

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



27/05/2022

Our Ref Joint Staff Consultative Committee/08.06.22
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To: The Chair and Members of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee of North Hertfordshire District Council

District Councillors Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg (Chair), Councillor Raj Bhakar (Vice-Chair), Councillor Claire Strong, Councillor Terry Hone and Councillor Tom Plater

(Substitutes: Councillors Councillor Kay Tart, Councillor Mandi Tandi, Councillor Ruth Brown and Councillor Tony Hunter)

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

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

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

to be held as a

REMOTE MEETING

On

WEDNESDAY, 8TH JUNE, 2022 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. MINUTES - 9 MARCH 2022	To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9 March 2022	(Pages 3 - 6)
3. 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.	
4. STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM	To receive the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum meetings from March, April and May 2022.	(Pages 7 - 20)
5. INFORMATION NOTE - HR UPDATE	INFORMATION NOTE OF THE HR SERVICE MANAGER To receive an update on the progress made in the last quarter completing HR work and projects and supporting people issues.	(Pages 21 - 26)
6. STRATEGIC DISCUSSION PAPER	To receive a discussion paper on shaping our future and values.	(Pages 27 - 28)
7. FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS	To consider the subjects for debate at future meetings of the Committee.	(Pages 29 - 30)

Public Document Pack Agenda Item 2

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE TO BE ADVISED
ON WEDNESDAY, 9TH MARCH, 2022 AT 10.00 AM

MINUTES

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

In Attendance:

Ian Couper (Service Director – Resources), Rebecca Webb (Human Resources Operations Manager), Maggie Williams (Senior HR & Contracts Manager) and Louis Mutter (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)

Also Present:

Debbie Ealand (UNISON)_

24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2:00

No apologies for absence were received from Councillors.

Apologies for absence were also received from UNISON representatives Dee Levett and Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews

25 MINUTES - 15 DECEMBER 2021

Audio Recording – 2:20

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 15 December 2021 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

26 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3:20

- (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.

27 STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM

Audio Recording: 3:50

The Service Director – Resources presented the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums held in December 2021, January and February 2022 and drew attention to points including:

- At the December meeting it was announced that the Council is extending the right to request flexible working to day 1 of employment;
- Also discussed annual leave carry forwards;
- All three meetings consisted of a review of the Consultation Forum, looking at the Terms of Reference and how to encourage engagement.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Kate Aspinwall
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions, the Service Director – Resources advised:

- Nothing to imply the Council is going to let DCO as a residential space;
- The Elections in 2023 are going ahead as normal.

IT WAS AGREED: That the minutes of the Staff Consultation Committee held in December 2021, January, February 2022 be noted.

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

28 INFORMATION NOTE - HR UPDATE

Audio Recording: 8:45

The HR Operations Manager presented the report entitled HR Update and drew attention to points including:

- Since restrictions have lifted there has been a gradual return to the office;
- Several measures still in place including facemasks, distancing and desk cleaning;
- The higher turnover is reflected in increased recruitment activity. 2 posts advertised at this time had to be advertised again due to low interest;
- In the process of recruiting three further apprentice posts;
- Section 3.6 covers the pay award which is now outdated; have now had an agreement on the 2021 pay award, and has been processed for March;
- The 2022 pay bargaining isn't expected to begin until next month, there will be another delay until that has been agreed;
- The inclusion group met in December and discussed sexual orientation and gender; overall it was felt that the Council is a inclusive place to work;
- COVID absences have increased, this is expected due to the cases currently in the District;
- Overall short term absences have continued to increase, felt this is due to be from the lifting of restrictions and the increased likelihoods of minor illnesses circulating;
- Labour turnover is at a high, it has slowed down in the last three months but expect these high levels to continue.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Kate Aspinwall
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions, the HR Operations Manager advised:

- The Council has actioned the pay award quicker than most other councils; the pay negotiations are in the hands of the national employers.
- The values of the Council are single words to ensure they are memorable; there will be some description as part of the communication about these values.
- Some employees have had long COVID, managers have been supported to ensure the employees that are suffering from this are provided with what is needed.

IT WAS AGREED: That the Information Note entitled HR Update be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Committee to consider the Information Note entitled HR Update.

