

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



3 March 2023

Our Ref Joint Staff Consultative Committee/15 March 2023
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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 as a

REMOTE MEETING

On

WEDNESDAY, 15TH MARCH, 2023 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 - 14 DECEMBER 2022	To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 14 December 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 December 2022, January 2023 and February 2023.	(Pages 11 - 22)
5. INFORMATION NOTE - HR UPDATE	INFORMATION 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 23 - 28)
6. DISCUSSION PAPER - COUNCIL VALUES	To receive a discussion paper on Council Values.	(Pages 29 - 30)
7. DISCUSSION PAPER - MANDATORY PAY GAP REPORTING	To receive a discussion paper on Mandatory Pay Gap Reporting.	(Pages 31 - 32)
8. FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS	To consider topics for discussion at a future meeting of the Committee.	(Pages 33 - 34)

Public Document Pack Agenda Item 2

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE VIRTUAL MEETING
ON WEDNESDAY, 14TH DECEMBER, 2022 AT 10.00 AM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Raj Bhakar (Chair), Claire Strong and Tom Plater*

In Attendance: *Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Rebecca Webb (Human Resources Operations Manager), Dee Levett (Unison), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Helen Bylett (Learning & Employee Engagement Business Partner) and Caelan Ballard (HR Apprentice)*

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

46 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 20 seconds

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg and Terry Hone.

47 MINUTES - 21 SEPTEMBER 2022

Audio Recording – 2 minutes 47 seconds

Councillor Raj Bhakar, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Tom Plater seconded, and it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on the 21 September 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

48 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 08 seconds

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting
- (2) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda 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.

49 SCF MINUTES

Audio recording – 3 minutes 25 seconds

The Service Director – Resources presented the Staff Consultation Forum and highlighted points including:

- The majority of the information within this would be included in the HR Update Information Note.

- The SCF Minutes from the previous three months had covered ongoing Council projects, a recent consultation for a new Council Tax Reduction Scheme, and the Council's purchase of the Churchgate Shopping Centre in Hitchin.
- Also covered were Green Space updates, IT updates and Building Services updates.

There were no questions from Members.

It was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum for September, October, and November 2022.

50 HR UPDATE

Audio recording – 5 minutes 01 seconds

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

- A formal document to show how employees work at North Hertfordshire Council was under development. The objective of this document was to inform job applicants on the work culture at NHC. Senior Management continued to work with HR to finalise the document, with feedback from employees and NHC's Inclusion Group.
- There have been 19 advertised vacancies this quarter which received a consistent number of applicants.
- A couple of these posts were not filled in the first attempt, so HR have worked with recruiting managers to fill these roles.
- The Recruitment Refresh project is ongoing and the use of feedback from employees and their managers will be used to improve the Council's job vacancy website as well as inform future recruitment processes.
- Staff Turnover remained consistent, although there have been small pockets of higher turnover in some key service areas. HR is working with these corresponding Service Managers to offer additional support in recruiting and also carrying out exit interviews. The feedback from these exit interviews will be sent back to these Service Managers.
- The number of apprentices currently employed by the Council had delayed the recruitment of new apprentices, as North Hertfordshire Council has a central budget for 8 apprentices only.
- The Pay Negotiations 2023 will begin in February with the Employer Consultation Meetings.
- HR's Benefits Review is underway and there are some changes to staff benefits, as well as some new benefits which will be introduced in the coming months. This is a very positive outcome for employee benefits given the current budget constraints of the Council.
- Graphics of the Council values have been made, which are now displayed in meeting rooms within the Council offices, as well as loading screens on staff laptops.
- Each monthly Personal Development morning in 2023 will be dedicated to a different NHC value. Resources will be provided for each of these mornings. This hopes to allow staff to consider what the values mean to them, and ultimately allow teams to further embed these values.
- Absence levels had increased in this quarter, with colds and minor infections contributing most to these absence levels. Covid absences made up a portion of these absences also, but the levels of Covid absence are currently much lower than their peak in January and March of this year. There was ongoing advice provided to managers regarding short-term

absence, and further advice and support is given to managers who have employees on long-term sickness leave.

- The Steering Group for 'Shaping our Futures' has now ended but North Hertfordshire Council remained committed to developing and maintaining a positive culture. It was felt that the monitoring and review of activity was best achieved through other streams and in other groups, such as this JSCC group.
- HR welcomed comments and feedback from the Committee on the contents of this paper to help it act as the strategic HR forum.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions, the HR Services Manager advised:

- The employee headcount found in this HR Update Information Note included all current employees, regardless of whether their position is full-time or part-time. There had been an increase in part-time employees, which is why the headcount has increased since the last quarter.
- HR were aware that sickness levels always rise during the winter, especially in children. The absence policy does not support employees taking sick leave if their dependants are ill, employees must be ill themselves to take sick leave. However, other types of leave are offered to support employees being away to care for their dependants who are ill.

