

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**



03 December 2021

Our Ref Joint Staff Consultative Committee/15.12.21  
Contact. Committee Services  
Direct Dial. (01462) 474655  
Email. [committee.services@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto: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 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, Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews and Daniel Washington

Staff Consultation Forum Andrew Betts, Emma Jellis, Christina Coor 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, 15TH DECEMBER, 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**

<b>Item</b>		<b>Page</b>
<b>1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b>	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.	
<b>2. ELECTION OF A VICE-CHAIR FOR REMAINDER OF CIVIC YEAR 2021/22</b>		
<b>3. MINUTES - 10 MARCH, 9 JUNE, 22 SEPTEMBER</b>	To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on the 10 March 2021, 9 June 2021 and 22 September 2021.	(Pages 5 - 18)
<b>4. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS</b>		
<b>5. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS</b>	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.	
<b>6. STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM</b>	To receive the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum meetings from September 2021, October 2021 and November 2021.	(Pages 19 - 32)
<b>7. INFORMATION NOTE - HR UPDATE</b>	INFORMATION NOTE OF THE HR 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 33 - 38)
<b>8. STRATEGIC DISCUSSION PAPER</b>	To receive a discussion paper on the modernisation of the recruitment process.	(Pages 39 - 40)
<b>9. FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS</b>	To consider the subjects for debate at future meetings of the Committee.	(Pages 41 - 42)

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING**  
**ON WEDNESDAY, 10TH MARCH, 2021 AT 10.00 AM**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** *Councillors: Kate Aspinwall (Vice-Chair), Keith Hoskins, Claire Strong, Martin Stears-Handscomb and Tony Hunter.*

**In Attendance:** *Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Jo Keshishian (Interim Human Resources Services Manager) and Anthony Roche (Managing Director), William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer) and Matthew Hepburn (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)*

**Also Present:** *Daniel Washington (UNISON) and Christina Corr (SCF).*

**19 WELCOME AND REMOTE/PARTLY REMOTE MEETINGS PROTOCOL SUMMARY**

*Audio Recording – 5 seconds.*

The Chair welcomed everyone to this virtual meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee that was being conducted with Members and Officers at various locations, communicating via audio/video and online and advised that there was the opportunity for the public and press to listen and view proceedings.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer undertook a roll call and gave advice regarding the following:

- Attendance;
- Live Streaming;
- Noise interference;
- Rules of Debate;
- Voting.

The Vice Chair, Councillor Kate Aspinwall, started the meeting proper.

**20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

*Audio Recording – 2 minutes 10 seconds.*

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Kay Tart and Terry Hone.

Having given due notice Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb advised he would be substituting for Councillor Kay Tart.

Having given due notice Councillor Tony Hunter advised he would be substituting for Councillor Terry Hone.

Apologies for absence were also received from Lea Ellis, Allison Fox, Andrew Betts, Dee Levett and Debbie Ealand.

## 21 MINUTES - 16 DECEMBER 2020

*Audio Recording – 2 minutes 43 seconds.*

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer advised of two amendments to be made to the minutes:

- Substituting 'Southern Rural Committee,' for 'Joint Staff Consultative Committee,' at Minute 9 – Welcome and Remote/Partly Remote Meetings Protocol
- Changing Jo Keshishian's job title to 'Interim HR Services Manager,' throughout

### **RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the amendments above be noted;
- (2) That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 16 December 2020 be approved as a true record of the proceedings;
- (3) That the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer be authorised to apply the Chair's digital signature to the approved minutes.

## 22 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

*Audio Recording – 4 minutes 22 seconds.*

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting;
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;
- (3) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

## 23 STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM

*Audio Recording – 5 minutes 5 seconds.*

The Service Director – Resources presented the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums held in December 2020, January 2021 and February 2021 and provided an overview of the matters discussed including:

- The relationship between SCF, JSCC and the Shaping Our Future group
- Home working expenses and tax allowances
- Monthly learning & development sessions
- NHS volunteering
- Remote social events and wellbeing strategies running in the organisation

The following Members and representatives contributed to the discussion:

- Councillor Kate Aspinwall
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Christina Corr – SCF

Points raised included:

- Staff were appreciative of the efforts being made to promote wellbeing while working from home;
- The number of social events produced by teams was encouraging;
- It was positive that staff did not feel guilty for taking time to socialise remotely;
- The People Recovery Plan should consider allowing staff the flexibility to continue working from home if they choose.

**IT WAS AGREED:** That the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums held in December 2020 and January 2021 and February 2021 be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable the Joint Staff Consultative Committee to consider any issues addressed by the Staff Consultation Forum.

## 24 HUMAN RESOURCES INFORMATION NOTE

*Audio Recording – 11 minutes 9 seconds.*

The Service Director – Resources presented the Information Note entitled People Strategy Update along with Appendix A – People Recovery Plan 2020-22 and drew attention to points including:

- The draft recovery plan considered what lessons could be learnt from the pandemic and how the organisation will move forward as restrictions change;
- The plan had been received by the leadership team and discussed by SCF;
- The main area of feedback from SCF was in relation to home working set-up fees which became redundant as IT equipment was to be provided by the Council;
- The council was looking at how to go about providing other equipment (e.g desk chairs) for employees working from home in future;
- Paragraph 3.3.1 provided statistics on recruitment;
- The application ratio statistics may be skewed by the apprentice posts which generally attract more applications per position than any other role;
- General levels of unemployment were also a factor;
- The Shaping our Future group was in an information gathering stage and the Inclusion Group had its first meeting earlier in the week;
- Paragraph 3.10.2 provided an update on Learning & Development days which most but not all staff had been able to take part in;
- The most recent Learning & Development session was on Equality & Diversity Training in line with the motion passed by Council, and this training would be rolled out to Members soon;
- Staff Survey results showed members of staff were coping well with pandemic restrictions and working from home but there were indications that as time progressed people were feeling strained, particularly in service areas where COVID-19 response had increased workload;
- Employees with caring responsibilities including those home schooling also reported that they were finding it more difficult;
- The survey results might have been indicative of the time it was taken as COVID cases were spiking and as numbers decline and the vaccination programme continues results should improve;
- Future surveys would ask staff what they feel the return to office work should look like and what measures they expect to be in place.

