

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



2 December 2022

Our Ref Joint Staff Consultative Committee/14
December 2022
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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 and Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews

Staff Consultation Forum Andrew Betts, Claire Bernard, Christina Corr, Louis Representatives: Franklin and Alice Ashbrook

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

to be held in the

VIRTUAL MEETING

On

WEDNESDAY, 14TH DECEMBER, 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 - 21 SEPTEMBER 2022	To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 21 September 2022.	(Pages 5 - 10)
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. SCF MINUTES	To receive the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum meetings from September, October and November 2022.	(Pages 11 - 26)
5. HR UPDATE INFORMATION NOTE OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES SERVICES MANAGER	To update the Joint Staff Consultative Committee on the progress made in the last quarter completing HR work and projects and supporting people issues.	(Pages 27 - 32)
6. DISCUSSION PAPER - MEN'S HEALTH	To receive a discussion paper on Men's Health.	(Pages 33 - 34)
7. DISCUSSION PAPER - APPRENTICES	To receive a discussion paper on Apprentices.	(Pages 35 - 36)
8. FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS	To consider the subjects for debate at future meetings of the Committee.	(Pages 37 - 38)

Public Document Pack Agenda Item 2

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE TO BE ADVISED
ON WEDNESDAY, 21ST SEPTEMBER, 2022 AT 10.00 AM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg (Chair), Claire Strong, Tony Hunter and Tom Plater*

In Attendance:

Abigail Hamilton (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Ian Couper (Service Director – Resources), Rebecca Webb (Human Resources Operations Manager), Jo Keshishian (Interim Human Resources Services Manager), Dee Levett (UNISON), Debbie Ealand (UNISON) and William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager)

Also Present:

There were no members of the public present

39 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 0:00

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Terry Hone who was substituted by Councillor Tony Hunter

Councillor Raj Bhakar was absent.

40 MINUTES - 8 JUNE 2022

Audio recording – 0:41

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Claire Strong seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 8 June 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

41 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 1:04

(1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting

(2) 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 need to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

42 SCF Minutes

Audio recording – 2:24

Ian Couper presented the Staff Consultation Forum and highlighted points including:

- The majority of the information within this will be included in the HR update information note.
- In relation to the Ways of Working document, we are taking it to the senior management group for discussion. We have already implemented many of the ways of working but want to finalise our formal document stating it.

There were no questions from Members.

It was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum for June, July and August 2022

43 HR UPDATE

Audio recording – 3:40

Rebecca Webb presented the HR Update Information Note and highlighted points including:

- Teams have been developing how they work after the pandemic. This looks at balancing the benefits of face-to-face collaborative work and homeworking
- As mentioned in the last item, a formal document is being developed to show these new ways of working and it is being taken to the senior management group
- The Committee requested further detail on recruitment and retention as this is an ongoing issue
- This quarter, the overall number of vacancies has stayed the same (compared to the same quarter last year), but there has been an increase in the number of apprenticeship posts.
- There has been an increase in the number of apprenticeship applicants, but the number of other applicants has decreased
- 19 posts this quarter have been filled, there were 4 that weren't filled at first attempt and so HR have worked with recruiting managers to fill these roles. One has been filled and the rest are being re-advertised
- There is a recruitment refresh project which includes a welcome payment to support recruitment
- The use of feedback from apprenticeship groups and senior managers feedback group will be used to improve the project, website, and the processes
- Turnover seems to have stabilised at roughly 10% but there is potential for this to increase
- The apprentice scheme continues and there was a careers fair with schools to advertise the apprenticeships and job roles at the Council. Many apprentices secure job roles after their apprenticeship which is a positive outcome.
- In relations to pay bargaining for 2022, the unions are consulting with members for the final pay offer. We don't expect an outcome until late October, early November

- HR are currently looking at options for the benefits review as the surveys have been completed. This will be presented to the leadership team
- A real focus for the HR team is mental health and wellbeing.
- Reminders of support are sent out regularly to employees as well as the flu vaccine
- There is a financial wellbeing intranet page to signpost where employees can find help
- There is also a salary advance scheme to help employees that need it
- The inclusion group is continuing to meet quarterly and at a recent meeting discussed marriage, civil partnership, pregnancy, maternity, paternity, fertility, and adoption. There was also a guest speaker who shared their personal career journey and challenges
- The inclusion group has asked all employees to use a photo of themselves on internal Microsoft accounts to promote diversity at the Council.
- The number of absences due to covid is reducing. This feeds into the short term absence levels which are high.
- The Council continue to support both long and short term absences

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Tony Hunter
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg

In response to questions, Rebecca Webb and Jo Keshishian advised:

- The three job roles that couldn't be filled were a Civil Enforcement Officer role, a Customer Assistant role, and a Food Safety role in Environmental Health
- The welcome payment would be funded from the salary lag initially. This would be up to 10% of the starting salary and would be spread over a period of 12 months and would get the first half after their successful probation period, and the second at the end of the 12 months.
- The welcome payment wouldn't apply to all posts, only ones where it has been shown it is hard to fill
- At the time of writing, 2 employees have used the salary advance scheme. When we issue the advance, we issue advice on finances and managing finances and look at the advance as a short term solution for those who are struggling. We want to introduce further financial support in the benefits review but are still looking at this
- There is one case of long covid but it is not a significant impact so we don't know the amount of absences due to this. We look at support and any adjustments we can make for those individuals with long covid.

