

24 November 2023

Our Ref Joint Staff Consultative Committee 6
December 2023
Contact. Committee Services
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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) Terry Hone, Tom Plater and Claire Strong.

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

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

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

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

to be held as a Virtual Meeting

VIA ZOOM

On

WEDNESDAY, 6TH DECEMBER, 2023 AT 10.00 AM

Yours sincerely,

Jeanette Thompson
Service Director – Legal and Community

****MEMBERS PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU DOWNLOAD ALL AGENDAS AND REPORTS VIA THE MOD.GOV APPLICATION ON YOUR TABLET BEFORE ATTENDING THE MEETING****

Agenda Part I

Item		Page
1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	Members are required to notify any substitutions by midday on the day of the meeting. Late substitutions will not be accepted and Members attending as a substitute without having given the due notice will not be able to take part in the meeting.	
2. MINUTES - 18 OCTOBER 2023	To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 18 October 2023.	(Pages 3 - 8)
3. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS	Members are reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Declarable Interest and are required to notify the Chair of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item. Members declaring a Declarable Interest, wishing to exercise a 'Councillor Speaking Right', must declare this at the same time as the interest, move to the public area before speaking to the item and then must leave the room before the debate and vote.	
4. SCF MINUTES	To receive the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum meetings from October 2023 and November 2023.	(Pages 9 - 16)
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.	(Pages 17 - 22)
6. DISCUSSION PAPER - PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR STAFF WELLBEING	To receive a discussion paper on Providing Support for Staff Wellbeing.	(Pages 23 - 24)
7. SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS	To consider topics for discussion at a future meeting of the Committee.	(Pages 25 - 26)

Public Document Pack Agenda Item 2

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM
ON WEDNESDAY, 18TH OCTOBER, 2023 AT 10.00 AM

MINUTES

Present: Councillors: Councillor Elizabeth Dennis (Chair), Claire Strong and Tom Plater

In Attendance:

Sjanel Wickenden (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Dee Levett (Unison Branch Administrator), Anthony Roche (Managing Director), Rebecca Webb (HR Services Manager), Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer) and Louis Franklin (Admin Support Officer).

Also Present:

There were no members of the public present for the duration of the meeting.

70 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 3 minutes 28 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Terry Hone.

Councillor Raj Bhakar was absent.

71 MINUTES - 5 JULY 2023

Audio Recording – 3 minutes 45 seconds

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

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 5 July 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

72 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 29 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.

73 SCF MINUTES

Audio Recording – 4 minutes 54 seconds

The HR Services Manager presented the item entitled 'SCF Minutes', alongside the Minutes from the meetings of July and September 2023 and highlighted the following:

- There was no meeting of the SCF held in August 2023.
- In the July meeting there was an update on the Gender Pay Gap, the Pay Gap 2023 was currently being analysed and an update would be provided at the next JSCC meeting.
- There was a soft launch of meeting free Fridays which was discussed in the July meeting. This had now been fully launched with feedback being encouraged for officers via the SCF.
- Comments made by Councillor Claire Strong at the last meeting of the JSCC regarding social media job adverts were highlighted to the SCF at the July meeting.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Tom Plater

In response to a question the HR Services Manager advised that telephone calls made to Customer Services were recorded for staff working in the office or from home.

In response to a question the UNISON Representative stated that all calls into and out of Customer Services were recorded, however if the call was then internally transferred the recording stopped once the call was transferred.

In response to a question the SCF Representative stated that calls to Benefits and Council Tax departments were also recorded, even when transferred from Customer Services and that the SCF had discussed implementing the recording of all internal communication between Customer Services and other departments.

In response to a question the Managing Director advised that:

- Floor two of the Council Building had been leased out for some time and generated an income of £50K per annum.
- Floor three was now empty and not in use and Estates were in negotiations with a prospective tenant.
- It was unlikely that there would be a clause in the contract of the tenants to reclaim the office space in the event of an emergency, but this could be confirmed in writing at a later date.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis noted that it was disappointing to see the comments from the Facilities Department regarding sanitary items in the toilets in the SCF Minutes from the July meeting. She noted that as most people no longer carried cash, it was not always easy to leave a contribution, but no-one should be made to endure period embarrassment.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum for July and September 2023.

74 HR INFORMATION NOTE

Audio Recording – 14 Minutes 57 seconds

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

- Recruitment continued to be busy and there had been an increase in applications compared to previous years as shown in 3.2 of the report, with more posts successfully filled although there were some unfilled posts that had not yet been readvertised.

