

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



10 September 2021

Our Ref Joint Staff Consultative Committee/22.09.21
Contact. Committee Services
Direct Dial. (01462) 474655
Email. committee.services@north-herts.gov.uk

To: The Chair and Members of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee of North Hertfordshire District Council

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

(Substitutes: Councillors Councillor Paul Clark, Councillor Sam Collins, Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Councillor Tony Hunter, Councillor Mandi Tandi and Councillor Kay Tart)

UNISON Representatives: Dee Levett, Debbie Ealand, Daniel Washington, Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews

Staff Consultation Forum Andrew Betts, Emma Jellis, Christina Corr, Matthew Hepburn and Nicola Viinikka
Representatives:

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

to be held as a

REMOTE MEETING

On

WEDNESDAY, 22ND SEPTEMBER, 2021 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. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	Members are required to notify any substitutions by midday on the day of the meeting. Late substitutions will not be accepted and Members attending as a substitute without having given the due notice will not be able to take part in the meeting.	
2. 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.	
3. STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM	To receive the minutes from the Staff Consultation Forums from June 2021, July 2021 and August 2021.	(Pages 3 - 14)
4. INFORMATION NOTE: HR UPDATE	INFORMATION NOTE OF THE INTERIM HUMAN RESOURCES SERVICE MANAGER To receive an update on the progress made in the last quarter on the People Recovery Plan and general HR related activities.	(Pages 15 - 28)
5. STRATEGIC DISCUSSION PAPER	To receive a discussion paper on the challenges and rewards of long-term home working.	(Pages 29 - 30)
6. FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS	To consider the subjects for debate at future meetings of the Committee.	(Pages 31 - 32)

MINUTES OF THE STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM ENCLOSED:

JUNE 2021

JULY 2021

AUGUST 2021

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Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

02/06/2021



Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**), Nicola Viinikka (**NV**), Andrew Betts (**AB**) Dee Levett (**DL**), Emma Jellis (**EJ**), Jo Keshishian (**JK**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Matthew Hepburn (**MH**) Fallon Rumball-Nunan (**FRN** – notes)

Circulation: Global

1. Apologies

Vic Godfrey, Allison Fox, Toby Le Sage, Ian Couper

2. Matters Arising

Thank you to EJ for work on the SCF inbox

3. NHDC update

Pay Award 2021 update: the trade unions have rejected the offer of 1.5% and have asked for further talks with the Employers Group in order to reach an agreement.

Flexi time policy: the flexi credit cap will be re-introduced @200hours credit due to issues with the Timesheet system. This will be effective from the next flexi period (13th June).

Elections: Big thank you to those who assisted on the day and with the count, and particular thanks to Melanie Stimpson in her first election as Returning Officer.

Staff Survey: Thank you to all those who have completed this. The Leadership Team are still working through the results, however an early look at the results shows a high number of employees wishing to work from home more than pre pandemic and this will shape our future working arrangements. Many have highlighted concerns about exactly how office working will look so we will use these comments and take them into account alongside government restrictions. We will share the full results and also our plans going forward in due course.

Local election Result: The council is still operating as a joint administration, the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties will continue to work together for a further year.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg - New Leader of the Council.

Councillor Amy Allen – New executive member for Waste and Recycling Management.

Councillor Sam Collins - New executive member for Enterprise, the Arts and Transport.

4. Employee Queries

No Queries

5. IT Update

No Update

6. Building Services Update

Stairwells have been jet washed at Letchworth and Hitchin Multi-storey car parks.

Question: June is Pride month, are we flying the pride flag at the District Council Offices?
Answer: DH to organise ASAP.

7. AOB

Reminder: JSCC meeting on Wednesday 9th June.

Discussion topic is Employee Assistance Provider if anyone has any feedback or comments.

Chair for next meeting – Andrew Betts

Have something to say?

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

Representatives (and extension):

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

Nicola Viinikka Visitor Services Assistant based at Hitchin Town Hall and Museum

Matthew Hepburn #4311 - Member, Committee & Scrutiny Officer

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

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

07/07/2021



Present: Ian Couper (IC), Andrew Betts (AB) Dee Levett (DL), Emma Jellis (EJ), Jo Keshishian (JK), Christina Corr (CC), Matthew Hepburn (MH) Toby LeSage (TL) Fallon Rumball-Nunan (FRN – notes)

Circulation: Global

1. Apologies

Anthony Roche, Nicola Viinikka, Vic Godfrey

2. Matters Arising

No Update

3. NHDC update

An update will be sent out shortly with results from staff survey and the 'future ways of working'. As a brief overview;

From a customer prospective: customers can self-serve using web as a primary contact, phone call as a secondary and if necessary, access to the customer services centre on an appointment basis.

Office Workers: General principle that there will be no difference between home and office working, will be looking into technology to make that as seamless as possible such as laptop roll out and the other work IT are doing to meeting rooms to allow for hybrid working. We will eventually go back to office-based working, to a smaller scale. The focus being engaging with teams as well as supporting individual needs. A desk booking system will be put into place, with individual and team areas able to be booked.

Council Meetings: The aim if legislation allows is, we will have a hybrid meeting with councillors, if not we will continue with councillors attending the meetings in person with officers attending remotely where possible.

Reduced Travel: Commuting less, reducing business mileage where possible. If meetings are required carry these out remotely with occasional meeting face to face to build relationships.

Flexibility: Aim is to continue to offer flexibility (e.g. when you do your work) depending on role. Where anyone was given additional flexibility (e.g. working reduced hours or working whilst caring) due to covid and personal circumstances then this will eventually need to return to normal to enable an equitable contribution to team working.

Intra-team Building and events: Will look at how this can be encouraged and facilitated, virtually at first (e.g. virtual kitchen) but face to face when allows.

Following Government announcement of relaxing of all rules on 19th July has led us to need to rethink how we get to those proposals.

