

Staff conference questions

The message that NHS sends about “zero tolerance” is clear. Is there a plan for WSCC (apart from policies in situ) to send clear message to the public that would reassure their staff that they’re supported & safe? Either via message on a leaflet or on WSCC website?

Answer: Everyone at West Sussex County Council deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of whether you are interacting with a fellow colleague, resident, or a customer.

We are committed to ensuring a safe and friendly working environment for all, which is why we have just refreshed two of our important policies.

These are the:

- [Dignity and Respect Policy](#) for interactions between staff members
- [Prevention, Management & Reporting of Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy](#) for interactions with customers and/or residents.

Both of these policies provide information on what to do whether you are experiencing, or a witness to, unacceptable behaviours, such as bullying, discrimination, harassment or victimisation. Our website also sets out behavioural expectations for staff and customers alike, which includes the ask that staff are treated politely.

You can find out more information about these policies by reading the [full update](#) from Gavin Wright, Director of HR and Organisational Development, on The Point.

Are you going to involve staff with the new chat bots that are being created?

Answer: We have worked closely with staff throughout the development and testing of the Staff ‘AI Assistant’ chatbot, which answers questions related to social care practice and policies, using the guidance and documents published on Connect to Support’s Professional Zone. Their input was essential in helping us to understand what was working well and what we needed to improve during the early stages of development, so that the answers provided by the AI Assistant were informative and accurate. The feedback staff provided has helped us to develop the AI Assistant to the point where we will soon be able to launch it more widely in a ‘beta’ version. This means that it will have all its features but may still have some minor bugs, and we will be continuing to upgrade and improve the AI Assistant during this period. Launching as a ‘beta’ gives us the opportunity to enable staff to use the AI Assistant, while also welcoming further feedback on the relevance and usefulness of the answers it provides.

We will be notifying all staff when the ‘beta’ version of the AI Assistant is available for their use and feedback.

We want to improve our engagement with customers in the codesign of services. To make these improvements requires a budget to pay for travel and NMW(?) for ‘work’ that individuals contribute. Can a budget be allocated to fund it as the lack of resources is a potential barrier?

Answer: Adults’ Services has an agreed approach to offering payment to people who work collaboratively with us to shape services and support our improvement work and [guidance](#) has been published on the Professional Zone. Payment is offered at the

National Living Wage at an hourly rate, including any preparation time. The guidance sets out the situations where payment should be considered and how this should be managed. The guidance also sets out the process for paying expenses to cover costs people encounter in working with us, attending meetings or taking part in engagement activities such as focus groups.

We recognise the pressures on budgets, but in the first instance the service or team that is planning to involve people in their work, or running activities where expenses will need to be reimbursed is responsible for considering how it will manage its budget to pay for those, before the work is started.

Do you believe that the current change culture within Adults is where it needs to be and how are you planning to drive this in the future?

Answer: Ensuring we have a working environment that demonstrates our Council values and behaviours is integral to our Adults Workforce Development Plan and by being culturally competent we will embody anti-racist and anti discriminatory practice, promote a diverse and inclusive workforce that fosters human rights, equity, equality, diversity, and a belonging ethos. We want to ensure that we are learning and development focussed, to support the delivery of high quality and innovative social care practice and work collaboratively to optimise efficiency and effectiveness, trusting, respecting, and valuing the knowledge and skills that everyone brings, irrespective of their professional background. Please click on the link to our Adults Workforce Development Plan to see our planned actions and activities.

With the increase in demand and cost in ASC, do you see the soft touch approach to performance management as something that can continue or that needs to be reviewed?

Answer: Performance management is broader than individuals. When considering performance management, our overall performance of service is monitored through various metrics. Our improvement programme includes activity to ensure there are clear processes and methods to measure quality of our performance as a service and on individual pieces of work. This is to support continuous improvement of our service delivery.