It was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the HR Update Information.

51 DISCUSSION PAPER - MEN'S HEALTH

Audio recording – 14 minutes 08 seconds

The following Members and representatives took part in the discussion

- Councillor Raj Bhakar
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Rebecca Webb

Points raised in the discussion included:

- The suicide rate for men in the UK was staggering, which showed a clear need to create conversation on physical and mental health for men.
- Annual events such as Movember created needed discussion and awareness of common health problems for men, including mental health problems, but there was still a clear need for more to be done.
- Within the Council, the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offered support and counselling on a wide range of issues which may contribute to an employee's poor mental wellbeing.
- However, evidence suggests that men are less likely to want to speak to someone in person or over the phone about their mental health, so a webchat or text-based service is being explored as an expansion of the EAP.
- Designated Mental Health First Aiders are also available to employees. These are trained members of staff who volunteer to receive calls and messages from employees who need support or advice. These Mental Health First Aiders are contactable over email or

Microsoft Teams chats. Additionally, there should be some further emphasis to outline that employees can send these Mental Health First Aiders a message or an email instead if they would prefer.

- There was now also a page on the staff intranet dedicated to Men's Health specifically. This page is similar to the Women's Health page on the intranet, both respectively signposting a range of specific support.
- Previously, support for employees regarding pregnancy loss and infertility had been targeted more towards women, but there is now an understanding that men are also just as affected by these issues. Pages on the intranet regarding fertility and pregnancy loss now use more inclusive language and link the pages to both women's health and men's health.

In response to questions, Rebecca Webb advised:

- The statistics included in this discussion paper record the most common cancers in men in the UK, being prostate cancer and testicular cancer. It seemed that there was less information on testicular cancer and other health issues in men, which indicates that there may also be a lack of knowledge about these other health problems.
- More signposting on screening programs and health checks for men can be shared on the intranet. Additionally, by sharing information and signposting support, these health issues may become less taboo which will encourage men to have conversations about their health.
- It has been noted that the formation of a Men's Health Forum may also be a helpful scheme to give male employees a safe and confidential space to discuss their health and their problems.

It was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Strategic Discussion Paper on Supporting Men's Health and Mental Health in the Workplace.

52 DISCUSSION PAPER - APPRENTICES

Audio recording – 19 minutes 46 seconds

The following Members and representatives took part in the discussion

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Raj Bhakar
- Helen Bylett

Points raised in the discussion included:

- The Apprentice Levy was introduced to North Hertfordshire Council in 2017 and has helped the Council to offer more apprenticeships over the past 5 years. The Levy is taken through our payroll provider and then transferred directly into the Council's apprenticeship funds.
- For each new apprenticeship, HR choose an apprenticeship provider from a list of training providers approved by the Government. These training providers must follow a set of agreed apprenticeship standards, which ensures the education and support offered to the apprentice is of a high standard.
- One of the requirements to become an apprentice at North Hertfordshire Council is that you must live or go to school within the North Hertfordshire district or surrounding areas.

This is so that if the training provider offers in-person classes or workshops, the apprentice is not required to travel out of the North Hertfordshire district to attend.

- Prior to this Levy, apprentices at North Hertfordshire Council used to attend North Hertfordshire College for their classes. The Levy has given an improved range of training providers and since Covid, most apprentices now do not have to travel to their classes in-person and instead do their learning remotely.
- Some training providers will travel to the Council offices to deliver training to the apprentices.
- The current requirement in an apprenticeship is that 80% of the learning completed by the apprentice is 'on the job' learning, and the remaining 20% is 'off the job' learning.
- North Hertfordshire Council offer additional learning support to apprentices, training them to take minutes, giving them the opportunity to work with other council apprentices, and teaching presentation skills.
- The Levy has allowed the Council to offer a wider range of apprenticeships across different service areas within the Council. The service areas which currently have an apprentice include I.T, Business Administration, Digital Marketing, Finance, Grants Administration, Health & Wellbeing, Community Protection, Museum & Cultural Services Support, HR Support, and Revenue Systems.
- A Communications Apprenticeship vacancy has also just started advertising.
- Council apprenticeships have an excellent success rate, with an additional 54% of apprentices being retained after completing their contracts.

In response to questions, Helen Bylett advised:

- The Council's 18 month fixed-term apprenticeship contracts are usually Level 3 Apprenticeships, but there are a couple of apprenticeships including the Communications Apprenticeship currently advertised which are Level 4 Apprenticeships.
- The Levy that the Council pays into also allows existing members of staff to undertake apprenticeships. However, it can be difficult for internal members of staff to adhere to the requirements of current apprenticeships, which state 20% of your working time must be 'off the job' learning, due to a lack of capacity in some teams.

