

23 June 2023

Our Ref Joint Staff Consultative Committee 5 July
2023
Contact. Committee Services
Direct Dial. (01462) 474655
Email. committee.services@north-herts.gov.uk

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

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

(Substitutes: Councillors Councillors James Denselow, Keith Hoskins MBE, Nigel
Mason, Michael Muir and Richard Thake)

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

Staff Consultation Forum Andrew Betts, Christina Corr, Louis Franklin, Claire
Representatives: Bernard and Vicky Kent.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

to be held in the

REMOTE MEETING

On

WEDNESDAY, 5TH JULY, 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
<p>1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Members are required to notify any substitutions by midday on the day of the meeting.</p> <p>Late substitutions will not be accepted and Members attending as a substitute without having given the due notice will not be able to take part in the meeting.</p>	
<p>2. MINUTES FROM 15 MARCH 2023 To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 15 March 2023.</p>	(Pages 5 - 10)
<p>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.</p>	
<p>4. SCF MINUTES To receive the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum meetings from March 2023, April 2023, May 2023 and June 2023.</p>	(Pages 11 - 28)
<p>5. HR INFORMATION NOTE INFORMATION NOTE - HR UPDATE INFORMATION OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES SERVICES MANAGER</p> <p>To update the Joint Staff Consultative Committee on the progress made in the last quarter completing HR work and projects and supporting people issues.</p>	(Pages 29 - 36)
<p>6. DISCUSSION PAPER - ATTRACTING AND REWARDING SCARCE TALENT To receive a discussion paper on Attracting and Rewarding Scarce Talent.</p>	(Pages 37 - 38)
<p>7. FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS To consider topics for discussion at a future meeting of the Committee.</p>	(Pages 39 - 40)

TNORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD REMOTELY
ON WEDNESDAY, 15TH MARCH, 2023 AT 10.00 AM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Claire Strong, Terry Hone and Tom Plater*

In Attendance:

Debbie Ealand (Housing Supply Officer), Christina Corr (Senior Technical Officer), Rebecca Webb (Human Resources Operations Manager), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Sjanet Wickenden (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Maggie Williams (Senior HR and Contracts Manager) and Louis Franklin (Admin Support Officer)

Also Present:

There were no members of the public present.

54 ELECTION OF A CHAIR

Audio recording – 0 minutes 45 seconds

Councillor Terry Hone proposed, and Councillor Tom Plater seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Councillor Claire Strong was elected Chair for this meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee.

55 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 46 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg and Raj Bhakar.

56 MINUTES - 14 DECEMBER 2022

Audio Recording – 3 minutes 48 seconds

Councillor Claire Strong, as Chair proposed, and Councillor Tom Plater seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 14 December 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

57 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 33 seconds

(1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded.

- (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 needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

58 SCF MINUTES

Audio recording – 5 minutes 4 seconds

The Service Director – Resources, presented the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum meetings held in December 2022, January 2023 and February 2023 and highlighted the following:

- The restructuring of the Community Engagement team had been discussed.
- Staff queries had been received on ensuring the office environment was looked after and that this is communicated to all staff.
- The regular IT updates had focussed on the new laptop rollout.

In response to Councillor Claire Strong question the Service Director – Resources, stated that workstation assessment should be an annual process for staff, or when an Officer changes their work setting.

RESOLVED: The Committee noted the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum for December 2022, January 2023 and February 2023.

59 INFORMATION NOTE - HR UPDATE

Audio Recording - 8 minutes 14 seconds

The HR Service Manager presented the 'HR Information Note' and highlighted the following points:

- There had been a focus on recruitment selection and working with recruiting managers, with welcome payments considered for hard to fill vacancies.
- The Recruitment Refresh project was ongoing, and was reviewing our Social Media presence, as well as the recruitment pages on the website, to assess how, this can attract new employees, it reflects us as an employer, the role is presented.
- The Recruitment Refresh project would amalgamate the Job Description and Person Specification into one document.
- Testing will begin on using a rolling closing date for vacancies, based on receipt of an application from a suitable candidate.
- A trial was ongoing with an in-house recruitment agency at Essex County Council who are providing advertisement on their website and job boards.
- Managers attended a recruitment training session, that included: the best approach to recruitment in this changing recruitment market, being ready for challenging question from candidates and selling the Council as an employer.
- Staff turnover is being reviewed and monitored, with a focus on exit data and feedback from leavers.
- National Apprenticeship week 6-13 February was a success.
- The Employee Assistance Program would have a new provider from April 2023.
- The Gender Pay Gap for 2022 was 19.1% compared to 17.4% in 2021, the first increase since 2017. The Inclusion group will be working with HR to develop an action plan.
- HR were offering support to managers dealing with absence management.
- There had been a considerable drop in Covid absences.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Terry Hone
- Councillor Tom Plater
- Debbie Ealand

In response to questions the HR Manager advised that:

- There were no key trend for our leavers, but promotions opportunities were mentioned by some.
- The Council was great at providing staff with ongoing development opportunities but did not always have a clear career progression path.
- Salary featured as a reason for leaving, with roles in private sector organisations often paying more.
- In 2021-22 an additional Service Director role was created which has impacted the Gender Pay Gap report.
- There were interviews scheduled for a Development and Conservation Manager later this month.
- The new Employee Assistance Program will be open to Members.
- The HR department are providing support for Officers, and their managers who are suffering from the effects of long Covid.

RESOLVED:

- (1) The Committee noted the HR Update Information Note.
- (2) That the Committee agreed to stop reporting specifically on Covid absences in future Information Notes, but requested Officers monitor these figures and report back to the Committee should they increase.

60 DISCUSSION PAPER - COUNCIL VALUES

Audio Recording - 26 minutes 20 seconds

The HR Service Manager presented the Discussion Paper 'Strategic Discussion Paper on Council Values' and highlighted the following points:

- The Council's core values were; Listening, Together, Learning, Adaptable and Inclusive.
- Organisational culture is a value and belief which is shared across the organisation and outlines the way the organisation functions.
- The Discussion Paper highlighted how Values can be used in practice to help create the Organisational Culture.
- The Values were integrated into Job descriptions, regular performance reviews, staff training and the Conduct and Capability Policy.
- The Council's Values aid decision-making process.
- Using the Council Values would ensure a consistency of approach and behaviour.
- Recruitment would be focussed on employing staff with personal values aligned with those of the Council and would build this into recruitment and interviews.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Terry Hone
- Councillor Tom Platter
- Debbie Ealand

In response to questions HR Manager advised that:

- The aim was to repeat the values message and embed it, into everyday work life, so that it becomes a reality, rather than just on screen or paper.
- Values forms part of the standard appraisal document and discussion.
- It was important that staff were aware of how the Values fitted within their role at the Council.
- Staff are encouraged to take part in a development morning on the first Friday of every month, which often focuses on Values. Staff are able to take part in the development work at other times, should they be required to work on the allocated time.
- The Employee Recognition Awards were open, and any staff can be nominated for their demonstration of the Values in their work.

