

6 October 2023

Our Ref Joint Staff Consultative Committee 18
October 2023
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To: The Chair and Members of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee of North Hertfordshire District Council

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

(Substitutes: 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

VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM

On

WEDNESDAY, 18TH OCTOBER, 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 - 5 JULY 2023 To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 5 July 2023.</p>	(Pages 3 - 6)
<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 July 2023 and September 2023.</p>	(Pages 7 - 16)
<p>5. HR INFORMATION NOTE 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 17 - 22)
<p>6. DISCUSSION PAPER - EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN A HYBRID WORKING ENVIRONMENT To receive a discussion paper on Employee Engagement in a Hybrid Working Environment.</p>	(Pages 23 - 24)
<p>7. SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS To consider topics for discussion at a future meeting of the Committee.</p>	(Pages 25 - 26)

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM
ON WEDNESDAY, 5TH JULY, 2023 AT 10.00 AM

MINUTES

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

In Attendance: *Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager) and Rebecca Webb (HR Services Manager) and Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews (UNISON Representative)*

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

63 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 58 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Elizabeth Dennis.

64 MINUTES FROM 15 MARCH 2023

Audio Recording – 3 minutes 09 seconds

Councillor Claire Strong proposed and Councillor Terry Hone seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 15 March 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

65 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 59 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.

66 SCF MINUTES

Audio Recording – 4 minutes 20 seconds

The Service Director – Resources presented the item entitled 'SCF Minutes', alongside the Minutes from the meetings of March, April, May and June 2023 and highlighted the following:

- There had been a wide range of topics discussed at the Staff Consultation Forum, including the recording of calls in the Customer Service Centre and how staff could still have confidential conversations, long service awards and the response to small fire incident which occurred at the Council Offices.
- It had been recognised that staff were central to the delivery of the elections which took place in May.

In response to questions from Councillor Claire Strong, the Service Director – Resources advised that:

- There were two new people recruited to the IT helpdesk, including one temporary.
- The development team had some recruitment issues, with staff leaving or having left, and these vacancies are being recruited to.
- Only major IT issues were raised at the SCF, and these were usually acted on quickly by the IT team.
- There was no record of ongoing issues not being resolved, but this would be raised at the next SCF meeting.

It was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum for March, April, May and June 2023.

67 HR INFORMATION NOTE

Audio Recording – 8 minutes 53 seconds

The Human Resources Services Manager presented the Information Note entitled 'HR Update', including that:

- There were still some issues with recruitment, with 7 roles unable to be filled and these areas have been given support.
- Processes were still being developed.
- The new Job Profile document had been launched, which merged the Job Description and Person Specification and included reference to the organisational values.
- The 'How We Work' document had been uploaded to the Recruitment webpage and this outlined the different types of working.
- Negotiations over pay had not been resolved and the unions were balloting for strike action, which could be taken at each Council individually.
- The new Employee Assistance Programme launched in April and offered a variety of routes for contact, such as live chat and text, and it was hoped this would encourage use by staff.
- The previously development morning had been themed around 'Together' and the session at the Office was well attended.
- The Personal Development programme had received good feedback, with further developments and ideas being discussed at SCF and Inclusion Group.
- The Inclusion Group had continued to meet and attended a staff briefing to encourage new attendees.
- The Gender Pay Gap had been discussed at the Inclusion Group, with an increase in 2022, but otherwise this had decreased as there are more females in the Leadership Team and the expansion of hybrid and flexible working.
- The figure for 2023 should be improved and HR would be working with the Group to refresh the action plan.
- Overall, the picture regarding equalities data was stable.
- Staff absence had improved during this period with a reduction in short term absence.