The Managing Director advised that he was in discussion with chief executives of other councils to compare strategies on the return to office working and indicated that NHDC's recovery plan would be benchmarked against staff needs and expectations.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Kate Aspinwall
- Councillor Tony Hunter
- Councillor Claire Strong

The Managing Director, Service Director – Resources, and Interim HR Services Manager gave responses to questions including:

- It was anticipated that staff would want a different balance of office and home working in future;
- Plans for the return to work envisioned using the offices differently compared to 12 months ago;
- Some employees missed the social side of office work and those with difficult working environments at home may find returning to office working a relief;
- The working assumption of the recovery plan was that the council would use one less floor in the office than it currently occupies;
- Comments attached to the staff survey indicate that there are groups in the workforce very keen to come back to office work and others that see value in working from home permanently;
- As people return to the office the way they work in the office would change including adopting hybrid meetings and hot desking;
- Not all services areas and teams had been able to work effectively from home during the pandemic and this would have to be considered by the leadership team;
- There were no plans as yet to enforce a particular home/office balance and it was felt that office space would be able to be managed naturally;
- If rotas or desk bookings did need to become a feature this would be implemented;
- Some degree of storage would still be provided in DCO offices;
- The next Learning & Development session was not themed so teams and individuals could determine the training they wanted to focus on;
- There were organisational benefits to allowing holiday balances to be carried over across two years.

**IT WAS AGREED:** That the Information Note entitled People Strategy Update be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable the Committee to consider the Information Note entitled People Strategy Update.

## 25 EQUALITIES UPDATE

*Audio Recording – 34 minutes 48 seconds.*

The Interim HR Services Manager presented the Information Note entitled Equalities Update and highlighted points including:

- The annual update on equalities data was based on a snapshot of figures on 31 December 2020 and was presented in percentage form rather than raw figures to preserve confidentiality;
- Not all employees provided NHDC with information relating to each protected characteristic;
- The overall workforce profile had remained stable in successive years;
- There had been a reduction in appointments of women which were now at their lowest in 3 years;
- More staff were declaring disability status;
- The increase in declarations of disability might be a result of ease of access on the iTrent reporting system;

- There were no new appointments in 2020 of employees declaring a disability;
- Ethnic minority appointments and leavers in the organisation were up;
- There had been a decrease in appointments of members from LGBT+ groups, with only 2 recorded in 2020;
- Employees aged 45-54 were the largest group within the workforce, making up a third of staff;
- Changes in figures on marital status and religion were minimal;
- The number of full time employees dropped to 63% in 2020, the lowest it had been in five years;
- The proportion of the full time workforce that were women had fallen;
- The number of employees on long-term sick leave had remained stable and 91% of all cases were among women;
- The data relating to the gender pay gap was based on a snapshot taken in March which was published online ahead of the government deadline;
- There had been improvements in the average differences in both mean and median gender pay gaps and the figures were at their lowest since the council first started publishing this data in 2017;
- When using the mean figures there was still a gap of £7291 annually between men and women;
- There was a significant difference in the proportion of women employed in the upper quartile of salary grades.

The following Members asked questions and took part in the discussion:

- Councillor Kate Aspinwall
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb

In response to questions the Interim HR Services Manager advised:

- There were 100 applicants for 3 Apprenticeship posts within the organisation which may have skewed the figures for applicants per age bracket;
- There was a high demand for roles overall and more technical positions had been filled faster this year than previously, though some service areas still see a low number of applicants e.g legal;
- The Inclusion Group had met on Monday with 14 participants in total and had a positive discussion on age, with a wide ranging and fruitful discussion which considered career progression, flatter council structure, lateral moves, secondments and mentoring, degrees, peer challenge feedback, the menopause, and pensions;
- Feedback from the Inclusion Group would be shared with the Shaping Our Future group and the leadership team;
- SCF had been asked to consider future discussion topics and share ideas between groups and committees;
- It was important that the Inclusion Group was a safe space for employees to discuss sensitive issues;
- The Community Engagement team was represented in the inclusion group and the Policy & Community Engagement Manager would link feedback from the Inclusion Group to wider corporate policy;
- The increase in number of workers, particularly women, on part-time working arrangements was noteworthy and required further investigation;
- Anything under 37 hours a week was considered part-time and numbers of casual contracts had increased overall;
- It was not yet known whether the increase in part-time work was primarily due to new appointments or full-time staff reducing their hours.

In response to questions the Managing Director advised:

- The narrowing gender pay gap was encouraging;
- 2020 had been an anomalous year in a number of ways including for recruitment and figures from this year would need to be compared with future years before they can be fully understood;
- It was not the intention to be prescriptive about how the Inclusion Group did its work and attendees were free to shape discussions as they felt fit;
- It could be put to the Inclusion Group to involve outside contributions but this would be up to them and could change the nature and profile of the group;
- Anecdotally some staff had reduced their working hours to handle COVID-related pressures including caring responsibilities and home schooling, and this may account for part of the increase, particularly among women who bear a disproportionate responsibility for care roles in wider society.

The Service Director – Resources advised that the Shaping Our Future group had both an internal and an external role and could incorporate the themes and topics considered by the Inclusion Group in to its work.

*N.B The Managing Director left the meeting at 11:01 on Council business.*

**IT WAS AGREED:** That the Equalities Update provided be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable the Committee to consider the content of the Equalities Update.

## **26 STRATEGIC DISCUSSION PAPER: SALARY SACRIFICE SCHEMES**

*Audio Recording – 1 hour 1 minute.*

The Interim HR Services Manager presented the Strategic Discussion Paper on salary sacrifice schemes and drew attention to points including the following:

- Salary Sacrifice schemes were used to attract new employees and provide benefits to existing employees;
- They were based on the exchange of salary payments for a non-cash benefit, and had benefits for employees and the organisation in terms of tax and national insurance;
- Various schemes had been run over the years and the number was now reduced due to changes in government policy;
- The child care voucher scheme was closed to new applicants since the tax free childcare scheme was introduced;
- A cycle to work scheme had been running in various forms since 2013, most recently opened in December 2019 with a small group of employees taking it up before office closures made the scheme redundant;
- HolidayFlex was the newest scheme open which allowed employees to purchase additional annual leave up to an extra week, with 7 applicants during the trial period in August;
- A second application window was opened for the new year with 10 applicants, 6 of whom had applied before;
- It was hoped there would be more interest in HolidayFlex once travel restrictions had been lifted;
- The annual leave rollover policy had reduced the need for employees to purchase additional leave;
- Future options for salary sacrifice schemes included additional pension contributions and ultra-low emissions vehicles;
- Administrative work was necessary to set up and run salary sacrifice schemes like making changes to the payroll, performing payroll checks, and encouraging up-take;
- Levels of staff interest should be assessed before considering further schemes.



