



**PENINSULA**

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# Peninsula Face2Face Report

**Gemma Murphy**

**Subject: Culture Review**

**Employer Name: North Walsham Council**

**Log No: 9983**

**Date of Meeting: 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2025**

**Date of Report: 21<sup>st</sup> of March 2025**

# CASE REVIEW

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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1. The Employer has requested a Culture Review to understand the concerns being raised by their employees around working processes in the business and the proactive working relationship between staff and council members moving forwards.
2. North Walsham Council (The Employer) are a market town and civil parish in the county of Norfolk and is a council
3. Gemma Murphy, GMU offered all employees the opportunity to speak to GMU anonymously as well as complete an employee survey. GMU notes that whilst all staff currently working willingly took part in the survey, only 3 councillors and the Mayor took part. Over two thirds of the Counsellors declined to participate despite GMU being on site for two days and all Councillors been given the opportunity of over a week to respond via email after the onsite visit.
4. GMU notes that the comments raised by employees are considered throughout this report and full discussions have not been repeated here.
5. The role of the Peninsula Face2Face Consultant is to provide an impartial service. We will provide a report and recommendations on the evidence put forward. It is for the Employer then to decide whether or not they follow the recommendations made.
6. For clarification, the purpose of the involvement of a Peninsula Face2Face Consultant is not as a representative of the business. The Peninsula Face2Face Consultant is instructed by the business via Peninsula Face2Face to participate in a hearing and to write a report when the hearing has been concluded.
7. Whilst there is a commercial relationship between the Employer and Peninsula Face2Face in terms of the provision of a Human Resources function, nevertheless the Peninsula Face2Face Consultant is, at all times, acting impartially. The Peninsula Face2Face Consultant is not acting in a representative capacity on behalf of the Employer.
8. The role of the Peninsula Face2Face Consultant in the process is not to dictate what steps the business will take. The Consultant is not a decision-maker. Their role is to listen to the points made by an Employee (and their representative where applicable) and to consider the evidence provided, to analyse that material and then to make findings of fact based on that evidence, to provide an objective analysis of those facts and then make findings and recommendations to the Employer, it is for the Employer then to decide whether to adopt or reject those recommendations.
9. In the performance of the role, there is no improper influence of the Peninsula Face2Face Consultant by the Employer. In fact, there is no influence at all. The Consultant is at liberty to make their own findings and their own recommendations.
10. For clarity, it is not within the remit of the Face2Face consultant to investigate whether the evidence provided is genuine but to accept it in good faith, and where no evidence exists, to determine an outcome based on the 'Balance of Probabilities' supported by reasonable justification.

## FINDINGS

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11. The Findings segment of this report will be split into the subheadings utilised within the survey and additional concerns and celebrations from employee interviews will be discussed after those topics are addressed.
12. The Employee Survey received 9 responses from employees and was available for completion for a period of over 7 days, 2 onsite and the rest via email. The survey was responded to by 47% of employees, all 6 staff members responded but only 4 of the 11 councillors which was disappointing.
13. GMU will outline their findings below and offer recommendations for all points within the recommendations section of the report.
14. GMU notes that the findings will not provide a verbatim account of the dialogue between GMU and the employees.
15. GMU will explore the survey results alongside the interview comments from the employees.

### **About You**

16. North Walsham Council is made up of 8 staff members and 11 councillors. There are currently 5 vacancies on the council side and 2 of the staff members are on long term sick.
17. The Cultural Review was recommended after Face2Face supported with a situation concerning the clerk. There have been grievances raised by the 2 employees who are on long term sick and some of the councillors were involved in wanting the clerk to be suspended.
18. GMU notes that from the interviews the following statements were made:
  - There is a divide between the staff and the councillors – and a disrespect from some of the councillors towards the staff.
  - Some of the councillors are perceived as rude.
  - Councillors are not following the policies and procedures of their oath.
  - There is a blame culture.
  - The issue with the clerk has taken over the whole Council and it feels that since September there has been no other agenda taken seriously.
  - The clerk issue on the staff has impacted morale and standards of work.
  - Some of the staff were able to identify the values of the council but stated that this is not currently being shown by all members for varying reasons.

### **Company Values, Policies and Procedures**

19. GMU questioned all staff on what the values of the company were with examples being given as below:
  - Manage the Councils assets
  - Represent the town's population

- Promote the town
  - Work Cohesively together as a unity.
  - Leadership
  - Integrity
  - The Nolan Principle
  - The Civility of life pledge
  - Accountability
  - Selflessness
  - Doing the right thing
20. GMU notes that from the survey results only 28% of the team feel that these values are being upheld.

