



NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

4 December 2020

Our Ref JSCC -16 December 2020
Contact. Committee Services
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To: The Chair and Members of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee of North Hertfordshire District Council

District Councillors Councillor Kay Tart (Chair), Councillor Kate Aspinwall (Vice-Chair), Councillor Terry Hone, Councillor Keith Hoskins MBE and Councillor Claire Strong

(Substitutes: Councillors Councillor David Barnard, Councillor Paul Clark, Councillor Sam Collins, Councillor Tony Hunter, Councillor Sue Ngwala and Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb)

UNISON Representatives: Debbie Ealand, Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews and Dee Levett.

Staff Consultation Forum Lea Ellis, Andrew Betts, Emma Jellis, Christina Corr, Representatives: Allison Fox, Matthew Hepburn and William Stafford.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

to be held as

A VIRTUAL MEETING

On

WEDNESDAY, 16TH DECEMBER, 2020 AT 10.00 AM

Yours sincerely,

Jeanette Thompson
Service Director – Legal and Community

****MEMBERS PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU DOWNLOAD ALL
AGENDAS AND REPORTS VIA THE MOD.GOV APPLICATION
ON YOUR TABLET BEFORE ATTENDING THE MEETING****

Agenda Part I

Item		Page
1.	WELCOME AND REMOTE/PARTLY REMOTE MEETINGS PROTOCOL SUMMARY Members are requested to ensure that they are familiar with the attached summary of the Remote/Partly Remote Meetings Protocol. The full Remote/Partly Remote Meetings Protocol has been published and is available here: https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/council-and-democracy/council-and-committee-meetings .	(Pages 5 - 6)
2.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	
3.	NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS Members should notify the Chair of other business which they wish to be discussed at the end of either Part I or Part II business set out in the agenda. They must state the circumstances which they consider justify the business being considered as a matter of urgency. The Chair will decide whether any item(s) raised will be considered.	
4.	CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS Members are reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Declarable Interest and are required to notify the Chair of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item. Members declaring a Declarable Interest, wishing to exercise a 'Councillor Speaking Right', must declare this at the same time as the interest, move to the public area before speaking to the item and then must leave the room before the debate and vote.	
5.	STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM To receive the Minutes from the Staff Consultation Forum Meetings held in October 2020 and November 2020.	(Pages 7 - 14)
6.	HUMAN RESOURCES - INFORMATION NOTE INFORMATION NOTE OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES SERVICES MANAGER To update the Joint Staff Consultative Committee on the progress made in the last quarter completing HR work and projects as well as our work supporting the people issues during the Coronavirus pandemic, lockdown and ongoing restrictions.	(Pages 15 - 22)
7.	APPRENTICESHIPS UPDATE To receive an update on Apprenticeships within NHDC.	(Pages 23 - 24)

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| 8. | DISCUSSION PAPER: CARERS AT WORK
To receive a discussion paper on wellbeing for Carers at work. | (Pages
25 - 26) |
| 9. | FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS
To consider the subjects for debate at future meetings of the Committee. | (Pages
27 - 28) |

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REMOTE/PARTLY REMOTE MEETINGS PROTOCOL SUMMARY

A protocol regarding remote meetings has been devised as a result of The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 No.392 ('the Regulations') to provide guidance for the conduct of any remote meeting of the Council, and its various Committees and Sub-Committees, held under the provisions of the Regulations and subsequent changes to the Constitution.

The full Remote / Partly Remote Meetings Protocol has been published and is available to view on the Council's website via the following link: <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/council-and-democracy/council-and-committee-meetings>

The Council's adopted Constitution will continue to apply to meetings of the Council and its various Committees and Sub-Committees. Where there is a conflict between the protocol and Constitution the Constitution takes precedence.

The protocol applies to this meeting. It outlines processes for conducting remote meetings. Some key points are highlighted here for guidance:

- Prior to the start of a meeting the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer/Manager ('The Officer') will confirm the meeting is being streamed live. They will confirm that they can see and hear all participating Members, Officers and/or members of the public at the start or upon reconvening a meeting.
- Any person attending the meeting remotely should join no later than 15 minutes prior to allow for technical checks. They should ensure that their name on screen appears in the agreed format, as indicated in the Protocol. They should mute their microphone when not speaking. Their background should be nondescript or virtual/blurred if possible. Headsets are recommended to reduce audio feedback.
- Remember to stay in view of the camera. While on camera everything you do is visible; please observe as far as possible the etiquette you would as if attending a meeting in person.
- Be careful to prevent exempt or confidential papers being seen within the video-feed. When a meeting is in private session there should be only those entitled to be present in the room. The live stream will continue with a holding card displayed.
- If a Member wishes to speak, they should use the raise hand function. Please wait to be invited by the Chair to address the meeting. The normal procedure rules with respect to debate and speaking times will apply as per the Constitution.
- If a Member has declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest and is required to leave the meeting during the consideration of an item, they will be placed in the waiting room. It is the responsibility of the Member in question to remind the Chair at the start of such item. The Officer will remind the Chair to return the Member as appropriate.
- Members will need to use the tools in the "Participants" function to vote: using a green tick to indicate 'for', a red cross to indicate 'against', or the "raise hand" tool to indicate an abstention. Where a Member has had to dial into the meeting by telephone, the Chair will ask for verbal confirmation as to how they wish to vote. Leave the vote in situ until told otherwise by either the Chair or Officer.
- The Officer will clearly state the result of the vote and the Chair will then move on.
- Details of how Members voted will not be kept or minuted unless a Recorded Vote is requested or an individual requests that their vote be recorded, although voting may be seen and/or heard on the video recording.
- If there are Part 2 (confidential) items Members will be invited to join a breakout room for these items. You must accept this invitation.
- Once Part 2 (confidential) discussions have concluded Members will need to leave the breakout room. Please do not leave the meeting.