Original plan was:

- Firstly, those who **need** to access DCO would come in (e.g. work needs, personal/home circumstances).
- Next phase in early August would be opening up CSC by appointment only.
- Mid-September, if cases continued to be low and most people vaccinated, we would encourage people to return but look to keep the capacity at 50%. Desk booking system to allow this and look to begin to hold face to face meetings.
- Finally, late October full use of the building. Considering continuing to social distance and wear masks at 100% capacity.

This will now all need to be readdressed as we need to balance government advice with our own views on reopening safely.

No update on Pay Awards for 2021-negotiations still on going.

Half Day Development Morning-Friday 9th July focus on IT with resources being circulated.

Inclusion Group Meeting focused on disability with some excellent points being raised. An article will follow on insight.

Question: Is there any thought about recycling rapid flow tests and paper masks?

Answer: Not aware this was an option and will now research into it.

Question: How will areas that can only have one person at a time entering be monitored?

Answer: This will need to be looked into further. We only plan to do this whilst the office is at low occupancy. When we are back to 50% occupancy, we will look to be moving away from this.

4. Employee Queries

No Queries

5. IT Update

Laptop Process:

- IT will send out an email to member of staff asking how many monitors they require. (IT would not recommend just using laptop for full working day as small 14" screen)
- A broadband speed check will also be required (instructions on how to do this included in the email)

- IT helpdesk will then contact member of staff with the details on how to sign up to the new authenticator, this will replace mobile pass application and tokens.
- YouTube videos on how to set up the laptop and screens will also be sent to talk staff through the set-up process. (Please remember to send these to personal email before changing over equipment!)
- Any issues please contact IT helpdesk.

The project will consist of approximately 400 laptops being issued to staff so this will be a time-consuming project. At the moment IT have successfully delivered 76 laptops, monitors and additional items of equipment to staff. When the new equipment is ready IT will contact members of staff and arrange delivery.

When the new equipment has been set up and it is working appropriately staff are required to submit a Help Desk request to arrange collection of their old equipment. Once the equipment has been collected and cleaned it will be stored with a view to resell any items of value.

The intranet is being updated weekly with rollout figures.

Question: Is there a limit to the areas you will cover for delivery?

Answer: We do have a limit, but this can be discussed.

6. Building Services Update

Nothing to update on and no questions.

7. AOB

No Update

Chair for next meeting – Christina Corr

Have something to say?

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Nicola Viinikka Visitor Services Assistant based at Hitchin Town Hall and Museum

Matthew Hepburn #4311 - Member, Committee & Scrutiny Officer

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

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Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

04/08/2021



Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**) Ian Couper (**IC**), Andrew Betts (**AB**) Dee Levett (**DL**), Emma Jellis (**EJ**), Jo Keshishian (**JK**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Toby Le Sage (**TL**) Michael Clark (**MC – Property Services Restructure**) Fallon Rumball–Nunan (**FRN – notes**)

Circulation: Global

1. Apologies

Debbie Hiscock, Nicola Viinikka, Matthew Hepburn, Vic Godfrey

2. Property Services Restructure

Currently some difficulties balancing reactive and projects, resolution was to re-evaluate the team structure. A consultation period with both team and individuals has resulted in some changes:

- Compliance Contract and Project Manager hours are being increased to 30 hours a week, with the intention being to utilise that extra time to split time between compliance contract monitoring and being able to provide some additional technical/project support for team members.
- Compliance and Facilities Co-ordinator JD has been amended to reflect the updated role and additional duties being undertaken, which are quite different to the role initially recruited to.
- We currently have two part time property services assistants with split shift patterns. To meet the growing demand for on- and off-site inspection and repair works, a full time Maintenance Caretaker role has been introduced in place of the two part time facilities assistant roles. The Maintenance Caretaker will require greater skill and knowledge than a Facilities Assistant and will be able to provide greater support, for example inspection work and where possible undertaking repairs.
- There are some slight changes to Health and Safety Officer's role, taking a greater lead on asbestos, fire, and water hygiene.

Closure consultation meetings to follow.

3. Matters Arising

Question: Any updates on recycling of rapid flow test equipment?

Answer: IC has investigated and will re-evaluate the need when more employees are back in DCO regularly.

4. NHDC update

Pay Award update: National Employers Group made an improved and final offer, currently with the union for consideration, any further updates will be communicated.

Proposal is:

- 2.75% increase for Grade 1 (to keep in line with national living wage)
- 1.75% increase Grade 2-12
- 1.5% increase Grade 14-16

Once agreed pay will be back dated from April 2021.

Half Day Development is Friday 6th August: team or individual development, no corporate focus.

Holiday Flex applications are open for August for anyone who would like to purchase up to one-week additional annual leave, with managers approval.

Workplace Bikes scheme has returned; Government-approved salary exchange initiative allowing you to hire a bike and accessories from the Council for the purpose of cycling to work.

SCF vacancy has been advertised on the message board, if you know any colleagues who may wish to join, please encourage them to do so.

Mini Restructure in Emergency Planning is proposed to give a more robust and efficient structure as previously had shared resources with Herts County Council.

Review of Council Plan to be proposed late September to Cabinet and Council. Further updates in staff briefing. Five priorities will be reduced to three (exact wording to be confirmed):

- People first
- Sustainability (Financial and Environmental)
- A brighter future together.

Review of ward boundaries has begun with a working group and public consultation. Finalised report will be proposed in January council meeting. This will include number of councillors needed, population projections and frequency of elections.

5. Employee Queries

Question: In terms of number of office days will this be instructed by department managers or employees be able to ask for a certain number of days, i.e., Staff would be asked individual their preference outside of the staff survey process, and this would be discussed and agreed?

Answer: There would be a discussion based on business need, individual needs and how the manager feels their teams will need to operate. Fairness would also be a factor.,

Question: Other councils allow staff to work from office, home or other, such as shared workspace, café. Given everyone has been working from home for over a year is this flexibility going to be possible in the future?