68 **DISCUSSION PAPER - ATTRACTING AND REWARDING SCARCE TALENT**

Audio Recording – 14 minutes 29 seconds

The Human Resources Service Manager presented the Discussion Paper entitled 'Attracting and Rewarding Scarce Talent' and advised that:

- Recruitment and retention had been a focus for many months due to employment conditions nationally, including positions which were previously easier to fill.
- Improvements had been made to the use of social media to promote roles, with images used to stand out and text to highlight key areas of specific role. Examples of these adverts was included within the reports pack.
- As the Council cannot always compete on pay, the benefits of working for the Council are being promoted more, including flexible working arrangements.
- Pay bands are now included on Job Adverts.
- Recruitment and Retention Policy had been put to use to attract people to hard to fill roles.
- The Council had a good record of career development, with staff often developing skills with the Council before moving onto further employment.
- Apprenticeship scheme was still running and often apprentices were able to find roles at the Council following the end of their apprenticeship contract.
- Had looked to expand the use of career graded roles in areas like Planning and Licensing.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Terry Hone

In response to questions, the Human Resources Service Manager advised that:

- They noted comments regarding use of positive wording on social media adverts and would guide recruiting managers on the use of these.
- Training and development was dependent on the role, where a professional qualification is possible then this might be considered a career graded post which would allow a candidate to enter at the lowest level, with a commitment from the Council to provide ongoing development.
- Information on future development was available on the recruitment pages on the website and would then form part of the induction process of new staff and into the Regular Performance Reviews.
- Where a qualification is expected to be worked towards, this would be specified in the advert.
- Ongoing development of existing staff would form part of the appraisal process, which takes place at least annually, and can be referred to throughout the year.
- Managers have access to information on development and training, but further information could be provided by HR.

RESOLVED: That the Committee commented on and noted the Discussion Paper on Attracting and Rewarding Scarce Talent.

69 **FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS**

Audio Recording – 24 minutes 06 seconds

Councillor Terry Hone noted that it was important that the Committee be kept up to date on recruitment issues, including specific areas which are of concern.

Wednesday, 5th July, 2023

Councillor Clare Strong noted that staff were the most important part of the business, and it was important to manage and monitor wellbeing of existing staff, as well as any development requirements.

In response to a question from Cllr Strong, the Human Resources Service Manager advised that the Council did have a secondment process which formalised this process, but it was expected that managers on a local level would speak with relevant officers at other Councils. However, there was no formal process for an experience day at other Councils.

The Chair suggested the topic of 'Employee Engagement within Hybrid Working' for the next meeting of the Committee and this was agreed with Members present.

The meeting closed at 10.30 am

Chair

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

05/07/2023

Present: Ian Couper (**IC**), Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Shaun Greaves (**SG**),
Stephanie Blunt (**SB**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Louis Franklin (**LF**),
Christina Corr (**CC**), Vicky Kent (**VK**), Dee Levett (**DL**), Mark Robinson
(**MR**), Caelan Ballard – notes (**CB**)

Circulation: Global

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

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Anthony Roche and Andrew Betts.

2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

3. Restructure Notices

• Conservation and Development Restructure

A proposed restructure in the Conservation and Development team is currently under consultation and will close on the 6th of July. The proposed restructure involves the creation of two new posts, including a Principal Planning Officer who would lead Enforcement and Conservation officers. The creation of this post would allow for more direct line management, as these officers currently all report directly to the Development and Conservation Manager. The proposal also includes the creation of an additional Enforcement Officer post. It is suggested that the addition of this second post would create more capacity for the Planning Enforcement team as there is currently only one Enforcement Officer. The proposed restructure has been met by staff with mostly positive feedback, including a comment that the creation of these posts could increase efficiency within the service area. However, a comment was raised during the Consultation Opening Meeting that Conservation and Enforcement are quite different and may not be best managed together.

• Strategic Planning Restructure

The Strategic Planning and Enterprise team also opened consultation for a proposed restructure on the 21st of June. The proposal includes the reduction of reporting lines to the service manager. This would be achieved through the creation of two 'teams' within Strategic Planning, who will report to the two Grade 11 Principal officers. The Grade 7-10 officers and the Planning Technician will report to one of the two Grade 11 officers. This will support the other Grade 11 Principal Officer to move from 37 hours to 24.5 working hours per week in line with an agreed Flexible Working Request. No redundancies are proposed as part of the restructure, and the proposal has received no negative feedback. The consultation period closes on the 6th of July.