It was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the HR Update Information Note

44 DISCUSSION PAPER - SUPPORTING WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

Audio recording – 14:13

The following Members and representatives took part in the discussion

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Tom Plater
- Debbie Ealand
- Councillor Tony Hunter
- Rebecca Webb

Points raised in the discussion included:

- There should be more information regarding hysterectomies and the recovery and support for this
- It is worth noting that none of the potential absences listed within the paper trigger the HR return to work forms which is good
- There needs to be support pre and post absence and referencing the mental health toll this may have
- There should be another session within the inclusion group around women's health issues within the workplace to give added visibility
- The boxes within DCO toilets are now regularly stocked with sanitary products which is positive and normalises periods which isn't often done. Women should feel like they can come forward and talk and there should be more support in this, especially if they have a male manager.
- It is good that people know they have people to talk to and we should make sure that managers of all levels, both men and women, are being kind
- There should be a point of reference or a few people that are highlighted for women to talk to. Women should feel like they have a safe space to talk and want support but don't want it to feel formal. This goes for all protected characteristics.
- We have mental health champions so why can't we have women's champions and hopefully this can be taken forward
- There should be a women's forum on the intranet, this can be circulated in internal emails so people have access to knowledge. This would be useful to Councillors too that need support
- The back door of the women's toilets is a good place to get women's attention so there should be information on the back of these. If they don't want a poster they should have a permanent sticker to remind women they aren't alone.
- The posters should highlight things such as women's health issues and raise awareness.
- Breast awareness is not on the document so this could be looked at in the future as women need to check themselves and things such as fibrous tissue which isn't always cancerous can cause distress
- There is a lot on men that needs to be highlighted as well, as a lot of these things also apply to men so there needs to be another piece of work on mens health and mental health topics
- Hopefully these discussions and information will create a more friendly and supportive environment for women

In response to questions, Debbie Ealand and Rebecca Webb advised:

- If a woman does have a male manager and doesn't feel comfortable talking to them, there are many female managers that they can talk to. Additionally, the people who attend the inclusion group have made themselves available

to be people they can talk to. This goes for every protected characteristics, not just women.

- There is a lot of good ideas from this conversation and these will be looped back into the inclusion group as this will be a good place to start a conversation
- Support is already available and is regularly circulated to staff but we could look at doing more

It was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the Strategic Discussion Paper on Supporting Women in the Workplace

45 FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS

Audio recording – 31:32

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

The following Members took part in a discussion:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- Councillor Tony Hunter
- Councillor Tom Plater
- Councillor Claire Strong

Points raised included:

- The mental health information we have should be checked and there should be a discussion paper on mens health and mental health
- It should be looked at how we are working with different age groups surrounding mens mental health in terms of things such as bereavement and domestic abuse.
- Many people worry about job security when it comes to absence due to things such as surgeries so there should be a supportive network everyone is aware of
- There should be an information note that is circulated regarding this and we should look at how we are communicating this to managers
- The apprenticeships that were discussed should be looked at further down the line and there should be profiling on those who have stayed within the Council.
- What can be done about people who are not cleaning their desks.

In response to questions, Rebecca Webb and Ian Couper advised:

- There is occupational health that is in place and it is a fundamental piece of work done to support people
- There hasn't been any more complaints regarding people not cleaning their desks. There was an email sent to stress the importance of cleaning desks.

Ian Couper advised that HR need to prep these topics so this may be a discussion rather than a long report.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg responded by agreeing that these topics should be a discussion rather than long reports but suggested that the topic of apprenticeships may need slightly more information.

It was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That men's health and mental health is looked into further and a discussion topic of men's mental health and how we are working with different age groups on a range of subjects is included in future meetings
- (2) That a discussion topic of occupational health is included in further meetings
- (3) That the apprenticeships we offer is looked into further and there is profiling of those who have stayed within the Council, and include this as a discussion topic in further meetings

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

The meeting closed at 10:47am

Chair

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

07/09/2022

Present: Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Ian Couper (**IC**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Brenda Downie (**BD**) Dee Levett (**DL**) Alice Ashbrook (**AA – notes**), (Caelan Ballard (**CB – notes**))

Circulation: Global

Chair for Meeting: Louis Franklin (**LF**)

1. Apologies

Mark Robinson, Anthony Roche, Andrew Betts, Emma Jellis, and Christina Corr

2. Matters Arising From Previous Meeting

None

3. NHC updatePay Award

Pay negotiations are ongoing and an update has been added to the message board to confirm that the unions are consulting with their members. Three consultations are taking place with the final consultation period ending on 21st October. We expect to hear the outcome towards the end of October or beginning of November. As soon as the pay award is agreed we will process with payroll, but payment date will depend on the pay-run timetable. If the pay award is not agreed following this consultation, it will return to negotiations.

Employee Benefits

HR are working through the feedback gathered on Employee Benefits and there may be a couple of short surveys on specific benefits, otherwise these findings will be presented to the leadership team and then any changes to the Employee Benefits will be raised at a future staff briefing.

Unison Branch Pay Briefing

The Union held a briefing regarding the 2022 pay negotiations on Tuesday 6th September. The meeting aimed to update attendees on Unison's consultation process and discuss the overall pay offer.

General NHC Update

August was the holiday period, as well as a break from Committee Meetings, but they are now back in full swing.

The community consultation strategy is going to Cabinet this month, as are the results from a district wide survey.

Also going to Cabinet will be the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. The cost-of-living crisis and general inflation are key issues, for example the waste contract costs are increasing by almost 10%.

The plan is to focus on service efficiencies and income generation, rather than service cuts, but the Council must also be realistic in their spending. There is no immediate reaction as there are reserves which can be used until there is more certainty on future funding.

Consultation is about to start regarding a change to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme which involves moving to a banded system. The change would mean that rather than having a set amount of Council Tax reduction which changes every time there is a change in income, the claimant would instead sit within a pay band, meaning there are less changes. NHC hopes overall this will help more people if it is approved. This will be a consultation between with the public, County council and the Police Crime Commissioner.

There are several other reports too, one of them being on the building of a soft play provision at North Herts Leisure Centre. This has been put to a consultation and is awaiting a response from cabinet.

Q: What optional services do we provide that would potentially be cut if needed?

A: We have mostly statutory services, such as planning and environmental health, enforcement etc. We have support services for these which could be considered optional but if we did not have these then we would struggle to run the other services. There are services around the edges that are discretionary or is an add-on to the statutory level of service.