Answer: There are a number of elements to this

1. The laptop roll-out will make working at different locations much easier.
2. However, it will still require a secure and reliable network connection. Working over the mobile network is only available to those that specifically need it for their role, due to the costs involved.
3. Need to consider the need for confidentiality (e.g., in relation to telephone calls and what can be seen on your screen). This will be more of an issue for certain roles.
4. The physical environment should be suitable for the length of time you are working there. It might be fine to work in a café for a short period, but the furniture (appropriate desk and chair) and background noise would make it inappropriate for a longer period.

Question: As we are working from home and have had people join the business during the pandemic, it's hard to put a face to a name. Could photographs be added to emails?

Answer: We had started a project to do this, but it has been delayed by the pandemic. There was also resistance from some. We also need a way to get a photo of any new starters.

Question: Is there any news about the Flu Vaccination?

Answer: Yes, a global email has been sent out. We have had a good response, with approximately 80-90 individuals requesting vouchers however many staff won't need vouchers as over 50's are eligible for a free NHS vaccine.

6. IT Update

Weekly updates for the laptop roll out project can be found on the intranet. IT has delivered 133 laptops, monitors, docking stations and headsets to employees. There has been an issue with delivery of docking stations, usually delivery takes 1-2 weeks however due to production issues it is now taking 6-8 weeks, this unfortunately is going to cause delays for the roll out. Using a different supplier would double costs.

Desk booking system purchase and implementation is in progress. This will allow individuals and teams to book a desk. It will be intelligent enough to book a docking station, PC, or specialist equipment desk.

IT have also been carrying out work in the Council Chamber, each desk now has a power unit with 3 pin plugs so laptops and other equipment can be used.

Work to install power into the middle of the rooms in the larger meeting rooms is due to start on the 14th August with diamond drilling taking place that day. Following that on the 16th – 18th August electrical installation will take place.

Question: Are those working in the office aware of the drilling?

Answer: The drilling work will be carried out on the weekend.

Question: Will the lack of docking stations available have an impact on those planning to return to the office?

Answers: No, there will still be a bank of 3 docking stations on 6 desks along with a PC.

Question: When is the aim for laptop completion?

Answer: It was October, but stock levels may delay this.

7. Building Services Update

Plans to return to DCO set out in previous meeting are still ongoing therefore new ways of working will be introduced and suggestions for this are:

Quiet Floor: due to many people returning for social needs and team meetings, areas could become noisy. Employees would have option to book a desk on a quiet floor to be able to focus. Popularity of this will be monitored by the desk booking system.

Question: What is acceptable behaviour on a quiet floor?

Answer: Some guidance will be put in place.

Lockers: Due to quiet floor proposal and potential to have booked a desk elsewhere within the building, suggestion for lockers for the majority of employees to become daily use only. This will need to be facilitated as many lockers are currently full! Exceptions will be made for those who have a corporate need for a permanent locker.

8. AOB

None

Chair for next meeting – Dee Levett

Have something to say?

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JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

22 September 2021

*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, and ongoing restrictions.

2. STEPS TO DATE

- 2.1 The HR Update Information Note contains the 2021/22 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 Recovery Plan

The pandemic and subsequent restrictions this year have had a big impact on all the normal forward planning carried out by services including HR, as well creating difficulties for forecasting on the economy, labour, market, pay and pensions etc. The People Recovery Plan was developed as an alternative to the People Strategy for 2020-2026 and describes how HR processes have been adapted as a result of the pandemic, and how we are supporting our staff throughout this period of change. In July we set out a plan for what our Future Ways of Working would look like and how we would transition to it. A lot of the plan focuses on moving back to some working time being in the office and the benefits that brings, alongside continuing to work at home and the benefits that provides. It also covers the technology and other arrangements needed to facilitate some people working in the office and others at home (e.g., hybrid meetings).

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 and share ideas on current employment issues relating to the changing circumstances as we move forward from the pandemic.

3.3 Recruitment

- 3.3.1 There continues to be a steady increase in recruitment and the number of vacancies has increased again this quarter.

Environmental Health have continued to experience work-load pressure relating to the pandemic and we have recently recruited an additional 3 Technical Support Officers

to assist with the workload. There have been good levels of interest in most of our job adverts and in addition to the Environmental Health posts, we have also recently appointed applicants in Planning, Housing, Communications and Emergency Planning. As restrictions ease across the country, Hitchin Town Hall have been able to start planning large scale events again. We have recruited an additional 5 events assistants and a duty manager on casual contracts for these events which will help generate income.

3.3.2 The Kickstart Scheme

This scheme provides funding to create new jobs for 16- to 24-year-olds who are at risk of long-term unemployment. We are supporting the scheme to help offer opportunities for young people in the district and recently offered our first Kickstart contract to a candidate who will be assisting IT with the laptop roll out.

The government funding covers 100% of the National Minimum Wage (or the National Living Wage depending on the age of the participant) for 25 hours per week for a total of 6 months, but we will be topping up this salary to grade 1.1 in line with our Apprentices. We are hoping to advertise further Kickstart vacancies in our Waste and Community Protection teams in the next few months. We will also continue to remind managers of the opportunity over the next two months (as applicants need to be in post by the end of December) as it may be easier to consider supporting the scheme as we move back to some office-based working.

3.3.3 Temporary workers

Following an approach by a Managed Service Provider to promote a tool to manage agency worker recruitment, a project team has been set up to consider the Council's use of temporary workers. This working group which involves HR, Procurement and the Commercial team is reviewing how these workers are recruited and managed within NHDC with a view to achieving savings through a reduction in agency costs and the introduction of improved processes.

3.4 Apprenticeships

- 3.4.1 We currently have five Apprentices studying a range of qualifications in Customer Service Specialist, Business Administration and HR Support. We have recently offered apprentice positions in Democratic Services, Procurement and Community Engagement, with two further positions currently being recruited for Customer Service and Hitchin Town Hall. Two existing members of staff are also utilising the Apprentice Levy Fund for further job-related training. Our training providers continue to be able to offer remote learning which has ensured that there has been no interruption to our Apprentices.

