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## **Agenda Part I**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Page</b>
<p><b>1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b> Members are required to notify any substitutions by midday on the day of the meeting.</p> <p>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.</p>	
<p><b>2. MINUTES - 8 JUNE 2022</b> To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 8<sup>th</sup> June 2022.</p>	(Pages 3 - 8)
<p><b>3. 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.</p>	
<p><b>4. SCF MINUTES</b> To receive the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum meetings from June, July and August 2022</p>	(Pages 9 - 22)
<p><b>5. HR UPDATE</b> INFORMATION NOTE OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER</p> <p>To receive and update on the progress made in the last quarter on HR work and projects and supporting people issues.</p>	(Pages 23 - 28)
<p><b>6. DISCUSSION PAPER - SUPPORTING WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE</b> To receive a discussion paper on Supporting Women in the Workplace</p>	(Pages 29 - 32)
<p><b>7. FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS</b> To consider the subjects for debate at future meetings of the Committee</p>	(Pages 33 - 34)

# Public Document Pack Agenda Item 2

## NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE REMOTE MEETING  
ON WEDNESDAY, 8TH JUNE, 2022 AT 10.00 AM

#### MINUTES

**Present:** *Councillors: Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg (Chair), Raj Bhakar (Vice-Chair), Claire Strong, Terry Hone and Tom Plater*

*Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews (UNISON)  
Christina Corr (Staff Consultation Forum)*

**In Attendance:** *Ian Couper (Service Director – Resources), Rebecca Webb (HR Services Manager), Helen Bylett (Learning and Employee Engagement Business Partner), William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager)*

**Also Present:** *There were no members of the public present.*

#### 32 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

*Audio recording – 2:35*

There were no apologies for absence.

#### 33 MINUTES - 9 MARCH 2022

*Audio Recording – 2:50*

Councillor Terry Hone advised that at minute 28 the phrase “Labour turnover” had political connotations and that the minutes should be clarified to avoid confusion.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg advised that phrasing such as ‘Staff turnover,’ would be preferable.

It was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 9 March 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

#### 34 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

*Audio Recording – 4:20*

- (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.

### 35 STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM

*Audio Recording – 5:03*

The Service Director – Resources presented the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum meetings from March, April and May 2022 and highlighted the following discussions:

- The introduction of regular Green Updates to keep staff aware of what actions the Council is taking on climate change
- The Staff Recognition Awards
- The Ukrainian refugee schemes and the role the teams in the Council's housing and environmental health departments are playing

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg

In response to questions the Service Director – Resources advised that there was no push from management for staff to return to office working but that teams were being encouraged to consider the benefits of working in the office more frequently, and that individual service managers would have the discretion to consider working patterns in light of service needs. Support was still available to staff via the EAP and HR team but gradual adjustment of childcare arrangements as the Council returned to a more regular way of working in the future might be necessary for some staff.

It was:

**RESOLVED:** To receive the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum meetings from March, April and May 2022.

### 36 INFORMATION NOTE - HR UPDATE

*Audio Recording – 9:43*

The HR Services Manager presented the Information Note entitled "HR Update" and highlighted the following points:

- The People Recovery Plan covered a gradual return to office based working and noted that flexibility was considered a key benefit by staff;
- The HR team was working on guidance and principles to assist managers and teams in returning to more in-person working;
- Staff turnover was still high in line with national trends and this was reflected in the number of vacancies;
- Several successful appointments had been made including the recruitment of new apprentices and one role under the Kickstart scheme;
- The HR team was undertaking a recruitment refresh project to review each stream of the recruitment process to ensure that talented candidates were attracted to roles at the Council;
- A review of staff benefits was underway to assess best value for money and which benefits staff most valued;
- Given economic conditions and the local government funding situation staff benefits beyond pay were increasingly important in attracting and retaining talent;

- Mental health and wellbeing remained a focus for the HR team; Mind e-learning was available on the growzone for staff and managers and corporate use of the Headspace offer was positive with 18,000 minutes spent on the app in total;
- The Inclusion Group continued to meet quarterly; the meeting in March focussed on religion and belief, and the group continued to be a forum for open and safe discussion of individual perspectives and experiences;
- Absences due to COVID had reduced slightly but short term absences have increased overall likely related to an increase in social activity and the circulation of minor infections.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- Councillor Tom Plater
- Councillor Raj Bhakar
- Councillor Claire Strong

Questions raised covered topics including:

- 2022 Pay bargaining and negotiations
- Guidance and principles to managers on the return to office working
- The Council's diversity and inclusion strategy
- Recruitment refresh and review plans

In response to questions the HR Services Manager advised:

- Regional pay briefings were ongoing and it was anticipated this round of negotiations would be difficult; employers were expecting the unions submission soon and expected there to be significant differences in the unions' request and the employees offer
- The HR team and management understood that staff value flexibility and guidance offered to service managers and team leaders on encouraging office-based working would reflect that;
- The Inclusion Group was expanded from the Gender Pay Gap working group in 2020 and has discussed a range of characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010 and was now looking at broadening the focus of its work; feedback from staff was valued and while no senior leadership team were part of the group in order to keep it a safe space for open discussion, the HR team briefed the Service Director – Resources after each meeting with any key issues raised;
- A recruitment review/refresh was on the horizon as a potential project for some time but now was an especially apt time to undertake the work;
- There was not a clear pattern evidenced in exit interviews to explain why staff were leaving; some turnover was positive but the HR team tries to identify trends that might indicate problems in the organisation.