5. Do you feel the values are being followed by all managers?



21. GMU notes that some of the context surrounding this answer were as follows:
- *“In my experience as a local council they believe that they are complying with these principles The reality is that it does not always happen, but it is rarely recognised by the persons involved”*
  - *The attitude and behaviours of some of the councillors maybe a little outdated, misogynistic and just plain rude on how they talk to one another”*
  - *The run up to Xmas has been stressful being short of staff and having to pick up a role I don’t fully understand nor am I trained for”*
22. GMU asked the team about the processes and procedures the staff and councillors should participate in. It was unanimous that both sides felt that policy and process has not been followed of late, largely attributed to by the clerk incident.
23. GMU notes some of the context behind this response:
- *“The clerk is trying to instil new processes and principles but is being met with challenges and resentment from certain councillors.”*
  - *“Being new to the Council there is still a lot to learn but that has been clouded by recent activities.”*
  - *“There has been a constant power struggle since (the clerk) joined the business, in the office and in with the councillors. Ever change she has tried to instil is met to challenge.”*

24. GMU notes that the those of the team that have participated have a solid understanding of the correct values and behaviours of the business but the team as a whole are failing to act on these values, policies and procedures.

9. Do you feel that all Policies and Procedures are followed by Management?

● Yes	0
● No	9



10. Do you feel that all Policies and Procedures are followed by Employees?

● Yes	0
● No	9



### **Job Satisfaction**

25. GMU notes that there has been a culture of misunderstanding about the role of the councillors verses the role of the clerk. There are concerns that the councillors are interfering with elements of the job role that are the clerks domain.

26. Commentary provided by the team regarding this includes:

- *“There is a lack of awareness of what being a councillor involves by certain councillors, and this isn’t helping the culture.”*
- *“My impression on coming back to Council is that it way of operating has become very slack and this is reflected in critical audit reports.”*
- *“Some of the more long serving staff appear to be operating on their own terms and not really recognising that the Clerk is their manager”*
- *“It appears there are a lot of bridges that need to be rebuilt and trust to be regained between staff and councillors”*

27. GMU notes that Training was a key component in a lot of the feedback collected within the interviews regarding job satisfaction:

- *“Training needs to be compulsory for councillors including refresher to remind them of their oath and duties”*
- *“The lack of training despite having to pick up a new role has been overwhelming especially with the financial end of year approaching”*
- *“I think training is needed for all after this current incident”*
- *“Training is needed across the board”*

## Councillors

28. GMU notes that the behaviour of the Councillors was a main topic of discussion for most of the colleagues that participated in this survey .
29. GMU notes that 50% of the participants felt very uncomfortable raising concerns about Councillors behaviour in the workplace.

15. How comfortable do you feel in raising concerns about management behaviours in the workplace?

Very comfortable	3
Somewhat comfortable	1
Neither comfortable nor unco...	1
Somewhat uncomfortable	0
Very uncomfortable	4



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30. GMU found that the main concerns were the following:

- Trust has gone
  - Rude
  - Unhelpful
  - Misogynistic
  - Demeaning
  - Challenging
  - Potential breach of procedures by sharing private information after council meetings in public places eg pubs and outside council offices
  - Low engagement with staff members in office and grounds crew
  - Unapproachable
31. GMU asked how supported those that participated in the survey felt by the Councillors and the responses are shown below

25. How supported do you feel by management in your role?

Very supported	0
Supported	3
Somewhat Supported	4
Not supported	2



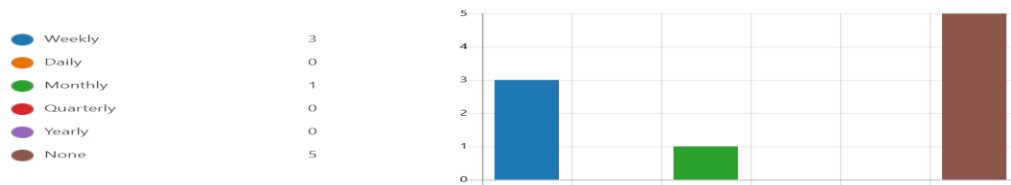
32. GMU notes that the 5 vacancies that are on the Council board are what those that participated in the survey believes contributes to the breakdown of working relationship between councillors and staff:

- *“We need to fill these vacancies to provide fresh thinking and a full rounded approach to decision making”*
- *“I believe that if we filled the vacancies on the council with fresh blood it would bring a new perspective onto the council”.*
- *“At the moment it feels vulnerable that there is a majority group that dominate all decisions within the Council and if my decision is not the same as there’s it never gets considered.”*
- *“The clerk issue has meant that some Council members have left the group as the scrutiny the Council has received from the press and public due to the way it has been handled by certain council members could have had a detrimental impact on their livelihoods outside of being a council member as the public are disgusted with their behaviour”*
- *We’ve seen councillors use their social media platforms to bad mouth the clerk and others have heard them in public places talking about private council matters - this is a direct breach of GDPR ”*
- *The Councillors do not respect the staff at this current time – one Councillor referred to me as the cleaner even though I had been a part of the team for over 6 months – that’s how often they come and visit us in the office”*