At an individual level, performance management approach is not a matter of 'hard' or 'soft'. Performance management starts with quality 1-2-1 / supervision conversations to ensure we are clear on what is expected of us and the standards to which we work. It also includes checking in and ensuring we have the tools, skills and knowledge to undertake our roles. As part of the Human Resources and Organisational Development workstream within the improvement programme, we are in the process of planning an audit of 1-2-1 / supervision as a key component of performance and development. Where there is an individual need to support improvement in performance, this does take place.

When reviewing processes is the information and data you are provided from the 'coal face' constructive and objective? It can seem as if the info is sugar coated

or comes from nominated persons and doesn't always reflect the day to day experiences of the 'front line'.

Answer: We have been working hard to strengthen and extend our communication lines both to and from staff. Monthly drop-in sessions are available to all ASC staff to attend, which provides an opportunity to ask questions and give honest feedback on our improvement programme. Also, the Director holds frequent staff Q&A sessions which is a further opportunity to ask questions, provide ideas and exchange information in an informal and open forum. Alan's monthly newsletter often showcases the excellent work undertaken by staff both on the 'front line' and those in supportive or strategic roles to ensure that those examples of good practice and positive news are cascaded to all staff. Staff are able and invited to share their views on our improvement programme and wider service activity or ideas by contacting WorkingTogetherAS@westsussex.gov.uk, and feedback is routinely sought on our activities and processes in various ways such as surveys, the staff conferences and through team meetings. Staff should feel encouraged and empowered to share their experiences and ideas.

It seems that many people still use the word 'customer' to refer to people who use our services. Do we need to be clear on our language and move away from this transactional relationship the word suggests? What is the panel's preference for how we refer to our service users?

Answer: Our current use of the term 'customer' was based on a corporate decision and was also discussed with our long-standing Customer and Carer Group, who preferred the term to 'service users' or 'clients'. A benefit of the use of 'customer' is that it highlights the expectations that people rightly have of us in providing them with advice, support and services. This was one of the main reasons the Customer and Carer Group preferred the term. It is, however, important to recognise that we have a range of relationships with a diverse group of people including adults with social care needs, their families, support networks and wider communities. These are all different and they cannot easily be accommodated by a single phrase. We recognise that other terms may be more appropriate in some contexts but, whichever phrase is used, what is most important to us is the quality of those relationships.

Looking to improve quality of information on customer invoices? Our duty worker spends so much time each day trying to explain the invoice to a customer and not understanding themselves, as not clear, especially if credit included.

Answer: Invoices are constructed in a particular way so the format and information is consistent across the authority. The Operational Finance Team work with the Customer Experience Team to look at ways of improving the internal and external customer journey with the focus on inbound finance calls to the CarePoint 1 teams. One of the new developments deployed in February 2024 was the provision of an Invoice Explanation Template to assist colleagues in explaining an invoice to the customer.

What are you doing about parking at County Hall? Councillors have spaces that are hardly used. The inability to park is impacting work.

Answer: Following the Covid-19 pandemic, the existing parking policy was suspended and parking at County Hall has since continued to be available on a first come, first served basis, with the exception of spaces reserved for County Councillors, ELT and short-stay visitors. Facilities Management and Senior Managers are aware of the challenges presented by the parking situation at County Hall, and it is expected a revised parking policy will be created and implemented, in due course. Staff are encouraged to car share and use public transport where possible to travel to County Hall as this is also helpful in reducing our carbon emissions as an authority.

Will the cost of living/council tax/inflation increases be reflected in my pay? I am at the top of my grade.

Answer: A cost of living pay award is normally applied annually to salaries with effect from April. For employees on NJC grades, this is a nationally negotiated pay award and often for various reason the negotiations are not completed in time to apply the award in April. An update on the 2024/25 Pay Award was circulated in May - [Update on the 2024/25 Pay Award \(sharepoint.com\)](#) The Hay/SMG pay award is agreed locally and negotiations on these will not start until the NJC pay award has been agreed, as it is one of the elements that is used to inform the decision making that underpins the negotiation. In conclusion, there is always a cost of living award applied every year, for all employees, even those on the top of their grade. Unfortunately, due to the level of national negotiation, this is rarely implemented in April each year (for NJC, Hay & SMG), but once implemented, it will always be backdated to April.