We have recently signed up for a new suite of learning aimed at providing Kickstart employees and Apprentices with specific skills to develop their employability. This will enhance our current training offer for all the young people employed by the Council.

3.5 Pay

- 3.5.3 **National Pay bargaining:** In mid-February the National Joint Council unions lodged their pay, and terms and conditions, claim for local government staff for 2021 which included a substantial increase of at least 10% on all spinal column points (SCP), along with a number of proposed T&C changes. and an agreement on a best practice programme of mental health support for all local authorities.

Following a pay offer in May, which was rejected by the unions, the national employers group made final offer in July which included an increase of 2.75% for Grade 1 staff, 1.75% for Grades 2 -12 and 1.5% for Chief Officers and Chief Executives (grades 14-16). The higher rate for Grade 1 aims to keep ahead of the increases in National Living Wage which for NHDC is currently £8.91 per hour (the proposed increase providing a base hourly rate of £9.60).

This pay offer was rejected by the trade unions in August and therefore union members will be invited to vote on the offer at the end of September. When an agreement is finalised, the pay award will be backdated to April 2021.

3.6 **Employee Benefits**

3.6.1 **HolidayFlex scheme:** This scheme allows staff to purchase additional annual leave via salary exchange and became a permanent benefit in 2021 after a successful trial last year. During the August applications window we received three more applications to add to the ten received from the February window. In October 2020 when the HolidayFlex scheme was run for the first time there were seven applications.

3.6.2 **Workplace Bikes:** After taking a break during the lockdowns, the Council's salary exchange workplace bikes scheme was relaunched last month. This scheme encourages employees to cycle to work by giving tax and NI incentives on the hire of a bike and accessories whilst spreading the cost over 12 months via deductions from pay.

3.6.3 **Flu vouchers**
HR have secured flu vaccination e-vouchers from Boots again this year. As the NHS have extended the eligibility for free vaccinations to all aged 50+, only staff under this age have been invited to request an e-voucher, and the uptake has been good. The Council has also extended this invitation to all Councillors aged under 50.

3.7 **Mental Health and Wellbeing**

3.7.1 We have been trialling a monthly drop-in session with our Mental Health First Aiders (MHFA's) to allow staff to discover more about the support that MHFA's can offer and to discuss any concerns. So far these have been well received by the small number of staff that have attended, and our MHFA's have appreciated the opportunity to engage with staff. A further session is planned for September.

3.7.2 With 10th September marking World Suicide Prevention Day, we have taken the opportunity to raise awareness and have shared some helpful information from our Employee Assistance provider on how we can all play a part in spotting the signs and take action to help those suffering from suicidal thoughts.

3.7.3 The Hertfordshire HR Leaders project to support employee mental health and resilience is progressing with a number of options being investigated. We have now received our allocated funding from Public Health and will be finalising how this be used shortly.

3.8 Learning & Employee Engagement

3.8.1 With mental health remaining a focus for us all, the September half day development session has been focussed on Wellbeing. Managers have been provided with a wide range of resources to support team and personal development on this important topic.

3.8.2 Service Manager Development Programme

The first cohort of the Service Manager Development Programme have now completed their programme. This was positively received with Manager's appreciating the opportunity for peer-to-peer support. The programme aims to improve leadership skills, as well as covering topics such as motivation, performance, and effectiveness. The second cohort will begin in September 2021.

3.9 Shaping our Future

The new Council administration and a shift in the priorities towards 'Themes' has provided an opportunity to review the Shaping our Future programme and our target outcomes. A major part of this is to consider what is sometimes known as a 'target operating model' essentially a clear way of describing how we want to do things as an organisation in order to deliver against the themes. This refocussing will also mean that the way we communicate this and our values and behaviours can be looked at and considered by both the Leadership Team and the Shaping our Future Group. This review will take place throughout September and October.

In the meantime, staff and management development initiatives linked to Shaping our Future continue and are detailed in section 3.8

3.10 Equality and Diversity

At the June meeting of the Inclusion Group, the discussion topic was Disability. Many of those attending had either a personal connection to disability or experience of supporting friends, colleagues, or family members with disabilities. An open discussion followed on a range of topics including defining and recognising disabilities, how to support colleagues with disabilities, recruitment support, reasonable adjustment, those with caring for disabled dependents, and the impact of Covid-19 on those with disabilities.

The next meeting is due to take place in mid-September and the group will be discussing issues and experiences relating to Race.

3.11 Absence

3.11.1 We still have a small number of staff absent from work due to illness relating to COVID-19, and a summary of the number of cases and days lost by quarter is shown below, with July- Sept 2021 showing cases to date:

	COVID absences									
	April - June		July - Sept		Oct - Dec		Jan - March		Total	
	Cases	Days lost	Cases	Days lost	Cases	Days lost	Cases	Days lost	Cases	Days lost
2020/21	1	4	2	6	7	27.5	9	38.5	19	76
2021/22	3	14	3	21.5					6	35.5

- 3.11.2 There are a number of long-term absence cases which the HR team are actively supporting by making use of Occupational Health and Employee Assistance as well as providing guidance to managers. Individuals returning from long-term absence are also supported with a phased return programme and reduced workload for up to 4 weeks.
- 3.11.3 Short-term absence remains relatively low although higher than in previous months when lockdown restrictions were in place. The absence figures for the rolling 12-month period are shown below as absence days lost per employee. The short-term absence target is 3.5 days per year, and at the end of July we were under this target.