In response to questions the Service Director – Resources advised that the guidance and principles document for managers on returning to office working would highlight the four main groups of staff as regards home/office working; those that always work from home; those that always work in the office; those who worked across the District travelling to various sites and locations; and hybrid workers.

It was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Information Note entitled "HR Update" be noted.

Audio Recording – 22:45

The Learning and Employee Engagement Business Partner presented the Strategic Discussion Paper on Shaping our Future and highlighted points including:

- The Council's values had recently been refreshed but were based on a set of values produced in consultation with staff from across the Council making sure to include staff at all 'satellite sites' as well as those working in the District Council Offices;
- The values and behaviours were now clearly displayed to staff across the Council at every opportunity and formed part of the regular performance review process as well as other training which ensured that the values and how staff were expected to demonstrate them was at the core of all work at the Council;
- The Shaping our Future group had the aim of developing a high quality, diverse, inclusive and resilient workforce; resilience had been a key focus in recent years with the pandemic and work on other priorities was ongoing particularly in the IT department in facilitating creative and innovative new ways of working.

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

- Councillor Raj Bhakar
- Councillor Tom Plater
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews
- Christina Corr

Points raised included:

- How were values communicated to staff and incorporated into the recruitment strategy
- How did the Shaping our Future group encourage and engage with diverse perspectives on the future of the organisation
- Values and behaviours highlighted the attitudes practiced by staff as a matter of course in their work

In response to questions the Learning and Employee Engagement Business Partner advised that:

- The values and behaviours were conveyed in part through a major branding effort; personal development sessions had been held that focused on the values; values already featured in the RPR process but as part of the recruitment refresh the team would be looking at how to promote values-based recruitment and display the Council's values prominently to prospective applicants;
- Ideas from the Shaping our Future group were discussed by the Inclusion group and feedback was gathered from other groups including apprentices and staff at all levels;
- All staff that worked with the Council – whether full time, part time, or on fixed-term contracts – were considered members of staff;

In response to questions the Service Director – Resources advised that the Shaping our Future group had previously included Members but it was felt by the steering group that staff-led feedback from a wider range of levels across the organisation was key.

It was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Strategic Discussion Paper on Shaping Our Future be noted.

*Audio Recording – 36:11*

The Chair led a discussion on potential future discussion topics at forthcoming meetings.

The following Members took part in discussion:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- Councillor Terry Hone
- Councillor Tom Plater
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Raj Bhakar

Points raised included:

- Recruitment and retention of staff was a key topic and should be featured at this Committee every time it meets, and could be included in the regular HR update;
- The resourcing topics of “attracting and retaining talent” and “rewards and recognition of staff” would be appropriate for a future meeting;
- Wellbeing strategies to support staff tied in with resourcing and retention and particularly discussion of the support available for staff going through the menopause;
- Menopause education was lacking generally and it was positive that workplaces were starting to provide support; this should be a focus going forward;
- Resources on the menopause and support available should also include staff impacted by endometriosis.

It was:

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That recruitment and staff retention be included as a topic in future HR Update notes
- (2) That the discussion topics of Supporting Staff through the Menopause and Endometriosis and attracting/retaining staff in the workforce be included in future meetings.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To allow the Committee to determine suitable topics for discussion at future meetings.

The meeting closed at 10.50 am

Chair

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## Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

01/06/2022

**Present:** Anthony Roche (**AR**), Jo Keshishian (**JK**) Emma Jellis (**EJ**), Alice Ashbrook (**AA**), Christina Corr (**CC**) Keith Fitzpatrick- Mathews (**KFM**),  
  
(Fallon Rumball-Nunan (**FRN – notes**))

**Circulation:** Global

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### 1. Apologies

Andrew Betts, Louis Franklin, Rebecca Webb, Ian Couper

### 2. Matters Arising

None

### 3. NHC update

#### HR update:

**Benefits Survey:** [Staff Benefit Survey](#) emailed out Monday - we are keen to hear your views on our current range of benefits as well as ideas on how we can improve, and new benefits which are under consideration so please take the time to complete the survey and encourage your colleagues to do so as well. The Survey will be open until 22nd June, and Ian and Rebecca will be answering questions on benefits at the next Staff Briefing 8th June.

**New Ways of Working:** Work on this is progressing. It will help to give further guidance and cover questions around returning to the office.

**Inclusion Group:** The next meeting is Tuesday 7th June, and the discussion topic will be marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy, maternity, and paternity (including fertility and adoption) and how these may impact upon your experience of working at North Herts. The meeting is at 10am and is open to everyone.