4. NHC Update

- The Council is back in its usual meeting cycles after the Local Elections, having now held Cabinet Meetings and discussed annual reports.
- The Leadership team has been reviewing Essential Learning, agreeing what constitutes essential learning and reviewing where Essential Learning is not being completed by staff.
- The Leadership team have also been reviewing the Gender Pay Gap report for 2023, which has indicated positive progress compared to the Gender Pay Gap report for 2022. The Leadership team will work with the Inclusion Group to form an action plan which will allow progress to continue in closing the pay gap.
- There has been a proposal that NHC trials a meeting-free day each week on a Friday. The proposal includes staff who do not work full-time, suggesting that they can allocate an appropriate time during their working hours as a meeting-free period. The proposal also encourages staff to consider the meetings held during the rest of the week; whether a meeting is strictly necessary, if a gap can be implemented between meetings so staff can have a break from meetings, or even where meeting durations can be cut down to allow staff to prioritise other tasks. Feedback on the proposal may be sent to the SCF inbox.

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- The Holiday-Flex window will open once again in August, offering staff the ability to buy an extra week of annual leave. A reminder about the scheme will be covered in Insight. More information can be found on the intranet here: [Holiday Flex: buy more annual leave | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)
- Insight will also cover upcoming training sessions, including the next RPR briefing session, New Starter Briefing and Financial Wellbeing Sessions.

5. Employee Queries

Q: Following updates to the Long Service Awards, 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. Feedback has been mostly positive, but a few concerns have been raised about how the change will affect long-serving staff who were between Service Award thresholds before the updates were implemented. Recently, a few concerns were raised that some staff feel they have also missed out since previous updates to the Long Service Awards, as the amount given for each of these long service milestones used to be lower, and some staff were also taxed on the Awards they did receive. Can any clarification be given around these concerns?

A: The concerns recently raised affect a small number of long-serving staff, who would only have received £100 for their 25 years' service award. These awards may also have been subject to tax at the time, so these members of staff feel that they were awarded quite a small amount in comparison to the value of Long Service Awards now. The Leadership Team will look at these concerns and determine how they can be addressed.

Q: On NHC job adverts, there is a section displaying benefits available to staff working at NHC – 'Benefits at a Glance'. In a submission into the SCF inbox, a job advert posted



by another Local Authority was compared to our own, suggesting that the advert's format could be utilised to draw in more applicants. Is there anything we can incorporate from this job advert format into our own, to help NHC job adverts gain more attention?

A: While the contents of the advertised staff benefits are similar between these job adverts, there is a difference in the style of language used by the other Local Authority, which could read as warmer and more welcoming. HR intend to continue using the current list of staff benefits as they are currently advertised, but some of the language may be refined.

Q: At the JSCC meeting on Wednesday 5th July, Cllr Strong gave a useful suggestion about the use of positive language and how this can be utilised in job adverts to create more engagement. An example given was the waste post advertised recently and the social media advert for the role, which communicated essentials from the Person Specification using tick marks, however Cllr Strong asked if the current format of the job advert would necessarily attract people to click and read the job advert in full?

A: While the job advert is entirely reflective of the role, we agree that the benefits of the role should be the primary focus of the job advert, above the salary of the role, and the advert will be updated to reflect that. Going forwards, other job adverts will similarly include a primary focus on staff benefits.

Q: There seems to be a mismatch between the staff benefits listed in the 'Benefits at a Glance' section which includes about 15 staff benefits, and the full list of staff benefits on the 'Information About the Job' document included in each vacancy post, which only includes about 8 staff benefits. Is this something that could be updated to better inform applicants of the benefits they would be offered if they work for NHC?

A: Yes, this is something which will be updated, and the 'Information about the Job Document' is currently under review. Applicants should be made aware of as many staff benefits as possible at that point in the recruitment process.

Q: Following on from the Building Services updates in the last SCF meeting about the replacement of the drinks machine in the ground floor canteen, have there been any updates on this or the associated costings?

A: Much of the expected costings was discussed in the previous SCF minutes. It is currently under consideration that the drinks machine is set up on a 'free-vend' system one day per week, and users will be charged 25p per drink they make during the other 4 days of the week. Previously, the option for the drinks machine to operate entirely on a 'free-vend' system was considered, but exact cost estimates for this have been very hard to calculate as the cost would greatly depend on the amount of use. Instead, it is proposed that to begin with, the machine will run on a free-vend system one day per week, which will likely be a Wednesday.