Rolling 12 months	Absence days lost per employee		
	Long-term	Short-term	Total
Aug-20	0.27	0.20	0.47
Sep-20	0.27	0.20	0.47
Oct-20	0.35	0.13	0.48
Nov-20	0.27	0.22	0.49
Dec-20	0.16	0.13	0.29
Jan-21	0.17	0.24	0.41
Feb-21	0.24	0.07	0.31
Mar-21	0.39	0.32	0.71
Apr-21	0.33	0.18	0.50
May-21	0.36	0.25	0.60
Jun-21	0.22	0.23	0.45
Jul-21	0.49	0.30	0.80
Total	3.52	2.46	5.98

3.12 Leavers and Turnover

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

Year (1 April – 31 March)	
2015/16	15.1%
2016/17	9.7%
2017/18	13.0%
2018/19	12.8%
2019/20	10.7%
2020/21	8.1%

At the end of March our labour turnover for 2020/21 was at its lowest levels more than 10 years at 8.1%. As the economy has opened up with restrictions lifting, the employment market has become more buoyant again, and with it the number of resignations and retirements have increased. Looking at the labour turnover for the rolling year, September 2020 – August 2021, labour turnover has increased to 12.4%.

4.0 **NEXT STEPS**

- 4.1 Progress against the HR Service plan 2021/2022, and work on the People Recovery plan as well as work on Shaping our Future will be reported to all quarterly JSCC Meetings.

5.0 **CONTACT OFFICERS**

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Action	Corporate Objective	Target/Aim/ Outcome	Planned Start Date	Due Date	Assigned to	Other services required (only list those service inputs which would not be considered 'business as usual')
Review contract for Occupational Health services	Support the delivery of all Council Objectives	Explore procurement options for the contract for this vital employee service. Current contract ends March 2023	01/04/21	31/03/22	Maggie & Laura	Procurement & Legal
Conduct a review of employee benefits package	Support the delivery of all Council Objectives	Understanding of value to employees of current benefits package to determine future direction and possible provision of new benefits.	01/04/21	31/03/22	Maggie & Jo	
Exit payment reform	Support the delivery of all Council Objectives	Follow and implement any changes relating exit pay reform and LGPS/pension changes including pension discretions	01/04/21	31/03/22	Jo Keshishian	
Deliver "Shaping our Future" organisational development programme	Support the delivery of all Council Objectives	Build on existing work and pull together all relevant strands to develop an organisational culture and capability to meet the future needs of the Council	01/04/20	31/03/22	Ian Couper Keith Crampton	
Review of format and content of remaining HR Policies	Support the delivery of all Council Objectives	Ensure all policies are fair, necessary and consistent and are formatted with a customer facing focus.	01/11/18	31/03/22	HRM	Policy Users
Gender Pay Gap (GPG) reporting and delivery of the Inclusion Action plan	Enable an enterprising and co-operative economy	Provision of accurate information in relation to reporting requirements. Deliver on action plan e.g. leadership development, succession planning.	01/04/21	31/03/22	Jo, Maggie & Helen	
Equalities Reporting and feeding into the Inclusion group	Support the delivery of all Council Objectives	Provision of accurate information in relation to reporting requirements.	01/04/21	31/03/22	Jo & Maggie	
Mental Health Financial Wellbeing	Support the delivery of all Council Objectives	Developing the work already done on mental health, with money worries being a significant stressor, focus work on helping people manage their finances .	01/04/21	31/03/22	Helen & Laura	
Increased HR automation of processes - digital transformation?	Support the delivery of all Council Objectives	Implement changes to e-administration and process handling of HR work and link to transformation work	01/04/19	31/03/22	Jo Keshishian Laura Bignell	Customer Services, IT
Annual Pay Policy Statement	Enable an enterprising and co-operative economy	Publication to comply with Section 40 of the Localism Act & the Local Government Transparency Code 2014 and proposed changes arising from the Enterprise Bill	01/04/21	31/03/22	Jo Keshishian	Finance
Develop a wide range of Learning and Development Opportunities embracing technology where possible	Enable an enterprising and co-operative economy	To develop the wider use of GROW Zone resources and supplement face to face training activity with range of responsive and engaging solutions	01/04/20	30/03/20	Keith Crampton	
Manage the councils recruitment and training of apprentices	Enable an enterprising and co-operative economy	Ensuring effective use of the Apprentice Salary Budget and the Apprentice Levy to meet targets and support services and help primarily young people get a route into work and a career	01/04/21	31/03/22	Helen & Laura	
Income generation from selling HR services or other income generation ideas.	Enable an enterprising and co-operative economy	generate income from acting on ideas for any possible income generation from HR	01/04/21	31/03/22	HR Managers	Commercial
People recovery plan and actions associated with post-pandemic working	Support the delivery of all Council Objectives		01/04/21	31/03/22	HR Managers	

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People Recovery plan 2020-2022

Purpose

The pandemic has naturally had a very big impact on the plans to create a new People Strategy for 2020 – 2026. Covid-19 has changed all the normal forward planning, forecasting on the economy, labour, market, pay and pensions etc. The Council is also embarking on a more co-ordinated approach to organisational development and change management called 'Shaping our Future'. Its outcomes have significant HR implications and will link closely with the work of the HR team for the next two years and beyond. Given the current circumstances it was decided to adopt a 1 -2-year pandemic People Recovery plan as an alternative to a longer-term People Strategy.

1. NHDC Values and Behaviours
2. Shaping our Future
3. Employee Wellbeing
4. Recruitment & retention
5. Benefits
6. Learning & Employee Engagement
7. Communication
8. Working Arrangements

1. NHDC Values and Behaviours

The corporate Values and Behaviours define how we aim work as an organisation. The Values provide the overall framework and the Behaviours describe how we make that a reality. There has been a lot of work in developing and communicating the Values and Behaviours. Some of this was based around the physical office environment (e.g. visuals on the walls of meeting rooms, screen at the entrance to the DCO and branded coffee mugs). The current enforced working from home, as well as a likely ongoing increase in working at home, makes these visuals less relevant and effective. Therefore, the HR team will look at ways to continue to embed the Values and Behaviours.