**Personal Development morning:** Friday 10th June: There is no specified theme for this month, but managers have been reminded of:

- [GDPR e-learning](#) which needs to be completed annually,
- [Annual Declaration Letter](#) which need to be signed and returned by the end of June.
- [Social Media policy](#)
- New Starter get-together.

#### Wellbeing Update:

[Headspace for work application:](#) Staff are still able to sign up for a year's free premium access to the Headspace app.



[Mind eLearning](#) E learning Grow Zone from the Mental Health charity Mind.

[Vita Health Group Wellbeing classes](#) staff also have free access to virtual wellbeing classes provided by Vita Health, and these range from Pilates, Yoga, Mindfulness and Diet & Nutrition.

**Carers' Week 6-12<sup>th</sup> June:** we will be running two lunch time events on Zoom:

- Tuesday at 12:30pm Gail and Maggie will be joined by Carers in Herts to provide information about support available for working carers
- Thursday at 13:00pm Virtual Kitchen for colleagues with caring responsibilities

**NHC Update:**

Annual Council took place on 26<sup>th</sup> May, details of cabinet changes can be found [here](#).

**4. Employee Queries**

None

**5. IT Update**

None

**6. Green Update**

*Prepared by Alice Sims*

**Clean Air Day, 16<sup>th</sup> June – HCCSP Initiative**

Hertfordshire County Council have received funding from DEFRA, which will be put towards improving air quality in Hertfordshire through a communications campaign, as well as installing new air quality monitors across the County. The Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership will be launching the comms campaign on Clean Air Day (16<sup>th</sup> June) by targeting idling across the County and involving community groups to take part and target specific locations of their choice during the day.

**New Mowing Regime**

The first cut for the new regimes of mowing has been completed and the biodiversity benefits are already evident, with more flowers seen in the verges and other areas, including Butts Close.

**Hitchin Eco Day**

North Herts Council were represented by a stall at the Hitchin Eco Day event on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> May. The stall promoted some of the work that the Council has, and is, doing in relation to the Climate Emergency. This includes promoting the Climate Change Strategy, the HEAT energy app, the Herts Sustainable Periods Campaign, and the WWF Carbon Calculator, as well as sharing information on the success of the recent 10,000 trees giveaway initiative. Posters were displayed to provide visual information and QR codes so that individuals could easily access the HEAT energy app and online information.

**Climate Change Implementation Group, 20<sup>th</sup> May**

The Climate Change Implementation Group (CCIG) is made up the Leader of Council, relevant executive Members, relevant service directors and the corporate policy team. This group works at a strategic level and the aim of group is to advance the implementation & development of actions from the Council's Climate Change Strategy.



The CCIG aids connecting climate work across council services and the activity of cabinet panel on the environment. Following a review of the terms of reference, a new format has been adopted, where specific actions from the Climate Change Strategy are spotlighted at each meeting to discuss how these can be implemented. The most recent meeting took place on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> May.

### **HEAT Energy App**

The HEAT Herts Energy Advice Tool, an energy saving app continues to be available for residents to download and use. This is available on apple and android app stores and is accessible to residents throughout Hertfordshire. The app is designed to take residents through their home and fill in a survey to identify how they can reduce their energy usage in order to save money on bills and help the environment.

### **7. Building Services Update**

Questions welcomed.

If anyone has any issues, please email these to [propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk)

### **8. Ideas/Suggestions**

None

### **9. AOB**

Recruitment has started for 3 new Apprentices within Finance, Human Resources and Licencing. If you know of anyone suitable, please encourage them to [apply](#).

JSCC Representative, Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> June – TBC

### **Chair for next meeting – Christina Corr**

### **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](mailto:propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk)

Alternatively, you can send any issues to the SCF inbox - [SCF@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto: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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## Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

06/07/2022

**Present:** Anthony Roche (**AR**), Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Ian Couper (**IC**), Emma Jellis (**EJ**), Alice Ashbrook (**AA**), Andrew Betts (**AB**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Dee Levett (**DL**) (Fallon Rumball-Nunan (**FRN – notes**))

**Circulation:** Global

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### 1. Apologies

Christina Corr

### 2. Restructures

Emergency Planning proposed move to Resources with no changes to the individual roles. Reasons include:

- Better linked to Resources
- The new executive member for Emergency planning is Cllr Albert, IC already liaises with Cllr Albert on other matters so would prevent duplication.
- Sarah Kingsley (SK) will be the lead officer on Climate change, and this will allow more time to focus on this.

Consultation has started and no representative asked to be on SCF during the consultation period (in line with the policy) and all involved in agreement with the changes. Consultation to end W/C 11/07.

### 3. Matters Arising

None

### 4. NHC update

#### HR update:

#### Benefits Survey:

Thank you to everyone for taking part, there was a good response rate and the HR team are currently analysing the results and suggestions provided. More information to follow.