4. Employee Queries

Q: Will we all be getting new ID badges with the new name and logo? Some of our photos are very old and the logo is outdated on most Staff ID cards.

A: Staff are not encouraged to get a new ID card due to just having the old logo, but if your picture is very outdated or your card isn't functioning then you should contact Property Services to get a new Staff ID card.

Q: South Cambridgeshire District Council are currently trialling a 30-hour work week, as opposed to a standard 37-hour work week. Is there any intention for NHC to consider implementing this?

A: There is currently no plan for us to adopt a shorter working week, but it is an interesting concept, and we will see how it goes at South Cambs.

Q: NHC allows staff a home-working allowance of £16, but HMRC allow up to £26 to be paid to staff working from home. If staff have been receiving the allowance from the council of £16 (rather than getting the tax relief from HMRC), can they also claim the £10 difference? Could you shed some light on these rules?

A: Let us preface this advice by saying we are not giving tax advice.

The HMRC guidance on home-working expenses paid by employers is that employers can choose to pay employees up to £26 per month, without deducting any tax or requiring evidence of expenses. The rules are that the employee must regularly work from home, and this must be an agreed arrangement. Employers can choose to pay less than £26, or even nothing. We currently allow claims for £16 per month (it is your decision to claim this, if you are eligible), and as it is less than £26, it is tax-free.

There are now different criteria for seeking tax relief in relation to working from home. They were broadly aligned during Covid-19. Now the criteria for claiming tax relief are much more strict and probably unlikely to apply (see [Claim tax relief for your job expenses: Working from home - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/claim-tax-relief-for-your-job-expenses-working-from-home)). If you determined that you were eligible to claim tax relief then you could either:

- Claim that tax relief on the difference between what you claim from the Council and the limit set by HMRC, or
- Not claim from the Council and claim the full relief from HMRC

Note that claiming tax relief is much less generous as it is an adjustment to your tax code. The amount you get is generally equivalent to 20% or 40% of the amount, depending on the rate you pay tax at.

The decision on whether an you seek to claim tax allowances is your personal choice and the Council does not provide tax advice.

The rules during Covid-19 for tax relief were less strict, and you may still be able to claim for a prior year. You will need to make sure that you fully understand the guidance for that year, and then see if you can apply. This link may help: [Working from home? Customers may be eligible to claim tax relief in 2021 to 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/working-from-home?customers-may-be-eligible-to-claim-tax-relief-in-2021-to-2022).

5. IT Update

No questions or queries raised for IT.

6. Green Update

HCCSP Solar Bulk Purchase Scheme

The Solar Together scheme has now been launched and will be open for expressions of interest until 27th September. We have produced a webpage with information for residents and put out comms on various channels: [Solar Together | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/solar-together)

Review of Climate Change Strategy

The Policy team are in the process of reviewing the Council's Climate Change Strategy. The revised strategy will be taken to Cabinet in December 2022.

Climate Change Officers Group

The next Climate Change Officers Group will take place on Monday 12th September. This will include a presentation on renewable energy generation by West Suffolk Council, as well as a discussion on adaptation.

Letchworth Green Festival - Saturday 10th September

Letchworth Green Festival is taking place on Saturday 10th September between 10am – 5pm located in The Wynd and The Arcade in Letchworth. The Council will have a stall in The Arcade, to share with the public what actions we are taking as part of our climate change strategy and to encourage residents to take action too. The stall will have representation from the Waste Team and North Herts Councillors on the day.

The Council also will be represented at the Royston Sustain-Ability Fair, which is taking place on Sunday 2nd October.

Q: Will the events be promoting the bulk solar scheme?

A: Some of the events may not have had enough notice to promote the bulk solar scheme, however, we will contact the those involved in the event on the 10th of September in Letchworth to ask if they are going to promote it.

7. Building Services Update

No concerns have been raised.

If anyone has any issues, please email these to propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk

8. Ideas/Suggestions

None

9. AOB

None

Chair for next meeting – Alice Ashbrook

Have something to say?

If you have an issue that 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 - Assistant Licensing Officer

Louis Franklin #4262 – Admin Support Officer

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Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

05/10/2022

Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**), Jeanette Thompson (**JT**) for agenda item 2, Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Ian Couper (**IC**), Emma Jellis (**EJ**), Andrew Betts (**AB**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Dee Levett (**DL**) Alice Ashbrook (**AA**), Caelan Ballard – notes (**CB**)

Circulation: Global

Chair for Meeting: Alice Ashbrook (**AA**)

1. Apologies

Debbie Hiscock

2. Licensing and Community Safety Restructure and Committee Meeting Consultation Update

Licensing & Community Safety Restructure

There is a proposed Restructure of Licensing and Community Safety, and the restructure plan has been sent to all staff who would be affected. The restructure proposal has come about following the resignation of the Community Protection Manager and has been trialled informally in the team since the Community Protection Manager left. The restructure would mean that some reporting lines are reduced. The aim of this is to increase communication efficiency within the team. This restructure proposes that the current Licensing Manager post absorbs the key requirements of the Community Protection Manager role. Therefore it is proposed that the Community Protection Manager role is deleted, and the Licensing Manager post is regraded and re-titled Licensing and Community Safety Manager.

This proposal is undergoing a normal consultation process. The individual and group consultation meetings for staff affected by the restructure took place on the 22nd of September and closes on the 24th of October.

Change to Committee Meetings' Start Times Consultation

The proposal and subsequent consultation regarding changing the start time of Committee Meetings and Town Talks has arisen following a request by councillors to change the start times of the Committee Meetings to a later time. Currently the Town Talks begin the informal meetings at 6.30pm and begin the legislative Committee Meetings at 7.30pm. The proposal aims to increase community and public engagement by holding these meetings later in the evening, as they have not been well attended in the past.