This will be a trial period in effect and will allow the estimation of costs for the drinks machine to operate on a free-vend system throughout the week. The survey will take place once the trial period has ended and cost impacts through demand have been considered. The replacement drinks machine will be much better than the current and will provide higher quality coffee regardless.

Q: When is the next pay increase due?

A: Staff pay increases are negotiated nationally, and the next pay increase is currently unclear. The Union has been balloting strike action because the National Employers and the Unions haven't yet agreed on a percentage increase. The Union's pay claim for



2023 includes a 12.7% increase, an additional day of annual leave and a 2hr reduction of the working week. The offer then put to the Union by the National Employers was a fixed increase amount of £1,925 per pay point, as well as a 3.88% increase on pay points above the NJC pay scales. The ballot was closed on the 3rd of July, so an update should be available soon. However, when the pay increase does come through, it will be backdated to the 1st of April for everyone.

Q: The Visitor Services Assistants within the Museum are expected to wear a uniform which includes a thick polo shirt. When the air conditioning unit was broken last year, the VSA's were allowed to wear their own clothes at work due to the heat. The air conditioning unit has now been fixed and so the VSA's are not allowed to wear their own clothes again this summer. Approaching the hottest time of the year once more, could there be provision for a water cooler for the VSA's who are required to wear their uniform during the hot weather?

A: This query will be looked into with the Service Manager so that a resolution can be reached.

6. IT Update and Queries

- From time to time, IT carry out internal phishing campaigns as part of a security analysis and the results feed back to the Leadership Team. An internal phishing campaign was carried out on all 487 IT users recently, but 17 users opening the email attachment and 6 clicking on the link within the attachment.
- This would be very compromising if it was an external malicious attack, which could then cascade into a ransomware attack on the Organisation. The campaign demonstrated that users need more learning surrounding cyber security and safety, as well as a learning need surrounding the mechanisms in place for phishing emails to be reported to. All the users who opened the email attachment have been assigned training. This training will be monitored and 30 days after the training, IT will contact these users again to check if they have any other learning need regarding cyber safety to be supported.
- However, 67 users did report the phishing email which was very positive. The more often users accurately report spam and phishing messages on Outlook, the stronger and more secure the system will become by identifying spam and phishing messages through pattern, which will mean the system will then begin pulling these messages from people's mailboxes automatically.
- The internal phishing campaigns will be conducted again sporadically and will include different styles of phishing as part of the due diligence required to maintain cyber safety.
- IT are currently conducting a tablet refresh and have been contacting staff to get their tablets replaced and updated. The next wave of tablet refreshes will be next year.
- IT have also been busy contacting users about their mobile phone contracts and sim cards, with the aim to reduce the amount of technology needed to communicate at work. The implementation of the V3 laptops has meant that users can do not need to use a mobile phone to make 'soft phone' calls on MiCollab. IT are also working with Benefits to try and remove the need for a physical desk phone, the aim being to allow recordings to work through laptop audio calls. Over time, these changes will save the organisation £2000 per quarter on mobile phone contracts.
- Staff are also asked to hand in any work phones or tablets they do not use so that these devices can be reallocated.
- IT have had a new IT Helpdesk Officer join the team, and other vacant posts are being prepared for the recruitment process.



- Sadly, IT's other Application Support Officer, Indy, is leaving the organisation, so IT are working with HR to consolidate the two vacancies in the same job role. Several vacancies within the IT team have left a strain on the service which may affect service speed.

Q: Would topics like phishing and cyber security come under essential learning as part of the current review?

A: Yes, phishing, cyber security, GDPR and other topics like auditing should come under essential learning. There is potential to increase the amount of essential learning surrounding these, but currently the IT team are more focused on supporting specific training needs in these areas where they crop up during events such as internal phishing campaigns. We are also considering an annual refresher for the phishing module.

Q: There have recently been some issues with Info@Work which IT have been working to resolve. Do you have any updates on this?

A: The root cause of the current issues with Info@Work were unclear, so IT reached out to the vendor who has provided a workaround solution which has been implemented. For context, selecting the 'View' button on a file on Info@Work crashes the server for everyone. IT have implemented a fix which stops the server from crashing in this manner, but to view a file, users should instead select 'Launch'. IT are working hard to build new servers for the upgrade which is meant to be happening later this year, and looking to see if the upgrade can be accelerated forwards which will allow laptops to move to the new version of Info@Work which is currently unsupported.