#### Policy Updates:

The 'Special Leave' policy has been renamed '[Other Absence](#)' policy this is inline with the titles on itrent. The policy also now includes support for employees volunteering outside of their roles at the Council.

The [Probation Period policy](#) has been updated in line with many other local authorities. The probationary period will apply to all new starters, including those with continuous service.

#### Pay Award 2022:



NH attended the Regional Pay Briefing and have provided feedback. The National Employers will begin negotiations with Unions. The pay claim is for an minimum increase of £2000 or current rate of Retail Price Index (RPI) on all spinal points, whichever is greater.

**Wellbeing Update:**

[Headspace for work application:](#) Staff are still able to sign up for a year's free premium access to the Headspace app.

[Mind eLearning](#) E learning Grow Zone from the Mental Health charity Mind.

HR team are finalising [Financial Wellbeing Intranet page](#), sign posting staff to support due to the cost-of-living increase. There has also been a soft launch process for salary advances. These will be for emergency costs, if you have an unexpected cost that could cause financial strain, please speak to your manager or email Hrhelp.

Check out the [monthly newsletter](#) from Employee Assistant Program, this month focusing on 'Getting ready for summer; travel, holidays and keeping it all together.'

**NHC Update:**

Shaping our Future (SOF)

Have been working with Communications team on the values logos, linking them with the new council branding and adding meaning with a strapline.

Refreshed values graphics below:



Welcomed any views or comment. The values will be taken to the Steering Group for views and approval. Following on from this, IC will be looking to discuss SOF with SCF and other employee led groups for feedback and the action plan in more detail.

**5. Employee Queries**

**Q:** Will there be a further staff benefit survey for feedback on the new proposals?



**A:** Within the survey there were a few potential ideas that employees could comment on and the free form boxes also allowed for people's views. If there are outstanding questions, this would be considered.

**Q:** With regards to the benefits survey, I don't feel that the survey was clear on how to answer any benefits that may not be applicable for yourself personally, but you felt were useful to the authority, or other colleagues.

**A:** The introduction in the survey asked everyone to fill out from own personal perspective. This was our first time using the Microsoft Form platform and it was a large-scale survey, so any feedback is welcomed to improve for next time.

**Q:** Currently we get £16 for homeworking, is this fair that full time and part time employees receive the same amount?

**A:** Response provided post meeting:

The homeworking allowance is intended to cover expenses relating to homeworking including broadband, heating and other associated costs. As not all these costs relate to the amount of time worked (you can't get a part time broadband contract, for example), it seems appropriate that the allowance is linked to the individual rather than their hours worked.

**Q:** If you have a non-working day on a Bank Holiday, is this included in your allowance?

**A:** Full time staff are entitled to paid time off for all public holidays and part time staff will receive a pro rata entitlement. RW to pass on calculation to the individual.

**Q:** There has been no update on IT Restructure in the SCF meetings?

**A:** As the timing did not correspond with closure of consultation period and upcoming SCF meeting details of the restructure were forwarded to the SCF inbox on 26/04/2022 this was forwarded to members for discussion/comment. AR added that the initial consultation was brought to SCF and the staff recommended changes. The consultation was paused to consider these suggestions and the proposal was changed on that basis. Those are the changes that would have been communicated by email.

## **6. IT Update**

None

## **7. Green Update**

*Prepared by Alice Sims*

### **Net Zero Week**

Net Zero Week is taking place across 2-8 July 2022. Throughout the week, Council communications will highlight the net zero targets that North Herts Council have set as part of our climate change strategy, promoting our work that contributes toward achieving those targets, and promoting the actions of community groups that are contributing to reducing carbon emissions in the district. An updated version of the climate change strategy infographic has been produced to demonstrate more recent actions taken by the Council to address climate change. This can also be viewed on the Council's climate change web page.

### **Cabinet Panel on the Environment**

The upcoming Cabinet Panel will take place on Wednesday 20 July and will focus on the theme of biodiversity. The Policy Team will provide an update to the panel regarding the HCCSP Biodiversity Sub-group. Andrew Mills, North Herts Council's Greenspace Manager, will provide an update on recent Council initiatives, and members from the Green and Growing Network have agreed to present at the panel on some initiatives that



they are currently involved in, and have been asked to consider the question 'How can residents get involved in helping local nature' as part of their presentation. Residents are also invited to sign up to participate.

### **Solar Bulk Purchase Scheme**

North Herts Council have partnered with iChoosr and other local authorities to provide Hertfordshire residents with an opportunity to be part of a solar bulk purchase scheme. This will enable residents to install solar panels (and battery storage and EV charging if desired) installed at their homes at a reduced rate due to multi-purchase discount. This scheme will launch at the end of August 2022.

### **Upcoming Letchworth Green Festival**

Letchworth Green Festival will take place on 10 September, between 10am – 4pm at The Wynd and The Arcade in Letchworth. The Council will have a presence at the festival to engage with residents on what the Council has and is doing to tackle climate change and increase sustainability, as well as encourage residents with actions they can take in reducing the district's overall emissions

### **Climate Change Officers Group (CCOG)**

The Climate Change and Sustainability Officers Group met on Wednesday 15th June. As this was an initial meeting, each team provided updates on what relevant work they are completing. This information has been collated by the policy team and will be recorded against our climate change strategy proposed actions. A discussion was also had around teams providing support to assist the comms quarterly plans for climate change.