The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb
- Councillor Keith Hoskins

In response to questions the Interim HR Services Manager advised:

- All employees were eligible to apply for HolidayFlex during the application window but applications were subject to approval by team managers;
- A survey on ultra-low emissions vehicles would take place later this year.

**IT WAS AGREED:** That the Strategic Discussion Paper on the salary sacrifice schemes be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable the Committee to consider the discussion paper on salary sacrifice schemes.

## 27 FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS

*Audio Recording – 1 hour 7 minutes.*

Members considered which subjects should be discussed at future meetings and the following points were considered:

- Lockdown restrictions may not have been lifted by June and a paper on the challenges and rewards of home working presented then may be premature;
- Any paper presented for June would have to be researched and written in the months prior;
- The conversation regarding a return to office working would have progressed by June so that meeting could be an opportunity to provide feedback;
- The Employee Assistance Programme was worth considering;
- The challenges and rewards of home working item had been on the list for a long time and when originally proposed was not purely focussed on COVID;
- It had been a long time since the Committee had received an update on employment law.

**IT WAS AGREED:**

(1) That the discussion topic for the next meeting be as follows:

(i) The Employee Assistance Programme

(2) That the discussion topic of the challenges and rewards of home working and the return to office work be considered at the meeting after next;

(3) That an Employment Law Update should be presented in the next civic year;

(4) That regular updates on the work of the Inclusion Group be provided to the Committee.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable the Committee to choose a discussion topic of interest.

The meeting closed at 11.14 am

Chair

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## NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

#### MEETING HELD AS A REMOTE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY, 9TH JUNE, 2021 AT 10.00 AM

#### MINUTES

**Present:** *Councillors: Kate Aspinwall (Chair), Terry Hone, Keith Hoskins and Claire Strong*

**In Attendance:** *Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg (Leader of the Council), Dee Levett (UNISON), Christina Corr (SCF), William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)*

**Also Present:** *At the commencement of the meeting there were no members of the public present.*

#### 28 WELCOME AND REMOTE/PARTLY REMOTE MEETINGS PROTOCOL SUMMARY

*Audio Recording – 1 minute.*

The Chair welcomed everyone to this virtual meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee that was being conducted with Members and Officers at various locations, communicating via audio/video and online and advised that there was the opportunity for the public and press to listen and view proceedings.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer undertook a roll call and gave advice regarding the following:

- Attendance;
- Live Streaming;
- Noise interference;
- Rules of Debate;
- Voting.

The Chair, Councillor Kate Aspinwall, started the meeting proper.

#### 29 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

*Audio recording – 1 minute 29 seconds.*

Apologies for absence were received from Anthony Roche, Managing Director.

#### 30 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 13 seconds.*

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation;
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;

- (3) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

### 31 MINUTES - 10 MARCH 2021

*Audio Recording – 5 minutes.*

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer advised that minutes could no longer be approved remotely and that the minutes of the meeting of the committee on 10 March 2021 would be presented at a later date.

### 32 STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM

*Audio Recording – 7 minutes 20 seconds.*

The Service Director – Resources presented the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums held in March 2021, April 2021 and May 2021 and drew attention to the following:

- The Staff Consultation Forum had discussed outcomes from the previous staff survey;
- A new vehicle policy introduced for tax compliance was discussed in April;
- The inclusion group was publicised;
- An extensive update from Property Services had been received.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions the Interim HR Services Manager advised that the work of the Inclusion Group would feature in an article in Insight and that topics were publicized widely by members and on the intranet, and comments submitted outside of the meeting were welcomed by the HR team.

**IT WAS AGREED:** That the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums held in March 2021, April 2021 and May 2021 be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable the Joint Staff Consultative Committee to consider any issues addressed by the Staff Consultation Forum.

### 33 INFORMATION NOTE: PEOPLE STRATEGY UPDATE

*Audio Recording – 11 minutes 41 seconds.*

The Interim HR Services Manager presented the Information Note entitled People Strategy Update and drew attention to points including:

- The HR team focussed on key areas in the recovery plan and attended regular meetings of HR managers in Hertfordshire and the East of England LGA group, discussing hybrid working, the return to office working, and the success of the apprenticeship scheme.
- Pay negotiations were ongoing and staff would be updated on progress;
- The payroll would be backdated from April of this year;
- COVID grant funding had been secured for employee wellbeing and resilience support programmes across Hertfordshire;
- The Shaping Our Future group had discussed a service manager development programme to focus on how managers can demonstrate the Council's corporate values and develop as leaders;

- The staff survey was concluded gathering views on the return to office working, confirming that the majority of staff were in favour of a high level of home working than prior to the pandemic; some staff were concerned about the return to office;
- Section 3.11 of the Information Note covered absence figures; the Council ended the financial year under target for short term absences with lower numbers than prior years due to home working, with an increase in the number of long term absences;
- The impact of COVID-19 on job vacancies and leavers had resulted in the lowest labour turnover for 10 years but it was expected this would pick back up over the coming months.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Terry Hone
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- Councillor Kate Aspinwall

In response to questions the Interim HR Services Manager advised that:

- Data was not collected on the number of staff self-isolating that were not based in the office;
- In the last year around 22 staff took absence due to COVID related reasons; this is relatively low in line with the national picture;
- There was not an internal staff network on mental health but the subject could be raised at future Inclusion Group and/or SCF meetings;
- The Inclusion Group had formed to gather concerns and feedback from the organisation in a way appropriate to its size, rather than producing independent support groups which could be small given the minority status of the subjects involved;
- The project team was looking at how additional funding for mental health support could be used in developing mental health first aider skills and resilience training;
- There were a variety of mental health and wellbeing services signposted on the intranet and the HR team conducted welfare checks on staff.
- Staff had been encouraged to talk and meet informally while working from home;
- The Holiday Flex scheme had smaller uptake than hoped due to timing when travel destinations were closed or limited due to lockdown regulations; interested was demonstrated from some staff that had used the scheme more than once; t
- There was always a risk that when workloads were high employees did not take their holidays and the HR team was working with managers to update the on quarterly leave balances and encouraging people to take leave when they are able.