The individual and group consultation meetings took place on the 21st of September and the consultation closes on the 24th of October.

The majority of Officers who would be affected have not been favourable to this proposal and there is concern that North Herts Council already start these evening

There was a discussion that included the potential end time of meetings and carrying out public consultation.

3. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

4. NHC update

- The consultation for a new Council Tax Reduction Scheme is underway, and the proposal has received good levels of feedback from members of the public. The consultation is due to finish soon, and then the next step will be the proposal going to Cabinet in December.
- The Inspectors report on the Local Plan came back at the beginning of September, and there will now be a special Cabinet and Council meeting in November to determine whether to adopt the Plan.
- The Budget process has begun now guided by the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy. The council is not expecting to need to make significant financial savings in this year.
- The Council is reviewing plans to regenerate Churchgate Shopping Centre now that it has been purchased.

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- There will be an update on the Pay Award later this month, or early November following the Union ballots. Our Unison Representative noted there was a fantastic turn out in the Unison ballots.
- In this month's edition of Insight, our spotlight is on 'Supporting Women in the Workplace'. The article is well-worth reading and signposts support available for all employees, as well as giving advice about how we can support female colleagues and women in our lives generally.
- We are holding a virtual kitchen event for World Menopause Day on the 18th of October. The event has been made virtual so it can be more inclusive and is accessible for staff who won't be in the office. Please join us online with a cup of tea or coffee. There will be some friendly faces there and we will be able to signpost Menopause related support, give advice, and share stories. Our Menopause Support guide can be found here: <https://intranet.north-herts.gov.uk/home/about-me/wellwork/working-health/menopause-support>
- World Mental Health Day is on the 10th of October. There will be a reminder on the staff message board of the support available, such as the Well at Work pages on our intranet, and signposting to resources such as NHC's Mental Health Support Service and our Mental Health First Aiders.

For more information about Mental Health, or to find out how to get in touch with our Mental Health First Aiders, please have a look at the pages linked here:

[Mental Health | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)

[Mental Health First Aiders | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)

5. Employee Queries

Q: Is there an update on the Council's Bulk Solar Panel Purchase Scheme?

A: We haven't got exact numbers yet but compared to the other surrounding Districts, we were leading in the number of Expressions of Interest, until St Albans overtook us.

Q: I'm aware that the amount of holiday we could carry forward into the next business year was changed due to the COVID19 lockdowns. Can you clarify how much holiday we can carry over this year?

A: At the start of the pandemic in March 2020, there was an amendment to the Working Time Regulations (WTR), which allowed additional annual leave to be carried forward due to increased workloads relating to Covid-19. This amendment covers employees until March 2023.

In addition, the Leadership Team recognise that the workload has continued to be significantly high for some teams particularly where resourcing issues have prevented individuals from taking leave and we are keen that nobody loses their leave.

Therefore, the carry forward leave arrangements are as follows:

- At the end of **March 2023**, carry forward will be limited to the lower of **148 hours** (or the pro-rata equivalent of 4 weeks for part-time staff) and the amount you carried forward in March 2022 (although if that is less than your weekly contracted hours then you can carry forward 1 week)
- At the end of **March 2024**, carry forward will be limited to the lower of **74 hours** (or the pro-rata equivalent of 2 weeks for part-time staff) and the amount you carried forward in March 2023 (although if that is less than your weekly contracted hours then you can carry forward 1 week)
- At the end of **March 2025**, the normal policy of a maximum of **37 hours** (pro-rata equivalent of 1 weeks leave for part-time staff) carry forward will apply in line with the Holiday policy.

For more information please see our intranet page explaining Holiday Entitlement and the carry-forward policy here: [Holiday Entitlement and Pay | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)

Q: Now that many employees are coming back into the office a few days a week, we have received some complaints from employees who are buying milk for their hot drinks, and say it is being used or even emptied without their permission. Could the council provide milk for employees, or post a reminder to employees?

A: We will remind staff that the Council do not provide milk so they will need to ask others before using milk from the fridges. Some employees may not realise other employees are buying the milk and bringing it in and believe the Council provide the milk.

Q: Some employees are having issues making calls with MiCollab. Now that employees are working from home more often, does the Council have any plans to provide employees with work phones to make calls with?

A: If MiCollab is not working please check your call settings within the application and make sure you are calling others using your 'DeskPhone' extension number. If issues continue log a call with the IT Helpdesk.

When MiCollab is functioning correctly there is little need for a separate work phone. Providing work phones would be cost prohibitive.

For more information on setting up and using MiCollab, please see the guides on our dedicated intranet page: [Telephones](#) | [Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)

6. IT Update and Queries

- IT increased the number of Citrix servers available by 20% last month, hoping to improve the performance of the system. IT are still aware of some speed issues, particularly with the log in process and will continue to investigate these issues as well as implementing changes to improve performance of the Citrix system as a whole.
- The IT team are still identifying and fixing a few minor errors with MiCollab, as well as some program icons not appearing in the start menu in Windows.
- IT also recently conducted security penetration testing on some employee laptops, and plan to update staff with the findings later, but are very happy with the security of our laptops.
- IT are still developing the new V3 Laptop Project. The team would ideally like to test for errors and security issues in every team when V3 is implemented, and Mark Robinson will be contacting Senior Managers at a later point to ask them to nominate someone from each team who is willing to have their devices tested.
- There were some significant issues with laptop slowness last month which affected many users. Identifying the problem was quite complex and took longer than the team expected but the issue has now been fixed. Mark would like to remind employees to report issues with their laptops as they arise so that the team can identify and solve the issue more quickly for all users.
- Finally, IT are looking at how they can improve communication with users across the Council, such as setting up a text alert system or global emails, depending on the nature and severity of the problem to be addressed.

Q: There appeared to be a problem with MiCollab for a short time, where the user status was greyed out for everybody. Can you update us on this problem and whether it has been fixed?