AR added that this month is Plastic Free July and at the LGA Conference, climate change was one of the main focuses. SK and Cllr Jarvis attended and have lots of ideas that will be communicated soon.

## **8. Building Services Update**

Welcomed questions.

### Reminder

- When using a desk on the 1st, 4th or 5th floor, you must book it using the desk booking system. [Desk Booking System | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)
- On the 1st floor and one side of the 4th floor, we still have every other desk out of use. These desks cannot be booked and must not be used. If a team wants to sit together then please use the other side of the 4th floor or the 5th floor.
- Clean and sanitise desks before and after use.

Leadership team have agreed to continue to offer free testing to those in customer facing roles, will be reviewed in March 2023.

If anyone has any issues, please email these to [propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk)

## **9. Ideas/Suggestions**

LF raised a suggestion for more allotment space as there are currently no availability in the district and would aid with the cost of living and bio diversity to local residents.

AR commented that the Baldock Allotment Society would like to expand into some adjacent land and that is currently ongoing but would highlight this to SK.

**10. AOB**

- SCF members thanked Helen Bylett for organising the meeting chairing workshop.

**Chair for next meeting – Louis Franklin**

**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](mailto:propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk)

Alternatively, you can send any issues to the SCF inbox - [SCF@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto: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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## Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

03/08/2022

**Present:** Anthony Roche (**AR**), Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Ian Couper (**IC**), Emma Jellis (**EJ**), Alice Ashbrook (**AA**), Andrew Betts (**AB**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Christina Corr (**CC**) Mark Robinson (**MR**) Brenda Downie (**BD**) (Fallon Rumball-Nunan (**FRN – notes**))

**Circulation:** Global

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### 1. Apologies

Dee Levett

### 2. Matters Arising

None

### 3. Launch of Enterprise

The Commercial directorate has been renamed Enterprise. Enterprise will now include Economic Development team as well as adding Tourism. Enterprise are working on many income generating projects, including the successful acquisition of the [Churchgate Shopping Centre](#) in Hitchin.

### 4. NHC update

#### Pay Award 2022:

The annual pay award is negotiated at a national level and earlier this week, the National Employers made a final pay offer of £1,925 on all pay points, which GMB Union and Unison are considering. The offer falls just short of the claim made by the Unions of £2,000 (Or RPI) and the Employers have called for a quick resolution so that negotiations for 2023/24 pay can begin and staff can be paid an increase.

#### Holiday Flex:

The [HolidayFlex](#) scheme has now opened for new applications during August, allowing you to buy additional annual leave. Apply for HolidayFlex between 1 and 31 August and, if approved, the holiday will be added to your annual leave entitlement in September. The cost of the additional leave is taken from your salary through a 'salary sacrifice' scheme and will be spread over six months (October – March).

Reminder that of the newly launched [well@work](#) intranet page focussing on [financial wellbeing](#) and signposting various support available.

### 5. Employee Queries

**Q:** The community engagement team have mentioned that they've had staff from NHC and councillors asking them which department deals with certain issues and who they need to contact within the council.

**A:** Please sign post councillors to the 'Councillor Portal' This will automatically direct them to the correct place. For general enquiries, if you email the Customer Services team, they will be able to allocate this to the correct person.

## 6. IT Update

Details of the IT restructure can be found in [Insight](#).

MR welcomed any questions.

**Q:** Is there an update on docking stations for Buntingford?

**A:** There is a system wide delay with docking stations and being able to require them cost effectively due to the move many businesses worldwide are making to remote working is difficult. As soon as we have the equipment, it will be installed.

## 7. Green Update

*Prepared by Alice Sims*

### **Local Authority Emissions Data 2020**

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has released 2020 local authority level emissions data. This now accounts for CO<sub>2</sub>, CH<sub>4</sub> and N<sub>2</sub>O, and displays overall emissions as CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent. Previously only CO<sub>2</sub> was reported. This gives us a more complete picture of our emissions.

The recently published data also includes two new categories of emissions: agriculture and waste management.

The CO<sub>2</sub>e data for North Herts has been presented on the attached spreadsheet and indicates that Transport (37.6%) and Domestic (29.3%) emissions were the highest contributors to North Herts' overall emissions in 2020, with public sector emissions estimated to contribute 1.8% towards the district's overall emissions.

Positively, the data indicates that overall emissions are continuing to decline over time in every sector. The district's overall CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions in 2020 are estimated to be 656kt. This is lower than 2019 (735 kt CO<sub>2</sub>e overall) and 2018 (743 kt CO<sub>2</sub>e overall). It is evident that 2020 saw a significant decline in emissions from the previous year, compared to the difference between 2018 and 2019. It can be assumed that the impact of the pandemic has had a role to play, and this significant decline may not be consistent going forward.