It was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Strategic Discussion Paper on Apprenticeships at North Hertfordshire Council.

53 FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS

Audio recording – 27 minutes 42 seconds

The following Members and representatives took part in the discussion

- Councillor Raj Bhakar
- Councillor Tom Plater

Points raised in the discussion included:

- Future streams of Pay Gap reporting should be looked into further, with analysis of pay disparities and an explanation of the strategies used to monitor and help close pay gaps.
- Progress of the Recruitment Refresh Project should be discussed in future meetings once implemented, along with any findings or feedback on the project.
- For organisational development and the shaping future culture at the Council to be discussed and to have an overview of current related projects.

It was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That future streams of Pay Gap reporting shall be looked into further and a discussion topic of how we are analysing and dealing with Pay Gaps are included in future meetings.
- (2) That the Recruitment Refresh project is discussed further in future meetings.

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

The meeting closed at 10.31 am

Chair

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

07/12/2022

Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**), Ian Couper (**IC**), Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Mark Robinson (**MR**), Andrew Betts (**AB**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Dee Levett (**DL**) Caelan Ballard (**CB – notes**)

Circulation: Global

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

1. Apologies

Alice Ashbrook

2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

Nothing noted.

3. NHC and HR updates

NHC Update

- The Staff Briefing held on the 6th of December will have covered most of the NHC updates for this month.
- The next Inclusion Group Meeting will be held on the 13th of December and will discuss diversity and inclusion in the Council's recruitment process, as well as in the Council's reward and recognition schemes.
- Pay negotiations for 2023 will begin in early 2023, with the Union's pay claim expected in January and the regional briefings in February. HR will be taking part in these meetings, and updates on the pay negotiations will be shared here.

Wellbeing Update

- Some articles have been published about financial support on Insight; these articles also include discounts targeted at easing the burden around Christmas.
- There will be a 'Focus on your Finances' Session on the 8th of December from 10 to 11.30am. This session will demonstrate how to budget more effectively, maximise workplace benefits, and save and invest finances with confidence. Staff can book their place for this session via [GROWzone](#).
- HR are preparing messages related to Blue Monday, which will be on Monday the 16th of January 2023.
- A briefing on the GP Helpline is due to take place in January. This briefing will give staff an overview of the service provided in the GP Helpline, as well as provide an opportunity for staff to ask any questions they have about the service.

4. Employee Queries

Q: We have received some complaints about staff using desks in the DCO and not cleaning the desk after use. Can the agreed procedures on desk cleaning be recirculated?

A: Yes, a reminder about the expected office procedure and COVID prevention at work can be sent out again.

Q: Can the absence policy be amended so that multiple short absences, each for only a couple of hours, can be counted as a single half-day absence?

A: The occasions and number of days are measured as part of the attendance policy, and an absence of less than 1 day will still count as an occasion. An employee should make the decision as to whether they are well enough to work. Some roles allow homeworking which may make it easier to continue to work whilst not feeling 100%. If an employee feels too unwell to work, they should advise their manager and it will be recorded as sickness absence.

Q: In the DCO, there have recently been a number of used cups left in the sink after a meeting on the 4th floor for other staff to clean up. Can a reminder be circulated to ask staff that if a meeting is hosted, all attendees are responsible for washing their own cups and plates?

A: Yes, both external and internal visitors should be responsible for cleaning up after themselves, so a message can be sent out to remind everyone of this office etiquette.

5. IT Update and Queries

- V3 has been launched and some people now have V3. IT are sorting out a few small issues before the main rollout begins.
- When the rollout begins, it is very important that staff attend the V3 installation slot which IT have allocated to them. If a member of staff is late to their set-up slot it will have to be rescheduled.
- IT also ask that managers request a laptop for a new starter well in advance of their start-date, as a laptop will need to be allocated and built for V3, which can take time.

Q: In Buntingford, half of the desks are taken by PC's which the Council has moved away from using. Are we going to get new computer monitors to accommodate staff laptop docking stations, and will the PCs be taken away?

A: Yes, the PCs will be taken away. IT are currently moving through the District Council Offices to remove the PCs on all floors, replacing them with docking stations, and this will be done in Buntingford too. However, IT have to be mindful of cost and will not buy docking stations for desks which are not used.

Q: Is the office in Buntingford going to get bigger computer monitors?

A: IT are not currently considering this, however, if a bigger monitor is something a member of staff requires for their work, options can be considered.

Q: There is a shortage of up-to-date staff laptops at the moment which means staff often have to wait while their laptop is repaired or a new one is allocated. How will moving away from PCs affect this?

A: Going forward, IT will have a pool of laptops which can be rebuilt and updated to V3. If a staff member's laptop is broken, IT should also be able to provide them with something which will enable them to join their Zoom and Teams meetings as normal while the laptop is rebuilt.