29 INFORMATION NOTE - EQUALITIES UPDATE MARCH 2022

Audio Recording: 25:05

The Senior HR & Contracts Manager presented the report entitled Equalities Update March 2022 and drew attention to points including:

- The graphs in Appendix 1 set out the data provided in the report;
- The equalities figures are from 2021;
- Overall the figures are stable; very few changes in the last few years;
- Notable increase of those in the 35-44 and 45-54 age bracket and a decrease in the 25-34 group;
- 21% increase of those under the age of 25 leaving the Council;
- No change in the number of staff declaring a disability since last year;
- No notable change in amount of staff in ethnic minorities or gender;
- Numbers of long term sick cases have had little change in the past three years;
- 2021 saw the highest number of leavers since 2015 and represents a 50% increase from 2020;
- During 2021 the percentage of leavers who resigned increased by 4% to 70%;
- The latest equal pay review has shown it is very stable; used a traffic light system to focus on the most important reports;
- The majority of cases in the equal pay review was due to the increments of pay rewarded to those who have stayed in a position longer;
- Now have figures from the 2021 Gender Pay Gap review, which will be published in the next couple of weeks; have an improvement in mean and median gender pay gaps; now at its lowest level;

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Kate Aspinwall

In response to questions the Senior HR & Contracts Manager advised:

- Long term sickness cases are discussed as a part of Business Partner team meetings, they will take that opportunity to look for patterns that may be concerning. We have a wide range of reasons at this point and see no pattern. Occupational health are always providing information to the senior team.
- The flexible return to work is available to everyone.
- The equalities data is published on the website; HR also look at the data to pull out any themes or actions to progress.

- There was a change to the gender pay gap group in 2021, this has developed into a broader group of the inclusion group. The actions from the gender pay group have been integrated into the inclusion group;

IT WAS AGREED: That the Information Note entitled Equalities Update March 2022 be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Committee to consider the Information Note entitled Equalities Update March 2022.

30 STRATEGIC DISCUSSION PAPER

Audio Recording: 58:35

The HR Operations Manager presented the Strategic Discussion Paper on the employer's role in keeping staff healthy and highlighted points including:

- The report was requested with a focus on mental health with a backdrop on the pandemic;
- North Herts has always been conscious of its responsibility to support the wellbeing of its employees;
- Since the pandemic the Council has responded to the emerging wellbeing and mental health needs with a wide range of additional direct support and helpful resources;
- The initial response to the COVID pandemic was to ensure that within the first months of lockdown every member of staff received a call from HR to ensure their wellbeing had been supported;
- These calls allowed individuals to converse with colleagues outside of their team and to have a direct route to raise problems;
- HR also created a lockdown toolkit on the intranet which included resources in where to find support;
- HR launched the headspace wellbeing app which was received well by employees.

The Chair and Members thanked the HR Operations Manager for the paper.

IT WAS AGREED: That the Strategic Discussion Paper on the employer's role in keeping staff healthy be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Committee to consider the discussion paper on the employer's role in keeping staff healthy.

31 FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS

Audio recording – 1:07:10

Members considered which subjects should be discussed at future meetings and

IT WAS AGREED: That officers should continue to update the Committee on the work of the COVID Recovery Plan, and should be presented at the first Committee meeting of the new civic year.

The meeting closed at 11:09 am

Chair

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting**02/03/2022**

Present: Anthony Roche (AR), Ian Couper (IC), Rebecca Webb (RW), Emma Jellis (EJ), Christina Corr (CC), Vicki Wood (VW) Dee Levett (DL), Toby LeSage (TL)

(Fallon Rumball–Nunan (FRN – notes)

Circulation: Global

1. Apologies

Vic Godfrey, Debbie Hiscock, Nicola Viinikka, Andrew Betts

2. Matters Arising

Welcome to the new SCF Employee Representative – Vicki Wood.

SCF Employee Representatives are in the process of organising a meeting with the communications team to discuss future SCF Communications.

3. NHDC update

Council Budget has been agreed for 2022/23. No significant changes to the draft versions except additional one-off spend on Green Space Wilding Projects, and the Outdoor Pool.

Improvements have been made to the Council Delivery plan, by linking strategic projects to the Council plan for 2022/27 with more clarity, The Council Delivery plan will go to approval to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny in March.

Hitchin District and County By Elections will take place on 10th March.

Planning has also begun for the May Election and Electoral Services will be reaching out for volunteers to assist with these.

HR Update

The pay award for April 2021 has now been agreed. An increase of 2.75% for Grade 1 only, 1.75% for Grades 2 - 12 and 1.5% for chief officers (Grades 13-16) will be applied to the payroll in time for March salaries and backdated to 1st April 2021.

Updated pay scales are now available on [Pay scales | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)

Members thanked HR for the quick turn around to make this available in March Payslips.