The Service Director – Resources in response to questions stated:

- That Values form the main discussion of an Appraisal, and this applies at all employee levels.
- The Staff Consultation Forum (SCF) has discussed the refreshed Values.
- At the next SCF meeting The Service Director will initiate a further conversation on Values.

RESOLVED: The Committee noted the Strategic Discussion Paper on Council Values.

61 DISCUSSION PAPER - MANDATORY PAY GAP REPORTING

Audio Recording - 40 minutes 56 seconds

The Senior HR and Contracts Manager presented the Discussion Paper ‘Strategic Discussion Paper on Mandatory Pay Gap Reporting’ and highlighted the following points:

- Pay Gap is an undesirable or unfair difference between the average amounts that different groups are paid. The report shows basic inequalities in the work force and is separate to equal pay. The Pay Gap looks at everyone across the organisation and compares them by their different characteristics.
- The Gender Pay Gap report was a snapshot of our employees based on two groups and this was produced annually on the 31 March.
- The Gender Pay Gap reporting has been mandatory since 2017 for employers who have over 250 employees, however this may change to 500 employees in 2024.
- After 2024 the Council would continue reporting the Gender Pay Gap on a voluntary basis, as the data is invaluable.
- It would take 20 years at the Council’s current rate to bridge the Gender Pay Gap.
- The Pay Gap was not limited to gender but includes as an example, ethnicity and disabilities, however gender is the only area where reporting is mandatory.
- Ethnicity Pay Gap Reporting may become mandatory but currently there were some issues regarding how this would be reported, as there were 5 ethnicity categories and 18 sub-groups. There were concerns that the information would vary, due to the demographics in different regions of the Country and for the confidentiality and anomaly of staff where there are few ethnic minority employees.

The following Members asked questions

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Terry Hone
- Councillor Tom Plater

In response to questions the Senior HR and Contracts Manager stated:

- Ethnicity formed part of the Equalities Data Report on staff and recruitment, and this figure was not in line with the demographics of the District.
- Gender Pay Gap was likely to remain mandatory for the County Council and District Councils would produce the information on a voluntarily basis.
- When the Council publishes their Gender Pay Gap it includes an action plan and narrative.
- The Council does not monitor Ethnicity as a Pay Gap, but the data is included in the Equal Pay Review completed every two years.

In response to questions the HR Manager stated that:

- Ethnicity was a main subject of discussion at the Inclusion Group.
- At the next Inclusion Group meeting they will be discussing the Halo Collective regarding hair discrimination.

RESOLVED: The Committee noted the Strategic Discussion Paper on Mandatory Pay Gap Reporting.

62 FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS

Audio recording – 56 minutes 08 seconds

The following Members took part in the discussion:

- Councillor Terry Hone
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Tom Plater

It was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the topics “Diversity and changing workplaces accommodation and practices” and “Attracting and Rewarding Scarce Talent” be discussed at the next meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee.
- (2) That the topics “Employment Tribunals” and “Employment Law” be discussed at a future meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee.

The meeting closed at 11.05 am

Chair

This page is intentionally left blank

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

01/03/2023

Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**), Ian Couper (**IC**), Rebecca Webb (**RW**) Claire Bernard (**CB**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Christina Corr (**CC**) Alice Ashbrook (**AA**) Drew Betts (**DB**) Dee Levett (**DL**), Mark Robinson (**MR**), Fallon Rumball Nunan - Notes

Circulation: Global

Chair for Meeting: Drew Betts

1. Apologies

Anthony Roche, Mark Robinson.

2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

3. NHC Updates

- North Herts Council's 2023/2024 budget was approved by councillors at last week's Full Council meeting (Thursday 23 February) more information can be found [here](#).
- Council Delivery Plan is going to cabinet week commencing 13th March current version can be viewed [here](#).
- [Churchgate project](#) has consulted with the public and is currently in review.
- Leisure and Waste projects set to be finalised.

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- HR held a [Menopause Virtual Kitchen on the 2nd March at 12.30](#) if you weren't able to make it there is some further support [here](#).
- Pay Award 2023 update – claim from the union in January for 12.7%, reduction of the working week from 37 to 35, an additional day's annual leave and a review of family leave and pay. The National Employers responded with an offer of £1925 on each spinal point (for most grades -more senior grades will receive a 3.88% or 3.50% offer) It is important to note that NHC apply the increases but work from own pay scale is different from NJC. It is expected that there will be further negotiations prior to a finalised offer being announced.
- Our new and improved Employee Assistance Program launches on 1st April 2023. Anybody seeking support from current provider will continue. We are really excited to share more information with you, keep your eyes peeled!

4. Employee Queries

Q: From previous minutes, when can we expect an email to be circulated regarding office etiquette?

A: It can be expected this week.

Q: Can employees update photographs on staff badges.

A: Yes, if you email propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk they can arrange this.

Q: Is there any update on the long service awards?

A: Discussions are ongoing, we will respond to all those who have queried in due course.

5. IT Update and Queries

No IT update, questions were welcomed.

6. Green Update

Contributions to the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP)

HCCSP members have asked officers to work through each of the current action plans (Water; Biodiversity; Carbon Reduction; and Transport) to present revised versions which consider action to date, clarified targets, and a broader view of the work of other organisations and community groups. We are continuing to lead on the biodiversity subgroup and action plan and have begun to work through this. The partnership have also invited relevant community groups and organisations to attend subgroup meetings to input their expertise.

Work continues to progress the actions in each of the plans, with the HCCSP Project Lead Officer working with various departments in all the authorities to monitor updates.