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Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

07 October 2020



Present: Dee Levett (DL), Christina Corr (CC), Ian Couper (IC), Vic Godfrey (VG), Emma Jellis (EJ), Jo Keshishian (JK), Lea Ellis (LE), Caitlin Bruce (CB – notes)

Circulation: Global

1. Apologies

Anthony Roche, Andrew Betts

Due to a regular Chief Executives/ Managing Directors meeting in relation to Covid-19, Anthony has not been able to attend for a number of months. He should be generally able to attend if the start time is moved to 2pm. All agreed to move the start time on a trial basis.

2. Matters Arising

A question arose around the IT response in the previous minutes – Staff receive a text if there is an IT issue, so can IT use the numbers they have to call back staff? This raised a data protection issue in that the phone numbers provided by staff which are held in a central database can only be used for that purpose only. A limited amount of CSC staff have access to add or amend phone numbers and send out messages when required. The majority of text alerts regarding I.T faults come from IT Staff. IT encourage staff to leave a contactable number which they can be reached on when logging an IT support call and if the call is being made by a colleague please ensure you leave a contact number for the person with the issue.

The Intercom doorbell is now in place at the district council offices.

3. Business Services Update

A reminder for staff to contact Property Services if they have any issues in the building.

Question: How do staff book time in the office?

The response was if you are booking a short period of time this should be done through the booking system, if it was a longer amount of time (full days etc) then staff should contact their Service Director to get this authorised.

4. IT Update

Question: Will staff be supplied with screens with a camera going forward?

VG replied that the idea of issuing of staff with laptops was currently being looked at and would be subject to Member approval.

IT are still getting requests for laptops/tablets/pcs and are reluctant to purchase more tablets in case the plan to supply home-working staff with laptops goes ahead.

All mailboxes have been migrated over to the Cloud, next all H:drives will be moved over. This will allow access to emails and files without going through Blackberry work.

Softphone apps are currently being investigated for the regular system and the careline system.

There is a new contract for wifi at the district council offices, installations are about to start, this will be faster 5G wifi.

There was a brief outage of 2G systems for NHDC issued mobile phone users, this has since been fixed.

The citizens and members portals are being worked on. The members portal will allow members to report issues such as fly tipping and graffiti in their constituency while the citizens portal will allow them to do the same as well as pay for their council tax and report missed bin collections and other functions.

FOI and Data Protection requests are currently coming in at a high rate.

The Information and Asset Officer post as well as the apprentice post within IT have been filled.

5. NHDC Update

The next Shaping Our Future meeting will be held on 20 October, the SCF representative will be Lea Ellis. This meeting will look at the feedback of the staff survey and the equality and diversity group as well as addressing the stated outcomes of the Terms of Reference of said group.

The next Staff Briefing is on 5th November.

The staff survey responses have been compiled and IC is currently looking at how this should be presented to staff.

There was a very good response to our apprentice adverts which went out after the A-Level results were released. The process included a 2 stage interview and all 3 job offers have now gone out.

Question: Has the recruitment process been updated in line with actions from the Gender Pay Gap group – such as unconscious bias training, and use of new software to checks job adverts and remove “masculine” words?

JK confirmed that these are in place. In terms of measuring the outcome, we review equalities data (on all protected characteristics) for job applicants as well as current employees, and we can review these when they are published at the end of the year.

The holiday flex scheme had 6 applicants, this was lower than anticipated but is likely due to uncertain times and the current situation.

6. Employee Queries

There had been no queries raised by members of staff. A discussion took place about the SCF: do staff understand its purpose or even know of its existence?

It was noted we were a member short. LE suggested a publicity drive for the group and offered to approach new potential members.

JK agreed to contact Comms to get some publicity done in Insight.

Chair for next meeting – Andrew Betts

Have something to say?

If you have an issue you think should be brought to the attention of the SCF, please contact any SCF representative via phone, email or in person. They will raise your issue at the next meeting. You will not be identified unless you want to be.