A: This has now been fixed, and we believe the error was due to an update. If anyone else experiences problems with MiCollab please report it to the IT team via the IT Helpdesk.

7. Green Update

No Green Update for this SCF.

8. Building Services Update

We would like to remind all staff to leave meeting rooms clean after themselves as a consideration towards other employees, as we have recently had issues with old cups being left in meeting rooms and the meeting rooms being used to store belongings. After meetings, please take your cups with you and either put them in the dishwasher or wash them in the sink. Paper cups should be disposed of in the recycling bins provided.

If anyone has any issues, please email these to propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk

9. Ideas/Suggestions

None

10. AOB

None

Chair for next meeting – Andrew Betts

Have something to say?

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

Representatives (and phone extension):

Christina Corr #4325 - Senior Technical Officer Revenues and Benefits

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

Alice Ashbrook#4235 - Assistant Licensing Officer

Louis Franklin#4262 – Admin Support Officer

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Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

02/11/2022

Present: Jo Dufficy (**JD**), Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Mark Robinson (**MR**), Andrew Betts (**AB**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Brenda Downie (**BD**) Dee Levett (**DL**) Alice Ashbrook (**AA**), Caelan Ballard (**CB – notes**)

Circulation: Global

Chair for Meeting: Christina Corr (CC)

1. Apologies

Anthony Roche & Ian Couper

2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

Consultation to change the start time of Committee Meetings and Town Talks

Jeanette Thompson attended the last meeting to discuss the Consultation for changing the start times of Committee Meetings and Town Talks. This consultation has now ended and concluded with the decision **not** to go ahead with the proposed change to the start times of Committee Meetings and Town Talks. Instead, some actions have been decided to increase public engagement and attendance of these meetings.

3. NHC and HR updates

NHC Update

- There has been an update to our SCF Staff Representatives; Emma Jellis will sadly no longer be a staff rep. We thank Emma for her contribution to the group over the years and welcome Claire Bernard who Emma has kindly nominated in her place.
- There will be an Extraordinary Cabinet Meeting this evening (Wednesday the 2nd of November) in relation to the local plan. This evening the Inspector's Report from September will be presented. The final version of the Local Plan will also be requested so that it can be presented to Council for the recommendation for it to be adopted.
- At another recent Extraordinary Cabinet Meeting, it was agreed by Waste Management that the Council will move to purple bin collections every 3 weeks, as part of the Service Change in 2025. This change will avoid an increase in costs and honour the Council's commitment to the Climate Change Emergency.
- The Consultation for the Council Tax Reduction (CTR) Scheme for 2023/24 has now closed, with just under 500 responses. The vast majority of respondents were in favour of the proposed changes to the scheme. The Council's CTR Scheme reduces the amount of council tax a person must pay if they are eligible for CTR. Since 2013 the Council has been required to set a local CTR Scheme, which has not changed very much. This year however, the Council is proposing to move to a banded scheme which will award a discount based on the household income – making the scheme fairer,

especially for those with a lower income. It will also be easier for the Council to administer. The proposal will go to Cabinet in December for recommendation to Council in January.

- Staff will have received a Pay Award update yesterday, on Tuesday 1st November, via email. We are happy to confirm that the Pay Award has been agreed as a flat rate pay increase of £1,925 on each pay point. HR is in the process of putting this through payroll, and once we have confirmation on when this will be run, it will be announced globally to staff.
- Now that our Values have been refreshed, you will see the new graphics both online and around the Council Offices. Our values underpin processes such as RPR's and the Staff Recognition Scheme.
- The way we treat Covid-19 sickness absence will shortly be updated. In 2020 the LGA issued guidance to Councils to discount Covid-19 absences from absence management procedures, which the Council has been doing until now. The LGA withdrew that guidance in early 2022 and therefore, from November, Covid-19 absences will no longer be discounted from our Attendance Procedure.

Q: Do we have the figures for how many staff members have been off with Covid in 2022, and for how many days?

A: These figures can be provided to the group on request.

Q: Will the implementation of this new Covid Absence process disadvantage staff who cannot work from home in their roles, like Civil Enforcement Officers for example?

A: The attendance procedure has clear trigger points, but the manager has discretion on what action to take when the procedure is triggered. The attendance procedure will be applied on a case-by-case basis, and managers will receive HR advice to ensure fairness and consistency.

Wellbeing Update

- We held a Menopause Virtual Kitchen event in mid-October, which was well attended. Due to the engagement, we are looking to repeat this at a later point. We have also updated our intranet pages giving information and advice about the Menopause.
- This month's edition of Insight will be released soon, and we have an article in that about Men's Health with various support signposted.
- Wednesday the 2nd of November 2022 is Stress Awareness Day, and there is a lot of various support signposted on the intranet for recognising and managing stress.

4. Employee Queries

Q: There have been a few queries as to whether there will be a change to the price limit for bikes as part of the Workplace Bikes scheme, in accordance with current inflation. Is the price limit for bikes going to be increased?

A: Our Workplace Bikes salary-exchange initiative is currently being reviewed as part of the Benefits Review. There will be some further information about updates to staff benefits at the Staff Briefing tomorrow, Thursday 3rd November. We can confirm that as part of this scheme, the price limit for bikes, as well as the duration for pay-back will be increased.

Q: Can we expect to receive back-pay from the Pay Award in November or December's pay?

A: We are doing what we can to process the pay award for November's pay, but we are awaiting confirmation from our payroll provider.

Q: The Pay Award agreement also includes an additional day's Annual Leave. When will this additional day of Leave be added?

A: The additional day of annual leave will be applied when the next annual leave year begins, which will be in April 2023.

5. IT Update and Queries

- IT Services are currently developing a new digital strategy, recognising that the way staff are working, and the way Customers interact with the Council has changed considerably in the last few years. The new strategy hopes to further support flexible working for staff, as well as customer engagement.