- There had been a social media refresh with a new style advert, which highlighted key elements of the role and the benefits of working for the Council and current staff were encouraged to promote these on all social media.
- There had been an increase of views of the job vacancies webpage and social media engagement, with an upcoming relaunch of the vacancies page.
- Most leavers would recommend the Council as an employer.
- The National Pay bargaining was still outstanding and there should be an update at the end of the October.
- Flu Vaccines for those not eligible on the NHS can be claimed through expenses.
- A successful pairing in the reverse mentoring scheme as highlighted in Insight, had led to another pairing.
- The Inclusion group discussed Halo Collective, race discrimination and microaggressions. An action plan was developed and proposed to the Leadership Team covering a range of initiatives.
- In August there was a peak in long term absences, many relating to stress, depression, and or anxiety.

In response to a question from Councillor Claire Strong, the HR Services Manager stated that:

- There were various updates and articles on the intranet, and signposts for staff along with external support on the EAP site for stress, depression and anxiety.
- Some of the absences through stress, depression and anxiety were not work related.
- Staff are encouraged to return to work, which in many cases was a good environment for them to be in where there was support available.
- A staff survey would commence shortly.
- Mental Health First Aiders were now in place and should be available on site.
- It was important for managers to recognise and respond to employee absences in a timely manner and to keep HR informed.
- There was training for both employees and their managers around mental health that was provided by MIND and available on GrowZone.

In response to a question from Councillor Claire Strong, the Managing Director stated that:

- The absences were a concern but were being monitored by the HR Team.
- Work had commenced on a staff survey, with a section on wellbeing and how people were feeling.
- It would be better to target and intervene at a point just before long-term sickness occurred and this had been highlighted as an area to identify and understand.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis stated that:

- There was an organisation called Centre for Mental Health that provided support for Council networks and Local Government employees.
- Mental Health First Aiders were available on site to assist employees, but it may be worth seeing what other support and help was available, as work can often follow you home and employees should be given all the help and support needed to deal with challenges

75 DISCUSSION PAPER - EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN A HYBRID WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Audio Recording – 24 minutes 24 seconds

The HR Service Manager presented the Discussion Paper entitled 'Employee Engagement in a Hybrid Working environment' and advised that:

- Employee Engagement was the emotional and professional connection employees feel towards their organisation, colleagues and work.
- High engagement leads to increased; job satisfaction, performance and retention and reflected the overall positive employee experience.
- Hybrid working can make informal, coincidental engagement less likely, managers need to work with their teams to engage by other means, and to conduct wellbeing check ins.
- SCF meetings, Inclusion Groups meetings and staff briefings now took place as hybrid meetings, ensuring that everybody can take part.
- Employees can take part in social events outside of work, the chats functions on teams, and reverse mentoring which can be online or in person.
- The key elements of engagement were, leadership, management integrity, employee voice and visible leadership that communicated a vision for the future.
- These occurred through, staff briefings, SCF, personal development days, having one to one and team meetings so that employees had the opportunity to be heard and listened to.
- This occurred by ensuring the support and development of effective Managers who understood and maintained the values of the Council.
- This can be achieved by using the regular performance review (RPR) framework for discussions on values and by recognising employee values through the staff recognition awards, and the provision of opportunities such as 'ask Anthony' and the staff survey.
- Now that technology supported hybrid working as part of flexible working there was a need to support engagement in the hybrid environment.
- The Comms Department were working on developing SharePoint and a staff survey was planned to balance face to face and virtual contact, depending on the employee and circumstances.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Tom Plater

In response to questions, the HR Service Manager advised that:

- Engagement can be measured in output rather than presentism whether at home or in the office, and Managers reviewed this through the RPRs.
- Managers are encouraged to have regular check ins, team meetings and have consideration for people who may live alone.
- An engagement survey would be used to measure employee responses, and more detailed information would be available through SharePoint.
- HR can review how many employees have read Insight and attended the staff briefings, which would help to develop a bigger picture of the engagement of employees.
- The Teams chats facility worked well for quick question and answer sessions and working together helped with coincidental chats.
- Some teams had weekly catch-up session and spent time together virtually as well as face to face.
- Employees can join Teams groups that, allowed groups of people to work and communicate together either online or via messages.
- IT had been running drop-in sessions on the better use of technology to increase communication and engagement.
- There was a difference between hybrid working and virtual working, and employees often arranged to work in the office with their peers.
- Team members and Managers of new staff are encouraged to be more available and to have face to face communication.
- Not every employee enjoyed or wished to take part in social functions, but these can happen on Teams or were advertised on the work intranet.