2.Shaping our Future

The outcomes for 'Shaping our Future' have been agreed as creating a:

- A high quality, diverse, inclusive and resilient workforce, meeting the needs of our community;
- A healthy, creative and productive organisation;
- A vibrant culture that embodies our values and behaviours.

The Learning and Employee Engagement (L&EE) Manager is the lead specialist for the programme. The L&EE Business Partner will also be involved, alongside the rest of the HR team. The Shaping our Future steering group is still establishing the key areas of development, but is expected to include a focus on the following:

The introduction and integration of organisational Values and Behaviours

Leadership and Management Development

Staff development workshops

Work on equality, diversity and inclusion (including work to address the gender pay gap)

New approaches to engaging with staff

Developing commercial skills

Developing transformational thinking

People Recovery plan 2020-2022

3. Employee Wellbeing

Mental Wellbeing

This is a big concern in a time of unprecedented circumstances and how individuals react will vary, however the pandemic and changes in restrictions will continue to impact significantly on people's lives. From an employment perspective, one of the greatest impacts on mental health and wellbeing has been, and will continue to be, the implications of our new ways of working with almost all the workforce working from home. Whilst there are benefits of home-working for many issues relating to a permanent home working environment can affect health in general i.e. the concept of living at work, feelings of isolation and the lack of face to face connection with the workplace and colleagues.

At the start of lock down the L&EE team spent time developing a 'lockdown toolkit' which contains helpful advice on wellbeing, stress management, personal organisation and resilience. In addition, we have provided support materials to managers helping them to lead in the challenging circumstances they continue to face. The team will continue to develop and promote this toolkit, including adjusting it as we hopefully emerge from mandatory working at home.

The team also initiated welfare calls from HR to all staff. This supplemented excellent work by managers in keeping in touch with and supporting their teams. Whilst this was a time-consuming activity at a busy time, it helped many people and created a positive impression of HR and their response to the crisis. We will ensure that managers (supported by HR and tools such as the Employee Assistance Programme) continue to be seen as a way of accessing support in times of need.

The intranet has plenty of advice on coping with permanent homeworking <https://intranet.north-herts.gov.uk/home/coronavirus/homeworking-tips-staff> The page on remote social contact attempts to go some way to bridge the gap on the unquestionable value of workplace daily, informal interactions whilst shared resources aim to boost social wellbeing with links to quizzes and other social sites to connect teams. We will adapt this moving forward to support staff who increase the amount that they work from home on an ongoing basis

The HR team maintains provision of a large range of support that staff can access such as an Employee Assistance Programme that includes a package for confidential counselling and links to all sorts of online help with Mental Health problems. Online: www.my-eap.com username: NORTHHERTSwell. This is known to have provided valuable support during Covid-19, as well as difficult personal or work-related situations. This service is highly rated by those who make use of it, in particular the free counselling sessions, and we will continue to promote this benefit to staff including via the use of anonymised real life examples and quotes. In addition, there are 16 in-house trained mental health first aiders and there are dedicated pages of help for staff <https://intranet.north-herts.gov.uk/home/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-support-staff-and-managers>. We will continue to support the development of these first aiders, and look to train more if required.

Managers are crucial in supporting the mental wellbeing of staff. Our management and leadership development will focus on the skills and knowledge needed by managers to fulfil this part of their role with a largely remote workforce. It will also focus on the other management skills associated with increased homeworking. This will include the new on-line workshop being run called 'Managing Homeworking Performance' which aims to help address mental health and wellbeing issues whilst maintaining organisational performance.

People Recovery plan 2020-2022

The HR team will continue to support staff and managers as restrictions ease and things seemingly move back towards normal. The economic impacts of Covid-19 will last beyond the end of the medical crisis. As the crisis subsides, this may be when burn-out happens. Support will include guidance for individuals on how to spot the signs of burn-out (both in themselves and in others) and practical ways to provide support. There will be a need to allow staff time, without the immediate pressure to pick up projects that may have been put to one side due to Covid-19. This will include allowing time for a break/ holiday, as well as reverting back towards normal.

Absence

To support staff to avoid the flu virus and to help reduce winter absence levels, we offer free flu vaccinations each year. We ran another very successful programme in the autumn of 2020 with over 140 vouchers taken up by staff and we intend to continue to provide this in future years. We will also support and encourage staff to make the time to get Covid-19 vaccinations (when available).

We also have access to a very good range of services that will help support our staff at this time and reduce absence, for example an Occupational Health Service, an online GP Service and of course a vital Employee Assistance Programme. The HR team will do regular reminders of the support available

Annual Leave

A significant number of staff have built up large annual leave balances due to work pressures and not wanting to take holidays. All staff will continue to be encouraged to take regular leave, where possible. As restrictions are lifted there will be an increased demand to take annual leave, and managers will be supported in being flexible, but also mindful of the need to maintain services. The using up of annual leave balances over two years (up to 31/3/2023) will be an option to ensure staff get the opportunity to take their leave over a phased period.

Some staff have continued to use leave (e.g. to support families and others) and where service needs allow, the Holiday Flex (purchase of annual leave) will continue to be available.

4. Recruitment & retention

Recruitment has slowed during the pandemic with a lower number of vacancies: in 2020 we appointed just 36 new staff compared to 81 appointments in the previous year.. We expect recruitment to return to more normal levels as we continue to adjust to the current working arrangements, although with unemployment on the rise there is likely to be less labour turnover which in turn will create less vacancies.

Since the start of lockdown in March 2020 we have adapted our recruitment and selection procedures. Interviews can now be conducted remotely using Zoom as our preferred video conference platform. Many job roles at NHDC include a test/presentation at the interview stage, which can also be carried out remotely, either via Zoom or through the use of email, with a time limit for response. The HR team have worked with recruiting managers to give tips and advice on navigating an interview via video conferencing. In future we will look at ways of reducing the time and travel commitment associated with in-person interviews and tests, this could mean that any tests and initial interviews may continue to be conducted online. This will need to be balanced against the advantages of candidates coming to council offices allowing them to get a better sense of the organisation.