6. Green Update

No Green Update for this meeting.

7. Building Services Update

- Some of the desks previously restricted for social distancing have been removed, meaning there are a few more desks available on each floor of the Council offices.

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 – Christina Corr

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):

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

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Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

11/01/2023

Present: Sarah Kingsley (**SK**), Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Andrew Betts (**AB**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Dee Levett (**DL**), Daniel Crowhurst (**DC**), Caelan Ballard – notes (**CB**)

Circulation: Global

Chair for Meeting: Christina Corr (**CC**)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Ian Couper who was substituted by Sarah Kingsley, and from Mark Robinson who was substituted by Daniel Crowhurst.

2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

3. NHC updates

- The Consultation for a new Council Tax Reduction Scheme has now finished and received positive feedback from members of the public. The Scheme proposes to allocate the amount of Council tax payable through income bands, supporting those with the lowest incomes and stabilising the amount of tax people pay. The Scheme now awaits approval from the Council on the 31 January.
- Councillor allowances and election fees will also be decided at this meeting on 31 January.
- A report on the Churchgate Shopping Centre will also be going to Council, outlining the key stages of the Churchgate regeneration project. Plans for Churchgate have not yet been decided. An initial public consultation survey remains open until 5 February.
- Budget reports are being drafted for the Audit Committee and Cabinet Panel in January before the final budget is agreed at the Council at the end of February.
- The Finance settlement was positive, but inflation remains high and other costs also offset the settlement substantially.
- The Council is proposing an increase of Council Tax of 2.99% for 2023-2024.

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- The Workplace Bikes Scheme has been updated. Up to £5000 can now be spent on a bike, and the pay-back period has been increased to 18 months. More information and details on how to apply for the scheme can be found on the intranet: [Workplace Bikes | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/intranet/workplace-bikes)
- A Virtual Kitchen will run on 16 January providing a chance to catch reconnect with colleagues across the organisation.

- The MIND Mental Health e-learning continues to be accessible for staff on GROWzone. The e-learning provides information for staff on spotting signs of poor mental health, as well as ways to improve their own mental wellbeing and sense of stress at work.
- Personal Development Mornings will continue to run throughout 2023, and themes will focus on the Council's Core Values. The first themed session will take place on 3 February, focusing on the 'adaptable' value. More information and resources on this Development Morning will be sent out closer to the date.
- The Service Recognition and Retirement Scheme has been updated for 2023. The details of this update have been published on the Intranet and the staff magazine, Insight. The Buffet option has been removed, and in its place the monetary value of the Service Recognition Vouchers and the number of milestones has been increased. This update follows feedback from the recent Benefits Survey. For more details on this update please see the intranet page here: [Long Service Awards | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](https://north-herts.gov.uk/intranet/long-service-awards)

Q: How will the update to the Staff Service Recognition and Retirement Scheme benefit members of staff who have worked for the Council for over 30 years?

A: The Members of staff who have worked for the Council for 30 years or more will have received their 25 Years' Service Recognition Vouchers previously. HMRC rules state awards should be 10 years apart, which is why the council has opted to celebrate the Achievement of 10, 20, 30 and 40years' service as there is more opportunity for recognition. The achievement of 5 years' service will be recognised by an increase in holiday entitlement.

Q: There have been queries raised by members of staff who passed their 20 years' service milestone just before the scheme was updated and are concerned that they will now have to wait until they have achieved 30 Years of Service before they get their next Service Recognition Voucher. Will the Council honour members of staff who have just missed out on a Service Recognition Voucher, and where will the cut-off point be?

A: It can be difficult to introduce a new scheme because there will need to be a cut-off point somewhere. Given the feedback, we are reviewing whether there is another way to fairly apply the changes. However, the scheme update is hoped to be a positive change for the majority of staff.

4. Employee Queries

Q: Where can staff find information about redundancy pay?

A: If a member of staff is at risk of redundancy, they will be invited to an individual meeting during the consultation period, at which point they are provided with an estimate of their redundancy pay. If a member of staff is concerned about being made redundant, and they want to find out an estimate of their redundancy pay before their meeting, they can contact the HR officer assigned to the consultation, or email Hrhelp.

Q: Pre-pandemic there were office etiquette rules which advised that snacks and fruit are acceptable for staff to eat at their desks, but main meals and hot food should not be eaten at

desks within an open-plan office. Can staff be reminded that this rule still applies, and that hot food should be consumed elsewhere?

A: Yes, this office etiquette rule does still apply, and staff are advised to be considerate of the colleagues they share their office with. Ian Couper is due to circulate a reminder to all staff about general office etiquette, such as cleaning desks after use and washing cups after use, so this issue can be raised within that reminder email.

