

**REPORT OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER**

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**SUBJECT: LISTENING SERVICE**

On 13 January 2021 Councillor P Kidney put forward a notice of motion that the Authority consider 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.

Agreement was reached to develop the principles for a trial 'Listening Service', which would provide employees with a direct link to Committee Members; this it was suggested would become a sounding board for when staff felt unable to resolve their concerns through the normal Authority channels. The HR Manager was tasked with drawing up a Terms of Reference, setting out how the service would work in practice and to set up a Sub Group to agree the finer details of implementation.

The Terms of Reference were not adopted by the Sub Group, following Councillor Kidney's request for a less formal approach – this was due to concerns that it may put staff off utilising the service and become counter-productive to its introduction. It was agreed by the Sub Group that the Service be positioned with the Staff Representatives Group and Councillor Kidney subsequently attended the Reps meeting, where his ideas were met positively.

In an attempt to find a solution for its introduction and trial, Members are presented with the Terms of Reference as requested. However, Members are also presented with a Poster for communicating a less formal approach and a 'signposting' document which may help enable staff to draw a distinction between all the support mechanisms available to them. This document was drafted following a suggestion by the Staff Representatives Chair.

The Personnel Committee are asked to support Councillor P Kidney's request for a less formal approach to introducing the Listening Service.

**Recommendation: Members are asked to AGREE an approach for introducing the trial Listening Service.**

*(Further information is available from the Kelland Dickens, Human Resources Manager, on 01646 624825 – email [kellandd@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk](mailto:kellandd@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk))*

Draft Terms of Reference for consideration and discussion:

## Terms of Reference

### Listening Service

*Pilot Scheme starting 2021 and reviewed in December 2021*

#### 1. Why the Listening Service?

Giving staff a voice to Members (where an organisation sees its people not as the problem, rather as central to the solution, to be involved, listened to, and invited to contribute their experience, expertise and ideas) is a key facet of the Authority's Staff Engagement Strategy. This includes engagement with Members.

The Listening Service can also improve collaboration, flag issues or crises, and improve decision-making and innovation.

#### 2. Purpose

The Listening Service is there to ensure working for the Authority remains a positive experience for its staff.

It provides employees and volunteers (*herein, referred to collectively as staff*) an opportunity to voice their experiences of working for PCNPA, to Members.

The Service provides an alternative route of support to staff and is complimentary to those mechanisms already in place and described below; it is not intended to replace them.

#### 3. Membership

The Listening Service is provided, on a voluntary basis, by Members. The Service will be supported by three Members at any one time aiming for a balanced makeup that will provide

staff with a choice as to whom they wish to address their concerns.

Actual representation will be subject to agreement by the Personnel Committee.

#### 4. Fundamental principles

Members of the Listening Service will display active listening – having an open mind about what individuals have to say, accepting perception is as valid as reality but not accepting as fact what is said without challenge and evidence; allowing adequate space and time for individuals to feedback; not second-guessing issues or concerns; and being mindful of non-verbal signs.

Members will also help to create a safe space –a climate in which staff feel they can speak up and feel confident there will be no negative repercussions from doing so.

#### 5. Remit

The Service is not there to replace the role of the Line Manager or to replace the professional support provided through the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) (*currently provided by Carefirst*).

Nor will it replace a staff member's rights under the Authority's Whistleblowing or Grievance policies. Furthermore, it does not act to supplant the Authority's mechanisms to engage with its staff with a view to learn from and respond to concerns or opinions either individually, collectively through the Employee Opinion Survey, or through the Staff Representatives Group.

The remit of the Listening Service will be:

- To listen confidentially and with impartiality to concerns and opinions raised by staff, with a view to helping the staff member find their own solution; and

- To help direct the staff member to the best qualified person, resource or route to enable resolution of the problem.

The Listening Service's remit is not:

- To attempt to resolve operational day-to-day issues that are best resolved by the staff member's line manager or by the Authority's Leadership; nor
- To escalate issues to Committee before consideration by either the Authority's HR Manager or Chief Executive as to the most appropriate course of action.

#### 6. Confidentiality

Staff using the Listening Service can expect Members to keep discussions confidential in almost all cases. However, where a member of staff has raised a serious allegation of bullying or raised serious concerns (e.g. fraud, a serious breach of health and safety legislation or similar), the Member is obliged to ensure the concerns are raised through the relevant channels. Encouragement should be given to the staff member to raise their concerns personally – although a Member may be duty bound to raise these concerns themselves, if the staff member is not comfortable or prepared to do so.

#### 7. What is the extent of the Listening Service?

Generally, staff are free to voice any opinions or concerns they have about their employment with PCNPA. However, there are a few exceptions.

The Listening Service should not be used by staff as an opportunity to criticise fellow work colleagues or managers and it may be necessary for Members to challenge such negative behaviours.

However, allegations of bullying and/or harassment will be taken seriously and procedural advice provided by the Member.

Members of the Listening Service will make clear during any discussion that they are not in a position either to agree or disagree with any opinion or concern raised by a member of staff. Instead their role is to remain as an impartial sounding board that does not pass judgement.

The Listening Service is not a trained counselling line and will direct staff members to the independent EAP service where they believe this is more appropriate. Moreover, the Member will direct the individual to their Line Manager or Senior Manager if they feel an operational matter is best dealt with by the 'line'.

#### 8. Conflict of Interests

Members will be required to comply with the Authority's Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interests policies.