The 2022 pay award negotiations have not yet begun so agreement will take some time.

The next Inclusion Group meeting will take place on Tuesday 8 March between 12pm - 2pm. The focus of this meeting will be on religion and how your personal beliefs and religion impact upon your experience of working at North Herts. The meeting will be formatted as an open discussion and all council staff are invited to join the discussion at any level they feel comfortable doing so.

The Staff Recognition Awards are open- closing date for nominations for this round is Friday 11 March 2022

Another Productivity Ninja Workshop has been organised for 19th May 09:30am- 11:00am.
[Click here to book.](#)

Wellbeing Update

The events in Ukraine will have personally affected all employees in some way.

If you require further support at this time, you can visit www.my-eap.com, speak to a Mental Health First Aider and/or sign up to the Headspace application using your North Hertfordshire Council email address.

We have obtained Mental Health E Learning from Mind Charity that will be available for employees and managers via Growzone in the coming weeks.

4. Employee Queries

Various queries were submitted regarding the relaxation of Covid restrictions and how this will impact working in DCO:

We have a corporate responsibility under Health and Safety Law to keep our staff safe and we have to take account of the impact of covid on employees. The Government may be relaxing measures but legally we are required to keep everyone safe. Therefore, it's very challenging to get this balance.

As of 04/03 as an organisation our guidance is currently to do all to protect colleagues and their families who may include high risk individuals, so therefore no changes to the restrictions in DCO. Throughout the pandemic, guidance from Public Health Hertfordshire has been sought and we are awaiting the latest guidance. Views will be sought from employees via SCF and other channels before implementation. Further correspondence and updates to be communicated in due course.

Are people thinking about the effects of long covid on employees?

Thankfully The Council has seen very few cases of long covid. The HR team are prepared to support managers and employees with any cases that arise..

Have we got any contribution from the authority for household expenditure?

For all contracted home-workers, general homeworking expenses (including broadband) can be claimed via Employee Self Service up to a maximum of £16 per month.

5. IT Update

Cyber Security Reminder:

Anything suspicious could mean anything as we are all very much in a connected world, some examples are:

- 1) 3rd Party supplier requesting access to systems when it hasn't been approved by you.
- 2) Your user account getting locked out when you haven't been trying to login.
- 3) Your password being changed without your knowledge.
- 4) More targeted and 'believable' emails going to staff/managers with attachments or links to viruses.
- 5) Large number of files being deleted or corrupted.
- 6) External suppliers attempting to send files for us to run/install to fix a bug (which then deploys a payload/backdoor).
- 7) Sophos anti-virus warnings / detection pop up – please log these on the IT Helpdesk giving as much detail as possible on what you were doing at the time and a screenshot of the message.
- 8) Be extra vigilant when reviewing your Personal Email Manager (PEM / Clearswift) held messages and make absolutely sure these are genuine before releasing them.

There is also a perceived increased risk with Microsoft Teams due to attackers getting hold of just one user account and password then sending 'files' to other users within the organisations for them to click and open. We have tried to make the system secure by only allowing Teams access from NHC Equipment and/or Android for Work but there could still be new attack vectors that we are unaware of.

In July 2021 your personal development session focused on Cyber Crime and Cyber Security. If you need a refresher or did not complete it in July this is a reminder to please take a look at the modules on GROW Zone. [Click here.](#)

Freedom of Information Requests:

IT are receiving high volumes of requests; please could these be answered promptly to allow the IT team to process correctly.

6. Green Update

Solar Panels on the District Council Offices are now connected and generating electricity.

In the process of installing four electric charging points in the DCO car park. Careline have two electric vehicles on order that will replace petrol ones.

Parking Services Team are in the process of investigating opportunities for more charging points to be installed in NHC car parks for public use.

Climate Change Implementation group last meeting included:

- Climate Emergency UK published a score for all councils. We have reviewed the score we have achieved and will take actions where we think they are relevant.
- Climate Change Officer Group have been newly formed to implement changes on a more practical level.

If anyone has any ideas, suggestions are welcome.

7. Building Services Update

Questions were welcomed.

8. Any other Business

CC to attend the JSCC meeting.

Chair for next meeting – Dee Levett

Have something to say?