The data has been published [here](#).

### **HCCSP Solar Bulk Purchase Scheme**

The Solar Bulk Purchase scheme for residents will be launched around the end of August.

### **Review of Climate Change Strategy**

The Policy team are in the process of reviewing the Council's Climate Change Strategy. This includes reviewing the main body of text from the strategy to incorporate suggestions highlighted by Climate Emergency UK at the beginning of the year, producing a document outlining updates against each of the strategy's proposed actions, and adding any new proposed actions going forward.



## **Cabinet Panel on the Environment**

The Cabinet Panel on the Environment met on 20th July to discuss Biodiversity. The Panel received presentations from officer on the HCCSP Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan, and what the council has been doing to improve biodiversity in North Herts. It also received presentations from the community on the Green and Growing Network, and on biodiversity and development. The panel was well-attended and the council was given various ideas by participants as to how we could do more to improve biodiversity.

### **8. Building Services Update**

If you regularly attend the office, we require First Aiders, a small allowance is provided. Please contact Les Davison.

#### Reminder

We have had several complaints about staff not cleaning their desks before and after use.

The desks are not cleaned by the contract cleaners so it is up to all of us to leave them as we would wish to find them.

Cleaning supplies are provided on all floors and replenished regularly

Covid still exists and we need to adhere to Health & Safety policies put in place to protect ourselves, our colleagues, and our colleague's families.

If anyone has any issues, please email these to [propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk)

### **9. Ideas/Suggestions**

None

### **10. AOB**

None

## **Chair for next meeting – Louis Franklin**

### **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](mailto:propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk)

Alternatively, you can send any issues to the SCF inbox - [SCF@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto: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**  
21 September 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 2023/23 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 North Herts Council Members.

**3.2 New Ways of Working**

Teams continue to develop how they work, balancing the benefits of remote working with the benefits of face-to-face team working.

Covid related absences have levelled off (see 3.11) and the Council continues to supply lateral flow tests for employees in certain public facing roles.

Our desk booking system remains in place, ensuring those attending the office have a suitable place to work.

**3.3 Recruitment & Retention**

The table below shows a comparison of recruitment statistics from May – July 2022 to the same period in 2021.

	VACANCIES		APPLICATIONS		SHORTLISTED		OFFER		NOT FILLED		INTERNAL	
	APP*	REG*	APP	REG	APP	REG	APP	REG	APP	REG	APP	REG
May - July 21	2	18	21	70	14	47	2	18	0	0	0	11
May - July 22	4	19	51	49	23	24	3	16	1	3	0	4

\*APP denotes an apprentice vacancy

\*REG denotes a regular / non-apprentice vacancy

The number of job vacancies has remained similar, but the ratio of regular/ non apprentice applications received to vacancies has reduced from 3.9 last year to 2.6 this year. Conversely the number of applications for apprentice posts overall has risen compared to the same period last year.

This quarter we have successfully filled 19 jobs including 3 apprentice posts, Careline Team Leader, two Environmental Health Officer posts, Electoral Services, and one Customer Service Assistant. It is also interesting to note that a smaller number of posts were filled by internal candidates this quarter. This can vary depending on the type of job and skill sets being sought.

There were 4 vacancies that were not successfully filled this quarter, whereas last year all vacancies were filled. Those unfilled were: Civil Enforcement Officer, Customer Service Assistant, Environmental Health Officer EHO (Food Safety) and Licensing and Community Protection Apprentice. The Licensing Apprentice vacancy has since been filled with a suitable applicant who initially applied for another apprentice post. The EHO post is being reviewed to offer as a trainee post, and the other posts are due to be readvertised.

We continue to work with the managers that have posts that were not successfully filled and managers of our traditionally hard to fill posts. As part of this support a Welcome Payment has been introduced to encourage recruitment and retention for posts meeting certain criteria.

Mindful of the changes in the labour market, work on the Recruitment Refresh project continues, and the team have gathered feedback from Senior Management Group (SMG) and the Apprentice group, which will help to steer the changes that will be made.

### 3.4 Leavers and Turnover

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

Year (1 April – 31 March)	Turnover Rate
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%

The current 2022/23 year has seen our labour turnover rate start to decline slightly and it appears to have stabilised at around 10.5%.

However, the labour market conditions mean that we should expect an increased turnover rate over the coming months, as the ONS report a high vacancy rate which means more jobs are available. Several HR workstreams will assist in reducing the

impact of this on services across the Council. Aspects of this work are detailed in this report.

### 3.5 Apprenticeships

We have 11 apprentices in post and our current group are completing a range of Apprenticeships including Business Administration, HR Support, Digital Marketing, Information Communication Technician, Community Health & Wellbeing, Finance and Cultural Learning.

We encourage our Apprentices to meet regularly as a group to provide cross team learning and allowing them to provide feedback on ongoing projects within the organisation.

Along with HR, some of our current apprentices recently attended a Career Fairs and local schools to continue to promote apprenticeships at the Council.