Issues relating to property e.g. broken lift, non-flushing toilets, etc. must always be reported to Property Services in the first instance: propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk

Alternatively you can send any issues to the SCF inbox - SCF@north-herts.gov.uk

Representatives (and extension):

Lea Ellis #4830 - Community Engagement team based on Floor 3

Emma Jellis #4312 - MSU team based on Floor 4

Allison Fox #4203 - Technical Support Officer based on Floor 3

Christina Corr #4325 - Senior Technical Officer R&B team based on Floor 5

Andrew Betts #4282 - Contracts Officer (Waste Management based at Buntingford)

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Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

04 November 2020



Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**), Dee Levett (**DL**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Ian Couper (**IC**), Vic Godfrey (**VG**), Emma Jellis (**EJ**), Laura Bignell (**LB**), Lea Ellis (**LE**), Andrew Betts (**AB**), Debbie Hiscock (**DH**), Antonella De Maria (**AD**), Chloe Hipwood (**CH**), Caitlin Bruce (**CB** – notes)

Circulation: Global

1. Apologies

Jo Keshishian

2. Matters Arising

None discussed.

3. MSU (Management Support Unit) Restructure

AD: A new Grade 5 role is being created; this is due to the fact that the tasks in this role have moved away from the generic Grade 4 job description. Within the Careline administration some tasks cannot be considered Grade 4 tasks. This restructure will not have any impact on existing posts in the MSU. The role was job compared to the current Grade 4 job description but was not a match. The consultation began on 28th October and will end on 11th November.

There have been no queries so far.

4. Waste Restructure

CH: The restructure has been proposed to ensure that both North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) and East Hertfordshire District Council (EHC) have an effective and efficient client team to manage the joint Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Contract. Previously there had been difficulty recruiting to posts and filling the technical skills gaps within the existing roles. It is expected that the new posts will provide career development opportunities within the team and organisation to help ensure staff retention within NHDC. The aim is to move the service forward and expand on use of Whitespace and analytics, for data lead service. As a result of proposed reduction in hours the two Service Development and Support Managers are at risk of redundancy.

Question: How do the contract officers feel about the proposal?

CH: There have been no responses yet.

AB: The team is currently without a Contracts Officer which has put a greater workload on remaining staff. It is hoped the new plans will give a more focused approach to the work.

5. Building Services Update

There was some concern over the number of people on the 4th floor on a Thursday at the District Council Offices – everyone in the offices has been observing social distancing.

6. IT Update

A reminder to staff to be vigilant when opening links and releasing spam emails – there was recently a cyber-attack on Hackney council.

The Information at Work update has been delayed to 06/12 as it is currently unstable.

Emails are now in the Cloud – if you would like to be able to access your emails from your personal device please contact the IT helpdesk.

The helpdesk continues to be very busy – **if you are able to log your issue on the IT helpdesk as opposed to contacting the employees directly please do** as this helps the service run more smoothly.

There is a new IT apprentice starting on 12/11.

7. NHDC Update

A new national lockdown has been announced from 05/11 – 02/12, the tier that we were in when we entered the lockdown may not necessarily be the same tier we will be in when we come out.

Hitchin Town Hall and Museum will be closing but the café will remain open for takeaway orders.

There may be the need to redeploy some of the staff who have volunteered to be redeployed to help services that are under pressure.
Environmental Health are under pressure at the moment and the EU transition could bring changes in food safety laws.

Homeworking is to continue into the new year and will continue to be monitored.

The Local Government reorganisation has been put on pause for now.

Howard Crompton will be discussing the transformation programme at the staff briefing (05/11).

Question: What are the current financial constraints of the council?

Answer: We currently have reserves which are being used – we are also getting some funding from Central Government. There is some financial pressure, but we are able to keep going.

Staff survey results will be covered in the staff briefing.

Please consider whether you need to be in the District Council offices during the second lockdown.

8. Joint Staff Consultation Committee (JSCC)

Question: Is the JSCC still beneficial as what is covered during the meetings is covered through various other forums.

The JSCC is considered useful for members.

IC to speak to JK about the need for JSCC and SCF

The next SCF member for the JSCC needs to be decided

9. Employee Questions

Question: Will staff be supplied with screens with a camera going forward for zoom/ teams meetings?

VG replied that the idea of issuing of staff with laptops was currently being looked at and would be subject to Member approval.

Question: Can there be more updates from senior management?

AR replied that this would be discussed in the staff briefing.

Question: Will the staff survey results still be relevant given the survey was carried out a few months ago now?

AR responded that there would be a re-run of the survey to gather more up to date feedback.

Question: How does booking time over Christmas work and what time will staff finish on Christmas Eve?

Answer: The stat days have been booked automatically by iTrent and the office will now be closed on Christmas Eve (announced in staff briefing). Instructions on how employees should book this day off will be sent out by JK.