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

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

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

Representatives (and extension):

Emma Jellis #4312 - MSU team based on Floor 4

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

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

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

06/04/2022

Present: Ian Couper (IC), Jo Keshishian (JK) Emma Jellis (EJ), Christina Corr (CC), Vicki Wood (VW) Andrew Betts (AB), Alice Ashbrook (AA), Dee Levett (DL), Toby LeSage (TL)

(Fallon Rumball–Nunan (FRN – notes)

Circulation: Global

1. Apologies

Anthony Roche, Rebecca Webb, Nicola Viinikka, Debbie Hiscock

2. Matters Arising

Welcome to the new SCF Apprentice Employee Representative – Alice Ashbrook.

3. IT Restructure

Following feedback from the IT Consultation this has been put on hold and will be raised at SCF in due course when the updated proposal has been finalised.

4. NHC update

Welcomed any questions on the recent return to work communications.

Two schemes currently in place to aid Ukrainian Refugees.

Ukrainian Family Scheme: If a refugee has family in the UK. This doesn't require any initial support from local government but there may be a need to provide services.

Homes for Ukraine: Working alongside County council to support refugees move in to homes in the district. North Herts have one of the highest number of matched hosts and refugees in the county with approx. 52 matches (at time of last set of data, likely to change).

County Council provides an initial payment to the refugee on arrival and DBS checks on the hosts.

Environmental Health team are providing property checks ensuring safety prior to refugee's arrival. NHC will also have a role in helping refugees integrate and settle into a new country.

Benefits team will be making the 'thank you' payments to the hosts of £350 per month (for up to one year).



NHC Communications team are working alongside other local councils to signpost residents to the information available.

HR Update

Annual Leave for 2022/2023

For those with leave left at the end of March 2022 there is automatic carry forward to the 2022-23 leave year, for up to one week's annual leave (up to 37 hours depending on your weekly contracted hours) which was available from April. Any additional leave (over the equivalent of one week's leave) has now been calculated and uploaded manually by our payroll team at Liberata.

Wellbeing Update

April is stress awareness month with this in mind HR would like to remind you of the support available:

[Headspace for work application](#): access to 1,000+ hours of content designed to help you manage stress, fall asleep, exercise mindfully, remain focused, and more. Headspace also has child-friendly content for those of you with young ones.

[Click here](#) to sign up with your north-herts.gov.uk email address.

[Employee Assistance Program](#): around the clock access to confidential, independent, professional information and emotional support.

[Vita Health Group Wellbeing classes](#): access to wellbeing classes, completely free of charge to employees. These classes focus on creating an environment that empowers employees to proactively manage their physical and mental wellbeing.

The classes will be delivered digitally, covering a number of topics including Working well at home, improving sleep, managing stress and anxiety and diet and nutrition. For further information, or to book a class please [click here](#).

[Mind eLearning](#): courses have been designed by the charity MIND and introduces mental health and wellbeing, covering key topics such as what is mental health and wellbeing, common mental health problems, what factors impact our mental health, how to care for yourself at work, how to build resilience and how to support others.

5. Employee Queries

None

6. IT Update

Desk booking:

Desks have returned to normal on floors 4 and 5 so you will now be able to sit directly next to colleagues. Please continue to book via the smart way desk booking system so as to monitor usage.

IT Helpdesk:

Please allow more time for non-urgent queries due to low staffing levels.



If anyone has any old or damaged NHC IT equipment please can you log an IT Helpdesk Ticket to organise its return.

Freedom of Information/Environmental Information Regulations requests:

IT are receiving high volumes of requests; please could these be answered promptly to allow the IT team to process correctly.

7. Green Update - Prepared by Alice Sims

A Roadmap to Net Zero is being produced for North Herts Council which will map how the council will achieve net zero by our target date.

A Climate Change Officers group is in the process of being set up. This will include key officers across the Council to ensure that the climate change response is coordinated and implemented across services collaboratively.

The Policy Team are currently working to produce a review of the Council's Carbon Emissions and Climate Actions in 2021. This will include an estimate of carbon emissions produced by the Council during the year, in comparison to our carbon baseline year of 2019 /20 and will also include a review of the Council's progress in achieving the proposed actions of the Climate change Strategy.

Climate Change and Sustainability communications over the last month have included:

- The promotion of the Herts Energy Advise Tool App
- The promotion of a carbon calculator, encouraging staff and residents to receive an estimate of their personal carbon footprint as well as suggestions as to how they can reduce this
- The promotion of Herts Sustainable Periods by Hertfordshire Waste Partnership – a new scheme which offers 15% off reusable period products to all Hertfordshire residents to tackle period waste as well as other issues around women's health and period poverty

There was a question about whether we had considered having "living walls" on our buildings. IC said that he was not aware of it having been considered. We do not have many buildings that we have control over and are looking to retain. There would be complexities with all our buildings (e.g. listed building status, structure) but could consider it as part of any future building projects.

