

## Member Questions for Council - 18th January 2023

Question	Response
<p><b>Question from Councillor Julia Judd to Councillor Lisa Spivey, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services</b></p> <p>The Calendar option associated with our email accounts, can quickly schedule meetings and events and get reminders about upcoming activities, so you always know what's next. Calendar is designed for teams, this Council, both officers and members, is a perfect model for its use. It makes it easy to share schedules with others, is easy to navigate and can be viewed by day, week, or month. One of the main advantages is its sharing abilities and it's easy use from mobile phones.</p> <p>Calendar tells us who has been invited, where the meeting is, who has accepted and could give us quick and easy access to documents and attachments, if they are attached. Amendments made by the host are automatically fed through. The Calendar facility makes appointments and meeting arrangements faultless, easy to manage and efficient.</p> <p>It would be helpful if all officers are trained to use Calendar for all invitations, appointments and meetings and desist from sending just email invitations. All the meetings on the Council's Website Calendar of Meetings link should feed through to members' personal calendars where appropriate. Email reminders are automatically generated directly from Calendar, firstly when the invitation is generated and then when amendments are made, saving the need to 'double deal', and reducing human error.</p>	<p>I'm not quite sure what the question is. This appears to be a statement of opinion on particular IT software.</p> <p>Officers are well-aware of the calendar function as it is a core part of managing day to day tasks and responsibilities.</p> <p>All members have been sent invites to their calendar for meetings of Council, and Committee Members have been sent the dates for meetings to the end of this current Council year.</p> <p>The new meeting dates for 2023/24 will be made available on the Council's website shortly. These can be downloaded directly into members Google Suite calendar from the website (there is a link above the calendar of meetings).</p> <p>For Member briefings provided by officers, these invites are sent with 4-6 weeks of notice unless there are external timescales which prevent this from happening.</p> <p>There is a system in place for officers to request additional training if required.</p>
<p><b>Question from Councillor Sue Jepson to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council</b></p> <p>In the Peer Review report, they state that staff morale is really low. Over many months/years</p>	<p>The Council and Publica acknowledge the Peer Review's findings - as employers we are both striving for continuous improvement and welcome the opportunity to improve our standards further. That's why we commissioned a second LGA Peer Review under this</p>

the Conservative group has questioned you about staff morale and the constant turnover since 2019. Cllr Harris, you have always stated that staff morale is good and that there are no problems, very happy or words to that effect.

Will you please agree now we have questioned this many times and now the peer review has highlighted the situation.

administration.

The Peer Review report makes a number of references to issues of staffing and staff morale. The findings of the Peer Review are somewhat at odds with other recent staff surveys, particularly the recent Publica Investors in People (IIP) Review, which was more positive. However, this isn't entirely surprising as both are snapshots at different points in time with different groups of employees being asked different questions.

From the feedback received from the Peer Review team, these recommendations appear to focus around communication and channels of communication. I believe that the key to engagement with staff is getting communication absolutely right, especially between members, senior managers and the teams delivering services.

This includes ensuring communications reflect supporting staff when they are under pressure, creating the space for them to deliver their projects and minimising the risk of any 'loss in translation' that can occur, especially via email communications.

Ensuring messages are clear and are constructive, especially when things may not be going to plan, is incredibly important.

So too is ensuring that messages are delivered at the appropriate level. It is too easy for those in positions of political power and management authority to overlook the impact that a brusque message can have on an employee. There are times when a message from a senior Councillor, Chief Executive or Managing Director might be better delivered by an employee's line manager who is likely to have a greater sense of the individual's workload and other commitments.

The last two years have demonstrated one thing beyond all doubt – our people are our greatest strength. Throughout and since the Covid-19 pandemic the people of the Cotswolds have depended on the council and its partners, Publica and Ubico, in ways that we couldn't have imagined at the beginning of 2020 and I am incredibly proud

of them.

Across the public sector and in councils up and down the country staff are being asked to do more with less resource in an ever increasingly challenging working environment.