Question: Have HR noticed an increase in stress related absence during this period?

LB answered that they have not.

Chair for next meeting – Dee Levett

Have something to say?

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JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

16 December 2020

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT	AGENDA ITEM No.
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TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE: HR UPDATE
INFORMATION NOTE OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES SERVICES MANAGER

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 To update the Joint Staff Consultative Committee on the progress made in the last quarter completing HR work and projects as well as our work supporting the people issues during the Coronavirus pandemic, lockdown and ongoing restrictions.

2. STEPS TO DATE

- 2.1 The HR Update Information Note contains the 2020/21 HR Service Work Plan.

3. INFORMATION TO NOTE

- 3.1 The terms of reference for the Joint Staff Consultative Committee are to be the corporate interface with employees on major Human Resources issues and to be the Strategic HR Forum for NHDC Members. HR projects often require support from other support services such as IT, Finance, Legal Services and others.

3.2 People Strategy

The coronavirus situation continues to have a big impact on the work of HR and has changed all the normal forward planning and forecasting on the economy, labour, market, pay and pensions etc. In the current circumstances we have postponed the plan for a new People Strategy for 2020 – 2026 and as an alternative a People Recovery plan is being developed. This will focus on how HR processes will adapt and improve as a result of, and learning from, the Covid-19 pandemic.

Councils across Hertfordshire and the East of England region meet regularly in virtual meetings to share knowledge and experience of employment matters, and in particular to discuss issues and share ideas on current developments relating to the ongoing restrictions and employment aspects of the pandemic.

3.3 Recruitment

- 3.3.1 With the economic downturn, we have seen a drop in staff leaving the council and as a result there has been a reduction in the number of vacancies. January – November 2020 there were only 33 vacancies advertised (compared to 93 in 2019 and 68 in the same period in 2018). These include posts advertised from restructures and some internal job moves as well as external recruitment.

HR have ensured that all communication relating to advertising, interviews, offers of employment and new starter information has been updated to reflect the changes to a remote recruitment process. We have also used to opportunity to make amendments

to our recruitment tool to recognise the diverse make up of society and allow us to gain more of an insight into where candidates are first viewing our adverts.

HR have supported managers with recruitment throughout this year to ensure the new ways of working have not hindered the usual procedures. Short-listing has been done remotely and all interviews and assessments have been carried out using Zoom. The number of applications received for recent adverts has been good and we have recently appointed applicants in Electoral Services, Waste, Revenues & Benefits as well as three new apprentices. We have also recently appointed applicants into two legal posts which in the past have been difficult to recruit to.

3.3.2 Resourcing for Vaccination Pods

Hertfordshire County Council have set up a weekly meeting for HR Managers following a call to support the NHS in resourcing the Vaccination Pods being set up around the county. NHDC along with other councils will be seeking staff volunteers to work extra hours in local vaccination pods (non-clinical support roles) covering opening hours – 12 hours per day, 7 days per week.

3.4 Apprentices

There is a separate Apprentices Information Note which provides an update on our apprenticeship scheme.

3.5 Pay

3.5.1 The Pay Policy Statement for 2020/2021 went to full Council in February and has since been updated following the recent senior managers changes and pay increases announced in August. The in-year update has been uploaded to the council website.

3.5.2 The Shared Internal Audit Services are carrying out the annual payroll audit, with particular focus on the new payroll contract to ensure the appropriate controls and measures are in place. The outcome and final report are expected in December.

3.5.3 £95K Exit Payment cap

These regulations which were first proposed in 2016 (and were subsequently delayed on several occasions) have now been approved with legislation coming into effect on 4th November 2020. The timing and impact on local councils has been unfortunate as the new legislation currently conflicts with existing regulations within the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). The cap limits the amount that employers can spend on pension strained costs for long serving employees who are made redundant aged over 55 whereas the pension regulations require employers to offer an immediate, unreduced pension by full payment of the strained costs. Amended pension regulations are expected from LGPS in the new year leaving uncertainty for those councils who are currently in discussions with staff at risk of redundancy. We are currently trying to avoid restructures that include Officers that may be affected by Exit Payment Cap, as neither the Council or the individual would be able to fully understand the implications. The legislation is also subject to legal challenge.

3.6 Employee Benefits

- 3.6.1 **HolidayFlex scheme:** This scheme which allows staff to purchase additional annual leave via salary sacrifice was successfully trialled in August and following a recent review, approval has been given to offer this as a permanent staff benefit. The initial uptake of the scheme has been low, with only 7 employees applying to purchase additional annual leave, however this was to be expected given the lockdown and travel restrictions we have all experienced this year. The level of applications received in the pilot therefore give a poor indication of the true level of demand for an additional annual leave purchase scheme amongst staff and it is hoped there will be more interest in the scheme next year. Despite receiving only 7 applications, salary savings of £3,904 have been made with an overall saving to the council from the August pilot (after set-up costs) of £2,814.