**IT WAS AGREED:** That the Information Note entitled People Strategy Update be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable the Committee to consider the Information Note entitled People Strategy Update.

## 34 STRATEGIC DISCUSSION PAPER

*Audio Recording – 27 minutes 34 seconds.*

Laura Bignell, HR Business Partner presented the Strategic Discussion Paper on the Employee Assistance Programme and highlighted points including:

- The Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) was an essential support service to assist employees and Members and was advertised as a benefit in attracting new staff and retaining employees;
- The EAP was provided by Workplace Wellness and had been for 2 years;

- The EAP was available to employees and their immediate family and provided information on physical and mental wellbeing as well as financial and employment advice;
- Advice through the EAP was confidential and did not come through HR or the Council; the only data HR received was on the number of staff that had accessed the service;
- The EAP was considered to be of significant benefit to NHDC;
- The highest uptake in the use of the EAP was in July/September 2020;
- In the year 2019/20 prior to the pandemic access of the EAP was consistent with this year;
- About 7.5% of the workforce had accessed the EAP, slightly above the national average for use;
- The annual cost of the service to the Council was £1,800 which came to around £4.50 per employee;
- The HR team promotes the EAP at every opportunity and will continue to do so.

The following Members and Representatives asked questions and took part in the discussion:

- Councillor Keith Hoskins
- Councillor Kate Aspinwall
- Dee Levett, UNISON

In response to questions the HR Business Partner advised:

- Workplace Wellness did not advertise the EAP to employees directly and all signposting to the service at NHDC came from the HR team;
- The HR team promotes the manager specific resources on the EAP to managers when liaising with them on employee relations cases;
- Anecdotal feedback on the EAP was available and presented in the information note;
- There was one example of negative feedback and Workplace Wellness was contacted to discuss the employee's experience.
- The HR team was satisfied with the standard of care provided to employees by the EAP;
- Workplace Wellness could be approached to provide training and a survey of the EAP on training days to employees directly;
- The intranet page on the EAP was laid out succinctly and signposted the log-in details to employees.

**IT WAS AGREED:** That the Strategic Discussion Paper on the Employee Assistance Programme be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable the Committee to consider the discussion paper on salary sacrifice schemes.

## 35 FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS

*Audio recording – 37 minutes 45 seconds.*

Members considered which subjects should be discussed at future meetings and the following points were considered:

- By September the results of the staff survey would be available for discussion;
- Information on the success of a return to the office could be presented at the December meeting as part of the Information Note and via the SCF;
- Modernisation in the way NHDC hired particularly with the prospect of long term home working and the work of the inclusion agenda would be an interesting topic;

**Wednesday, 9th June, 2021**

- The NHDC website recruitment pages were being updated in conjunction with the Communications team and in line with the Council's rebranding and the impact could be presented in December;
- The equal pay review and progress on the gender pay gap could be advertised and an update presented as part of the recruitment topic.

**IT WAS AGREED:** That the discussion topics for the meeting in December would be as follows:

- (i) The modernisation of the recruitment process

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable the Committee to choose a discussion topic of interest.

The meeting closed at 10.50 am

Chair

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## Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

01/09/2021



**Present:** Ian Fullstone (IF) Dee Levett (DL), Emma Jellis (EJ), Jo Keshishian (JK), Christina Corr (CC), Fallon Rumball-Nunan (FRN – notes)

**Circulation:** Global

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### 1. Apologies

Debbie Hiscock, Nicola Viinikka, Vic Godfrey, Anthony Roche, Ian Couper, Andrew Betts

### 2. Matters Arising

IC has organised for a PPE recycling box in the canteen area of the DCO.

Accepted items include:

- Lateral flow tests (place in the plastic bag it comes in)
- Disposable face masks
- Plastic gloves
- Visors and face screens
- Safety gear (helmets and bump caps)
- Safety goggles
- Earplugs
- Plastic overalls and clothing covers

### 3. NHDC update

Pay Award update: Union have rejected the offer of 1.75% increase (for most grades) and union members will be invited to vote on whether to accept the offer later this month. Update to follow dependant on when outcome is announced.

Half Day Development is Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> September: team or individual development on Wellbeing. Managers have been sent team activity suggestions and individuals can find resources available on Covid intranet pages or a dedicated module on GrowZone.

Inclusion Group Meeting will focus on Ethnicity and will take place on Monday 20 September 2021, 10am - 12pm. The agenda for this meeting will be posted closer to the time on intranet page and message board.

Three new apprentices have been appointed:

- Democratic Services

- Community Engagement
- Procurement (Legal Team)

Currently advertising for apprentices in:

- Hitchin Town Hall (Digital Marketing)
- Customer Service.

Also, we have appointed our first Kickstart trainee, as part of the government scheme supporting those aged 16-24 who are unemployed, this role will be assisting IT with laptop roll out.

Covid cases across Hertfordshire are currently rising. The return of schools will likely also affect these numbers. This will be monitored along with staff survey responses to formulate a potential return to office date.

Government have chosen not to continue with virtual Council meetings so meetings within the Council Chamber and full Council meeting at Hitchin Town Hall have taken place. Meetings will have key officers attending in person and others dialling in remotely. Hybrid meetings have been working really well.

#### **4. Employee Queries**

**Question:** Pre Covid, those retiring would have the opportunity to have a recognition buffet within the Council building. Due to the Council Offices being closed, and staff working from home this has ceased however now restrictions have been lifted, can this happen in a local park or restaurant instead and a receipt be given?

**Answer:** This has been raised in HR Help previously and was discussed with IC. Unfortunately, it has been decided we must continue to be consistent with the Employee Handbook which states that buffets must take place in a council meeting room, and it is imperative that the buffet allowance is not used towards alcohol. Due to Covid we have had to put a hold on all retirement buffets, and we are hopeful that people who have missed out can return to do these at a later date.

