

**PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
(Extraordinary Meeting)**

13 January 2021

Present: Councillor M James (Chair)
Councillor Mrs D Clements, Councillor ML Evans, Councillor P Harries (Ex-Officio), Mrs J James, Mr GA Jones, Councillor P Kidney (non-voting), Councillor A Wilcox and Councillor S Yelland.

[Councillor PJ Morgan joined the meeting during consideration of the Notice of Motion. Councillor ML Evans advised that he would have to leave the meeting at 10.30am]

(Virtual meeting: 10.00a.m. – 11.25a.m.)

1. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Dr R Heath-Davies. Councillor PJ Morgan had advised that he was having difficulty joining the meeting.

2. Disclosures of interest

There were no disclosures of interest.

3. Notice of Motion from Councillor P Kidney:

“That the Authority considers a mentor service for staff of the Authority, to discuss any problems or anxieties, in light of extra pressure being put on them due to the current pandemic” referred to the Committee by the National Park Authority on 04/12/20

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Kidney to the meeting and invited him to present his Notice of Motion (NoM). He explained that his concern for staff, particularly in the current circumstances, was borne of his own experiences in a difficult working environment some years ago when he had felt he had no one to turn to for help. He therefore wanted the Authority to set up an arm’s length service whereby any member of staff who felt under pressure could ring up a Member and air their grievance in a confidential environment. The Member would then filter whether the issue should be brought forward to the Chief Executive/HR Manager. Whilst he understood that staff could contact those individuals directly, he believed that some people would not want to do that, and this service would provide a way to support them. He offered to work alongside relevant staff to develop the details of the scheme and envisaged that a review would be undertaken after 6 months; he hoped that there would be no referrals but this would not mean the initiative had failed. He also wished to stress that his NoM did not constitute criticism of the HR team



but was a means of providing extra support for colleagues and he firmly believed that there was a need for it.

The HR Manager then provided Members with a presentation outlining the existing services that were offered to all staff and immediate family members by the Authority through the organisation Care First. These consisted of a free and confidential 24/7 telephone information and advice line; information online through their Zest (health and personal fitness portal) and Lifestyle (advice on a wide range of issues relating to home, work and health) websites in addition to a series of daily webinars. Staff were also able to access an independent Counselling service. He added that the advice provided was independent, confidential and provided by experienced and trained advisors.

The Chief Executive added that in addition the Authority recognised Unison, the Public Service Union and had a variety of policies making clear what should be provided for, and be expected by, employees.

Some Members commended Councillor Kidney for his honesty and agreed that many present would have experienced similar difficulties, particularly in years gone by when the mechanisms available today, such as counselling, did not exist. They were pleased to learn that the Authority had had these services in place for some time, but agreed that perhaps greater promotion was needed of the services available. A note of caution was sounded in that Members were not trained in these matters and did not have access to support themselves. Looking at the adopted Member Role Descriptions and Specifications, one Member did not consider that acting as a Mentor fell within them. There was also a concern that Member involvement could undermine managers and also conflict with their roles on the Grievance, Disciplinary and Appeals Committees and therefore compromise their independence as Members of the Authority.

However another Member noted that as a result of the pandemic many people had felt the need to find a support group with whom they could chat about their problems. It was suggested that it may be possible for Members to act in that capacity, as a listening ear, particularly as they had a degree of understanding of the issues. It was also suggested that the Authority could consider a 'buddying' system whereby staff could support each other by chatting to other colleagues.

Other Members noted that the presentation had referred to a number of professional agencies, but agreed with Councillor Kidney that there was no harm in putting forward a service that fell outside of existing management structures. It was therefore proposed that a trial 'listening'



service be set up by Members for staff. As the detailed mechanism and the parameters were unclear, the Chief Executive suggested that officers work with Councillor Kidney and the Chair/Deputy Chair of the Committee to develop these and the resulting proposal come back before the Committee. The proposer agreed to incorporate this suggestion within his motion and this was seconded.

It was **RESOLVED** that a small group of staff and Members develop the principle of the Member 'listening' service and that this be brought back to the Personnel Committee for final agreement.

The Minutes of this meeting were confirmed at the meeting of the Personnel Committee held on 23 June 2021 without amendment