Members can, in some cases, be the last point of escalation within the Authority's Grievance, Disciplinary & Appeals procedures. This may compromise their ability to listen to a staff member, where the individual is the subject of an investigation or being managed as part of the Authority's Grievance or Disciplinary procedure.

In the event of such a situation arising, the Member should inform the Authority's Human Resources Manager immediately and will have to remove themselves from being involved in any formal investigation by the Authority in order not to compromise the member of staff, the Member or the Authority in any subsequent proceedings.

#### 9. The process of contacting Members

Members will decide how they can be contacted. This may be via work email or telephone. Private email addresses should ideally not be used by Members due to security of data and information.

10. Promotion of the Service

The Authority's Human Resources and Communications teams will assist Members in promoting the service through the Staff Newsletter, Staff Handbook to new members of staff and Noticeboard Posters.

DRAFT



# **Listening Service**

**Do you want to talk to someone?**

***Who is it for?***

*You and all PCNPA staff*

***Why?***

*You have work concerns.*

*You want further advice or support after speaking to your Line Manager.*

*You need an impartial 'sounding board' before raising a work concern formally.*

***When?***

*Before raising your concerns formally and after speaking to your Line Manager or HR.*

***How?***

Contact the following Member(s)

**Do you need some support, a listening ear, or just want to chat through a problem?**



## Staff Guidance – Where to seek support and advice depending on your issue?

What?	Why?
Line Manager	Your Line Manager plays a crucial role in supporting staff wellbeing and engagement. Where possible, workplace issues should be discussed with your Line Manager in the first instance.
Senior Manager	If your Line Manager is unable to resolve your concerns or your complaint is about your Line Manager, you should speak to a more Senior Manager in your area. Where possible, let your manager know you are doing this - if only out of courtesy
Human Resources	Human Resources is there to provide <u>impartial</u> advice in the following circumstances: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your concern or complaint is about your Line Manager or Senior Manager.</li> <li>• You want to know all the options available to you, to resolve your concerns.</li> <li>• You want your complaint to be resolved informally.</li> <li>• You need a 'sounding board' on 'how' to raise your concerns with your Line Manager or more formally.</li> <li>• You need advice on who to speak to externally about your problem, e.g. you have debts so would be advised to contact the Money Advisory Service (MAS).</li> </ul>
Grievance Procedure Policy	The Grievance Procedure is used as a more <u>formal</u> way to raise a complaint. It should be used if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You feel your concerns have not been addressed informally.</li> <li>• You do not want it dealt with informally.</li> <li>• It is a serious issue where informal resolution is not appropriate.</li> </ul> Issues that may give rise to a grievance include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Terms and conditions of employment</li> <li>• Health and Safety</li> <li>• Team conflict</li> <li>• Bullying, harassment or victimisation</li> <li>• Working environment</li> <li>• Organisational change</li> <li>• Discrimination</li> </ul>
Whistleblowing Policy	The Whistleblowing Policy is there to provide an avenue for <u>specific</u> and serious concerns at work. These relate to either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A criminal offence, e.g. fraud / corruption;</li> <li>• Serious health and safety breaches which are likely to cause danger to someone, e.g. failure to carry out risk assessments;</li> <li>• Risk or actual damage to the environment, e.g. inappropriate disposal of hazardous waste;</li> <li>• The Authority breaking the law;</li> <li>• Disclosures relating to miscarriages of justice;</li> <li>• You believe someone is covering up a wrong-doing, e.g. unauthorised use of public funds; or</li> <li>• Other unethical conduct, e.g. inappropriate receipt of gifts or hospitalities.</li> </ul>
Employee Assitance Programme (Care first)	Care first provides <b>TOTALLY INDEPENDENT</b> support to staff and their families, to provide advice on any practical issue that may be causing you stress or worry and help you feel more in control of a situation. All staff are eligible to use Care first by calling Freephone 08000 174319. You only have to tell them that you are part of the Park Authority. You <u>don't have to give them your name</u> . Nothing comes back to the Authority! Information and Advice Specialists are there to help employees find practical ways to deal with a range of problems. Specifically, but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Stress</b> – Personal or Work related</li> <li>• <b>Family and Personal</b> – Relationships, Divorce, Child Support, Domestic Violence, Childcare, Eldercare, Community Care</li> <li>• <b>Debt</b> – Credit, Debt, Loans, Consolidation</li> <li>• <b>Workplace</b> – Bullying, Harassment, Maternity Rights, Sickness, Health &amp; Safety at Work</li> </ul>
Counselling (Care first)	Care first's BACP accredited counsellors are available 24/7 to provide support with emotional issues either on the telephone or face-to-face. All staff and their families are eligible to use Care first by calling Freephone 08000 174319. You only have to tell them that you are part of the Park Authority. You <u>don't have to give them your name</u> . No information comes back to the Authority, making it truly independent.
Listening Service	The Listening Service is an informal arrangement where staff can phone a member of the Committee for further advice or support after speaking to their Line Manager or Human Resources. It is also there to provide an impartial 'sounding board' before raising a work concern formally.
Disciplinary Appeals and Grievance Appeals Procedure	The Authority's Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures both have a right of appeal. The appeals process should be used if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You have received a disciplinary sanction and feel it is too harsh or not appropriate or there is a flaw in the decision making; or</li> <li>• You raised a grievance and you still feel it has not been resolved satisfactorily.</li> </ul>

**Further advice on all the above can be sought from Human Resources**