#### **5. IT Update**

Weekly updates for the laptop roll out project can be found on the intranet.

IT continuing to deliver laptops and working on each floor putting docking stations in. Booking system is also still in production.

#### **6. Building Services Update**

None

#### **7. AOB**

None

**Chair for next meeting – Christina Corr**

## Have something to say?

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

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## Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

06/10/2021

**Present:** Anthony Roche (AR), Ian Couper (IC) Dee Levett (DL), Emma Jellis (EJ), Laura Bignell (LB) Maggie Williams (MW) Christina Corr (CC), Vic Godfrey (VG) Debbie Hiscock (DH) Fallon Rumball–Nunan (FRN – notes)

**Circulation:** Global

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### 1. Apologies

Jo Keshishian, Nicola Viinikka, Andrew Betts

### 2. Matters Arising

IC to update on PPE box usage at next meeting.

### 3. NHDC update

Pay Award update: Union have rejected the offer of 1.75% increase (for most grades) and further meetings will be held to reach an agreement along with possible balloting. Pay Award will not be agreed for some time.

Had both Cabinet and Full Council meetings in September which included that the council plan for 2022 onwards has been adopted as has the medium-term financial strategy. This also means the budget process for 2022/23 is underway.

Half day development day- 5<sup>th</sup> November will be based around the council plan objectives and what that means for shaping our future e.g., training and development needs.

**Question:** Will the half day development days be continuing into 2022?

**Answer:** Yes, they will be on going.

Values and behaviours will be refreshed. Four statements will replace the twelve currently in place in the hope they will be more memorable.

Monday 4<sup>th</sup> October saw the gradual return to the office. IC has not received any feedback yet and welcomes further feedback on individuals' experiences.

Inclusion Group met on Monday 20 September with focus on Ethnicity. Really good discussions and helpful suggestions were offered and the notes for this are available on the relevant intranet page.

#### 4. SCF - Terms of Reference

HR have been reviewing policies and procedures to ensure they are relevant and effective. There is currently a SCF policy, but the view was taken that it would be more appropriate to replace this with Terms of Reference in line with other council committees.

A draft version has been circulated prior to this meeting and comments are welcomed.

The union have also received this draft and accept the proposal.

The employee representation for SCF will also be under review, as having a representative per floor is now out dated. It is suggested that there should be 8 employee representatives in total.

Proposal one:

1 employee representative per service directorate, plus 1 each for Hitchin Town Hall and Buntingford Office.

Proposal two:

Two representatives from both Customer and Regulatory directorates, as well as one representative from Legal, Community, Resources, Commercial (Hitchin Town Hall), Place (Buntingford).

Future of SCF suggestions:

- CC raised a concern regarding staff engagement regarding the employee representative role. It was felt that the proposed training for representatives should address this.
- More interaction and information on various platforms e.g., Insight, Intranet, Message Board.
- Representative from directorate has a slot at Directorate Management Team meeting.
- Does having a regular ICT and Building Services update send the wrong message for the more strategic purpose of SCF?
- No feedback from SCF Minutes Global email, should agenda be sent out as global e-mail prior to meeting to spark debate?
- Seek employee views on SCF future e.g.
  - Issues they would want to see covered
  - Standing items
  - Focus Points
  - How they should be represented

MW to action- Proposed questions for a possible employee survey to be circulated to SCF members before November meeting to discuss.

#### 5. Employee Queries

**Question:** In light of the increase of electricity costs that have been reported in the news and employees working from home more, is £16 a month still a realistic amount?

**Answer:** There is the option to claim the difference between what we pay (£16) and the amount that can be paid without tax deduction (£24) = £8, as an adjustment to your tax code.

**Question:** It was my understanding that under the terms of working from home, should you choose not to work from home you would have the right to a permanent desk. With the desk booking system will this be possible.

**Answer:** This sounds like an outdated policy. If you would like to book the same desk you can do so for up to 14 days but please remember to cancel if circumstances change.

**Question:** As there will be no desktops, will temporary members of staff be given a laptop?

**Answer:** Yes, but IT will require at least 24 hours to configure this individual laptop so managers will need to give adequate notice for this.

**Question:** Does this apply to agency staff; they are not employees?

**Answer:** VG to consider and feedback.

**Question:** What happens with the desk booking system if someone is sick or absent?

**Answer:** If you don't check into a desk within an hour of your booking, it will cancel the booking and the desk becomes available.

## 6. IT Update

90% through laptop roll out.

IT have begun collecting data for colleagues at Hitchin Town Hall.

Buntingford laptops have been built and IT will be fitting docking stations week beginning 11<sup>th</sup> October.

Three of the meeting rooms have the audio-visual equipment, ready for hybrid meetings.

Covid deliveries and petrol shortages have caused delays.

Desk booking system is live. It is simple and easy to use, and you can download a mobile application. It will also run lots of useful background reports.

IT are still configuring system and will have a training day on 7<sup>th</sup> October.

**Question:** How do I know if a desk is available or a covid desk?

**Answer:** On each floor, there is a floor plan of where each desk is. If a desk has a red circle it is a covid desk.

If it has a docking station it is available, if it is an empty desk, it is not available.

**Question:** When will we no longer have Citrix?

**Answer:** Between three to six months.

## **7. Building Services Update**

DH welcomed questions or queries for building services.

**Question:** What has happened to the chairs that have be lent to people for home working?

**Answer:** There are 50 out on loan but there are ample chairs for the amount of people who will be returning to the office and considering we will no longer be using floor three.

**Question:** With the desk booking system in mind, could the desks be numbered/labelled?

**Answer:** Yes

**Question:** There are enough lockers for everyone to have one each, why has the swimming pool style locker system been introduced?

**Answer:** With employees mostly home working it is expected that anything in your locker will not be used daily and with the hot desking if your permanent locker is situated on a particular floor and you are sat at another it is more convenient to adopt the swimming style locker approach.

IC to send another announcement about locker usage and explain the transitional period.

**Question:** When do the lockers need to be cleared out by?

**Answer:** A message has already been communicated that if you are returning to the office, please think about beginning to clear out your locker. There will be a gradual approach to it.