In summary, 7 employees (4 male and 3 female) applied for the scheme and all applications were approved by their line managers. The applications came from 6 full time members of staff and 1 part time member of staff. All applied for the maximum amount of leave available under the scheme, 1 week's working hours. 4 of the applications came from the Customer Services Centre, 1 from Electoral Services and 2 from Resources. The applicants came from grades 3, 4, 5 and 14.

- 3.6.2 **Bikes for Work Scheme:** This scheme was re-introduced to the Council after a gap of some years and has seen a good level of interest with a total of 6 employees joining over the last 12 months. With the vast majority of NHDC staff working remotely since March 2020 however we have closed the window to new applications and will review the situation early next year, when we might be better able to predict what the year holds for us. We remain committed to allowing staff access to this staff benefit and see it as a valuable addition to our green credentials, and therefore it is anticipated that the scheme will be part of our benefits offering again from April 2021.
- 3.6.3 **Flu Vaccinations:** The seasonal flu vaccination programme went ahead in a slightly different format this year. Due to Covid-19 lockdown no office-based clinics were held. Online Boots vouchers were issued to staff via our Occupational Health provider Optima Health. Staff received their vouchers via email and then booked their own appointments at a local Boots pharmacy. This year the government announced that they would extend free vaccinations for the first time to the 54 – 64 age group, with the aim to reduce pressure on the NHS from flu admissions. However, an NHS source advised us that this age group are unlikely to be offered the vaccination until December due to high numbers, it was agreed to cover this group as in previous years. A total of 142 staff requested vouchers with an increased take-up of nearly 50% on previous years.

3.7 Mental Health and Wellbeing

- 3.7.1 In a follow-up to the staff welfare calls which took place in April and May, the HR Team have been in contact with all employees individually by email. The intention was to ensure that all individuals felt supported but in particular to reach out to those who needed it most and encourage them to make direct contact with HR or to make use of other support channels including managers and colleagues. In the email an update was provided on the support and resources available to staff including links to relevant websites. A separate email tailored for managers was also sent with tips on how managers can actively support their teams whilst working remotely, as well as encouraging regular contact and highlighting the need for us all to look out for one another.

The “check-in” emails have been welcomed by staff and feedback has been very positive indicating that staff appreciate the contact with HR and the support available. One of the feedback emails has been published in Insight (in the Compliments section).

- 3.7.2 HR were approached to provide some specific support to individuals in one service team who have been extremely busy due to a mix of a high volume of additional work and some resourcing issues. Each member of staff has had a personal welfare call from one of the HR team, and the Service Director has been provided with an update and further offer of support.
- 3.7.3 The benefits of Workplace Wellness, the council’s confidential employee advice service has been promoted through the check-in emails to staff and managers, as well as in a recent article in the monthly Insight e-newsletter. Feedback from Workplace Wellness is limited to high level usage figures, but the most recent report shows an increase in the volume of calls to the helpline as well as numbers accessing their online resources.
- 3.7.4 Wednesday 25th November was White Ribbon Day in the UK which is a campaign that aims to prevent violence towards women. This campaign has been highlighted to staff via the intranet with links to relevant external support and also to our own dedicated intranet page for staff who may be experiencing domestic abuse.

3.8 Equality and Diversity

Work is due to commence shortly on the Equal Pay Review, and a report from this review will be discussed at the March JSCC along with our annual analysis of equalities data which will be published at the end of January 2021.

At the last meeting of the gender pay gap group it was decided that the group would be expanded to widen the focus on all aspects of diversity and inclusion. The terms of reference of the new Inclusion Group have been drafted and the first meeting will take place in December. The primary purpose of the group will be to drive the equality and diversity agenda forward and its recommendations and actions are expected to feed into the Shaping our Future programme.

3.9 Shaping Our Future

The Council’s Shaping Our Future organisational development programme is now underway with two meetings of the steering group having taken place involving staff and Members. Some of these staff have specific roles relevant to the programme and others are intended to add diversity to the discussions.

A total of eight virtual sessions to explain and discuss Shaping our Future have been held with staff and managers which have proved to be popular with positive and useful feedback received.

A series of staff development workshops focusing on personal skills such as time management, career planning, confidence and personal awareness have been arranged for December. These are fully booked already with further sessions planned in the new year.

3.10 Learning & Employee Engagement

3.10.1 **Staff communication:** The team have been working hard to keep staff informed on a variety of topics which help to support wellbeing including: building resilience, personal organisation, remaining in control, relaxation, managing positivity, getting and staying healthy as well as links to dedicated Covid-19 support eLearning module (the lockdown toolkit)

3.10.2 The Leadership Team are introducing a monthly half day dedicated to personal and professional development for all staff starting in January. The first session will be focussed on wellbeing. The Learning & Employee Engagement team will signpost staff to various resources that are available, provide guidance for Managers to run team activities and will also be delivering short workshops.