People Recovery plan 2020-2022

The council's apprenticeship scheme will continue to be important during a period where youth unemployment is expected to be high. During the recruitment campaign in August 2020 three apprentice posts were advertised, with a large volume of applications being received and all first-round interviews took place via Zoom with an independent service manager and HR representative. Successful candidates were offered a second interview with recruiting managers for final selection before job offers were made.

Retention

To support the remote onboarding of new staff, HR have introduced a New Starter Welcome call which provides an overview of HR matters with the opportunity to ask questions or discuss any concerns. Feedback suggests this is being appreciated by staff. Other induction material has also been adapted to reflect that most new staff will be working through their induction period whilst working from home. Videos to replace the content that would previously have been part of the induction training have also been developed. Following a return to office-working some further induction and familiarisation will be arranged for the cohort of new starters recruited during the pandemic.

Retention is also supported by our approach to career development and succession planning. This will be a continued area of focus and will need to be addressed whilst maintaining our goal of equality, diversity and inclusion.

A series of online workshops were introduced in November 2020 which help staff consider their future career, their confidence and what they can do to achieve their goals. We are also boosting the role of our coaches as career coaches.

Leavers

Some staff will have left the Council during the pandemic and will have not been able to say goodbye in the usual way. Where the leaver has retired and would have been eligible for a retirement buffet, then this will be honoured when restrictions on such gatherings are lifted. Teams have made use of online cards, collections and virtual gatherings to say goodbye to staff that have left.

5. Staff Benefits

As we move through the consequences of the pandemic and a "new normal" way of working becomes established for most employees, the impact of this on the Council's current benefits package needs to be considered. This will include a review of whether as an employer with a duty of care for the wellbeing of staff, the Council should consider if additional support is needed for employees. The negotiation of new contracts for traditional elements of the staff benefits package such as the OH and EAP services will provide the opportunity to review the services provided.

New and innovative ways of enhancing the remuneration package enjoyed by employees can also be explored. This will reflect that the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to mean that pay inflation will be lower than previously expected, and the Council needs to find other ways to attract and retain staff. The latest benefit to be approved has been the Holiday Flex salary sacrifice scheme following a successful trial which achieved a net saving of £2,000, with further annual savings expected.

6. Learning and Employee Engagement

With ongoing changes to restrictions, there is likely to be a continuation of full home working for the majority of staff for many months. The results of the staff survey on recovery will inform a new 'Recovery Toolkit' which will support our staff through this difficult time and the

People Recovery plan 2020-2022

continued anxieties and challenges we will face as an organisation. We will also coach and develop managers to provide the ongoing welfare support needed.

The pandemic and the shift to homeworking has seen a necessary change towards more blended learning approaches in the form of online workshops and virtual conferences, and fewer face to face events. In some ways this move to online learning for both internal and external training provides an opportunity to make learning more accessible and flexible. L&EE have taken positive steps towards this approach to ensure that development can continue through the pandemic and have already arranged a number of learning events online ranging from a Pre-Retirement Seminar to Management Fundamentals.

The team are also exploring what new skills and capabilities will be required post pandemic and therefore the requirements for new Learning and Development. L&EE work very closely with their suppliers to ensure the right approach for our staff. The excellent coaching resources that the organisation has developed are also being mobilised to play a part in supporting people working through the COVID-19 challenges.

Learning and Development half-days have been implemented to allow individuals and teams time to focus on their personal and professional development needs. This reflects the Council's commitment to supporting staff development and wellbeing. The L&EE team will continue to provide useful resources and monthly themes will be decided in consultation with the Leadership Team and the Shaping our Future group.

7. Communication

We have many things in place to ensure people remain well informed particularly through extensive remote working. The Communications team are supporting remote working with an excellent range of regular items such as Insight, virtual all staff briefings and Senior Management Group meetings.

The Staff Consultation Forum every month is being held as a virtual meeting using Zoom. The agendas and minutes are shared with all staff, and the SCF representatives will raise questions and concerns at the meetings on behalf of staff. There is also a monitored e mail address SCF@north-herts.gov.uk where people can leave items to raise at the meeting. The Trade Union liaison meetings are also continuing regularly as virtual meetings.

8. Working Arrangements

At the start of the lockdown in March 2020, the IT team worked hard to create over 100 new home-working set-ups for those who had not previously worked from home. In addition, all staff on partial home-working contracts or with ad hoc home-working arrangements in place moved to full home-working, many using their own equipment. There will be further work to be done to ensure we have consistent terms and conditions for all staff who are home-working and this will be supported by the IT providing the majority of staff with a laptop to allow them to work both from home and in the office. These laptops will include cameras and microphones to allow staff to use them for virtual meetings, such as team meetings and staff briefings. Guidelines will be developed to determine what other IT equipment and furniture will continue to be provided, which will be linked to the amount of time spent working at home. As part of this new provision, the council will cease payment of the home-working set up fee for the purchase of IT equipment which was introduced in 2010. The eligibility for this payment has already substantially diminished.

People Recovery plan 2020-2022

The return to office-working and using our buildings will be dependent on government guidelines, the safety of staff and service delivery needs. Initial occupation will also be limited by the equipment (e.g. IT and furniture) that has been taken home.

Many staff have indicated their preference for greater home-working (compared to pre-pandemic) in the future and service areas will review the requirements for office working to facilitate this where possible.

STRATEGIC DISCUSSION PAPER: September 2021 The challenges and rewards of long-term home working

Background

Prior to March 2020 many employers still viewed homeworking as a perk for employees, and others were resistant to allow it due to concerns around productivity.

As we know, the Covid 19 pandemic was a gamechanger for flexible working and many companies have had to embrace full-time home working for their staff, in order to keep businesses functioning.

NHDC has been a pro-active supporter of home working since 2010, with many job roles deemed suitable for adhoc or partial homeworking. In a small number of cases, full-time homeworking has been permitted. Prior to the pandemic approximately 65% of staff were able to work from home to some degree, with teams such as Careline and Customer Service being wholly office based.