8. Building Services Update

Questions were welcomed.

VW: Have you considered removing desk phones and consequently saving on related contracts?

IC: This is something that has been looked into, such as internet phones and plugging headsets directly into laptop.

9. Any other Business

None

Have something to say?

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

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

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

Representatives (and extension):

Emma Jellis #4312 - MSU team

Christina Corr #4325 - Senior Technical Officer Revenues and Benefits

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

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

Vicki Wood #4158 – Planning Officer

Alice Ashbrook #4235 - Community Protection Apprentice

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

04/05/2022

Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**), Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Emma Jellis (**EJ**),
Andrew Betts (**AB**), Alice Ashbrook (**AA**), Dee Levett (**DL**).

(Fallon Rumball-Nunan (**FRN – notes**))

Circulation: Global

1. Apologies

Ian Couper, Christina Corr, Toby Le Sage, Debbie Hiscock

2. Matters Arising

None

3. NHDC update

HR Update

The next Personal Development Morning is Friday 13th May, the focus for this month is Finance and to support this we have a number of resources available.

Friday 13th May 10.00am – 11.00am

Ian Couper will be presenting a session about Financial Sustainability. This one-hour, interactive session will help us to understand what financial sustainability means, why it is important, and how everyone can help the Council achieve it. It will also include an overview of how the Council is funded, how we manage what we spend and deliver good value for money. This will be held via Zoom and joining instructions will be sent out just ahead of the session next week.

Book your place on the GROW Zone here: [Financial Sustainability: Financial Sustainability for All Staff \(learningpool.com\)](#)

VAT eLearning Module

In addition to this session, a new VAT eLearning module that has been launched – this should be completed by all staff who raise purchase requisition orders or sales invoices, use a purchasing card, or who just want to find out more about VAT.

Click here to access the module: [VAT: NHC VAT eLearning Module \(learningpool.com\)](#)

Risk Management eLearning Module

We also have the Risk Management eLearning module which should be completed by all Risk Owners or Risk Assignees, if you are unsure if you are in either of these categories, please contact Tim Everitt.

Click here to access the module: [RM: Risk Management eLearning \(learningpool.com\)](#)

The popular Think Productive – The Way of a Productivity Ninja workshop is taking place again on Thursday 19th May 2022

Click here to book: [Prod Ninja: The Way of the Productivity Ninja Virtual Workshop \(learningpool.com\)](#)

Benefits Review: Employees are encouraged to complete the upcoming survey around our current benefits and HR welcome ideas for any potential new benefit ideas. Further information on staff benefits can be found on the intranet under [Staff benefits](#) and some are covered in the [Employee Handbook](#).

Wellbeing Update:

Mental Health Awareness Week 9th -15th May

Reference to the preventing work related stress article featured in Insight – read it [here](#).

Reminder of internal support available to staff and managers including:

[The Employee Assistant Programme](#)

[GP appointment Service](#)

[Mental Health First Aiders](#)

[Accredited Internal Coaches and Mentors](#)

NHDC Update

Thursday 5th May is election day, staff will be updated on result as soon as count is completed.

Following on from the previous minutes, the Ukraine housing is ongoing.

Question: Do we have any updates on figures relating to the Ukraine housing?

Answer: As of W/C 25th April in North Hertfordshire:

- 117 Visa's approved (34 have arrived in UK)
- 94 Sponsor households matched
- 209 Ukrainian refugees matched in total

In wider Hertfordshire 1064 Ukrainian Refugees have been matched into 612 homes

4. Employee Queries

Question: Given that covid isn't going away and the period of time people can be testing positive, will the Council remain flexible where parents have a child at home off school/nursery with covid?

Answer: This is something that HR and Senior Leadership team are discussing and will feedback in due course.

Question: For children in childcare, changes to hours need to be done at least a month if not 6 weeks in advance and subject to availability i.e., any increase in hours might not be possible initially or even at all. With the shift to increased office working (and increased commuting time), sufficient notice should be given so that parents can make any necessary childcare arrangements.

Answer: We appreciate that making changes to childcare arrangements require notice and managers and employees are encouraged to have open discussions on this issue.

Question: I understand there may be the wider council aim for people to go back to the office 1-2 days per week. Can part time workers do less days in the office i.e., 1 day (subject to service needs)? For full time workers the reduction in office days from 5 to 2 days is quite a drop (40%) but for part time workers say on 3 days per week 2 office days would be 67% of time. Can this be proportional to the hours worked?