3.10.3 **Managing a Remote Workforce:** In November a new on-line workshop was held called Managing Homeworking which focussed on achieving the balance between performance and wellbeing. The workshop allowed managers to consider their approach and style, communication, performance levels and how to support the wellbeing of staff.

In addition to the check-in emails sent to managers in October, support materials have been provided to managers as part of the lock down 'toolkit' as well as some individual coaching and guidance.

All management training activity run recently or planned will have content added to reflect the challenges and opportunities of managing a remote workforce.

3.10.4 A staff survey was undertaken at the end of the summer to help us understand views of homeworking during the lockdown and considerations for the future. Feedback was also sought on the support provided to staff during the pandemic. The results and general themes from the survey were discussed at a staff briefing in early November, where we encouraged further ideas to be shared. Results of the initial survey along with feedback from Service Directors has allowed us to identify service areas that may require further support and also to amend our current workshops to align with the new way of working. We intend to repeat the survey very soon to ensure we continue to understand the needs of staff.

3.11 Absence

3.11.1 Absence figures for the rolling 12-month period are shown in Table 1 as absence days lost per employee. The short-term absence target is 3.5 days per year, and we are currently under target with 2.95 days.

Table 1

Rolling 12 months	Absence days lost per employee		
	Total	Long-term	Short-term
Nov-19	0.42	0.14	0.28
Dec-19	0.33	0.06	0.27
Jan-20	0.40	0.05	0.35
Feb-20	0.46	0.09	0.37
Mar-20	0.37	0.12	0.25

Apr-20	0.19	0.10	0.09
May-20	0.26	0.10	0.16
Jun-20	0.44	0.14	0.30
Jul-20	0.67	0.42	0.25
Aug-20	0.50	0.25	0.25
Sep-20	0.54	0.31	0.23
Oct-20	0.49	0.35	0.14
Total	5.08	2.13	2.95

311.2 Short-term absence has reduced since lockdown started with April – October 2020 over 0.5 days lower than the same period in 2019. This will in part be due to almost all staff working from home. We know that home-working reduces some minor absences as staff who are not feeling 100% may feel more inclined to continue to work in their home without having to commute to the office. In addition, the high level of homeworking and lower levels of social contact has probably helped by reducing the number of bugs and infections being passed between colleagues.

3.11.3 Long-term absence has increased this year and the team are actively working with managers on the current cases and involving support from Occupational Health where appropriate. 6 out of a total of 15 cases since April involve stress or mental health issues.

3.11.4 Since March we have had 10 staff absent from work due to either suspected or diagnosed COVID-19 which has accounted for a total of 37 days lost. Again, the ability to work from home has enabled some staff to continue to work with mild symptoms so the true number may be slightly higher. It is interesting to note that we only had 3 cases reported up to August, and 7 cases since September including 4 in November reflecting the rise in cases both locally and nationally.

3.12 Leavers and Turnover

Year (1 April – 31 March)	
2013/14	10.1%
2014/15	12.6%
2015/16	15.1%
2016/17	9.7%
2017/18	13.0%
2018/19	12.8%
2019/20	10.7%

Turnover figures exclude redundancies, retirement, apprenticeships and fixed term contracts).

Since the start of the April 2020 we have seen a drop in the number of staff leavers reflecting the current economic downturn and more limited employment opportunities available. There have been 19 leavers in the period April – November 2020 compared to 32 leavers in the same period in 2019.

4.0 NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 Progress against the HR Service plan, and work on the Covid 19 recovery as well as work on Shaping our Future will be reported to all quarterly JSCC Meetings.

5.0 CONTACT OFFICERS

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JSCC Apprentice update: December 2020

We have been running our apprenticeship programme since 2013, with funding for approximately 8 apprenticeships per year which are shared across a variety of service areas. Expression of interest forms are completed by service areas and then collated and presented to the Leadership Team. Apprentice posts are allocated to service areas on a priority basis.

The Apprenticeship Levy was introduced in April 2017, and this levy applies to all employers with an annual pay bill of £3,000,000 or more, who must pay 0.5% of their pay bill. Employers may then access this money through the Digital Apprenticeship Service to pay for apprenticeship training from a selection of training providers.

Entry Level Apprenticeships

The majority of our apprentices are recruited into entry level apprenticeships. The payment of fees for training and education are offset against the apprenticeship levy. These apprenticeship contracts are fixed for 18 months and although there is no guarantee of permanent employment at the end, apprentices are encouraged to apply for suitable vacancies and many stay with us after they complete their apprenticeships. Nonetheless the scheme provides an excellent introduction into employment for young people as well as the opportunity to study and achieve a Level 3 qualification e.g. Business Administration, Customer Services, or Events Apprenticeship (Hitchin Town Hall only).

The majority of NHDC apprentices are paid at Grade 1 - £9.34 per hour which is well above the minimum apprentice rate of £4.15 and also above the National Living Wage of £8.72. Higher level apprenticeships paid at Grade 3 - £11.00 per hour have been trialled in HR with a Level 5 qualification in Human Resource Management.