We are currently analysing postcode data for the Solar Together acceptances in North Herts. We requested this data to aid our evaluation of the scheme and to understand how participation has varied across the district. Installations of the panels for those who accepted their offers are now progressing and are still on track to be completed by April.

The Policy Team continue to be a part of the Behaviour Change Subgroup and the Adaptation Subgroup. The Adaptation subgroup are working to identify climate-related risks from across the county and now have a template on which we can begin recording these under the categories of key climate impacts (i.e extreme heat; rainfall & flooding; drought; and wind/storms).

Sustainable Warmth

At the end of 2022 we continued to progress our work on the Sustainable Warmth fund. This scheme is to retrofit homes (insulation, new windows/doors, possibly things like solar panels if people have already done all the other efficiency improvements) for those who earn less than £30k per year and whose property has one of the poorer EPC ratings. In December we worked with comms to do social media and leaflet promotion and sent out a mailout to possibly eligible households. Early indications suggest we have hit our target number of referrals which should allow around 55 homes to be retrofitted in North Herts in this round of the scheme. We are also beginning to prep for the next round of funding which will target just off-gas properties.

Green Courses Research

Following a question that was asked at the recent Environment Panel meeting, the Policy Team have conducted research on courses, modules, and vocational training available in Hertfordshire with links to sustainability, climate change and the environment. The courses include those from school leavers to undergraduate degree courses both available at Hertfordshire Colleges and Universities as well as The Open University. We are looking at how to promote this information.

Green Business Awards, and Prizes for Residents

We have completed research into green and sustainable Business awards across the country, run by businesses, organisations, and councils to recognise businesses that are showing contributions to sustainability and Net Zero targets. We will be raising this at the next Hertfordshire Sustainability Officers Group to see if there is the opportunity for the Local Enterprise Partnership to incorporate something similar in their Green Growth efforts to help and encourage businesses to decarbonise.

Responding the Water Company Consultations

We have been preparing NHC's response to the Water Resources Management Plans (WRMP) laid out by the water companies. We have so far completed our response to the Affinity Water plan and have begun looking at Anglian Water.

Engaging with Planning on SPDs and the Baldock Development

We are currently engaging with Planning colleagues to ensure alignment between NHC's environmental goals and the content of the Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document. We are also ensuring that the goals and actions of the relevant HCCSP action plans are fed in.

We are also working with Planners to define and maximise sustainability aims for the Baldock development in the Local Plan.

7. Building Services Update

Questions welcomed.

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

Q: A member of the public has asked why has Hitchin Arcade has 2 male toilets and 3 unisex toilets?

A: If you pass this through, we can investigate it.

8. Ideas/Suggestions

None

9. AOB

This will be Alice Ashbrook's last SCF meeting as she leaves NHC at the end of March, taking a career break to go travelling. Good luck Alice and thanks for all your contributions!

Chair for next meeting – Louis Franklin

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

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

05/04/2023

Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**), Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Chris Jeffery (**CJ**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Vicky Kent (**VK**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Andrew Betts (**AB**), Dee Levett (**DL**), Mark Robinson (**MR**), Caelan Ballard – notes (**CB**)

Circulation: Global

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

1. Call Recording Note – Chris Jeffery

From Monday 24th of April, the Customer Service Centre will begin recording outgoing calls using a system called Red Box. The Data Protection impact assessment has been signed off, and the Privacy notice on the Council website will be updated. Telephone notices will also be updated before the 24th so that customers will be aware that they are being recorded. This is an industry standard and ensures protection for the Customer Services team to deal with any issues or complaints that arise. The call recordings will also be used for enhanced quality monitoring and will be accessible by the team leaders. This notice is to ensure that all staff across the Council are aware that their call will be recorded if a member of the Customer Services team calls them, until the call is handed off or ended. Customer Services accept are accepting comments and questions about this new implementation until Wednesday the 19th of April.

Q: Can it be clarified whether internal calls will also be recorded?

A: All outgoing calls from members of the Customer Services team will be recorded. If a member of staff were to call the Customer Services team, this call would not be recorded as it did not originate from Customer Services.

Q: Members of staff from all over the organisation sometimes wish to speak to Unison or HR in confidence, particularly if they are experiencing a problem at work and are seeking advice. Will the call recording system prevent these conversations from being private?

A: Customer Services staff can request for their manager to deselect the call recordings function via the Red Box mobile workstation settings. This will stop calls from being recorded and enables staff to make confidential phone calls where it is necessary. Call recording will be switched back on after the conversation has taken place.

Q: If a member of staff wanted to make a private phone call to HR about a problem they were having within their team, they would need to inform their manager and request the call recording function is switched off. Will this call recording system make it unnecessarily difficult to privately speak to HR or seek advice on the phone?

A: It is important for the Customer Services team to be aware there are other ways of contacting HR, including through our HRhelp email inbox, which would eliminate the issue of call recording. HR are able to meet individuals face to face if they do not want their manager to be aware they are seeking support from HR. Unison can also be contacted privately through their email inbox.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Ian Couper and Debbie Hiscock.

3. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

4. NHC Update

- The next local elections will be taking place next month, with the list of candidates now published. This list of candidates is available on the modern.gov website.
- As staff will be aware, there was a fire outside the main entrance to the District Council Offices. The fire was very minor, fuelled by a wooden palette with cardboard and carpet underlay stacked on top and then doused in petrol. The fire itself was put out quickly, without any damage to the building, but the doors were blocked off while Police carried out their initial investigation. The Police investigation is ongoing, and an appeal for information will be put out with some CCTV photos of the unidentified suspect. The CCTV photos will be circulated to staff to help Police gather more information in the ongoing investigation.
- Staff must remain vigilant about the security of the DCO while the Police continue to investigate. This vigilance should include not holding the door open for people without checking their staff ID.

Q: In response to the fire, have security measures like new CCTV cameras been considered?

A: There are ongoing conversations about our existing CCTV cameras and whether there is a need for more. Currently there is a CCTV camera outside the building reception which is there to protect members of staff working in Customer Services, and CCTV cameras covering the small carpark at the rear of the DCO. The GDPR implications of having CCTV film everyone who walks past the DCO also have to be considered.