Answer: We believe there are benefits in working from the office and benefits in working from home and it's about finding the right balance. There has been guidance around returning 1-2 days per week and in practice this should be based on what works for both teams and individuals. If someone part time feels that the arrangements are not suitable for them this should be discussed openly with their line manager.

Please keep these questions coming we hope to publish a document that will provide clarity for employees and it is useful to know the thoughts and concerns to focus on.

5. IT Update

Provided by Toby Le Sage subsequently to the meeting.

IT Update

The new Vodafone contract is now in place. If existing staff or new staff require a mobile phone or a data SIM card please can Managers complete the Mobile phone application form on the following intranet page [Mobile Phones | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#) Managers will be required to provide a cost code before IT can activate the SIM card. Existing phones and tablets, if any member of staff is experiencing connection issues, please reboot the phone/tablet, if the connection issue persists following the reboot please log a call and IT will investigate.

Cadcorp upgrade

A business case has been submitted for the upgrade of Cadcorp to version 9. There are a number of improvements that the new version will offer staff. Once the business case has been approved work will start to upgrade the software. IT will be in contact with certain members of staff when planning the upgrade.

Helpdesk

IT are still working with a reduced number of staff on the IT helpdesk. IT will work to assist staff that have high priority helpdesk requests, however there may be some delay in responding to some helpdesk calls during this period of reduced staff.

Question: When will all the desks at Buntingford have docking stations installed?

Answer: Remaining desks to have docking stations installed by the end of June.

6. Green Update

Prepared by Alice Sims

The terms of reference for the Climate Change Officers Groups have now been reviewed and finalised. The policy team will arrange for the next meeting of the group to take place in the near future

- The carbon baseline report, which sets a baseline of carbon emissions for 2019/20 has been updated to include smaller sites and buildings. This will be used to measure our carbon reduction progress against.
- The Policy team have completed an assessment of the Environmental implications contained with any decision-making papers that were presented to Cabinet/Council from the last civic year. This review ensures that any impacts either on environment were adequately assessed, and mitigating action put in place where practical, including any impact assessments that were completed throughout the year. During the civic year 2021/22, three environmental impact assessments were completed and included in reports to cabinet, Council and for delegated decisions. These were for:
 - The Grounds Maintenance Contract Review
 - The decision regarding Land South of Clare Crescent, Baldock:
 - The County-wide Solar Group Purchase Scheme

North Herts Council will be represented by a stall at the Hitchin Eco-Fair on Saturday 14th May. Materials are being collated to promote some of the work that the Council has, and is, doing. This includes the North Herts climate change infographic; posters to promote the HEAT energy app, Herts Sustainable Periods, and the WWF carbon calculator

7. Building Services Update

Questions were welcomed.

8. Any other Business

SCF Membership

Dee Levett will be retiring from the CSC but will return to the SCF meetings in her TU capacity.

A discussion followed regarding recruiting SCF members, if you would like to join or are a manager who thinks you know just the person please encourage them to talk to an existing SCF member or HR.

Action: Add ideas/suggestions as standing item to the SCF agenda.

Chair for next meeting – Alice Ashbrook

Have something to say?

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

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

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

Representatives (and extension):

Emma Jellis #4312 - MSU team

Christina Corr #4325 - Senior Technical Officer Revenues and Benefits

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

Alice Ashbrook #4235 - Community Protection Apprentice

Louis Franklin #4262 – Admin Support Officer

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JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

8 June 2022

*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 and supporting people issues.

2. STEPS TO DATE

- 2.1 The HR Update Information Note contains updates regarding the 2021/22 HR Service Work Plan and the People Recovery 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 North Herts Council Members.

3.2 People Recovery Plan

The pandemic and subsequent restrictions have had a significant 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.

Since restrictions have been lifted nationally, the general guidance around expectations has been updated for employees at the Council. Some measures remain in place with a focus on ensuring that everyone attending the office feels comfortable and the Council are supplying lateral flow tests for employees in certain public facing roles. We are seeing a gradual increase in the number of traditional office-based employees returning to working from the office for some of their working time, whilst many employees continue to work effectively from home.

Flexibility is important to our employees. We are developing a document which will explain the principles around the Council's new ways of working and guidance for managers and staff on how to apply the new ways of working in practice as we move towards a new normal.

3.3 Recruitment

We continue to see a relatively high number of vacancies although the number of leavers has started to slow down. During the last quarter, two of our apprentices were recruited to permanent roles (Licensing and Customer Service), as well as

appointments in Careline, Waste Services, Community Engagement and Electoral Services. The team have supported with temporary staff requirements in the Customer Service team to assist with the high levels of calls regarding Council Tax rebates.