#### **Clerk and Colleagues**

33. GMU notes that the long-term sickness of 2 colleagues was the main point of discussion regarding Clerk and Colleagues.
34. GMU notes the main concerns regarding the Clerk and Colleagues were
  - Training needed
  - Distracted
  - Sickness and Absence not followed proper procedure
  - Mixed Contracts – Green Book verses Croner Handbook – need to be aligned.
  - Downtrodden
  - Under Appreciated by the Councillors
  - Doing roles that they need training on
  - Lack of Role Model
  - Health and Safety issues for Grounds crew
35. GMU asked how often the team felt recognised by Councillors and Management; over 50% said they received no recognition.

44. How frequently do you receive recognition from your manager?



36. Feedback regarding the Clerk and Colleagues were as follows:

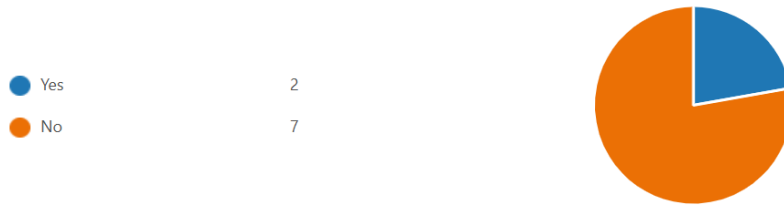
- *“Lone working in the office is something I don’t feel comfortable doing”*
- *The current event with the clerk has stopped engagement and satisfaction for doing a good job; the sooner we can move on from it then we can aim to do better with engaging the team to work together as a unit”*
- *Counsellors do not engage with the staff or listen to their views so a more proactive approach from them would benefit everyone trying to work together more harmoniously”*
- *There are no thank yous or well dones; We are no longer invited to key meetings such as Finance meetings even though we know the information to help them make the right choices – we used to be invited but no longer”*
- *“The process in regard to the grievances and the long-term sick cases needs to be addressed and proper training needs to happen so that the rest of the team are not impacted”*
- *As we go into the summer months, we are concerned about being a man down; our workload increases with the grass growing – is there going to be a solution [REDACTED]?”*
- *“We feel downtrodden and need support and guidance”*
- *I believe the staff feel under appreciated by some of the councillors and that they have lost their voice and ability to have their say”.*

### **Communication**

37. GMU notes that from the interviews of the people that participated in the survey that there is a need for improvement concerning communication across the board.
- Staff feel they are not listened to nor have their opinion valued
  - Councillors are seen to be breaching trust and privacy policies
  - There is a clear divide between staff and councillors
  - There are instances of miscommunication.



29. In your opinion, do you believe that management creates an environment where everyone feels included and valued?



38. GMU refers to some of the commentary provided by the team

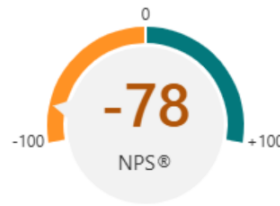
- *“We need to change our way of thinking and think how we can make all sides of the business feel valued and included”*
- *“This issue with the clerk needs to go away so she can go back to her job without worrying about the repercussions of making decisions in her remit that certain counsellors challenge at every opportunity”*
- *“Hopefully once everyone has the outcome of these grievances the clerk will be able to focus more on the job and some of the changes, she had started to implement such as training and development for her team”*
- *“There is a lot of work to do to get back to a good working establishment”*
- *“The Personnel Committee is not fit for purpose; we should adopt an Employment and Appeals Committee instead”*
- *“No one really knows what’s going on and Chinese rumours are rife with different toxic stories”*
- *“We need to stick to our roles and let those that understand the business do their jobs so that we can do the best for the community.”*

**Additional Points to Note**

39. GMU notes that Wellness was referred to throughout the participants responses.
40. When GMU visited in December 2024, it was recommended that a Wellness Ambassador was elected for the teams needs. There were two volunteers at the time, and they were voted in.
41. Feedback from the team is that since Dec is that morale is at an all-time low

51. In your opinion what is the overall Employee morale within the team like at this time?

Promoters	1
Passives	0
Detractors	8



42. Common concerns were as followed:

- *“Training and development across the board with Wellness being accessible to all the team”*
- *“A current Wellbeing structure for the whole team”*
- *“We appointed someone in December, but I think more training is needed”*
- *I run a well-being group for the community, and I would love to incorporate my knowledge and skills into supporting both the counsellors and the staff with their Wellbeing needs”*
- *“There is a Wellness Councillor, but he is unapproachable, hasn’t completed any training and never comes into the office. We have had to set up our own 1:1 sessions on a fortnightly basis to ensure that our wellbeing needs are being kept and supported by each other.”*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