The SCF Representative stated that:

- They attended the office once a week on different days to interact with more colleagues.
- They were part of several Teams groups with a lot of different departments and felt that there was still active engagement.
- They had been a buddy for 3 new employees, meeting with them once a week, introducing them to other people and assisting their needs.

In response to questions, the Managing Director advised that:

- There were lots of digital platforms and it was sometimes challenging to decide which one to use or check, from Teams, WhatsApp to text messenger.
- SharePoint would be launching soon and would incorporate 'Yammer' an internal social media page promoting activities.
- Direction had been sought from employees as to which platform should be used and when, as different employees preferred different media types to respond to queries and were often unsure of which to use.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis advised that Members communicated using the Portal, and by emails, it would be a good idea to encourage Members to use Teams for quick communications with Officers.

Councillor Tom Plater stated that he had used Teams with Committee Services and that if Officers were happy to receive communication in this way, then it should be promoted to Members.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis suggested that relevant Officers were contacted regarding Members using Teams, after which an update for Members should be sent by email and published in MIS encouraging everyone to communicate effectively and appropriately.

RESOLVED: That the Committee commented on and noted the Discussion Paper on Employee Engagement in a Hybrid Working Environment.

76 SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

Audio Recording – 41 minutes 21 seconds

The Managing Director suggested following on from the discussions at this meeting that 'Providing Support for Staff Wellbeing' would be a most appropriate for the next meeting.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis agreed with the suggestion and further suggested linking the wellbeing item to finances ahead of the festive period and Blue Monday in January.

Councillor Claire Strong agreed with the wellbeing discussion and also suggested that in the March meeting the discussion should be on the 'Guidance for use on Social Media'.

Councillor Tom Plater clarified the wellbeing item for the next meeting and social media discussion in March.

The Chair confirmed the topic of 'Providing Support for Staff Wellbeing' focusing on mental health and finances for the next meeting of the Committee and this was agreed with Members present.

In response to a question from Councillor Tom Plater, the HR Service Manager stated that no formal advice or support had been offered to Officers and Members regarding the recent Terrorist attacks, but this could be reviewed.

The meeting closed at 10.47 am

Chair

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

04/10/2023

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

Circulation: Global

Chair for Meeting: Drew Betts (**AB**)

1. Apologies

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

2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

3. NHC Update

- The Leadership Team have been discussing the upload of profile photos for everyone on Outlook and Teams to further support hybrid working. The photos would only be viewable on internal messages. The Leadership Team is also looking at an opt-out process.
- Thank you to all staff who have been involved in the office clear-out days. A reminder will be sent to teams still working on clearing their old items from the office, and all staff are reminded to ensure confidential waste is disposed of properly in the confidential waste bins.
- Staff are also reminded to clear out lockers, as there will not be enough for one each now that the lockers on Floor 3 can no longer be used.
- Some additional EV chargers will be installed outside the back of the DCO to accommodate new Careline vehicles.
- The consultation regarding the terms and conditions and pay for Deputy Chief Officers has now concluded. Deputy Chief Officers pay will be linked to Green Book, and they will be able to choose whether their notice period is in line with the Green Book rules or Chief Officer terms.

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- HR has sent out an email regarding arrangements for the free flu vaccinations this year. The process to claim a free vaccination has changed this year; anyone who wishes to get the vaccine and is not eligible through the NHS must book the vaccination themselves and can then reclaim the expense on iTrent. There are many pharmacies offering flu vaccinations, including supermarket pharmacies, and you can use loyalty cards if they provide a discount. ASDA are offering the vaccine for £12, Superdrug from £8.79 with a loyalty card, and Tesco are charging £13.
- The next Personal Development Morning will be held this Friday morning and will focus on our Inclusion value. The Inclusion Group are holding a drop-in session starting at



9.30am in Committee Room 1 on the First Floor of the DCO. All staff are welcome to attend to meet the members, find out what the group is working on or how to get involved.

Q: As the Waste Team also use electric vehicles, can they use the new EV chargers?

A: The EV chargers are only available to use during the day and with use of an EV charging card, but if there is a spare charger it may be used for Waste Team vehicles.