Q: The cyber-security information and resources that were sent out to staff were really useful, as there were a lot of really simple and easy-to-follow tips on avoiding phishing, both in and out of work. Would it be possible to create a webpage on the Council's public website with information and resources about phishing and cyber-security?

A: It is a good idea, but there would need to be careful consideration around the advice the Council gives its customers about phishing and cyber-security, as it is a difficult subject to advise on and could potentially lead to more queries with Customer Services than it would solve. However, the Council could have a webpage signposting the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) for information and advice on cyber-security.

Q: In a previous SCF meeting, the cost of using Zoom versus Teams for meetings has been mentioned. Could we move these SCF meetings to Teams going forward?

A: If the SCF members would like to move to Teams for future meetings, that would be fine and would not be difficult to arrange. The only thing we would need to remind staff of is that they would need to ensure they join these meetings outside of Citrix.

6. Green Update

No Green Update for this meeting.

7. Building Services Update

- The faulty EV charging unit is being replaced on Monday 7th of November.
- Committee Rooms 2 and 3 are now one large room, seating 24 people. You will need to book room 2 to use these two joined rooms together, as room 3 has been temporarily removed from the bookings list. Bookings for room 3 will not be accepted.

If anyone has any issues, please email these to propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk

8. Ideas/Suggestions

None

9. AOB

None

Chair for next meeting – Louis Franklin

Have something to say?

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Representatives (and extension):

Claire Bernard #4323 - MSU team

Christina Corr #4325 - Senior Technical Officer Revenues and Benefits

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

Alice Ashbrook #4235 - Assistant Licensing Officer

Louis Franklin #4262 – Admin Support Officer

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

14 December 2022

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

AGENDA ITEM No.

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 information note contains updates regarding the significant and strategic activities from the 2022/23 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 How we work

The document describing what working at the Council looks like for our employees is being finalised. Our Senior Managers group has contributed to the development of the messaging around flexibility and homeworking, whilst continuing to effectively deliver services. The document will provide a guideline for current employees and be used as part of recruitment.

3.3 Recruitment & Retention

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

	VACANCIES	APPLICATIONS	SHORTLISTED	OFFER - EXTERNAL	OFFER - INTERNAL	NOT FILLED
Aug-Oct 21	25	111	63	16	7	2
Aug-Oct 22	19	111	55	14	3	2

The number of job vacancies has declined slightly with a small increase in the ratio of applications to vacancies.

This quarter we have successfully filled 17 jobs including Area Monitoring Officer, Careline Data Officer, EH Technical Officer, Revenues Apprentice, Revenues Collection Officer, and Safeguarding Team Leader.

There were 2 vacancies that were not successfully filled this quarter - Customer Service Assistant which was readvertised and has now been filled; and Contracts

Lawyer. We are taking a different approach to legal vacancies and have now advertised two Trainee Solicitor posts with the aim to train and develop our own lawyers.

The team are focussing support on two areas which have seen increased staff turnover this year – Development Management (Planning) and Committee Services.

3.4 Recruitment Refresh

Based on feedback and research, changes are being made to our jobs and careers webpages and recruitment documentation such as our job descriptions and person specifications. We are in the process of creating an application pack which will provide information to candidates once they have applied for a role with us, to ensure clarity on what we offer as an employer.

Part of the refresh will include an increased usage of social media for advertising and the team are working alongside our communications team to achieve this and develop and modernise our webpages.

The ultimate aim of this project is to modernise our recruitment processes and content, to better describe North Herts Council as an employer, attract more applications and try and ensure that those applicants want to come and work for us.

3.5 Leavers and Turnover

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

	Turnover			
	Leavers	Headcount	Monthly	Rolling
Dec-21	4	323	1.24%	14.29%
Jan-22	1	325	0.31%	12.73%
Feb-22	1	322	0.31%	12.11%
Mar-22	5	323	1.55%	13.66%
Apr-22	1	327	0.31%	13.02%
May-22	1	325	0.31%	11.15%
Jun-22	3	331	0.91%	10.50%
Jul-22	4	331	1.21%	10.78%
Aug-22	2	340	0.59%	10.43%
Sep-22	4	340	1.18%	10.38%
Oct-22	6	344	1.74%	10.62%
Nov-22	4	344	1.16%	10.87%
Total	36	331.25	10.9%	

The table above shows the rolling labour turnover rate is currently 10.9% which has increased slightly since the last quarter. Although we saw the highest number of monthly leavers in October, overall, the number of leavers has reduced since 2021.

The HR team analyse turnover data at service level, as well as using information from discussions at Business Partner meetings. This shows higher turnover in a few key

service areas and the HR team are working with managers to provide additional support and advice.

3.6 Apprenticeships

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

Recruitment preparation is underway for a further 3 apprentice posts in Democratic Services, Communications and Enterprise and Environmental health.

Apprentices are encouraged to meet regularly as a group, not only is this a great opportunity for them to expand their network within the Council, but it also allows them to provide feedback on ongoing and gives us the opportunity to consult with them to ensure that future apprentices are supported throughout their time with us.

The current high number of apprentices is due to delays in recruiting to roles previously, and the build up of available budget. Over the next 18 months, the Council will need to return to having 8 centrally funded posts.

3.7 National Pay bargaining 2022

On 1 November the 2022 pay award was agreed:

- With effect from 1 April 2022 an increase of £1,925
- An additional day of annual leave

The pay award was applied in the November pay run and backdated to April 2022. The additional leave will be applied from April 2023.

The Unions are intending to lodge their 2023/24 pay claim by the end of January 2023. This will then be considered by the Employers and North Herts Council will take part in the regional pay briefings.

3.8 Employee Benefits

Work to support the review of employee benefits continues and an update was given at the November staff briefing. The changes being made to our benefits package include:

- Refreshing our long service and retirement recognition awards
- Extension to the bike to work scheme
- Enhancement of our family leave provision
- Increasing GP helpline communications

We are also looking at introducing an Electric Vehicle lease car scheme and a shared cost AVC (additional voluntary contribution) scheme. AVCs are a salary sacrifice method providing LGPS members with a tax efficient way to contribute to a separate pot that sits alongside the main pension.