Q: Are there any updates on the fixes IT is working on for Tascomi?

A: This fix is still being worked on, and since Tascomi is functional, it has not been a high priority fix, though IT is continuing work on it.

7. Green Update

No Green Update for this SCF.

8. Building Services & Facilities Update

- The women's toilets each have an honesty box with sanitary items available for anyone who wants one, however, sanitary items are continually being taken with no money left in the honesty boxes. Please ensure that if you take a sanitary item that you leave some money in the box to support this provision.

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

9. Ideas/Suggestions

Q: Inclusion Group recently covered some amendments made to Job Profiles regarding disability access, which received some really good feedback. SCF and the Inclusion Group may be a good place to get feedback after the updates to the Benefits at a Glance document, so could these updates be shared at the next meetings?

A: Yes, this can be organised.

10. 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

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

06/09/2023

Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**), Ian Couper (**IC**), Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Vicky Kent (**VK**), Dee Levett (**DL**), Daniel Crowhurst (**DC**), Caelan Ballard – notes (**CB**)

Circulation: Global

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

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Christina Corr, and from Mark Robinson who was substituted by Daniel Crowhurst.

2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

3. NHC Update

- A consultation process is being held with Deputy Chief Officers - those who report to Service Directors, about how their pay is set. Pay will either be set by Chief Officer rules or by the Green Book rules, which determines pay for the rest of staff. The Trade Union have been made aware of these meetings.
- Meeting Free Fridays were publicised with staff which has effectively resulted in a soft-launch. We have sought feedback from Councillors. If after considering that feedback (as well as continuing to seek comments from staff), we go ahead with a formal launch then there would be an initial 6-month trial period. Any new feedback about Meeting Free Fridays is very much welcomed.

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- Details on flu vaccinations will be available in Insight and the intranet. This year, the standard process of vouchers being issued will not be followed, instead anyone who wishes to get the vaccine and is not covered by the NHS can reclaim the expense on iTrent. Winter flu vaccinations will begin in October.
- The next Personal Development Morning will be held this Friday morning and does not have a theme. Managers should have some information from Helen Bylett, and IT are also offering a bitesize training session on the morning.
- As mentioned in the Staff Briefing earlier, staff are reminded of the features available on the [North Herts- Be Well](#) platform, as well as the GP helpline. As National Suicide Prevention Day approaches, some signposting and support is available on the platform as well as on the staff intranet.

4. Employee Queries

Q: There is a list of countries the European Commission have recognised as having adequate protection for homeworking. Are staff able to work from home while temporarily staying in another country which is not on this list?

A: Queries of this matter are dealt with on a case-by-case basis, dependant on a variety of factors such as the job role, which country it is, and how long the individual plans to stay abroad for. IT restrictions and internet usage would also be factors to consider. Issues of this matter should contact hrhelp for guidance.

Q: A member of staff has been working overtime for months due to staff shortages but cannot have this change to their contract made permanent. Is there a procedure in place in which annual leave can be gifted to staff working overtime long-term?

A: There is no policy in place to support the gifting of annual leave as retribution for overtime. However, any concerns or queries about long-term overtime can be raised to HR and discussed confidentially.

Q: Physical panic buttons have been used in departments where staff regularly take calls from members of the public which can be distressing or can become verbally abusive. Would there be resources to implement a similar panic system for staff taking calls who are working from home?

A: In most instances, when receiving a verbally abusive call while working from home, staff are advised to just hang up. Managers should also be made aware of these incidents immediately via a phone call, Teams message or email. Councillors are also holding ongoing discussions about panic systems for members of staff who may encounter abusive or threatening behaviour in the community. There are systems in place to monitor and ensure the safety of staff who deal with the public while alone, such as Lone Working Risk Assessments as well as measures for specific community-based roles such as body worn cameras and systems to dial into.

Q: Is there any update on the pay increase negotiations?

A: There is no update yet, but the unions are meeting later this month, and an update is likely to follow. When any update is available it will be communicated to staff, and once an award is agreed, this will be processed by payroll as soon as possible.