According to new research from the employee benefits company Howden Employee Benefits & Wellbeing as many as 88% of employers expect to facilitate homeworking in their post-pandemic plans. The firm polled more than 200 senior HR professionals from a range of public, private, and third sector companies, and found that almost nine in every ten organisations are now set to introduce homeworking in some form – whether that be full-time, or in a hybrid model. At NHDC, the Future Ways of Working plan will support an increased level of home working (compared to pre-pandemic) where this can be balanced with the service needs of the organisation.

The challenges of long-term home working

IT connectivity: In the two weeks leading up to NHDC going into 'lockdown' in March 2020, the IT team set up approximately 130 Citrix connections (approximately 30% of total NHDC staff) to allow everyone to move to full-time homeworking using either personal equipment or NHDC equipment. IT are also completing the laptop rollout project to allow greater flexibility when returning to the office. The Micollab telephone system was also upgraded in March 2020 to allow for more people using conference calls. Use of Zoom and MS Teams has become widely used to facilitate virtual meetings and video conferencing although the use of Zoom will be phased out when the laptop project is complete.

Suitability of home environment: A small minority of staff do not have a suitable home working environment. For those needing more suitable equipment, chairs and screens have been loaned from the office, and office working has been agreed for those that have been unable to work from home. Staff are able to claim monthly for homeworking expenses up to £16 which is intended to help cover the costs associated with broadband, and additional heating and lighting.

Less face to face working time/disconnected from teams: The introduction of video conferencing, as mentioned above, has allowed teams to work together and virtual contact to take place. Managers have been encouraged to continue to have regular team meetings and teams have shared ideas on their different ways of working as well as reminding everyone to keep in touch and support their colleagues.

Mental health wellbeing and Isolation: During April 2020 the HR team commenced welfare calls for all staff to check on their wellbeing during the lockdown since full time homeworking was difficult for many to adapt to. The calls were well received by staff. This has been followed up with bespoke emails and further support for individuals who have been struggling.

Over the past 18 months we have introduced a number of initiatives to encourage staff to get together in a different way – Virtual kitchen, Mental Health First Aider drop-in sessions, IT drop-

STRATEGIC DISCUSSION PAPER: September 2021

The challenges and rewards of long-term home working

in sessions, Half Day development sessions, lockdown toolkits, and additional guidance for managers.

The focus for HR during the extended working from home period, has been to ensure people understand where they can access an excellent range of existing support and to provide additional resources and information. The main focus is positively promoting mental health awareness in the home and virtual workplace and supporting that 'it is ok to talk'.

Caring responsibilities: During the periods of lockdown when schools and nurseries have been closed, working parents have had to juggle child-care responsibilities alongside work commitments. Likewise, many of those with other caring responsibilities have also had to provide additional support and balance this with work demands. The council has provided an increased level of flexibility for staff with caring commitments, and where needed the HR team have given advice on individual cases. This is more pandemic related rather than due to home working and would therefore not expect it to be an ongoing concern.

Other challenges include:

- No home/work definition, difficulty switching off, risk of overworking
- Dealing with difficult situations can feel invasive in own home
- Back-to-back meetings when being held virtually creating "Zoom fatigue"
- Decrease in physical activity- although staff survey feedback has provided examples of increased opportunities for physical activity

Rewards of long-term home working

Despite the challenges, many staff at NHDC have embraced the opportunity to work from home and have adapted very well. The most recent staff survey showed there was a clear desire to continue working at home more in the future. Pre-pandemic staff were working in the office for an average of 3.15 days per week and have indicated their hope to reduce this to 1.3 days per week going forward.

The staff survey highlighted a number of employee benefits to increased homeworking:

- No office distractions / interruptions which allows for greater productivity
- No time spent commuting, and no travel costs (with environmental benefits)
- More flexibility for those with caring responsibilities
- Better work / life balance

For NHDC as an employer, we have been appreciated a number of benefits of homeworking for some time which include:
















- Lower levels of short-term absence
- Ability to attract new employees from wider geographic talent pool
- Improved employee retention as homeworking is seen a valuable benefit

Getting the right balance

As part of our Future Ways of Working plan we will look at getting the right balance between home and office-based working. Office based working will be designed around teams coming in at the same time to give the opportunity for in-person team meetings and also the informal conversations that can take place from sitting near to each other.

Where an individual would benefit from coming into the office more regularly (e.g., due to home working environment, benefits for them of being around others, better able to do their job) then they would also be able to do so.

JSCC Strategic Discussion Topics Suggested Items: 2020-22

Continuous Development
 Essential Learning
 Coaching for individual and organisation development
 Career Development and Talent Planning
Health and Well Being
 The role of Occupational Health
 Long Term Absence Management
 Outplacement Support
 What's the employer's role in keeping staff healthy?
 Continuing to provide support for staff during these uncertain times
Employee Relations
 Family friendly policies
 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
 Changes in the employment market – impacts and challenges
 Apprenticeships
Equalities
 Inclusion and Diversity – how can we become a more inclusive employer
 Future Streams of mandatory pay cap reporting

JSCC Strategic Discussion Topics Suggested Items: 2020-22

JSCC		Discussion topic
2019	March	Essential Learning – Responding to growing demands and how L&D support organisational change
	June	The role of Occupational Health at NHDC
	Sept	The role of employer supporting employees with mental health problems.
	Dec	Salary Sacrifice: What are they, what have we got on offer and what's their future?
2020	March	Career Development, Talent and Succession Planning
	June	N/A
	Sept	Knowledge Transfer
	Dec	Support for Carer's
2021	March	Salary Sacrifice Schemes, what we have and what's their popularity
	June	The value of an Employee Assistance Provider
	Sept	The challenges and rewards of long term home-working
	Dec	Recruitment - How we are modernising the recruitment process
2022	March	
	June	
	Sept	
	Dec	