There continue to be difficulties in recruiting for some professional roles where resource and skills are in short supply. We continue to work with these teams and colleagues from other Councils to try to find solutions.

The Kick Start Trainee Programme has now come to an end. One of the Council's trainees has been successful in securing permanent employment with the Council. The other two trainees have recently completed the scheme having had 6 months paid work experience which has developed their skills and knowledge which will be valuable in their future careers.

Work has begun on a Recruitment Refresh project with plans to update and modernise the current processes and information presented on our website. Over the coming months, this will ensure that the recruitment webpages better reflect the Council as an employer and improve the employee experience as individuals join the Council.

3.4 **Apprenticeships**

We have nine apprentices in post and our current group are completing a range of Apprenticeships including Customer Service Specialist, Business Administration, HR Support, Digital Marketing and Information Communication Technician.

Now that the Apprenticeship Levy Scheme is more established, we can offer a greater variety of Apprenticeships and are currently advertising for an Assistant Accountant Level 3 and a Cultural Learning Officer, together with further Business Administrations opportunities. We also have a Community Health & Wellbeing Apprentices starting in August. To promote working as an Apprentice with North Herts Council, there will be an article in the next edition of the Outlook magazine. We also have 2 Apprentices registered to participate in the EELGA Apprentice of the Year Event on 25th May.

3.5 **Pay**

National Pay bargaining 2021: The pay negotiations for the 2021 general pay award reached an agreement at the end of February 2022. A 2.75% increase was agreed for grade 1 and a 1.75% increase for grades 2-12. The pay award was applied to salaries from March 2022 and backdated to April 2021.

National Pay bargaining 2022: The Unions are expected to table their pay claim for 2022 in June. North Herts Council will continue to take part in the National Pay Briefings.

3.6 **Employee Benefits**

There are a range of benefits available for Council employees and these are key to our reward package, helping the Council to attract and retain staff, as well as playing a role in improving wellbeing. To ensure that we are offering a package that is valued, the team will conduct a review in the coming months. Employees views will be reviewed, and research conducted to establish the most valued benefits and considerations made for launching new opportunities.

This seems particularly important with the current economic situation, and employees salaries being eroded by inflation.

3.7 Mental Health and Wellbeing

Mental Health Awareness week took place in May and the team took the opportunity to highlight the HSE Working Minds campaign and remind employees of the support available to them.

Using the Public Health funding, we have launched MIND E-Learning modules on Growzone, to support those wanting to increase knowledge of mental health and/or how to support others.

Uptake of the Headspace app continues to increase, and the app has helped us mark World Meditation day on 21 May with tips on how to meditate.

3.8 Learning & Employee Engagement

The Personal Development Sessions continue to be well received, every other month there is a specific theme with resources provided to support this. The remaining months allow employees to focus on their own personal or professional development. The theme for May was Financial Sustainability.

We are also running several core skills workshops to support staff to participate in groups that are crucial to the keeping North Herts Council inclusive, such as the Inclusion group and Staff Consultation Forum.

3.9 Shaping our Future

The team continue to work on the activities highlighted in the Shaping our Future action plan, which are aligned to the Council Plan priorities. This action plan was shared with the Shaping our Future steering group at the end of February. The next Shaping our Future steering group takes place in July 2022.

The graphics to support our values are being finalised and will be launched shortly. This will support the work to imbue the values at the Council – Together, Listening, Learning, Adaptable and Inclusive.

3.10 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Inclusion group met in March 2022 to discuss experiences relating to religion.

The group noted that there was little awareness of the Religious Observance policy, which outlines support for faith requirements at work. It was appreciated that not everyone needs to be an expert, but that raising awareness can help ensure that Religion is not a barrier. The group agreed that sharing more information about religions and their various festivals would be helpful to raise awareness.

The next meeting is due to take place in June and the group will focus on Marriage & Civil Partnership, Pregnancy & Maternity (including Fertility).

3.11 Absence

Rates of employee absence relating to COVID-19 were at their highest to date between January – March 2022. This level appears to be in decline in the first month of 22/23, which is in line with the national trends of infections in the ONS data. A summary of the number of cases and days lost by quarter is shown below, with April - June 2022 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	34.5	32	184	54	206	94	438.5
2022-23	6	25								

The HR team continue to actively support long term absence cases, with assistance from Occupational Health, by providing advice and information to managers and employees. There are a small number of ongoing cases of this nature.