3.9 Mental Health and Wellbeing

In the October edition of Insight, the team highlighted a number of female health issues and the resources and support available, both on the intranet and external websites. This was followed up in November with an article on Men's Health and relevant signposting.

In addition, to mark World Menopause Day, the HR Team hosted a menopause virtual kitchen. Those in attendance agreed that it was incredibly helpful to speak to others experiencing similar situations and to get advice from each other it was agreed to host another of these in the new year.

The team continue to update and promote the recently launched financial wellbeing intranet page, which signposts resources for support. In addition, "Focus on your Finances" and "Planning for Retirement" workshops are offered to support staff to make informed choices about retirement.

We continue to update and signpost staff to the wellbeing resources that are available linking with national campaigns such as National Stress Awareness Day in October.

3.10 Our Values

The graphics to support our values are now displayed within the offices and other staff locations as well as through our IT platforms and on internal documents. To further embed the Values, our monthly Personal Development sessions throughout 2023 will focus on each individual value, providing a range of resources and opportunities for teams to further embed the values.

3.11 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Inclusion group met in September 2022 and discussed Shaping our Future and the LGA Diversity framework – Diverse by Design. The group provided feedback on the 'how we work' document and felt that we should better promote the flexibility we offer as an employer.

Future topics will include neurodiversity and further sections from the Diverse by Design framework.

3.12 Absence

Employee absences relating to COVID-19 have continued to decline since their peak in January – March 2022. However, they remained at a higher rate over the summer compared to 2021. A summary of the number of cases and days lost by quarter is shown below, with October – December 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	26	106.5	11*	33*			59	215
OVERALL TOTAL									113	514.5

Overall short-term absence rates are approximately 40% higher than the same quarter last year, with common infections such as colds and sickness bugs accounting for around 40% of cases, compared to Covid absences which account for 13% of cases.

The HR team are continuing to support managers with a number of long-term absence cases which include several stress cases, chronic illness and one case of long-Covid. Occupational Health provide individuals and their managers with appropriate advice and signposting to relevant support, as well guidance on phased return to work programmes and adjustments as needed.

October has the highest overall absence this year since March, and the highest level of absence for October compared to recent years. Both the increased levels of short-term and long-term absences have contributed to this position as described above.

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
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
Aug-22	0.26	0.33	0.59
Sep-22	0.23	0.36	0.59
Oct-22	0.30	0.53	0.83
Total	3.28	5.13	8.41

3.13 Shaping our Future

The Shaping our Future steering group was ended during the last quarter. The short and medium-term actions had been completed, or there was a clear plan as to how they would be completed. There is still a commitment to develop and maintain a Council culture (and values) that help us deliver the Council Plan. However it was felt that the monitoring of this would be best achieved through other routes, including using the Joint Staff Consultative Committee (see below).

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.

- 4.2 This Committee receives this update, as well as getting to choose one or more discussion topics for each meeting. There is also the opportunity for the Committee to comment on what information is included in this report to help it act as the “strategic HR forum” (from Terms of Reference for the Committee).

5.0 CONTACT OFFICERS

Authors

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JSCC Discussion Paper: Focus on Men's Health

Some sobering facts about men's health:

- On average men die 5 years earlier than women and largely for preventable reasons
- 1 man in 5 dies before the age of 65
- 10.8 million men across the globe are facing a prostate cancer diagnosis
- Testicular cancer is the most common cancer found in men, it often strikes young, BUT 95% of cases are treatable. Although the survival rate is high, there is a large proportion of men who are left with life limiting conditions.
- Men make up 75% of the global suicide rate, with one man being lost to suicide every minute.
- 3 out of 4 suicides in the UK are men, with more than 4,000 men taking their own lives in England and Wales last year.

Traditionally men have been more reluctant than women to engage when it comes to their health, both mental and physical. The development of organisations which focus specifically on men's health in recent years and promotional events such as [Movember](#) and [International Men's Day UK](#) help spread the message that men need to look after themselves.

Men and mental health

Today, suicide is the biggest cause of death in UK men under the age of 50. 4,129 men took their own lives in England and Wales in 2021, with the highest rates of suicide being in men from mixed and white ethnic groups. Men also report lower levels of life satisfaction than women, according to the Government's national well-being survey, and are less likely to access psychological therapies, with only 36% of referrals to NHS talking therapies being for men. In addition, more men than women go missing, sleep rough, become dependent on alcohol and use drugs frequently.

Research into why this occurs from the [Mental Health Organisation](#) explains that society's expectations and traditional gender roles play a part in why men are less likely to discuss or seek help for their mental health problems and feel there's a stigma attached to doing so. According to the [Movember Foundation](#), 58% of men think society expects them to be emotionally strong and not show weakness. Other studies show the lack of social support for men correlated with increased restriction of emotions and has been associated with more experiencing psychological distress and that a high proportion of men in western societies are less equipped to cope with life's challenges because they are not as able as women to adapt to new ways of managing such challenges.

All of this means that men are less likely to speak openly about their feelings, are less able to recognise symptoms of mental health problems, reach "crisis point" more readily than women and consequently their mental health suffers. Today, one in eight men in England are suffering with a mental health issue but are struggling to address it and this is only likely to get worse as the cost of living crisis deepens. Another shocking statistic states 40% of UK men said it would take thoughts of suicide or self-harm for them to reach out for help. There are however signs that things are beginning to change with some sources reporting more men reaching out to share how they are feeling, e.g. research by health insurer [Vitality](#) found that the number of men seeking support through their Talking Therapies service has spiked in recent years, with a 41% increase from 2019 to 2021.

What can the Council as an employer do to help?