The challenges in relation to the recruitment and retention of talented staff, and tightening labour markets, has been consistently reported in the media.

Only this month it's been reported that "the gap between wage growth in the public and private sector is near a record high". Workers in the private sector saw their average pay rise by 6.9% between August and October according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). This compares to wage growth of just 2.7% for public sector employees.

In July, Publica, who employ over 650 workers delivering Council services, were pleased to achieve the "Investors in People" standard. The assessor recognised that over the last twelve months "a number of improvements had been made, but there's still work in progress particularly around workloads and resource levels, but a huge positive cultural shift".

The external assessor identified several highlights:

- The increased focus on wellbeing and the introduction of Mental Health First Aiders.
- The Staff Forum group and increased consultation with our staff through this forum.
- Improvements made within reward and recognition and the continued focus ensuring that people are rewarded in ways that motivate them.
- Embedding organisational values and Publica's employer brand.
- Agile working has been organised well and staff enjoy the flexibility that supports a

	<p>better work/life balance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Increased Learning and Development opportunities including Apprenticeships.</li> <li>· Career development opportunities with internal transfers and promotions to retain key talent.</li> <li>· Increased level of trust and confidence.</li> <li>· Leadership and management training investment encouraging a more coaching style of management and increased awareness of the positive impact of good leadership and management.</li> <li>· Our performance during the last year gives huge confidence for the future.</li> </ul> <p>The pandemic created huge amounts of stress for everyone and this, linked with some dramatic changes in working arrangements, emphasised the importance of a comprehensive and coordinated approach to staff wellness. A healthy workforce is a productive workforce and the Employee Wellness programme is an integral element of our offer to staff. Through our ambitious Employee Wellness programme we have already put measures in place, including a range of physical and mental health and well-being resources, access to a free and confidential counselling service, and will continue to monitor the health and wellbeing of colleagues ensuring staff have the advice and support they need.</p> <p>Although much has been achieved already, without the right people in place we cannot hope to play a key role in supporting our residents in light of the cost of living crisis and deliver on our ambitions for the district over the next few years.</p> <p>We have incorporated the Peer Review findings into the Action Plan that is part of the report to the Council and we will work through them to understand and address the issues.</p>
<p><b>Question from Councillor Gina Blomefield to</b></p>	<p>A link to 'Key Officer Contacts' for different Council services is available on the Member</p>

<p><b>Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council</b></p> <p>It was very interesting to read through the Peer Group Review report and whilst other members will also be picking up on other aspects contained within it, I would like to highlight the difficulties noted that Members can experience in getting their casework progressed due to the lack of clarity around prioritisation and timescales for responses to their queries on behalf of a resident. I am sure we all have experienced this at some point and indeed discovering the most appropriate officer to approach on a particular problem can also lead to delays in obtaining an answer for the resident concerned.</p> <p>Will the system of how queries by Members are prioritised and timescales for responses be addressed as a matter of urgency so that all officers have an understanding of this framework?</p>	<p>Portal. Officers will aim to respond to Member queries in a timely fashion. There isn't a set timescale for dealing with responses, but this matter will be referred to the Constitution Working Group for further consideration as part of an update to the approved Member/Officer Relations Protocol.</p>
<p><b>Question from Councillor Stephen Andrews to Councillor Jenny Forde, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing and Armed Forces Champion</b></p> <p>In November last year, following extensive consultation with service providers, the Government published Statutory Guidance on how local authorities should treat current members of the Armed Forces, Veterans, their partners and families when providing some important services.</p> <p>This is an important step in strengthening the support to Veterans provided under the Armed Forces Covenant.</p> <p>Can she reassure the Council that CDC is fully</p>	<p>Cotswold District Council complies with the statutory guidance on the Armed Forces Covenant duty for current members of the armed forces, veterans and their families.</p> <p>In some respects the Council and Publica exceed the requirements of the statutory guidance, particularly in respect of employees who are members of the reserve forces, as we provide generous additional leave for training requirements. However, the number of employees who are members of the reserve forces is very small.</p>

compliant with all of those Statutory Regulations?

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