The following service areas currently have apprentices:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| - Customer Services | - Democratic Services |
| - Hitchin Town Hall | - IT |
| - Management Support Unit | - Community Engagement and Policy |
| - Property Services | - Community Protection and Licensing (shared) |

Recent graduates from the new apprenticeship scheme are now employed in the following roles:

- Revenues Officer
- Information and Asset Officer
- Assistant HR Business Partner
- HR Projects and Systems Officer

The assessment process is very different under the new scheme and consists of an End Point Assessment (usually an on-line exam) and a Professional Discussion, which is a one to one interview to discuss the portfolio evidence submitted throughout the Apprenticeship.

In addition to those listed above, we have 12 other current employees who are graduates of the apprenticeship scheme working in a range of service areas including IT, Customer Services, Management Support Unit, Environmental Health, Planning Compliance, and Active Communities. Other apprentices have opted to stay on with NHDC following the completion of their apprenticeship either in temporary or permanent roles but have since left to further their careers.

Training for Existing Staff

The Apprenticeship Levy can also be used to fund Apprenticeship qualifications for existing members of staff – providing an alternative way to achieve a professional qualification – this was recently trialled by a member of staff who completed the Level 3 Team Leader qualification and we have another member of staff who has recently started a professional qualification as a Revenues and Welfare Benefits Practitioner (Level 4).

Careers Fairs

We support a number of annual school careers fairs with members of the HR team attending along with current NHDC apprentices to promote the apprenticeship scheme and to raise awareness of the Council as a local employer.

Feedback

To celebrate National Apprenticeship week earlier in the year, we sought feedback from former apprentices:

I'm extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to be an apprentice in Environmental Health. I learnt so much over that year and made great connections with different teams. This then enabled me to move over to another team and learn even more skills. After I returned from travelling, I was lucky enough to start a temporary position back in Environmental Health. This then resulted in a permanent position which I love. Being an apprentice gave me a lot more confidence, better people skills and knowledge of Environmental Health. I saw a good opportunity and I most definitely took it. If it wasn't for my apprenticeship, I wouldn't be doing what I do today!

Natalie, Environmental Health Technical Officer

My first reaction and the reason behind my becoming an Apprentice was to get a way into working at the council, and with a lack of office experience it seemed like a sensible way in. I am very grateful for the apprenticeship for getting me the job, for giving me the opportunity to work in 2 departments, for getting to meet a group of apprentices in the same boat to share good things and frustrations with. It gave me a way to show off the skills I already had without having the necessary "Paper evidence" (qualifications etc.) But other than just an "in", it also gave me the opportunity to display why I would be worth keeping on afterwards.

I also enjoyed the support I got during the apprenticeship from management and HR, that you may not get as much of just coming into a regular role.

Matt, LLPG & GIS Officer

I have now been at NHDC for nearly 7 years and started as an apprentice. I joined with the idea of improving my office and PC experience and skills in a professional environment. NHDC has allowed me to develop and evolve through several roles to now be a Technical Development Officer which I would not have been able to do without the apprenticeship scheme.

Peter, Technical Development Officer

The apprenticeship at NHDC has helped me to learn new skills, develop skills I already have and use programs I have never used before. I found the course very useful and when I finished my apprenticeship, there was a job vacancy that I applied for and was offered that enabled me to continue working at NHDC and use the knowledge I had gained in my new role. I have been at NHDC for 5 years now.

Emma, MSU Admin Support Officer

Strategic Discussion Topic JSCC December 2020 Carers at Work

This topic is never far from the top of the workplace agenda but has been increasingly in the spotlight through 2020 as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequent restrictions.

Who is a 'carer'?

We traditionally think of carers as those who are, or expect to be, responsible for a child under 18 but an employee can also be a carer if they are caring for a partner, relative or friend. A growing number of people are defined as "sandwich" carers, combining care for an older person alongside childcare responsibilities.

The facts¹

- There are currently an estimated six and a half million carers in the UK.
- More than four million carers provide up to 19 hours of unpaid care for a family member or friend each week and of these, more than three million are still in paid work.
- Recent research from the Office for National Statistics showed that more than 1 in 4 sandwich carers are reporting symptoms of mental ill health.
- One in seven UK employees is caring for an older, sick or disabled family member or friend who cannot manage without their support.
- Currently 600 carers leave work every day, a figure which is not sustainable given the challenges to UK productivity.
- The UK is facing a significant skills gap as over the next decade the number of workers aged 16-49 is forecast to drop, while the number of people aged 50-65 will rise. As a result, an increasing number of workers will be taking on caring responsibilities; with our ageing population and rising State Pension age, more people will be combining work with care.
- Carers will include many talented and experienced employees; the peak age for caring is 45-64, an age at which many people will have gained valuable skills and knowledge in the workplace.