5. IT Update and Queries

- The final stages of the V3 rollout have been reached with the remaining staff now booked in to receive their new laptops. The next phase of the project will be removing any remaining Citrix desktops, and the Councillor rollouts.
- IT are also looking at starting an upgrade to Windows 11.
- The IT development team have been left very short-staffed due to multiple staff leaving the organisation, so currently this team are operating on critical issues only. The recruitment process for new team members is ongoing.
- IT has had some new additions recently; a new IT Helpdesk Officer, Salman, has joined the Helpdesk team and Amber has joined Jacqui's team in IT as an Information & Asset Officer. Recruitment is open for another Helpdesk officer and an IT Helpdesk apprentice.



- The new starter form is in place on the IT helpdesk and has received positive feedback. The new form notifies all service areas needed to set up new starters, so has added some efficiency to the process.
- Managers are also reminded to give IT as much notice as possible about starters and leavers as possible. New laptops must be built, and user profiles set up for starters which takes time, and IT not being notified about leavers can leave the Council open to buying licenses they then cannot use.
- As mentioned previously, IT have worked with HR to arrange drop-in training sessions about different software packages. The first session is on Friday 8th of September and will cover OneDrive. Staff are welcome to attend.
- In the future, more of these drop-in sessions will be planned to coincide with personal development mornings.

Q: Are the drop-in sessions just virtual, or will there be opportunities to attend in person?

A: Currently these sessions are just being hosted on Teams, but if there is sufficient demand for in-person sessions this can be explored further.

6. Building Services & Facilities Update

- The new coffee machine has arrived and has now been installed! The machine also makes delicious tea and hot chocolate, and all drinks are 25p per cup. Staff are reminded to read the instructions before using the machine for the first time.
- Two office tidy-up days have been scheduled for Tuesday 26th September and Friday 29th September, aiming to clean up a lot of items that have been left in the office as well as preparing the third floor for letting. Staff are encouraged to participate in the tidy-up by filing and decluttering their team space.

Q: Have the Council received any interest in letting the third floor?

A: There has been very high interest in the space, so the Council will be moving ahead with letting the space. Due to the continued level of homeworking, the space is not really needed and letting it will generate more income and reduce the Council's carbon footprint.

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

7. Ideas/Suggestions

None

8. AOB

None

Chair for next meeting – Andrew Betts

Have something to say?



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JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
18 October 2023

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT	AGENDA ITEM No.
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TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE: HR UPDATE
INFORMATION NOTE OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES SERVICES MANAGER

1. SUMMARY

1.1 To update the Joint Staff Consultative Committee on the progress made in the last quarter completing HR work and projects and supporting people issues.

2. STEPS TO DATE

2.1 The 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 May – July 2023 to the same period in the previous two years.

	VACANCIES	APPLICATIONS	SHORTLISTED	OFFER - EXTERNAL	OFFER - INTERNAL	NOT FILLED
May - July 21	20	91	61	20	0	11
May - July 22	23	100	47	19	4	4
May - July 23	22	170	69	16	3	3

Recruitment continues to be busy, with a similar number of job vacancies to previous years, and we have received a higher number of applications for many of our vacancies.

We have successfully filled 19 jobs including Climate Change and Sustainability Project Manager, Digital Communications Officer, IT Helpdesk Support Officer, and Senior Licensing Officer.

There were 3 vacancies that were not successfully filled:

Career Graded Estates Surveyor	Currently on hold
Senior Estates Surveyor	Covered via agency
Contracts Officer (Waste Services)	Re-advertised and now appointed

There are posts that remain unfilled but have not been advertised during this period.

3.3 Recruitment Refresh

As part of the recruitment refresh project, we have changed the way we use social media to attract candidates. The changes include a new style social media advert which uses images and focuses on key skills and experience or benefits of working for the Council. Employee have also been encouraged to share adverts on all platforms and we have increased variety of jobs boards used for adverts.

In the 5 months since making these changes we have seen an increase of 13% in views of our job vacancies website page, an increase in social engagement on jobs posts ranging from 87% on LinkedIn to 107% on Facebook and an increase in applications, as shown in 3.2. It's important to note that comparisons may be affected by the job roles that are advertised, as some roles will attract more applicants than others.

Further work is planned on improving our website and processes supporting recruitment and the HR team continue to work with recruiting managers, especially in service areas with hard to fill vacancies.