Short-term absence continues to increase, with Covid absences being a significant factor during Jan-March. The increase is also linked to other minor infections and this is likely to relate to increased social interactions and the reduced Covid restrictions. There is HR guidance and support available for managers managing short term absence.

The absence figures for the rolling 12-month period are shown below as absence days lost per employee.

Rolling 12 months	Absence days lost per employee		
	Long-term	Short-term	Total
May-21	0.36	0.25	0.60
Jun-21	0.22	0.23	0.45
Jul-21	0.49	0.30	0.79
Aug-21	0.19	0.23	0.42
Sep-21	0.31	0.25	0.56
Oct-21	0.26	0.35	0.61
Nov-21	0.22	0.53	0.75
Dec-21	0.24	0.54	0.78
Jan-22	0.24	0.42	0.66
Feb-22	0.21	0.33	0.54
Mar-22	0.38	0.62	1.0
Apr-22	0.36	0.46	0.81
Total	3.48	4.51	7.98

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%
2021/22	13.7%

We have completed the 21/22 year with a 13.7% turnover which is an increase from recent previous years. This increase is expected, based on national trends and labour market.

Looking ahead, it's expected that a higher rate of turnover will continue and several HR workstreams will assist in reducing the impact of this on services across the Council. Aspects of this work are detailed above and include the Benefits Review, the Recruitment Refresh project and Shaping our Future.

4.0 NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 Progress against the HR Service plan, and work on both the People Recovery plan and Shaping our Future action plan will be reported to quarterly JSCC Meetings.

5.0 CONTACT OFFICERS

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Shaping Our Future

Introduction

This paper is intended to support discussion on the progress and future of the Shaping our Future initiative. Initially launched in 2020, Shaping our Future is the term used to describe the North Herts Council approach to Organisational Development (OD) and although aspects of OD were already in place a more co-ordinated approach was suggested as part of our peer review report in 2020.

What is Shaping Our Future?

Like all other Authorities, North Herts Council faces significant challenges and opportunities, which require it to change and adapt in order to continue to achieve the Council's priorities.

We are seeking to develop an organisation which demonstrates:

- 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.

These are effectively the aims of Shaping our Future.

Shaping Our Future is not a totally new initiative, the Council is already doing a wide range of things, both structured and more organic, which contribute towards the development of our organisation. This includes (but is not limited to):

- staff and leadership development
- work on equality, diversity and inclusion
- moving towards a more commercial culture
- digital transformation

A steering group that includes both Officers and Members is in place. Its overall role is to create a forum that generates ideas, provides feedback and supports and scrutinises the Shaping our Future action plan. The programme is led by Ian Couper (Service Director: Resources) supported by the Human Resources Team.

The steering group is also developing alternative ways of getting ideas and feedback. This includes using the Staff Consultation Forum and the Inclusion Group.

The Importance of Organisational Values

Shaping our Future is underpinned by the organisations values which should be at the heart of everything we do and support the change we are seeking to achieve.

We originally had six values with six matching behaviours to explain what each meant in practice. The steering group concluded that this was an over complicated way of communicating the values. As a result, the values have been distilled down to 5 single words, which can be expanded with more detail as required.

Our Values are:

- Listening
- Together
- Learning
- Adaptable
- Inclusive

In full:

- We listen to and consider the views of each other, our partners and our customers
- We work together and support each other to deliver the best we can
- We learn from others and are open to change
- We are adaptable in finding solutions for each other, our partners and our customers
- We are inclusive and value diversity

The Values will be a reference point for many things we do such as recruitment, training, performance management and leadership. These will once again be displayed prominently around the District Council Offices, the Intranet and the Councils webpage (where relevant, e.g. recruitment pages).

The Importance of the Action Plan

Shaping our Future is an umbrella concept, what is important are the actions we take to move towards the aims. To this end an action plan has been produced which forms the basis of review and discussions at the steering group.

The action plan is an evolving document. Several of the actions currently sit with Learning and Employee Engagement, as well as HR more broadly. It is the intention that over the coming months the plan is expanded to include other actions that contribute to Shaping our Future.

Future considerations and areas for Discussion

- Communicating both Shaping our Future and our Values in an accessible way
- Broadening the action plan to include a wider range of relevant actions
- Encouraging a more diverse range of views about the future of the organisation

Date of JSCC		Discussion topic
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
2022	March	The Employers Role in Keeping Staff Healthy
	June	Shaping our Future and Values

Subject area	Suggested discussion topics for future meetings
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

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