Staff are also advised that eating lunch away from their desks will have a positive impact on their wellbeing, and that the canteen in the DCO is open to all staff to eat their lunch or to take a break.

5. IT Update and Queries

- The testing of V3 has almost completed, with several departments successfully using V3 already. The testing phase is due to complete within the next month.
- Once the testing is complete, Customer Services will be managing the laptop handover booking process and the departments who have been using V3 during the testing process will be invited to book their handover slots. Customer Services will be phoning staff to book a handover slot, so staff are advised to check their work calls.
- Handovers will take place at DCO in the IT office and are not expected to take longer than an hour. During the handover, staff will give IT their current V2 laptop and will be provided with a replacement V3 laptop. Staff will also be shown some videos outlining how to use V3.
- There are currently 41 members of staff using V3 laptops and a further 50 are booked in for a V3 handover. During the next week, an email will be sent to staff detailing the current progress of V3 implementation.
- Staff will also be invited to join drop-in sessions on Zoom and Teams for the IT department to answer any questions staff have about V3.

Q: Will any identified issues with the V3 laptops be resolved before the main staff rollout?

A: Yes, we are hoping the current testing phase will identify any issues or bugs with V3 so that they will be fixed before the main staff rollout begins. Overall, the feedback we have had so far on the V3 laptops has been very positive, but we have made some small fixes.

6. Green Update

No Green Update for this SCF.

7. Building Services Update

No Building Services updates have been raised.

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

8. Ideas/Suggestions

None

9. AOB

None

Have something to say?

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Representatives (and phone extension):

Christina Corr #4325 - Senior Technical Officer Revenues and Benefits

Claire Bernard #4323 - MSU Admin Support Officer

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

Alice Ashbrook#4235 - Licensing Officer

Louis Franklin#4262 – Admin Support Officer

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

01/02/2023

Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**), Ian Couper (**IC**), Jo Keshishian (**JK**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Alice Ashbrook (**AA**), Christina Corr (**CC**) Dee Levett (**DL**), Mark Robinson (**MR**), Caelan Ballard – notes (**CB**)

Circulation: Global

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

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Andrew Betts, and from Rebecca Webb who was substituted by Jo Keshishian.

2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

3. Community Engagement Restructure Note

- There has been a proposal to reorganise the Policy and Community Engagement teams with the aim to make the service more streamlined and efficient. The proposal includes the deletion of one Grade 8 post and the creation of an additional Assistant post at Grade 6.
- Reallocated funding from this restructure and past restructures in the Legal department would also allow the creation of a new part-time Scrutiny Officer role, as per recommendation of the peer review. If agreed, the existing Trainee Policy Officer role would be managed by the Policy Officer. The proposal has passed the initial stages of reviewal by Senior Leadership and is now under Consultation, which will close on the 16th February.

4. NHC Updates

- Budget reports went to Cabinet on January the 31st and will go to Council on the 23rd of February. The reports explain that NHC have had to stretch budgets in the past few years and there are expected to be funding cuts in future years. Government have not yet announced when they will carry out a Funding Review. This means that for now, while the reports contain some proposals for saving, there are no significant staffing implications.
- The Government have provided a funding offer to the to build/acquire additional housing for Ukrainian and Afghan refugees. However, because there were many terms and conditions involved in addition to low funding, unfortunately it has only been possible to deliver some of the target allocation. North Hertfordshire's Housing Team as well as other registered housing providers such as Settle are working hard to assist in finding options for using the funding.

- Other topics recently covered at Council include the by-elections for Hitchin North division of Hertfordshire County Council, being held on Thursday 9th of February, as well as preparation for the District elections in May.
- At the end of last year, the Government published draft proposals for the new Ward boundaries. These proposals went to Council at the end of December and agreed to uphold parts of it, while strongly disagreeing with other parts of the proposal. Public consultation on the proposed Ward boundaries has now closed. Council now awaits the Boundary Commission to return with their final proposals within the next 3 months. These final proposals will be adopted by Government and will be used by North Hertfordshire Council beginning in 2024. The Council will confirm the intended changes to staff once notified. The Elections team will potentially need to find new polling stations in accordance with new Ward boundaries.