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- An email was circulated last week about the launch of the new employee benefits and wellbeing platform – [North Herts-Be Well](#). Staff are encouraged to register and explore the platform as there are a variety of features on offer. North Herts-Be Well includes an Employee Assistance Program, fitness videos, a recipe catalogue, as well as a mindfulness platform called [Be Calm](#). Feedback on the Be Well platform is welcome and can be directed to hrhelp@north-herts.gov.uk.
- The new Annual Leave scheme began on the 1st of April, and changes include the additional leave linked to the 2022 pay award, and some increases in leave entitlement for some grades.
- iTrent is currently experiencing some glitches where holiday balances and annual leave bookings are not displaying correctly. Our payroll provider is aware of this and are working on resolving these errors as soon as possible. Staff will be notified when an update is available.



- There was also a reminder in the latest edition of Insight focusing on Regular Performance Reviews (RPR's). Traditionally, appraisal meetings would have been carried out around April every year, but RPR's can happen at any point during the year and discussion around RPR's should be ongoing and covered in one-to-one meetings between staff and their line manager.
- The next Personal Development Morning will take place on Friday the 14th of April with the focus being our organisational value 'Together'. An informal tea and cake morning will take place on the first-floor meeting rooms 1 & 2 in the DCO. Staff are encouraged to come along, have some cake, and reconnect with colleagues!

Q: There was recently an update email about the new Employee Assistance Program which mentioned an introductory benefit on the platform where staff are able to access 3 months of free Wellbeing Calendar Studio Sessions. If there is good staff uptake on this offer, would continuing staff access be a possibility?

A: Unfortunately, budgets will not allow for a continuation of these free sessions past the first 3 months. If a significant amount of feedback is received about these sessions, this staff benefit can be reconsidered but currently the budget cannot stretch any farther.

5. Employee Queries

Q: Some staff feel they fall in a gap between the two new Service Award thresholds and are unhappy with the current proposals. Is there an update available on the proposed changes to the Service Awards?

A: A proposal has been emailed to those that will be affected by the changes to the Service Awards and will fall in the gap between the two new service milestones. Positive feedback has been received regarding this amendment. If there are staff that wish to provide feedback, they are encouraged to reply directly to the email which details the new proposal.

Q: An officer had tried to sign up for the Sustainable Warmth Scheme and had an appointment with a surveyor on the 9th of January. However, the officer was still waiting on the 16th of March for an update and was asked not to chase or contact the company because they were overloaded. Is the Sustainable Warmth Initiative being successfully implemented and running as planned?

A: Staff are recommended to send any queries on the Sustainable Warmth Scheme to the SCF email inbox, SCF@north-herts.gov.uk, so that they can be forwarded on to the appropriate officer who will be able to look into this matter and properly advise.

Q: Many horse-riding schools have closed down in North Hertfordshire due to the Cost-of-Living Crisis. This will unfortunately prevent many people from getting into horse-riding unless they own horses themselves. Are there any plans to support the very few riding schools which remain open?

A: Although there are currently no plans to finance riding schools, Central Government offer financial support for businesses, available in the form of grants and financial schemes. The riding schools will have to apply for these schemes and grants directly. The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Network and Hertfordshire County Council are also able to offer support signposting and advice on finances.



Q: Staff used to have access to a mindfulness app, but this has now ended after one year. Are there plans to renew the staff subscription, given how popular it was?

A: The new benefits and wellbeing platform, [North Herts Be Well](#), includes a mindfulness provision called [Be Calm](#), which offers very similar resources.

Q: Recently there was discussion around dropping full-time working hours from 37 hours per week to 35 hours per week for the same pay, which is being trialled in a study led by the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Is this something that may be considered or trialled here? If so, how will this affect staff who work part-time hours?

A: The 35-hour work week trial is not being currently considered at NHC. Trade Unions requested employers consider this change in the 2022 and 2023 Pay claims, but this is not something the National Employers have agreed to, and is not part of the pay offer put to the Trade Unions at this stage.

Q: Following the recent fire outside the DCO, can it be clarified whether there are only Fire Marshalls and First Aiders in the office on an ad-hoc basis?

A: The plan going forwards is that there should always be at least one Fire Marshall and First Aider in the office on any working day. There is a need to continue recruiting staff to volunteer and train to become First Aiders to ensure that there is always cover in the DCO, and so far, around 3 members of staff have newly volunteered to undergo the training. Discussions are ongoing about how methods of contacting Fire Marshalls and First Aiders can be improved, and a phone tannoy system is being considered.

6. IT Update and Queries

- An email was circulated this morning regarding the recent Virgin Media outages, as well as some proposals from IT which could mitigate the effect of future outages. V3 users commented that they were still able to access some programs on their laptops despite the outage, which was positive.
- The IT text alerts were able to notify staff of the outage and give an estimate for updates. Staff can sign up to receive these text alerts by logging an IT ticket on the [IT Helpdesk](#) with the subject line 'IT Text Alerts' and provide a mobile number.
- IT are also exploring other ways to contact staff in the event of an outage, including on the Microsoft Teams Global chat, or using the Gov Notify service which would not require internet connection.

7. Green Update

No Green Update for this SCF.

8. Building Services Update

- Open water containers (bottle and paper cups) have been left in the toilets on the 1st and 4th floor on a few occasions. Whoever is doing this, is asked to remove them in future. HR/ Property Services can be contacted for support with any issues.



- The Council provides sanitary items in the women's toilets with an 'honesty' box. Those using the items are reminded to add a contribution to the honesty box.
- The need for staff safety also must be reiterated, and staff must be vigilant and not let anyone inside that they do not know. The need for this policy was increased last week when the office reception was closed off and members of the public were admitted through the back door, presumed to be staff, and were then left to wander in the DCO.
- When leaving the DCO please wait for the door to shut behind you as this prevents damage to the door and prevents tailgating. When the door is pushed too hard it will stay open for a long time which is a security concern.
- If you don't recognise a member of staff coming into the office, just ask if they have ID. Checking staff ID on entering the office is acceptable, especially with the majority of staff homeworking no one is likely to know or recognise everyone.

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

9. Ideas/Suggestions

None

10. AOB

We welcome Vicky Kent as our newest SCF staff representative, and also give our grateful thanks to Mark Melliush who is retiring after 40 years of service at the Council. He will be missed, and we wish him a wonderful retirement.