The consequences

Supporting carers in the workplace is an issue that cannot be ignored by employers. Organisations which fail to address these issues and do not create a workplace culture which supports carers are potentially at risk of:

- Losing top talent and skills
- Incurring additional recruitment and retraining costs
- Facing productivity losses

Many carers struggle to balance their work and caring responsibilities, others feel obliged to make a choice between the two. Caring for someone is not only physically exhausting, but emotionally stressful, with such pressures resulting in many carers feeling unsupported, isolated and alone.

What support does NHDC have in place?

Flexible working practices are the cornerstone of the support the Council gives to its employees who have caring responsibilities and help balance domestic responsibilities with work. All staff can request to work flexibly which can result in arrangements such as part-time working, job sharing, compressed hours, term-time working, staggered hours, or annualised hours. The most common form of request we get is for reducing hours from full to part time. NHDC's flexi-time policy (which has recently been improved) and homeworking arrangements also support those with caring responsibilities.

For working parents there are Maternity, Paternity, Adoption, Paternity Adoption, Parental Leave and Shared Parental Leave Policies. Those who were employed with NHDC prior to October 2018 were

¹ Carers UK

able to sign up for the Kiddivouchers salary exchange sacrifice childcare voucher scheme. This type of scheme is now closed to new applicants, but a national tax-free childcare scheme is available to new parents.

In addition, special leave and time off for dependants provisions can offer support to carers such as allowing a period of unpaid leave for nursing a dependant or relative, or giving a short period of unpaid emergency time off for an employee to make arrangements for the provision of care for a person who reasonably relies on them for assistance. This includes a wife, husband, partner, child, parent or someone who lives in the same household as the employee, (but is not a boarder, lodger or tenant), or even an elderly neighbour who lives alone.

For those who are struggling with the pressures of work and caring, the Council's health and safety arrangements give support through stress assessment arrangements and the Wellbeing Policy.

Supplementing the above policies are a range of additional support mechanisms for employees which include:

- Occupational Health referrals for staff whose caring responsibilities are affecting their own health. Line managers will be advised on any reasonable adjustments to working arrangements to support the employee.
- The GP Helpline through which all employees now have 24/7 access to a consultation service where they can speak to a GP who can provide advice, diagnosis and reassurance on a wealth of medical matters. The service also includes an online doctor service, where employees can have a face-to-face webcam consultation with a GP, a private prescription service (chargeable) and a medical information service, where health, disease, lifestyle and travel information on over 700 topics can be accessed.
- The Workplace Wellness advice service which is a free, confidential service which offers employees, Councillors and their dependants expert guidance, invaluable information, specialist counselling and support any time, day or night, either over the telephone or online. Employees and Councillors can also access up to 6 sessions of face to face counselling.
- Well@work is an intranet page which provides information on health and fitness initiatives, as well as guidance for employees and managers dealing with serious personal or family health issues e.g. cancer.

























What are the benefits of this support?

Supporting staff with caring responsibilities is not only the right thing to do as a responsible employer, but by offering this it enables carers to carry on working effectively which can attract and retain staff (reducing recruitment and training costs), reduce stress, increase resilience and productivity, reduce sick leave, improve service delivery and increase staff morale, all of which are beneficial to the Council. It also has a positive impact on the provision of quality care by working carers on those they care for, with ongoing benefit to valuable NHS resources.

Latest developments

In June 2018 the Government published its Carers Action Plan covering actions to be taken to support carers. These include the development of a carer friendly employer benchmarking scheme, promotion of the Employers for Carers organisation, consideration of dedicated employment rights for carers and raising awareness of the return to work after caring talent pool. As these develop HR will consider the implications for the Council's support for carers.

JSCC Strategic Discussion Topics Suggested Items 2020-22

Continuous Development
 Essential Learning
 Coaching
 Career Development/Succession Planning
 Knowledge management – Sept 2020
 Managing a remote workforce – added to People Information report Dec 2020
Reward
 Salary Sacrifice Schemes, what we have and what's their popularity.
Health and Well Being
 The role of Occupational Health
 Wellbeing for carers, supporting employees with caring responsibilities – Dec 2020
 The value of an Employee Assistance Programme Service
 Long Term Absence Management
 Outplacement Support
 The challenges and rewards of long term home-working
 What's the employer's role in keeping staff healthy?
 Continuing to provide support for staff during these uncertain times
Change Management
 Bi-annual update on Shaping our Future
 Shared Support Services

Employee Relations
 Employment Tribunal
 Employment law update
 What can we expect in terms of employment law changes in the next 12 months and beyond?
Resourcing
 Social Media for recruitment
 Recruitment - How we are modernising the recruitment process
 Apprentices – past and future – updated Dec 2020
Equalities
 Future Streams of mandatory pay cap reporting
20's Diversity, changing workplace accommodation and practices to embrace all equality streams.

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