Given that in general there is a reluctance for men to seek assistance with their mental health, ease of accessibility must be an important factor when considering the provision of support at the Council. Our current work sourcing a supplier for our EAP contract when the present provision expires in 2023, has highlighted that engagement with the service by men is significantly increased when Live Chat or Whatsapp functions are available, so this will be considered as part of the evaluation the new contract.

By publicising specific men's health events to employees through Insight and the Message Board, the Council can assist in highlighting these valuable initiatives, but men's health should not just be for November; awareness of the health issues that affect men disproportionately should occur all year round. This has led to the recent creation of a Men's Health page on the Council's intranet to spread the word about the support available. The intranet page highlights easy health checks that can be done at home and what to do if changes are noticed as well as information on how employees can help to support the men in their lives.

In developing the intranet page we recognised that men's health can be adversely affected by events occurring not only to themselves, but also to those they care about, so it signposts to other support available which men may find helpful to access too, such as menopause guidance and assistance for those undergoing fertility treatment or experiencing pregnancy loss or stillbirth.

Internal support for our staff:

- Counselling support and advice is available through our [confidential employee advice service](#)
- 24/7 access to a [GP consultation service](#)
- [Mental Health First Aiders](#)
- [Sick pay](#) from day 1 of absence
- Referral to our [occupational health service](#) to provide support in managing a health condition
- [Flexible working policy](#) and Leadership Team support for flexibility, including homeworking
- [Bereavement and other types of leave](#)
- [Support for carers](#) caring for the carer is vital to maintain their physical and mental health
- [Financial wellbeing](#) intranet page signposting support
- [The Inclusion Group](#) provides a forum to share experiences and raise awareness
- Various signposting to external support

JSCC Discussion Paper: Apprentices

Background

The Apprenticeship Levy was introduced in April 2017 by the UK Government as part of its plan to increase the number of Apprentices. The levy applies to all employers with an annual pay bill of £3,000,000 or more, who must pay 0.5% of this pay bill (with a deduction of £15,000) to HMRC. Employers then access this money via the Digital Apprenticeship Service (DAS). This is used to pay for apprenticeship training (using approved Apprenticeship Standards) from a selection of training providers, these training providers are approved and listed on the government apprenticeship website, training providers are paid directly via the DAS.

How Apprenticeships work

For North Herts Council, prior to the introduction of the Levy, Apprentices completed a Business Administration NVQ which was delivered by a local college and involved Apprentices attending North Herts College one day a week, this was linked to the Academic year.

Training providers are now far more flexible with their delivery methods. Current Apprenticeship Standards require Apprentices to complete 80% on the job learning (the “day job”) and 20% off the job learning. The 20% off the job learning can now be made up of:

- Workshops or webinars
- E-learning – completing modules
- Attending a client meeting/networking events
- Reflecting on skills knowledge learnt ie. completing of Learner Journal
- Role play and simulation
- Planning and preparation for tasks set by the Trainer/ Coach
- Job shadowing a colleague
- Providing mentoring support for a colleague or candidate

Off the job learning is defined as learning which is undertaken outside the normal day to day working environment and leads to the achievement of an apprenticeship. This is a legal requirement of an apprenticeship but does not need to be fixed to one day a week and can fit with the requirements of the role.

Additional support that we provide to our Apprentices

We provide a number of Apprentice Specific learning opportunities to equip apprentices with skills for the workplace:

- Presentation Skills and the opportunity to present on a given topic
- Coaching and Mentoring opportunities
- Minute taking skills
- Participation in EELGA Apprentice of the Year Event

- Additional support towards the end of the fixed term contract including CV writing and interview skills

What Apprenticeships are available?

Upon introduction of the levy, the number of training providers increased. In the first few years the number of apprenticeship available were limited, but now that the scheme is more established, the number of Apprenticeship standards have increased and we are now able to offer Apprenticeship Standards that link more closely to the field of work rather than general Business Administration qualification.

Current apprenticeships in addition to Business Administration are:

- Assistant Accountant
- Community Health & Wellbeing
- Cultural Learning & Participation
- Customer Service Specialist
- Digital Marketing
- HR Support
- Information Communication Technician

The Apprenticeship Levy can also be used to upskill existing members and staff have completed Team Leader & Supervisor Apprenticeship and Revenues and Welfare Benefits Practitioner.

Additional information

- Apprentices join the Council on a fixed term contract, typically of 18 months
- The salary is generally funded from a central budget, although Service Areas can also fund their own apprentices and this mostly occurs where there are hard-to-fill vacancies as part of a 'grow your own' approach. The central budget provision is for 8 apprentice posts (although underspends from delayed appointments are carried forward which can lead to more posts at certain times)
- We pay £10.60 per hour which is above the NLW for over 23s
- We have recruited 69 apprentices since we started our programme in 2013, aside from 12 who are still in their apprenticeship, 31 have gone on to secure a further role within the organisation – a 54% success rate
- Since the scheme began in 2013, 19 different teams have recruited an apprentice

How do we promote our Apprenticeship Opportunities?

- Apprenticeship vacancies are advertised in line with our other vacancies on our Jobs page
- Apprenticeship vacancies are advertised on the gov.uk find an apprenticeship website
- We attend career fairs (with current Apprentices) at local schools to promote North Herts Council as a potential employer
- We have featured our Apprentices in the Outlook magazine

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
	Dec	Men's health
	Dec	Apprenticeships

Discussion

Subject area	Suggested discussion topics for future meetings
Organisational Development	How the values can shape the future culture at the Council
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 gap reporting
Equalities	20's Diversity, changing workplace accommodation and practices
Learning and Development	Coaching
Learning and Development	Face to face v on-line learning, striking a balance
Employee Engagement	Employee engagement within blended working
Wellbeing	Providing support for staff wellbeing during uncertain times
Resourcing	Attracting and rewarding scarce talent
Resourcing	Social media for recruitment
Resourcing	Succession planning and development
Wellbeing	Long term absence management

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