**Question:** Can I request a personal locker?

**Answer:** Yes, requests will be accepted in certain circumstances. An approval process will be put into place.

**Question:** What time is DCO open?

**Answer:** 07.30AM – 20.00PM

## **8. AOB**

VG raised that on returning to the office could documents with retention schedules be checked and disposed of accordingly using the blue bins. DH suggested that confidential shredders could be organised.

**Chair for next meeting – Dee Levett**



## Have something to say?

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

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## Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

03/11/2021

**Present:** Anthony Roche (AR), Ian Couper (IC) Dee Levett (DL), Emma Jellis (EJ), Maggie Williams (MW) Christina Corr (CC), Vic Godfrey (VG) Nicola Viinikka (NV), Andrew Betts (AB) Rebecca Webb (RW) (Fallon Rumball-Nunan (FRN – notes)

**Circulation:** Global

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### 1. Apologies

Debbie Hiscock

### 2. Matters Arising

None

### 3. NHDC update

IC invited feedback regarding the current DCO Covid guidelines, and whether they were still appropriate or whether we should consider relaxing them. Members discussed various topics surrounding this including those with underlying health issues that may not be apparent and younger staff members with no immunity. Members collectively agreed to continue with current guidelines and a reminder to go out to colleagues recapping these to everyone:

- Wear face coverings (unless exempt) when moving around the building (including coming in to and leaving the building)
- Book a desk before using it and definitely only sit at the bookable desks.
- Continue to socially distance when using meeting rooms and therefore use a meeting room that has plenty of space
- Clean your desk before and after use
- Regular (twice weekly) lateral flow testing.

IC to action.

### 4. SCF - Terms of Reference

Draft survey questions circulated prior to meeting. MW welcomed comments on these.

Discussion on attendees, format, timing, and responses to data collected followed.

Members agreed with the questions. MW to liaise with communications team regarding circulation.

Anonymous results to be discussed in January SCF meeting. (To be held at a later date of 12.01.2022)

## 5. Employee Queries

Question: Why was the decision taken to let floor 3?

Answer: If the decision is made to let this alongside floor 2 it makes more sense for them to be close together.

## 6. IT Update

**Laptop project:** 259 have been rolled out.

Currently working on Careline and Communication's team.

Hitchin town hall, car parks and contact centre to follow.

75 docking stations still to be placed on floors 1,4 and 5.

Buntingford has 5 docking stations, more to be added.

Cark parks have 2 docking stations.

12 to be installed in Hitchin Town Hall. Hitchin Town Hall will receive a survey of equipment they require for homeworking.

Once all V2 (Version 2) laptops are rolled out, they'll be upgraded to V3 (Version 3) moving away from Citrix.

Audio visual equipment has been installed on floor 5, meeting room 4. Meeting room 3 to follow.

**Booking System:** Please make sure you are using it. It is important to book in to allow for responses to any positive covid tests and to follow social distancing guidelines.

Remember to check in/out, if you do not check in after an hour your booking will be void and desk will be available to book.

Question: Will guidance be available on usage?

Answer: This can be found on the intranet pages. [Desk Booking System | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](https://north-herts.gov.uk)

## 7. Building Services Update

IC welcomed questions.

Positive feedback with regards to seating charts and desk numbers actioned from previous meeting.

## 8. AOB

VG raised low staffing in IT and its impact on IT help desk. VG asked for employees to be patient as response times have been affected as a result.

**Chair for next meeting – Christina Corr**

## **Have something to say?**

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<b>JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE</b>
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15 December 2021
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*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 NHC 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 this was shared with staff via the Staff Consultation Forum and the monthly Staff Briefing and circulated to all. Since October staff have been encouraged to return to the office one day per week, and this has been supported by the introduction of an online desk booking system. In addition, the larger meeting rooms have been fitted with video conferencing camera to allow hybrid meetings to take place. Most staff have now been issued with new lap-tops and can therefore work at home or at hot-desks in the office. Several measures are still in place to help minimise the risk of infections these include desk cleaning materials, facemasks whilst moving around the building, and social distancing, as well as encouraging staff to use lateral flow tests regularly.

Councils across Hertfordshire and the East of England region meet regularly in virtual meetings to share knowledge and experience of employment matters, and to discuss and share ideas on current employment issues relating to the changing circumstances as we move forward from the pandemic.

### **3.3.1 Recruitment**

- 3.3.1 Recruitment continues to be steady and while there has been a slight decrease in the number of vacancies this quarter compared to last, we have continued to see good levels of interest. We have been successful in filling management vacancies within Electoral Services and Housing, which have previously proved difficult to recruit to, as well as a successful recruitment process for the Service Director for Place role.

Environmental Health have continued to experience work-load pressure relating to the pandemic and we have recently advertised for an additional Track and Trace Officer and Covid Marshall Team leader to assist with the workload.

As well as Environmental Health and the management vacancies detailed above, we have also successfully appointed candidates within Hitchin Town Hall, Communications, Housing, Estates and Democratic Services.

### **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. 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 currently have two Kickstart assistants; one in IT helping with the laptop roll out, and another who is working with the Healthy Hub. Kickstarters are also eligible to apply for any internal vacancies and we offer employability support throughout the duration of their contract. One Kickstarter recently applied and was successful in securing permanent employment with us in the role of IT Helpdesk and Technical Support Officer.

Managers have been reminded about the opportunity, which will be closing to new vacancies from 17<sup>th</sup> Dec 2021, with successful candidates needing to be in post before 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.

### **3.3.3 Temporary workers**

Following meetings between Procurement, Commercial and HR on temporary workers at the Council, it was identified that further information was needed on how agency temps were currently used, who by and in what roles. A questionnaire was therefore developed and distributed to NHC managers who had used agency temporary workers in recent years. Information on spend was also sought from Finance.

The results of the survey showed the Council's volume of usage and current level of spend did not warrant the costs involved with engaging a managed service provider. It was however felt that there were savings to be made, e.g. by using fewer agencies and negotiating better rates on a bigger spend with each one and it was suggested that a broader working group be set up with representatives from all relevant areas; user line managers, Commercial, HR, IT, Finance and Procurement, to consider the next steps. The actions proposed following the first meeting of this group included the investigation of a possible NHC framework agreement, benchmarking with other local authorities, further investigation into why multiple agencies were being used for the same roles within the Council, how current health and safety and safeguarding



requirements were being met in relation to agency workers and what IT equipment was being used by them.

