were about 40 different work patterns across the Authority, with managers being as accommodating as possible to staff requests. Some teams had experienced tensions resulting from the degree of flexibility suitable to some roles, such as the ability to work from home, which was not possible for all roles. However there was some flexibility in all contracts, including those for seasonal staff who worked on a rota.

The Personnel Manager pointed out that the flexibility introduced in working arrangements in 2003 was largely driven by Staff Representatives at the time.

**NOTED.**