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- The Holiday Flex application window for 2023-24 has now reopened as of Wednesday 1st of February. Staff who wish to purchase additional leave in the coming holiday year are advised to make an application this month, with managers to authorise these requests in March so that payroll deductions can be set up and split equally over 12 monthly instalments beginning in April. Further information can be found on the intranet here: [Holiday Flex: buy more annual leave | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)
- Staff are encouraged to book leave before the end of March so that leave entitlement is not lost at the end of the leave year. Further information on carry forward arrangements can be found on the intranet: [Holiday Entitlement and Pay | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)
- As previously discussed in the most recent Staff Briefing, the next Personal Development Morning is on Friday 3rd February and will focus on NHC's Core Value of 'Adaptable'.
- Teacher's Strikes are taking place throughout February and March, and we understand that some staff may need to find alternative childcare arrangements, book time off work or work from home during these strike days. A global staff email was circulated yesterday advising staff how to book time off and discuss their needs with their managers during this time.
- The HR team is preparing for a new cycle of auto-enrolment into the Local Government Pension Scheme, which last occurred in April 2020. All staff who are not already enrolled in the Pension Scheme will be automatically enrolled. Message board reminders will be posted this closer to the time.
- The GP Helpline service was also discussed in the Staff Briefing on Tuesday 31st of January and there was a Q & A session with some helpful information. Staff who would like to learn more about the service are advised to read the January Staff Briefing Minutes which will be circulated soon.

5. Employee Queries

There were no employee queries.

6. IT Update and Queries

- In 2022, IT closed over 7,199 helpdesk tickets of which over 5,000 were incidents. This averages to IT receiving around 100 helpdesk tickets a week. IT hope that the number of these helpdesk tickets and IT issues will decrease over 2023 with the implementation on V3, as many of these issues have been related to Citrix.
- 75 users have now begun using V3 laptops, and another 50 users are already scheduled for their handovers this month. It is expected that some ad-hoc handover slots will also be available during this period.
- IT are in ongoing contact with all users who now have V3 laptops and are fixing bugs and small issues where they crop up. The only issues experienced so far with V3 have been very minor.
- Currently, IT have 65 active projects, with a further 56 completed since June 2022. 16 projects have been rejected, which includes those redistributed to the wider department.

Q: Will the identified small issues with V3, particularly with Tascomi, be fixed prior to the majority of staff moving to V3?

A: Currently there have been two identified issues with Tascomi on V3, and one is related to Excel file downloading. Workarounds have been created to address this problem. The other reported issue has only been experienced by one user so far and relates to the general documents from Tascomi not opening correctly. This is being looked into and IT endeavour to get this fixed as soon as possible. Unfortunately, the issue with Excel is a vendor issue which is why the only solution so far has been a workaround. Mark Robinson has a meeting with the vendor to address the problem and will also be engaging with the Service Manager within the next weeks.

7. Green Update

No Green Update for this SCF.

8. Building Services Update

- An email is due to be circulated globally, relating to tea & coffee provisions as well as office etiquette. The reminder will discuss the cleaning of desks and eating lunch in designated areas, meeting room etiquette and washing up of dishes out of consideration for other staff.
- We also request that staff do not move tables around in meeting rooms 2 & 3 on the first floor in the DCO.

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

9. Ideas/Suggestions

Q: There is some public interest in the provision of more allotment sites, as there rarely appear to be sites with availability in the area. The provision of more allotment sites would also encourage residents to take up environmentally friendly activities and encourage biodiversity in the area. Would the Council be able to increase the provision of allotment sites in the district?

A: Unfortunately, the Heritage Foundation own most of the allotments in Letchworth, and the allotments in Baldock were handed over to an allotment association which

means the Council has little direct control over it. However, the owners of the Baldock allotment have recently been in contact with the Master Planner for the town over talks to expand the allotments.

10. AOB

None

Chair for next meeting – Andrew Betts

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 phone extension):

Christina Corr #4325 - Senior Technical Officer Revenues and Benefits

Claire Bernard #4323 - MSU Admin Support Officer

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

Alice Ashbrook #4235 - Licensing Officer

Louis Franklin #4262 – Admin Support Officer

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

15 March 2023

*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 Recruitment & Retention

The table below shows a comparison of recruitment statistics from November – 2022 – January 2023 to the same period in the previous year.

	VACANCIES	APPLICATIONS	SHORTLISTED	OFFER - EXTERNAL	OFFER - INTERNAL	NOT FILLED
Nov21-Jan22	15	82	56	10	4	1
Nov22-Jan23	17	94	51	7	6	4

The number of job vacancies, applications and short-listing are quite similar year on year, with a higher number of vacancies being filled internally in this period.

We have successfully filled 13 jobs including 2x Trainee Solicitors, IT Digital Service Manager, IT Helpdesk Officer, Conservation Officer, 1 x Committee Services Officer and two apprentice posts.

There were 4 vacancies that were not successfully filled – Committee Services Officer (we advertised three during the quarter and filled one), Development & Conservation Service Manager, and Contract Lawyer.

We have been supporting vacancies within Planning, including the readvertisement of the Development & Conservation Service Manager, and extended the deadline for the Senior Planning Compliance Officer post which is currently vacant. One further vacancy (Planning Officer) has interviews scheduled for this month.

3.3 Recruitment Refresh

Work continues on the Recruitment Refresh project. Key changes include:

- New look recruitment pages on our website
- Changes to how we advertise posts including social media
- Updated training and advice for recruiting managers
- An updated Job Description document
- Reviewing how we recruit to 'hard to fill' vacancies.