In the meantime, HR have been working on redesigning the Temps Register into a Fast-Track recruitment option and looking at amendments to the on-line recruitment system to enable a quick turnaround on the recruitment of directly employed temps by the Council. The current Use of Temporary Workers Policy and supporting documentation is also under review.

### 3.4 Apprenticeships

- 3.4.1 We currently have nine Apprentices in post studying a range of qualifications including Customer Service Specialist, Business Administration, HR Support and Digital Marketing. We are continuing to utilise the Apprentice Levy Fund for further job-related training for existing staff when the opportunity arises. Our training providers continue to be able to offer remote learning with some face-to-face observations now able to take place.

We recently attended a Generation Hitchin Apprentice event arranged by Bim Afolami MP, in collaboration with Amazing Apprenticeships. This was an opportunity for us to promote NHC as a potential employer and highlight what we can do to support the careers of young people within district. The event was supported by 3 of our current Apprentices, who had the opportunity to listen to the newly appointed Minister for Skills, Alex Burghart MP.

### 3.5 Pay

- 3.5.3 **National Pay bargaining:** The pay negotiations for the 2021 pay award have not yet reached a settlement. At a meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> October between the National Employers and the National Joint Council, the employers group reaffirmed the pay offer made in July as a full and final offer and declined to reopen the negotiations.

The pay offer provides 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). This offer has been rejected by the unions and in December they are due to ballot their members to seek support for industrial action. There will need to be at least 50% turnout at the ballot to meet the threshold for industrial action as well as a majority voting to support of action.

### 3.6 Employee Benefits

- 3.6.1 **Employee Wellbeing Classes:** Following the introduction of a series of free wellbeing classes for employees provided by our employee advice service earlier this year, employees can now access new classes which will be available until the end of 2022. These classes, which are delivered digitally, focus on creating an environment that empowers employees to proactively manage their physical and mental wellbeing.

Topics covered include working well at home, improving sleep, managing stress and anxiety and diet and nutrition.

### **3.7 Mental Health and Wellbeing**

- 3.7.1 The Mental Health First Aiders continue to support staff, we are holding further drop in sessions for staff on Monday 17<sup>th</sup> January, commonly known as “Blue Monday” we are also ensuring that we support the wellbeing of our Mental Health First Aiders and they have regular catch up sessions arranged to allow them to share any concerns
- 3.7.2 25<sup>th</sup> November marked White Ribbon Day – a day when thousands of people take action and raise awareness to prevent violence before it starts. White Ribbon UK is the leading charity engaging with men and boys to end violence against women and whilst we recognise the amazing efforts of this charity, we at NHC recognise that men are not the only perpetrators of domestic violence but can sometimes be the victim. We took the opportunity to highlight to all staff, the support we have available to both men and women who may be victims of domestic abuse.
- 3.7.3 The Hertfordshire HR Leaders project to support employee mental health and resilience is progressing with the allocated funding from Public Health received. This will be invested in tools and training to help staff to develop their resilience.

### **3.8 Learning & Employee Engagement**

- 3.8.1 The Personal Development sessions are continuing, and dates have been confirmed for 2022, with the focus for the start of 2022 being to develop good habits.
- 3.8.2 **Service Manager Development Programme**  
Both cohorts 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. Feedback has been received from the participants and will be passed to the Leadership Team.

### **3.9 Shaping our Future**

The new Council Plan and the inclusion of priorities and 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 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, Diversity and Inclusion**

At the September meeting of the Inclusion Group, the discussion topic was Race and Ethnicity. The meeting started with the definitions of race and ethnicity in legal terms, and a comparison of the ethnicity of employees at NHC compared to the North Hertfordshire census data. Discussion followed on a variety of points including how our recruitment process avoids bias at short-listing by removing personal details such as applicants name and ethnicity, known as blind recruitment; the importance of

individuals feeling comfortable being able to raise concerns relating to their race or ethnicity and how any barriers can be overcome. The group have agreed to act as Inclusion Champions, with their details provided on the intranet, so they can be contacted by members of staff who want to approach someone in confidence. It was noted that taking a concern to their manager or to HR may not always be the preferred option in the first instance and that having Inclusion Champions will provide an alternative and less formal option.

The next meeting is due to take place in mid-December and the group will be discussing issues and experiences relating to Sex, Sexual Orientation and Gender Reassignment.

### 3.11 Absence

3.11.1 Employee cases of illness relating to COVID-19 have increased more recently in line with the national trend, and a summary of the number of cases and days lost by quarter is shown below, with October – December 2021 showing cases to date at the time of reporting.

	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	5	30.5	10	46			18	90.5

3.11.2 The number of employees on long-term absence has now reduced to just two at present which the HR team are continuing to actively support. Overall, in 2021 we have supported and advised on 20 cases of long-term absence, of these 7 were related to stress or mental health issues, 5 musculo-skeletal, 2 related to cancer and 6 other reasons.

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 October we were under this target.

Rolling 12 months	Absence days lost per employee		
	Long-term	Short-term	Total
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

Aug-21	0.19	0.23	0.42
Sep-21	0.31	0.25	0.56
Oct-21	0.26	0.35	0.61
Total	3.39	2.78	6.15

### 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%

Our labour turnover for 2020/21 was at its lowest levels more than 10 years at 8.1%. Since April we have seen the number of leavers increase to pre-pandemic levels, with resignations during the period April – October 2021 being just over double (30) compared to the same period in 2020 (14). This has increased our labour turnover for the rolling year, November 2020 – October 2021, to 13%.