3.4 Leavers and Turnover

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

Rolling 12 months	Turnover		
	Leavers	Monthly	Rolling
Sep-22	4	1.18%	10.38%
Oct-22	6	1.74%	10.62%
Nov-22	4	1.16%	10.87%
Dec-22	2	0.58%	10.21%
Jan-23	6	1.75%	11.66%
Feb-23	1	0.29%	11.61%
Mar-23	5	1.47%	11.56%
Apr-23	4	1.15%	12.39%
May-23	2	0.57%	12.61%
Jun-23	6	1.73%	13.44%
Jul-23	4	1.15%	13.38%
Aug-23	2	0.57%	13.35%
Total	46		12.61%

The table above shows the rolling labour turnover rate.

All leavers are encouraged to complete an exit questionnaire to give feedback on their reasons for leaving, our pay and benefits, working relationships and the Council as an employer. Leavers can also request an exit interview to provide more detailed feedback if required.

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.

In terms of feedback, we see dissatisfaction regarding local government pay, but most of our leavers would recommend the Council as an employer. Any specific issues raised are discussed with management with a view to resolving problems and continuing to improve as an employer.

3.5 Apprenticeships

We have 7 Apprentices in post with a further 2 due to start in the coming weeks.

Our Apprentices 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 recent Apprentices was successfully recruited into a permanent role within the Council. When this happens, we encourage the Apprentice to continue to complete their Apprentice qualification.

We offer our Apprentices specific learning opportunities during their time with us and as their contracts near completion, we also provide several support resources to develop their application and interview skills. We encourage them to apply for any suitable vacancies within the Council.

3.6 National Pay bargaining 2023

The Union ballots for industrial action on pay and other terms and conditions did not result in action at North Herts Council. No decision was reached at a meeting of the National Employers and Unions in September. Some industrial action continues and there is likely to be a further meeting in late October.

The Unions pay claim for 2023 includes:

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

In February 2023 the Employers issued their full and final pay offer:

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

3.7 Employee Benefits

As flu season approaches, we are offering flu vaccinations for employees who are not entitled to the vaccine through the NHS. This is being supported by Hertfordshire County Council and will support our employee's general wellbeing through the winter months.

A Shared Cost Additional Voluntary Contribution Scheme will be launched shortly, which will allow employees the opportunity to boost their pension.

3.8 Learning Together

Earlier this year, we began a pilot of a reverse mentoring scheme called Learning Together. The initiative involves pairing members of the Leadership Team with staff who are less senior, to help them think differently about their leadership and mindset, current and future issues, as well as culture and change at North Herts Council. The

aim is for both parties to learn from one another, share views and ideas, and support the mentor to build their confidence.

The pilot has worked well, with positive learning reported for both parties, and so the initiative will be expanded with more volunteers encouraged to take part. We now have another pair of volunteers who have started Learning Together.

3.9 Our Values

Since the last update, our Personal Development Mornings have focussed on our Learning and Listening Values, and we provided resources to managers and staff across the Council to encourage cross team learning. We also provided information for staff and managers to develop their skills to be able to have a coaching style conversation.

3.10 Inclusion Group

The Inclusion group meeting in June focussed on the Halo Collective, a group campaigning against hair discrimination in schools and workplaces. The discussion included experiences of race discrimination in general and the impact of microaggressions.

Following the meeting, an action plan has been created with proposals to Leadership Team to support a range of initiatives that continue to support our value of Inclusion. This includes provision of information and awareness raising about microaggressions and supporting employees on how to become an ally.

3.11 Absence

Absence levels have stabilised, and the rolling 12-month total is similar to the total for the previous 12-month period. The absence figures are shown below as absence days lost per employee.

Rolling 12 months	Absence days lost per employee		
	Long-term	Short-term	Total
Sept	0.23	0.36	0.59
Oct	0.30	0.53	0.83
Nov	0.32	0.37	0.69
Dec	0.30	0.49	0.79
Jan	0.18	0.41	0.59
Feb	0.19	0.37	0.55
March	0.39	0.34	0.73
April	0.30	0.22	0.52
May	0.26	0.26	0.52
June	0.15	0.28	0.43
July	0.28	0.32	0.60
August	0.45	0.21	0.66
Total	3.35	4.15	7.49

According to the latest sickness absence report produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) The number of days lost to sickness absence increased to a record high in 2022 after remaining relatively flat in the 10 years leading up to the pandemic.