The 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 talent.

3.4 How we work

The How we work document will be published on our website alongside updates from the Recruitment Refresh project.

3.5 Leavers and Turnover

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

	Leavers	Headcount	Turnover	
			Monthly	Rolling
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%
Dec-22	2	343	0.58%	10.21%
Jan-23	6	343	1.75%	11.66%
Feb-23	1	341	0.29%	11.61%
Total	39	336		11.61%

The table above shows the rolling labour turnover rate has remained fairly stable during this year and despite having 6 leavers in January, there were 9 leavers in the last 3 months compared to 14 leavers in September- November.

The HR team continue to review turnover data, and monitor responses to exit questionnaires, to understand the key issues as well as working with managers to provide support and advice where higher levels of turnover are causing concern.

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, Community Health & Wellbeing, Finance, Public relations and Cultural

Learning. One of our Apprentices has recently been successful in their application for a permanent position.

The current 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.

To mark National Apprenticeship Week (6-12 February), in our staff magazine, the Managing Director took the opportunity to personally thank all our Apprentices and we shared more information about how Apprenticeships work, some of our current Apprentices were also featured on our social media platforms.

In January, members of the HR Team attended a local careers fair to highlight the variety of different careers and Apprenticeships on offer at the Council. The aim is to encourage young people to consider the Council and local government as a future career path.

3.7 National Pay bargaining 2023

In January 2023 the Unions tabled their pay claim for 2023 which includes:

- 12.7% increase (RPI plus 2%)
- Additional day of annual leave
- 2hr reduction in working week

Following regional briefings, in February the National Employers made a pay offer:

- £1,925 increase on each pay point
- 3.88% increase on pay points above the NJC pay scales
- 3.5% increase on pay points of chief officers

The offer has been presented as full and final and is with the Unions to consult their members.

3.8 Employee Benefits

The first enhancements to our employee benefits package have been introduced with the refresh of our service and recognition awards and improvements to our bikes for work scheme launching from 1 January.

Work to support the review of other employee benefits continues and a webinar on the GP Helpline formed part of the January Staff Briefing. The next stages of the project include:

- Changes to grade and service holiday entitlements
- Extension of our employee discounts scheme
- Introduction of a shared cost AVC (additional voluntary contribution) scheme for LGPS members
- Consideration of an Electric Vehicle lease car scheme
- Review of our family leave provision

3.9 Mental Health and Wellbeing

We continue to update and signpost staff to the wellbeing resources that are available, in February the Employee Assistance Newsletter focussed on managing your own mental health, the power of talking, children's mental health and the importance of building resilience.

Following feedback from employees, we have arranged a second menopause virtual kitchen to take place in March.

3.10 Employee Assistance Programme

We will be launching our new Employee Assistance Programme in April. The provision will continue to cover a 24hr confidential service for employees to access information, support and counselling, but also includes discount and wellbeing platforms and mental health support resources.

3.11 Our Values

Throughout 2023 we will be focussing on our Values during our monthly Personal Development Mornings. In February we focussed on our Adaptable value and managers were encouraged to consider how their teams have adapted over the past few years.

3.12 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Inclusion group met in December 2022 and focussed on 2 further topics from the Diverse by Design framework, Rethink Recruitment Processes and Transparent and Fair Reward and Recognition.

The group agree that further information about the benefits of working for North Herts Council should form part of the recruitment webpages to best sell the Council as an employer and that the culture at North Herts could be better communicated through these pages including information about the inclusion group itself.

The group also discussed the workforce profile at the Council and ensuring that any data showing groups that are under-represented is investigated.

3.13 Gender Pay Gap

The annual snapshot date for Gender pay gap data is 31 March. Our Gender Pay Gap data for 2022 will be published by 30 March 2023.

3.14 Absence

Employee absences relating to COVID-19 have been consistent over the first three quarters of 2022-23. However, in quarter 4 we have seen a significant drop in Covid absences– only 2 cases so far compared to 25 in the same period last year, which is likely to reflect the general reduction of testing. There is also an increase in absences related to colds and other respiratory illnesses. A summary of the number of Covid cases and days lost by quarter is shown below, with January – March 2023 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	21	70	2*	6.5*	71	258.5
OVERALL TOTAL									184	773

Absence levels remain fairly high and are similar in November – January to those same months last year. Several long-term sickness cases have been resolved, but short-term absence rates remain high. Common infections such as colds and sickness bugs account for around two-thirds of all absences (compared to 40% last quarter), with Covid absences now only accounting for only 8% of cases (compared to 13% last quarter).