## 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

Authors

- 5.1 Rebecca Webb  
HR Services Manager  
Tel: 01462 474481  
[rebecca.webb@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:rebecca.webb@north-herts.gov.uk)
- 5.2 Jo Keshishian  
Human Resources Operations Manager  
Tel: 01462 474314  
[jo.keshishian@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:jo.keshishian@north-herts.gov.uk)
- 5.3 Ian Couper  
Service Director – Resources  
01462 474243  
[ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk)

## Strategic HR Forum – Discussion paper JSCC December 2021 – The Modernisation of the Recruitment Process

### **What are the benefits of a modernised recruitment process?**

Effective recruitment means filling a vacancy with a candidate with all the required skills, experience, and qualifications for the job. Technology has enabled the modern workplace to develop new ways to screen applications and to interview potential candidates. Modernising our recruitment processes cuts time and costs for NHC, helping to streamline this HR process and effectively recruit the best potential candidate possible at a time of high labour turnover and a competitive market.

- **Candidate experience:** Almost all candidates will now expect to search and apply for jobs online and want easy access to information on employers' websites. With our online system, candidates can pause an application and amend it before submitting. They have confirmation of receipt of their application and can be updated of its progress.
- **Employer brand:** The Council website acts as our "shop-window" to prospective employees and allows us to promote NHC as a good employer. Having a strong brand image online is increasingly important in a competitive employment market and helps to attract good quality candidates.
- **Automation:** Having an online recruitment system has reduced administration tasks for HR through system generated emails, and allowing recruiting managers to self-serve, easing the workload and removing the need for paperwork to be printed.
- **Speed and efficiency:** Recruiting managers can access candidates' applications by logging onto a system rather than having to collect paper applications. The click of a button confirms shortlisted or successful candidates, without the need to complete separate forms or emails. Faster processes ensures that communication is swift and vacancies are filled in a timely manner.
- **Flexibility:** Applicants can access the online recruitment portal via their computer or mobile phone and receive email notifications relating to their recruitment wherever they are. Recruiting managers are able to access the system to review applications whether they are working from their home, the office or another remote location.

### **North Herts Recruitment in 2021**

#### Applications

Since 2014, we have had an online recruitment system which allows candidates to view and complete applications online via the jobs page of the Council website. The system also allows managers to complete shortlisting online. This resulted in a reduction of HR administration workload as applications were no longer needed as paper copies. All administration contact with the candidate throughout the recruitment process is done via email, including interview invites and outcome letters, which is more time efficient and has reduced administration costs.

#### Advertising

All our vacancies are advertised using the intranet and open to all staff including those on casual or temporary contracts. External vacancies are also advertised on the NHC website which continues to attract a good volume of visitors. We aim to maximise the use of free recruitment pages including the Job Centre, Indeed, as well as the Council's Twitter and LinkedIn pages which assists us in reaching wider

audiences whilst keeping advertising costs to a minimum. In 2020 we created our own recruitment video to share on the website, created in house by our Digital Communications Officer, and hope to complete to same for our Apprenticeship page in the future.

#### Positive Action

We have supported the recruitment of disabled applicants for many years via the government's *Positive about Disability* scheme. More recently this has been updated and we are proud to be *Disability Confident* employers and we display the logo on our adverts, applications, and Jobs pages.

At the end of 2020 we also updated our application form to make it more inclusive of the LGBTQ+ community. Under the equalities data section, candidates can declare their gender as 'non-binary' or 'prefer not to say' as well as 'male' and 'female', which had previously been the only options available.

#### Employment Checks

We have also modernised our process for DBS checks which are now completed by an external provide (Experian) who manage the process on our behalf via the use of an online portal. Candidates are emailed a unique link to the portal, enter their own details, and HR are kept informed of the application process until completion. We have also been trialling the use of a similar process for our reference checks. This is proving to be a very effective process and has increased the speed of completing these tasks as well as reducing administrative time.

#### Video interviews

When the pandemic hit in March 2020, all interviews and assessments were moved to a virtual platform with immediate effect, using Zoom or Teams. Managers and candidates have adapted to this new way of working with relative ease and it has allowed us to reach a greater number of diverse candidates without the usual barrier on location. As the world slowly returns to a new normal, we will continue to offer a virtual interview process when needed, alongside the traditional face to face interview.

#### Careers fairs

For several years, we have taken the opportunity to raise our profile at apprentice careers fairs and school careers events, positioning ourselves as a desirable local employer. These events have allowed us to speak with young people from local schools who may not previously have considered a career at NHC and therefore attracting new talent into the organisation.

#### **Future developments**

- A review of the NHC employer brand as presented to candidates on the website to ensure NHC vacancies attract the best candidates, including our Apprenticeship recruitment video and applicant pack to interested candidates
- Further development of the recruitment tool to include reminder emails to be sent to candidates who start an application but do not complete
- The Transformation team are working on a modernised new starter process to cut down administration burden for recruiting managers. Once established we propose to review how this can link into the recruitment process
- Continued monitoring to ensure that the systems remain effective and non-discriminatory

Date of JSCC		Discussion topic
2017	March	Obesity and disability
	June	TUPE
	Sept	Shared Parental Leave
	Dec	Local Government Pension Scheme: What is the current position and what changes are planned?
2018	March	The future for Apprenticeships Apprentice Levy, Public sector targets and Higher Apprenticeships
	June	Coaching for individual and organisational development
	Sept	Update on new and proposed family friendly legislation – e.g. Parental Bereavement, Grandparental Leave
	Dec	How we are modernising the process for on-line applications
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	Employee Assistance Programme - What it is, what does it do and is it of value?
	Sept	The challenges and rewards of long term home-working
	Dec	Modernisation of the Recruitment Process

<b>Subject area</b>	<b>Suggested discussion topics for future meetings</b>
Change management	Update on Shaping our Future specifically related to Evolving simply expressed values
Change management	Shared Support Services
Employee Relations	Employment Tribunal updates
Employee Relations	Employment law - what can we expect in the next 12 months and beyond?
Employee Relations	Employee guidance on use of social media
Equalities	Future Streams of mandatory pay cap reporting
Equalities	20's Diversity, changing workplace accommodation and practices
L&EE	Coaching
L&EE	Face to face v on-line learning, striking a balance
L&EE	Employee engagement within blended working
L&EE	Providing support for staff wellbeing during uncertain times
Resourcing	Attracting and rewarding scarce talent
Resourcing	Social Media for recruitment
Resourcing	Supporting young people through apprenticeships and other schemes
Well-being	Supporting the Menopause at work
Well-being	Long Term Absence Management
Well-being	Outplacement Support
Well-being	What's the employer's role in keeping staff healthy?