Three of our recent apprentices have been successful in securing further fixed term or permanent roles with the Council.

### 3.6 Pay

#### **National Pay bargaining 2022**

On 6 June the Unions tabled their pay claim:

- A substantial increase with a minimum of £2,000 or the current rate of RPI (whichever is greater) on all pay points

Following a set of National Pay Briefings, the National Employers issued a final pay offer to the Unions on 25 July:

- With effect from 1 April 2022 an increase of £1,925 on all pay points

The Unions are carrying out consultation with their members and an outcome is not expected until late October/ November.

### 3.7 Employee Benefits

The review of employee benefits is underway with aims to ensure we offer a valued reward package to support recruitment and retention. An employee survey was carried out and the results are being analysed along with research into options available. It's clear that many of the benefits already in place at the Council are highly valued but there are areas for potential improvements that will benefit our employees in the future.

Following the analysis and research, options will be presented to Leadership Team.

### 3.8 Mental Health and Wellbeing

Given the increased concerns around the cost of living and rise in energy prices, we have launched a financial wellbeing intranet page, this signposts staff to a variety of resources that can offer support.

We have also launched a scheme to offer a short-term salary advance to support employees during difficult times. This scheme has been welcomed by the union and Staff Consultation Forum and we have already processed two applications.

We continue to promote the wellbeing resources that are available to staff through a variety of means; almost a third of staff are using the Headspace App and the specialist eLearning modules produced by MIND are available to all staff through the GROW Zone – these have been accessed almost 100 times.

### **3.9 Learning & Employee Engagement**

There is a focus on developing Learning and Development activities and associated resources, that support our People First priority. The intention is to ensure all staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge to ensure that everything we do in engagement, service delivery and effective collaborative working, delivers on the priority.

HR continue to work with the Leadership Team and Senior Managers to ensure that we continuously develop our workforce.

### **3.10 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. A more specific action plan that takes on recommendations from the recent SIAS audit was reviewed by the Shaping our Future steering group at the July meeting.

The graphics to support our values have been finalised and will be launched shortly by being displayed in DCO and other staff locations as well as through our IT platforms, documents etc. This will support the work to embed the values at the Council – Together, Listening, Learning, Adaptable and Inclusive.

### **3.11 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

The Inclusion group met in June 2022 to discuss experiences relating to Marriage & Civil Partnership, Pregnancy, Maternity, Paternity (including fertility and adoption).

This meeting included a guest speaker (Service Director, Place) who talked about her experiences and working journey so far.

The group have requested that all colleagues include a photo on their Microsoft work profile for internal use. This is to raise awareness of diversity within the Council as well as supporting colleagues who may not have met each other in person and help new starters feel welcome and get to know the people they work with.

The next meeting is due to take place in September and the group will consider the Shaping our Future action plan and our Values.

### **3.12 Absence**

Employee absences relating to COVID-19 have declined since their peak in January – March 2022. However, they remain at a much higher rate than summer 2021. A summary of the number of cases and days lost by quarter is shown below, with July – September 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	22	75.5	21	109.5					43	185
<b>OVERALL TOTAL</b>									<b>113</b>	<b>514.5</b>

The HR team are currently supporting managers with 7 long-term absence cases which include several chronic illnesses, as well as a couple of employees recovering from planned surgery. We work alongside Occupational Health to ensure that advice is shared with managers as well guidance on phased return to work programmes and appropriate adjustments.

Short-term absences remain relatively high, with Covid absences a significant factor as well as an increase in other minor infections which declined during the pandemic and periods of Covid restrictions.

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
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	1.00
Apr-22	0.35	0.45	0.80
May-22	0.31	0.20	0.51
Jun-22	0.25	0.37	0.62
Jul-22	0.29	0.45	0.74
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.25</b>	<b>4.74</b>	<b>7.99</b>

#### 4.0 NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 Progress against the HR Service plan and Shaping our Future action plan will be reported to quarterly JSCC Meetings.

#### 5.0 CONTACT OFFICERS

Authors

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## **Supporting Women in the Workplace**

Women represent 64% of the workforce at the Council.

Issues relating to women's health have been discussed more widely in recent years and with better awareness comes more information for our managers and leaders on how we can support our female colleagues within the workplace.

### **Periods**

In 2019, People Management magazine reported that many women with period-related symptoms felt compelled to lie about their reasons for absence. A survey found that nearly half of respondents felt there was a "noticeable stigma" around period-related health issues, and 30% felt their colleagues didn't take period pain seriously. There is now a growing movement to normalise periods, removing misconceptions, and to help remove the stigma so that individuals can discuss openly discuss their periods, and related health issues with their managers.

The links provided here and later in the document show the research supporting the information within this paper.