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 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

Louis Franklin#4262 – Admin Support Officer

Vicky Kent #4396 – Community Protection Apprentice

This page is intentionally left blank

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

03/05/2023

Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**), Ian Couper (**IC**), Jo Keshishian (**JK**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Vicky Kent (**VK**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Andrew Betts (**AB**), Dee Levett (**DL**), Mark Robinson (**MR**), Caelan Ballard – notes (**CB**)

Circulation: Global

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

1. Apologies

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

2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

3. NHC Update

- The next local elections will be taking place on Thursday 4th May 2023. The list of candidates is available on the modern.gov website.
- The new Leisure and Waste procurements are now out.
- As part of the new Leisure contract, it is proposed that staff discounts for NHC Leisure Centre facilities will be continued at 50% off. However, the discounts will no longer apply to partners of staff.

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- A message recently went out to staff confirming that the issues with Annual Leave on iTrent have now been resolved. All carry over leave is now showing on balances and the December statutory days have now been added. Any further problems with iTrent or leave balances should be directed to the [Hrhelp inbox](#).
- The next New Starter get-together will be held on Tuesday the 6th of June and may be beneficial for new members of staff.
- Staff are reminded about the new EAP platform, [North Herts Be Well](#). An article has been published in Insight which highlights features and new benefits of the platform.
- A user guide on the North Herts Be Well app, Spectrum.Life, will also soon be available on the intranet. The Spectrum.Life app includes many different features, from virtual workout classes, and exclusive staff discounts to self-guided meditation resources.



4. Employee Queries

Q: Currently, staff are supplying their own milk for the fridges in the DCO, however, this has caused an excess of milk bottles being stored in the fridges and monitoring the expiry dates has become difficult. This has caused a lot of waste but could potentially also cause a health and safety issue. Is there provision for milk to be supplied and monitored by NHC?

A: This can be considered, but the logistics of how milk will be supplied fairly and monitored will need to be suggested by staff before this can be agreed upon.

5. IT Update and Queries

- The IT training room has now been closed and the room can no longer be booked on the system. However, the rollout of V3 laptops should enable staff to engage in training from any meeting room. The room is now being refitted and being used by Careline.
- The IT team are in the process of converting the workstations to laptop docking stations on the first floor. The first bank of desks are expected to be converted by the 19th of May.
- Staffing levels for the IT Help Desk are lower than normal due to vacancies within the team, which may affect service speed. IT are currently recruiting for several roles.
- Staff are reminded to log any pre-business case or new program as a pre-business case, so that the IT department can advise or investigate accordingly.
- The new starter form is under development and is expected to be finished by the 12th of May.

Q: The upcoming Bank Holidays are not displayed on staff Timesheets, which is affecting flexi-leave balances. Is this there a reason for this, and can it be amended?

A: Bank Holidays will not be displayed automatically on the Flexi-Timesheets and will need to be added manually. This can be done by clicking the grey box above the weekday where a Bank Holiday occurred, and then selecting 'Bank Holiday' as the type of leave and 'Full Day' as the duration. Ensure the changes have been saved for the flexi-leave to be adjusted correctly. Any ongoing problems with the timesheets should be reported to msu.support@north-herts.gov.uk.

Q: Do staff working from home need to use a docking station?

A: It is not necessary to use a docking station while working from home and is down to the preference of staff. However, a docking station means there are fewer cables to plug when switching between working at home and the office. A docking station will be needed if connecting to more than one monitor or a monitor that does not connect that via HDMI.

6. Green Update

No Green Update for this SCF.

7. Building Services Update

Q: The vending machines in the DCO only accept coin payments currently, and most members of staff do not have coins with them at work. Could the accepted payment methods be expanded to card or contactless payments too?

A: This is feasible and can be considered once the current vending machine contracts have finished.

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?

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

Louis Franklin#4262 – Admin Support Officer

Vicky Kent #4396 – Community Protection Apprentice

This page is intentionally left blank

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

07/06/2023

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

Circulation: Global

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

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Anthony Roche, Rebecca Webb, and Vicky Kent.

2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

3. NHC Update

- An advert has been published in the process of recruiting an additional Service Director on an 18-month, fixed-term basis, and can be offered as a secondment. This role was created to generate capacity in the Housing, Environmental Health and Planning departments. The post went through the consultation process with those affected.
- The Local Elections which took place on the 4th of May and the Council is continuing with a joint administration continuing between Labour and the Liberal Democrats.
- Cllr Alistair Willoughby has been appointed as Executive Member for Communities and Partnership following the Local Elections, the only change to the Executive Members (Cabinet). A list of Executive Members and Deputies was published in Insight.

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- The next Inclusion Group meeting will be held next Tuesday on the 13th of June and will be focused on the Halo Collective. All are welcome to attend.
- The HR team have launched a new Job Profile document which merges Job Description and Person Specification documents into one, making the format clearer and easier to read. This new document is being introduced gradually and the new document format will be used in future Job Evaluations.
- There are two Business Partners joining the HR team, Natalie, and Bryony. The new starters will bring HR back to its full capacity since Laura left the organisation in April and Gail, the current HR Business Partner, is due to retire in July.
- All are encouraged to take part in the Personal Development Morning being held this Friday and to use the time to develop personal learning.
- This month's edition of Insight has now been published, focusing on Carer's Week 2023 exploring wellbeing guidance for carers and carer's rights at work.



- A workshop focusing on 'Building Resilience and Maintaining Confidence' will be held tomorrow, on Thursday the 8th of June 2023. Staff can enrol themselves into the workshop via GROWzone.

4. Employee Queries

Q: When the Government reformed public service pension schemes in 2014, it introduced transitional protections for older members. In December 2018 in the McCloud case, the Court of Appeal ruled that younger members of the main public service pension schemes have been discriminated against because the protections do not apply to them. Following consultation in 2020, the Government proposed to remove age discrimination from the LGPS, ensuring members would not receive a lower pension because of the reforms. The new LGPS draft regulations are due to come into effect in October 2023. How will the new regulations effect members of the pension scheme who did not receive transitional protection when the LGPS moved from final salary to career average in 2014?

A: Communication surrounding the new LGPS regulations will be published in due course, and any questions staff have about the new regulations can be answered.

Q: The bike sheds outside the DCO have recently become inaccessible due to vehicles parking in front of them. May all be reminded to please be considerate of staff who travel to work by bike, and park in a way which does not prevent access to the bike sheds?

A: An email will be circulated to remind service areas which have access to the car park that vehicles should not obstruct the bike sheds or prevent access at any time.