In terms of absences at North Herts, during the 4-month period May – August 2023, there were 115 recorded absences:

- 93 absences were for 1 week or less, with over half relating to common ailments such as headaches, colds, and stomach upsets.
- 12 absences were for 1-3 weeks, with half of these categorised as stress, depression, or anxiety reasons.
- 10 absences were classed as long-term (3 weeks or more), with half of these also categorised as stress, depression, or anxiety reasons.

The HR team work closely with managers to support the more complex absence cases including those related to stress, depression, and anxiety. This can include an OH referral, use of a stress questionnaire (where the stress is deemed to be work-related), recommendation to use our Employee Assistance Programme, and often a phased return to work, with reduced hours and / or a reduced workload.

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

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JSCC discussion - Employee Engagement in a Hybrid Working Environment

Employee engagement is the emotional and professional connection employees feel toward their organisation, colleagues, and work. High engagement leads to increased job satisfaction, performance, employee retention and is a reflection of a positive overall employee experience.

“When people are emotionally invested, they want to contribute.”

Simon Sinek (Leadership Development Writer)

There are several versions of a 5cs concept that attempts to describe the elements of Employee Engagement such as:

- Care
- Connection
- Coaching
- Contribute
- Congratulate

We can also relate Employee Engagement principles to our values:

- **Together** – Working collaboratively and engaging within and across teams to create a collective sense of team contribution.
- **Listening** – By definition, engagement requires listening by all parties regardless of role and hierarchy.
- **Learning** – Finding new ways of working and engaging with our workforce that reflect what we learn from our experiences and collective listening. Valuing everybody’s contribution to collective learning.
- **Adaptable** – Being agile in the way we address the challenges of hybrid working whilst not forgetting the positive impact of face to face employee engagement.
- **Inclusive** – The collective outcome of all the above.

The Challenges Created by Hybrid Working

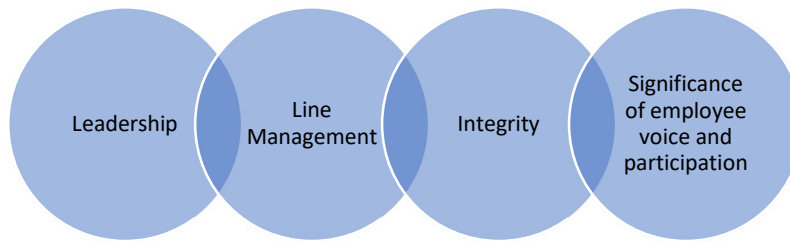
Many of our employees work in a hybrid way, splitting their working time between the office and home. When employees are not in the office environment all the time, the informal engagement can be more difficult and regular ‘corridor or kitchen’ engagement is less likely.

Our managers and teams have found ways of achieving effective engagement through other methods:

- Regular online or hybrid meetings both for business and informal team or 1-1 wellbeing catch ups
- Hybrid Staff Consultation Forum meetings, inclusion group meetings and staff briefings
- Teams chat function
- Staff social events outside of work
- Online 1 – 1 meetings
- Hybrid ‘work together’ sessions for groups/ teams
- Reverse mentoring (Learning Together)

Creating an Engaged Culture

The MacLeaod Review 2009 identified 4 key enablers of engagement



In practice this will mean:

- Visible leadership that maintains and communicates a vision of the future and a drive to reach it
- Line management that cares about and is equipped with the skills of engagement
- Maintaining integrity and upholding NHC values as a norm
- Ensuring that our mechanisms for employee participation are significant and genuinely result in everybody being listened to and having a voice.

Opportunities for the future

Whilst we should not underestimate the power of established ways of leading and engaging face to face, benefits of working away from the office are significant and existing and future technology presents organisations with a variety of other tools to support engagement in a hybrid environment.

The Council are developing the use of SharePoint as an internal communications platform and planning pulse and full staff surveys in the coming months.

There is a balance required between face to face and virtual engagement and the challenge is about making the appropriate choice of communication or engagement medium for the people and circumstances.

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
	October	Employee Engagement in a hybrid working environment

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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
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

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