[Women compelled to lie about period related absence](#)

[NORMALISE | Bloody Good Period](#)

[BBC Sounds - 28ish days Later](#)

### **Endometriosis**

Endometriosis is a condition where cells similar to the ones lining the womb are found elsewhere in the body, usually within the pelvic cavity. Each month these cells react to the menstrual cycle in the same way to those in the womb, building up and then breaking down and bleeding. Unlike the cells in the womb that leave the body as a period, this blood has no way to escape. This leads to inflammation, pain, and the formation of scar tissue (adhesions).

Earlier this year, the House of Commons held a debate to discuss the current lack of support for employees who suffer from endometriosis. The disease affects around 1.5 million people in the UK who experience symptoms such as chronic pelvic pain, bladder and bowel problems, heavy and painful periods, fatigue, depression or anxiety, abdominal bloating and nausea, and difficulties getting pregnant.

Three key areas were identified as providing the most benefit to endometriosis sufferers:

- Flexible working, including the ability to work from home
- Reasonable adjustments, as endometriosis has the potential to be classed as a disability
- Paying sick pay from the first day of absence

[Endometriosis Facts and Figures | Endometriosis UK \(endometriosis-uk.org\)](#)

[Support Groups | Endometriosis UK \(endometriosis-uk.org\)](#)

## **Fertility**

The Fertility Network reports that there are more than 3.5 million people in the UK experiencing fertility problems, with most of them in employment, meaning there will be staff – male and female - in every organisation who will be impacted. Their research shows that most employees are reluctant to speak to their employer about their fertility struggles because of uncertainty about the potential detrimental effect on their career. It is also quite common for staff to end up reducing their hours or quitting their job if they're unable to balance work and fertility issues.

[Fertility Network \(fertilitynetworkuk.org\)](https://www.fertilitynetworkuk.org)

## **Pregnancy, miscarriage and still-birth**

Whilst there has been support and legal protection for pregnant women in the workplace for many years, with policies in place to inform managers and staff of the employment rights and maternity benefits, it is less common to have support in place for instances of miscarriage and still-birth.

With an estimated one in four pregnancies ending in miscarriage, the Miscarriage Association reports that women and their partners don't always feel able to talk about this at work, but when there is support in place it can make a real difference to how people cope. A lack of support can mean reduced productivity, increased absence and even resignation. Sands, is the leading stillbirth and neonatal death charity in the UK, reports that:

- Women may need up to 8 weeks off work following a miscarriage
- 10% of parents remain off work 6 months following their baby's stillbirth
- 38% of mothers and 21% of partners reduce their working hours following their baby's stillbirth

[The Miscarriage Association: Pregnancy loss information and support](#)

[Sands | Stillbirth and neonatal death charity](#)

## **Menopause**

The menopause is a natural part of ageing that usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age, as a woman's oestrogen levels decline and she stops having periods. Members of the trans and non-binary community can sometimes experience menopause symptoms if they are taking hormonal treatments.

According to a recent Government Report 'menopausal women are the fastest growing demographic in the workforce'. The average age for a woman to go through menopause is 51. It can be earlier than this, naturally or due to surgery, or illness. Symptoms may start years before menopause, during the perimenopause phase. According to the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM), nearly 8 out of 10 of menopausal women are in work. Three out of four women will experience symptoms throughout the stages of the menopause, one in four of these

could experience serious symptoms. The number of tribunal cases that cited menopause jumped 44% from 2020 to 2021.

[British Menopause Society | For healthcare professionals and others specialising in post reproductive health \(thebms.org.uk\)](https://www.thebms.org.uk)

[Menopause - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

[Menopause and later life | RCOG](https://www.rcog.org.uk)

**Support for our staff:**

- Menopause Guidance for staff and managers is available on the intranet
- Ability to refer to Occupational Health and provision of support for managers in considering reasonable adjustments
- Flexible working policy and Leadership Team support for flexibility, including homeworking
- Employee Assistance Programme providing information and support for employees and managers
- GP helpline service
- A number of options are available to cover fertility appointments - flexi-leave, annual leave or special leave can be used (up to 5 days in a 12 month period), and additional annual leave (up to 1 week) can be purchased through the Holiday Flex scheme.
- Paid compassionate leave is available for employees who have experienced pregnancy loss as well as employees whose partner has experienced the physical loss.
- Employees who have experienced a stillbirth are covered by provisions within the maternity policy. In addition, these employees and partners of those who have experienced a stillbirth are entitled to paid bereavement leave.
- Sick pay from day 1 of absence (increasing with service)
- Maternity returners are offered a meeting with HR to welcome them back and support them settle back into work.
- Where additional time off is required to recover from the effects of medical procedures and drug treatment, this should be taken as sick leave. Sick absence related to treatment for infertility are treated as pregnancy related and do not count towards attendance triggers or warnings.
- The Inclusion Group provides a forum to share experiences, raise awareness and continue to ensure the Council is an inclusive employer.

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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
	Sept	Supporting Women in the Workplace

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	<b>Attracting and rewarding scarce talent</b>
Resourcing	Social Media for recruitment
Resourcing	<b>Supporting young people through apprenticeships and other schemes</b>
Well-being	Long Term Absence Management
Well-being	Outplacement Support

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