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
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
Nov-22	0.32	0.37	0.69
Dec-22	0.30	0.49	0.79
Jan-23	0.18	0.41	0.59
Total	3.38	4.91	8.28

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

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JSCC discussion paper: How the values can shape the future culture at the Council

Introduction

This paper is intended to support discussion about how the organisational values can shape the future culture of the organisation. Previous discussions have focussed on the wider Shaping our Future programme and the development and communication of the values. This discussion is focussed more on how we can use and reference the values in a way that positively reinforces and shifts our culture for the future.

Our Values

The values are:

- Listening
- Together
- Learning
- Adaptable
- Inclusive

In full:

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

Values are intended to describe what is important to us as an organisation and the behaviours we need to demonstrate to make the values come alive.

What is Organisational Culture?

- Values and beliefs which are shared
- The taken for granted and shared meanings that people assign to their social surroundings
- The glue that holds it together
- “How things are done around here”

Why is it Important?

- Culture is often left to chance
- You can't not have a culture
- Positive culture is a significant factor for job seekers deciding whether to accept a job offer

- A positive culture is also seen as a significant motivational factor and a benefit

How the Values can be used in practice

- As a way of being an employer of choice for perspective candidates
- As a means of establishing clear expectations and managing performance
- By integrating them into all our training, particularly those that relate to our priorities such as 'People First'
- To work towards an alignment between the officers values and those demonstrated by members in their role
- To aid decision making by asking "is this in line with our values"?
- To ensure a consistency of approach and behaviors
- As an aid to recruitment by ensuring we appoint staff with personal values are aligned with the organisations.

Agenda Item 7

JSCC discussion paper - Mandatory pay gap reporting

A pay gap report measures the difference in hourly pay between different groups and can be seen as a basic indicator of inequalities in the workplace at all stages of employment. This is different to an equal pay audit, which looks at the difference in pay between people with different characteristics at the same job; pay gap reporting looks at a wider picture across the workforce.

Gender

In 2017, the Government introduced mandatory gender pay gap reporting and employers with 250 or more employees are required to publish statutory gender pay gap calculations every year. Accordingly, North Herts Council are required to calculate and publish the following gender pay data:

- Gender pay gap (mean and median averages)
- Gender bonus gap (mean and median averages)
- Proportion of men and women receiving bonuses
- Proportion of men and women in each quartile of the Council's pay structure

The data must be a snapshot of salary data on 31 March each year and the bonus pay gap must be calculated from all bonus payments made in the 12 months up to and including the snapshot date of 31 March each year. This data must be published on the NHC website and the Gov.UK Gender Pay Gap Service website by 30 March each year.

Ethnicity

In October 2018 the Government ran a consultation seeking employers' views on ethnicity pay gap reporting, what should be reported and who should be expected to report. Following this, a petition received over 130,000 signatures in favour of mandatory ethnicity pay gap reporting and the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee urged the Government to make ethnicity pay gap reporting mandatory as a first step to addressing pay disparities between employees from different ethnic backgrounds.

In its policy paper published in March 2022, the Government stated it would not be making ethnicity pay gap reporting mandatory "at this

stage”, to avoid burdening workplaces during their post-pandemic recovery and because it recognised that it is not a tool that can be consistently and fairly applied across all employers. It was however confirmed that for those organisations who made the choice to publish ethnicity pay figures, they would be required to publish alongside their voluntary figures a “diagnosis” and action plan to reduce and close any gaps that were apparent.

Ethnicity pay gap reporting has several issues which can cause an extra burden for employers. Where gender pay gap reporting only uses two categories (it does not incorporate those that identify as non-binary), for ethnicity there would need to be many specific categories instead of a few broad groups, for example the Office for National Statistics suggests 5 main categories and 18 sub-groups of ethnicity are used when collecting data. Collection of this data and the need to calculate pay gap figures for each measured against each of the other categories/sub-groups to get a full picture can be resource-intensive for employers. The data is not binary which makes collecting more challenging, including the fact that employees may not identify with any of the categories or may not want to share such information, which would distort the data and would impact its usefulness.

In addition, any outcomes need to account for the different demographics in different regions of the country, as some areas have very small ethnic minority populations.

There are also the challenges of confidentiality and ensuring the anonymity of staff as in an organisation where there are few ethnic minority employees it might be possible to infer from pay gap information who individuals are.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) (now Department for Business and Trade) has been tasked to produce guidance which should provide specific advice to deal with the issues mentioned above for organisations wanting to measure their ethnicity pay gap. The guidance will include case studies of companies that already report on their ethnicity pay gaps and will provide employers with the tools to understand and tackle pay gaps and to build trust with their employees. No date has yet been set for this guidance to be available and in February 2023 BEIS confirmed it would be published in due course.

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
2023	March	How the values can shape the future culture at the Council
	March	The future of mandatory pay gap reporting

Subject area	Suggested discussion topics for future meetings
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	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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