Q: The [Staff Discounts](#) page on the intranet states that all council staff and their partners are offered concessionary rates of 50% off all NHC Leisure Facilities, including membership prices. A normal peak membership (including unlimited gym, swim, classes, and sauna use) at North Herts Leisure Centre in Letchworth is £46 a month (totalling £552 per year), but for staff it is discounted to £23 per month (or £276 per year)

A member of staff said that they were paying £78.20 per month for a joint account with their partner, while being told this was the discounted rate for both parties at 50%. Can any light be shed on why is this happening, and can anything be done to resolve it?

A: All council staff are currently entitled to concessionary rates of 50% off NHC Leisure Facilities, which covers Hitchin Swimming Centre, Archers Health & Fitness Club, North Herts Leisure Centre, Letchworth Outdoor Pool, Fearnhill Sports Centre and Royston Leisure Centre. Partners of staff are also offered a discount for pay-as-you-use (casual use) of facilities, but not for casual fitness/gym use. This discount can be used for an employee and their partner to go swimming on a pay-as-you-use basis.

In the case of the specific instance raised at the meeting, they had been offered a discounted joint membership (i.e. cheaper than two full price memberships), but it was cheaper still to pay for one half-price membership (for the employee) and one full-price membership (for the partner). The leisure centre had identified this and offered to back-date the cheaper price.

The current partner discount will end at the end of March 2024. This will be clarified by the Leisure team who will be able to communicate the correct rates across all NHC Leisure Facilities.



Q: As of next year, the concessionary discounts for NHC Leisure Facilities will no longer apply to the partners of staff. Why is this, and will staff be notified at this time?

A: The new Leisure contract begins on the 1st of April 2024, and a decision has been made that the current concessionary discount for partners of NHC staff will cease. Staff have been notified of this through the recent Insight article, and it was raised at SCF last month. As per the update above, the partner discount does not apply to memberships, there will be no impact on regular direct debit payments from the change.

Q: As part of the Benefits review in January, the Long Service Awards were updated, aiming to increase the number of recognition milestones for service at North Herts Council. Staff are now entitled to an award for 5, 10, 20, 30 and 40 years of service, and there is no longer an award for 25 years of service. There was some concern about how this change would affect staff who had more than 20 years of service but less than 25 years of service when the scheme launched and would miss out on their 20 years' service award. HR proposed a compromise for the affected staff which would involve offering the opportunity to bring forward the 30 years of service award to the 25 years milestone instead. Has a decision been made regarding this proposal?

A: After considering the feedback received from affected staff, it has been decided that we will go ahead with the compromise (i.e., being able to bring forward the 30 years to 25 years). The concerns of staff are recognised, and while it is not a perfect solution, the update to the Long Service Award milestones has increased the number of milestones that staff can receive and should not leave anyone worse off. Furthermore, members of staff who achieved 25 years of service just before the Long Service Awards were updated will receive awards for their 25 and 30 years of service.

5. IT Update and Queries

- IT have recently been short staffed due to multiple vacancies in the department, but recruitment for these positions is underway. A job offer has been sent to one applicant following interview.
- In addition, a new 12-month, fixed-term role as an IT Helpdesk Support Officer is being opened to allow the IT department to keep up with demand.
- The new starter process is going live as of the 14th of June and will increase efficiency by combining multiple starter forms into one document. Further communication about the new starter process will be shared during the next Staff Briefing. A new leaver process is also underway.
- The V3 rollout is still progressing and is now around 50% complete, with 216 laptops switched over. IT are continuing to contact staff to have them added to the rollout as availability arises. Staff are reminded to ensure they are contactable during their work hours so that they do not miss calls from IT regarding their V3 handovers.
- IT would also like to remind staff to update their MiCollab status when they are unavailable, as many staff have had their status set as 'available' despite calls going straight to answerphone.

6. Green Update

No Green Update for this SCF.

7. Building Services & Facilities Update



- Pending consideration by Leadership Team, a survey will be launched to gather staff consensus about replacing the current drinks machine on the ground floor canteen with a new drinks machine.
- Depending on the option taken this may also provide an alternative to the request to provide milk across all fridges in the DCO. It was felt that this would generally be impractical and could lead to a lot of wastage.
- Capacity to replace the current snack vending machine will also be raised to the Leadership team in the upcoming months.

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 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

Louis Franklin#4262 – Admin Support Officer

Vicky Kent #4396 – Community Protection Apprentice

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

5 July 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 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 February – April 2023 to the same period in the previous year.

	VACANCIES	APPLICATIONS	SHORTLISTED	OFFER - EXTERNAL	OFFER - INTERNAL	NOT FILLED
Feb 22-Apr 22	22	90	53	8	11	3
Feb 23-Apr-23	24	80	43	11	6	7

The number of job vacancies, applications and short-listing are quite similar year on year, but notably a higher number of vacancies remaining unfilled this year.

There were 7 vacancies that were not successfully filled:

Assistive Technologies Technician	Re-advertised and now filled
Contracts Lawyer	Covered via agency
Environmental Health Food Safety Officer	Re-advertised with interviews pending
Helpdesk Technical Support Officer	Re-advertised and now filled
IT Application Development Officer	Reviewing job role
Senior Planning Compliance Officer	Reviewing job role
Senior Town Centre Project Officer	Looking at alternative recruitment route

This period we have successfully filled 17 jobs including several catering posts for the new Bancroft Kiosk, Community Partnership Officer, 2x HR Business Partners, Principal Planning Officer, and Strategic Planning Officer.

3.3 Recruitment Refresh

Our new job profile document has been launched, which merges the job description and person specification and provides modernised and easy to use document for both managers and candidates. The new document includes our values graphics.

How We Work has been published on the recruitment pages of the website. The document will help candidates understand what working looks like for an employee at North Herts Council.

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 Leavers and Turnover

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

	Leavers	Headcount	Turnover	
			Monthly	Rolling
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%
Mar-23	5	339	1.47%	11.56%
Apr-23	4	347	1.15%	12.39%
May-23	2	349	0.57%	12.61%
Total	43	341		12.61%

The table above shows the rolling labour turnover rate was fairly stable during the second half of 2022 but has started to increase again since January.

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.

3.5 Apprenticeships

We currently have 9 apprentices who are completing a range of Apprenticeships including Business Administration, Customer Service Specialist, HR Support, Community Health & Wellbeing, Finance, Public relations and Cultural Learning.