43. The organisation should utilise the BrAlnbox feature to encourage line managers to increase their HR and Health and Safety knowledge. It should be noted that this is not to replace the advisory service but is implemented to offer quick answers to the HR and H&S queries that they may have. This could be found here

- Croner BrAlnbox - [Croner BrAlnbox](#)
- Bright BrAlnbox - [Bright BrAlnbox \(brighthr.com\)](#)

44. The organisation should utilise the GLU feature, which is available for free, as part of the e-learning offering available to all employees. This could be found at the following link - [GLU Elearning \(peninsulagrouplimited.com\)](#)

45. The Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) should be promoted to all employees. This can be communicated through emails, posters within the workplace, in meetings with employees and through proactive discussions with the wider team. Services which are available within the EAP include:

- Wellbeing services which cover physical, social, financial and mental wellbeing.
- Structured counselling with an appropriately appointed counsellor.
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.
- A mobile app which includes rewards, perks and discounts.
- A mobile app which offers advice for sleep, fitness, meditation and recipes to better improve an employee’s quality of life.

- Podcasts

Benefits of the EAP include:

- Reduction in Depression (up to 53%)
  - Reduction in workplace stress (up to 19%)
  - Reduction in absenteeism (up to 45%)
  - Reduction in anxiety (up to 56%)
46. Employee of the month to be introduced where employees nominate an individual for showcasing a behaviour linked to the company values.
  47. Employee Appreciation Day to be introduced bi-annually where employees add comments about their colleagues and why they appreciate them to the notice board to promote a positive working environment.
  48. GMU recognises that employees work in a high-pressured environment and therefore the implementation or further utilisation of a trained Mental Health First Aider is recommended.
  49. BrightHR to be utilised with employee contracts of employment, job descriptions and employee handbooks to also be added.
  50. All employees should have a monthly one to one with their line manager to discuss wellbeing, reduce the potential of grievances being placed and to build professional working relationships with the line manager, as well as direct reports.
  51. An Employee Engagement Committee is recommended to be implemented where Engagement Champions can collaborate, at all levels of the organisation, to better improve the employee experience and begin to build that trust between employer and employee. The Engagement Champions should also be included when discussing any potential employees benefits so that anything offered by the organisation is appropriate for the workforce. This will ensure that everybody in the department feels that they have a voice.
  52. Training should occur on the following topics:

**Absence Management:**

This course is designed to allow delegates to gain an effective understanding of the absence management procedures.

In addition, the training will allow delegates to gain an understanding of the role of a manager in the process, understand relevant legislation, enable delegates to be confident in conducting absence management meetings, recognise types of absence and learn effective ways to reduce staff absence by dealing with this in a fair and consistent manner.

**Assertiveness:**

The Assertiveness course is designed to assist employees to gain an effective understanding of what assertiveness is and how delegates can use this skill effectively.

The delegates will develop an understanding of when they can be assertive and what the differences are between assertive, aggressive and passive aggressive.

**Effective Communication:**

This course is designed to gain a thorough understanding of the communication cycle, and to learn new and effective communication techniques.

**Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:**

The Equality and Diversity course focuses on the fundamentals of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and the effects there can be in the workplace.

**HR Essentials for Line Managers:**

This course is designed to provide employers with information, and competencies which will help them understand procedures required to ensure that their organisation complies with all employment laws and regulations.

**Investigation, Disciplinary and Grievance:**

This course is designed to gain an effective understanding of how to conduct and manage a fair internal investigation from gathering and assessing evidence through to presenting findings, conducting disciplinary hearings, and managing grievances raised by employees.

**Managing Behaviour and Harassment Awareness in the Workplace**

This course focuses on the management of difficult workplace conflicts and will help managers to understand how to overcome the challenges involved with this. The course is suitable for both experienced managers and newly appointed managers and will assist your management team with some of the challenges your managers may be facing.

**Preventing Sexual Harassment: Training for Managers:**

This course is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of sexual harassment, in line with the recent legislative changes which took effect from 26th October 2024, which now places a mandatory duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment.

**Preventing Sexual Harassment: Training for Employees:**

This bespoke course is designed to deliver training to your workers on the new sexual harassment requirements.

**Time Management:**

Having a work-life balance is crucial in the workplace. Where time management is ineffective, it can affect employees in their family life, personal, and social life.

This course is designed to assist employees to gain an effective understanding of how delegates can manage their time effectively. The delegates understand how they spend their time currently, what barriers there are to effective time management, and to provide tips, tools and techniques for the future.

53. A You Said / We Did should be implemented following the survey and focus groups with answers to all questions / suggestions raised by the workforce. The survey results and current recommendations could ideally be used to do this so that employees feel they have a voice and that their views matter.

**Gemma Murphy**  
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