In May 2023, two of our Apprentices attended the Local Government Apprentice of the Year event. Over 130 Level 2 and 3 local government apprentices took part from across the country, making it the biggest event yet.

All those taking part were either current apprentices or qualified within the last 12 months. The theme this year was Net Zero, with each activity designed to draw on that theme while helping to develop successful workplace behaviours, linked to a range of apprenticeship standards. Each participant will receive an individual report with their scores for each activity and an Employer Checklist with suggested questions for line managers to use with their apprentices. The apprentices who attended found the experience challenging but enjoyed being pushed out of their comfort zones within a safe, supportive environment.

3.6 National Pay bargaining 2023

Following the National employers pay offer in February, Unions consulted their members and are running ballots for industrial action. The ballots are disaggregated, and we expect to be advised of the outcome late in the summer.

The Unions pay claim for 2023 includes:

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

The National Employers pay offer:

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

In May, the Chief Officer pay award was agreed at 3.5%

3.7 Employee Benefits

Since the staff benefits survey last year, the HR team have been working to improve the benefits on offer to those working for the Council, taking into account the survey responses and other feedback received. So far, the following have been introduced:

- Launch of an updated employee assistance programme
- Renewal of our GP Helpline contract giving 24/7 access to a GP consultation service
- Enhancements to grade and service holiday entitlements
- Refresh of service and retirement recognition awards
- Extension of the repayment period and raising of the maximum spend under the Workplace Bikes scheme

Still to come are:

- Shared Cost Additional Voluntary Pension Contribution Scheme – a salary exchange scheme to boost pension
- Electric Vehicle Leasing Scheme
- Review of our 'family leave' provision

3.8 Mental Health and Wellbeing

The new Employee Assistance Programme was launched in April and gives staff various routes to access support including an online portal via an app, text messages and via phone. The app provides access to a mindfulness and meditation resource, a variety of wellbeing resources including podcasts and information sessions, access to fitness plans together with access to hundreds of recipes to support a healthy lifestyle.

Throughout the month of May, staff had access to a Mental Fitness Hub through our Occupational Health providers. This contained a collection of videos, downloads and signposting links to help build resilience, boost confidence and give greater control over thoughts.

We ran a Building Resilience and Confidence virtual workshop in May, which was well attended, and we continue to review the wellbeing resources that we have available to staff.

3.9 Our Values

April our personal development session focussed on our 'Together' value and it was great to see so many people attend the coffee morning at the Council Offices. Those that couldn't take part got together either in person or virtually and members of the team visited those not based at the Council Offices.

We have received positive feedback on the personal development mornings with staff using the time (either on the dedicated days or at other times to suit their workload) to develop their skills or catch up on their continued professional development. Other staff members have said that they use various meetings (such as the Inclusion Group or Staff Consultation Forum) to push themselves out of their comfort zone to further support their development.

3.10 Inclusion Group

The Inclusion group met in March 2023 the session focussed on the gender pay gap and a further topic from Diverse by Design "Rethink your Equalities Training". It has been agreed that the Inclusion group will work alongside HR to further develop the action plan to support improvements in our gender pay gap.

At the staff briefing in June, members of the Inclusion group took the opportunity to explain what the group does and why it's important. The discussion highlighted the impact the group can have through making recommendations to Leadership Team which have included increasing awareness about use of pronouns, encouraging internal use of photos on Teams and providing feedback to support the improvement of recruitment processes.

3.11 Gender Pay Gap

In March, we published our 2022 gender pay gap data. This showed an increase in both the mean and the median pay gap since the previous year. The mean figure for 2022 was 19.5% and the median 19.3%. Whilst the widening of the gap is disappointing, it highlights that there is no quick fix to resolving the issue of the gender pay gap especially for organisations with the type of gender profile the Council has. It should also be remembered that given the Council's size, just one staffing change can have a significant impact on the data and whilst more women have been recruited into

the senior leadership team in recent times, there is still further work to be done to increase the proportion of women in senior roles at the Council.

Since the Council began reporting back in 2017 our pay gap has decreased due to a focused effort, including increasing female representation at Leadership level, continuing to offer varied training and development opportunities, and expanding flexible and hybrid working options.

Other factors which continue to impact on our gender pay gap include the fact that the Council outsources services consisting of predominantly manual roles which traditionally attract males and have retained the services that traditionally attract females in house.

The 2023 gender pay gap data can now be calculated and will be reviewed over the summer to inform a refreshed action plan.

3.12 Equalities

The 2022 equalities data for staff, joiners and leavers has now been analysed. The figures show that the make-up of the Council's workforce, appointments, and leavers by protected characteristic remains very stable, though there are some points to note:

Age

- The number of employees in the age group 55–64 increased in 2022 and this remains the largest age group for those working at the Council comprising 28% of all staff. In 2021 just under 35% of the North Herts population was aged 45-64, which contrasts with 50% of Council employees being in this age bracket.
- 32% of leavers in 2022 were under the age of 25, which represents a large proportion of all staff exiting the Council. This together with a decrease in recruitment from the same age group means the age profile of the Council is increasing.

Disability

- The percentage of Council staff in 2022 who class themselves as disabled is 4%, a slight fall from 2021. There was however a strong increase in appointments from this group which rose from 1% in 2021 to 8% in 2022.

Ethnic Origin

- 8% of North Herts employees came from a non-white background in 2022, a small increase from the previous year. This compares with 12.5% of the population of North Herts district who come from a non-white background* (*ONS 2021).

Gender

- The proportion of staff who are female has remained largely unchanged at around two-thirds of all staff since this data began to be reported in 2015.

Data

- The current payroll system gives the facility for staff to record their equalities information. A full picture of its equalities profile enables the Council to better promote its diversity and inclusion agenda in an informed way. We encourage staff to provide their data and will continue to consider how to promote trust and understanding of why the data is collected and how it will be used. During 2022 across a number of characteristics (all except marital status) there has been an

increase in employees providing data. But there are still gaps, e.g. there is still no data on disability status or sexual orientation for over 20% of staff and no data on marital status or religion for 25% of employees.

3.13 Absence

Absence levels are improving with the period January to April 2023 having approximately 20% lower rates of total absence compared to those same months last year. This reduction relates to both short-term and long-term sickness cases.

The absence figures for the rolling 12-month period are shown below as absence days lost per employee, and the total of 7.75 days also shows the improvement compared to the last report where the rolling total was 8.28 days.

Rolling 12 months	Absence days lost per employee		
	Long-term	Short-term	Total
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
Feb-23	0.19	0.37	0.55
Mar-23	0.39	0.34	0.73
Apr-23	0.30	0.22	0.52
Total	3.32	4.44	7.75

4.0 NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 Progress against the HR Service 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

- 5.1 Rebecca Webb
HR Services Manager
01462 474481
rebecca.webb@north-herts.gov.uk

- 5.2 Ian Couper
Service Director – Resources

01462 474243
ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk

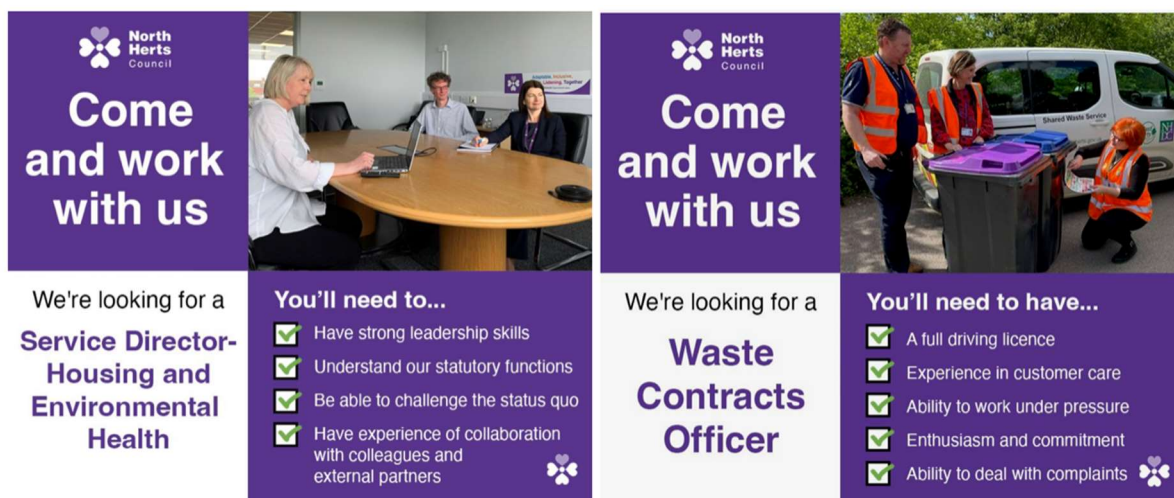
This page is intentionally left blank

JSCC Discussion: Attracting and rewarding scarce talent

The employment market conditions are impacting many sectors, and this presents challenges for us in recruiting to several job roles – including some which were previously relatively easy to fill. As a result, the HR team have been actively working to improve how we can attract and reward job applicants.

Advertising

We have reviewed how and where we advertise our vacancies to ensure we reach a wider target audience. Working with the Communications team, our social media advertising has been refreshed and is pitched as being more friendly and approachable, and less formal. We have been trialling a new style advert (see below) using photos of NHC employees to create impact and increase audience engagement. These adverts have been used on the council’s pages for LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, and we encourage recruiting managers to share these posts more widely on their own social media to increase the range.



The standard template for our website advert has also been reviewed to highlight the benefits of working for us, along with an updated statement on equality, diversity, and inclusion. This advert format can also be used on specialist jobs boards when required.

Benefits

We can attract job applicants by promoting the key benefits of working for us. Our staff really appreciated many of our benefits, so we now ensure these are highlighted in our advertising. These include the pension scheme, generous annual leave, occupational sick pay, free onsite car parking, 50% off leisure membership and flexible working options including flexi scheme and homeworking.

Flexible working and the ability to work from home are important factors to many job applicants, and it is vital that we promote the high level of flexibility which is possible in many of our jobs. When we make this is clear at both the advertising and interview stages of recruitment, we will become the employer of choice for more applicants.

We have always been supportive of flexible working hours for existing employees, and we have now extended this to new starters. Job adverts include the wording “Hours: 37 (full-time) open to flexible working patterns and hours” so that applicants can request an alternative working pattern or working hours and discuss these with the recruiting managers. Last year, the HR team worked with a manager to facilitate a term-time only contract that had been requested by a candidate at their job interview.

JSCC Discussion: Attracting and rewarding scarce talent

Likewise, for many of our employees, the option to work from home has been a benefit for over 10 years. We now encourage managers to consider how many office days are needed for their job vacancy, and to give guidance in their job adverts so applicants are aware of how often they will need to commute. For job roles where the average requirement is one or two office days per week, the vacancy is likely to be attractive to candidates from a wider geographical area.

Reward

It can be difficult to compete with the private sector on salary, which is why it is important for us to focus on other benefits, but we aim to be transparent when advertising and always include the minimum and maximum for the appropriate salary band on the website. Whilst we await the pay award, we also state that our pay award is pending. In addition, the recruitment and retention incentives policy was reviewed last year, and now includes guidance for managers on using market supplements and welcome payments for job that are deemed to be “hard-to-fill”.

Career development

We have a great record with training and development, and many of our employees have developed their careers with us, moving between job roles (sometimes across service areas) and progressing in seniority as their skills and experience grow. Our popular apprenticeship scheme helps us to bring in young people, and those looking for a career change, and develop their skills from the grass-roots level. Many of our apprentices stay with us and move into permanent job roles when they complete their apprenticeships.

In areas such as Planning, Environmental Health and Legal Services where the difficulty in recruiting can be extremely difficult, we can make use of training schemes and career-graded roles which provide clear career paths for professional qualifications and progression. We currently have one Trainee Solicitor in post, with another one due to start shortly, two graduate Planning Officers and are interviewing for a career graded Food Safety Officer post which will support a Technical Officer to train and progress to a qualified Environmental Health Officer.

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
	July	Attracting and rewarding scarce talent

Page 37

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
Learning and Development	Coaching
Learning and Development	Face to face v on-line learning, striking a balance
Employee Engagement	Employee engagement within hybrid working
Wellbeing	Providing support for staff wellbeing
Resourcing	Social media for recruitment
Resourcing	Succession planning and development
Wellbeing	Long term absence management
Equalities and Inclusion	2020's Diversity and changing workplace practices

This page is intentionally left blank