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

A: The pay increase negotiations are still ongoing and National Employers are meeting with the Trade Unions at the end of October. When any update is available it will be communicated to staff, and the agreed award will be processed through payroll as soon as possible.

4. Employee Queries

Q: Under the McCloud case, the Court of Appeal ruled that younger members of the main public service pension schemes have been discriminated against because 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 this month. Will details on the McCloud remedy and any effects on pension contributions be circulated to all staff?

A: Any changes to the pension scheme or pension contributions will be circulated by LGPS. A Government factsheet on the McCloud remedy, including information on who is affected and what the changes mean can be found here: [The McCloud judgment and your LGPS pension \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/931212/the-mccloud-judgment-and-your-lgps-pension.pdf).

Q: While feedback has been mostly positive regarding the changes to the Long Service Awards which now commemorate 5, 10, 20, 30 and 40 years of service, 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. A few concerns were also raised that some staff feel they have also missed out from 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. Is there any update on an agreement with the Leadership Team following changes to the long service awards?

A: An agreement has been made with the Leadership Team and details of this will be emailed out to those affected soon (i.e., those who had more than 30 years' service when we transitioned to the new award scheme).

5. IT Update and Queries

- The IT team has had another new addition; Ivan is a new IT Helpdesk Officer. Interviews will also be taking place tomorrow for a new IT Helpdesk apprentice.



- The V3 Rollout for staff is now complete and the V3 system is running smoothly. As such, the Citrix system for staff use is now being decommissioned.
- The Windows 11 rollout will begin soon but is currently still in the testing phase. The V3 rollout for Councillors is continuing, and these V3 devices will be the first to have Windows 11 installed.
- SharePoint is on the IT road map and is continually being tested. The G: Drive is now on SharePoint and working well. A couple of departments have begun to use SharePoint for various tasks to allow IT to test it in action and iron out any issues.
- IT are hosting more bitesize training sessions on Personal Development Mornings following the success of the last IT training session about OneDrive. The next bitesize IT training session will be held this Friday, on the 6th of October from 10.30 to 11.15am on Teams. The session will focus on Excel Pivot Tables & Conditionals.
- Suggestions for future bitesize training sessions are welcome.

Q: The Waste Team have been contacted to return unnecessary tablets and old work phones following the implantation of V3 on workstations and the upcoming rollout of new work phones. Is there an estimate on when the new smartphones will be issued for those who cannot use a soft phone due to their role?

A: The rollout of the new work phones is in progress and will be delivered soon. Staff are asked to bear with IT as this is a complex & multifaceted rollout project.

Q: The bitesize IT training sessions have been fantastic, and staff seem to be really engaged in them. Is there any chance that notes from the sessions can be sent around afterwards so that staff can recap what has been discussed?

A: Unfortunately, IT doesn't currently have the capacity to create & circulate extensive resources due to the format of the sessions, but any specific questions or queries about the content of the sessions can be answered via the IT helpdesk.

Q: The Revenues & Benefits department still uses a particular program, which requires the use of Citrix, which is the system it was written for. Will a new program be written for the department now that Citrix is no longer used?

A: The organisation still has a Citrix footprint because of legacy applications like the one mentioned. There is also a new digital project underway, Loco, which is a rationalisation of all software used throughout the Council which will be consolidated to a single platform. This project will hopefully remove some of the need for a new version of the Revenues & Benefits program to be written. Loco is a digital project rather than an IT project, but IT are heavily involved in the design and implementation of it and will collaborate with service areas. There is also a finance technology procurement currently in progress, and when implemented it will allow the integration of various files and money between systems. This will also help to remove the need for a new Revenues & Benefits program to be written. Any issues or bugs with these existing programs will be worked on and fixed as normal.

6. Building Services & Facilities Update

Q: The new drinks machine in the DCO canteen has the ability to serve soup. Is this something which can be considered leading into the winter months?

A: Response from Property Services after the meeting. It is not something that is easy to add in. Also, when we tried having soup in the last machine it wasn't very popular.

Q: Are there any new updates about the letting of the third floor?

A: There is a very interested potential letter, but leases are currently being agreed which might take some time.

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 – 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

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

01/11/2023

Present: Ian Couper (**IC**), Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Dee Levett (**DL**), Caelan Ballard – notes (**CB**)

Circulation: Global

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

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Drew Betts, Mark Robinson, Daniel Crowhurst and Vicky Kent.

2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

3. Careline Restructure Notice

- The proposed restructure outlines the creation of a new Assistive Projects, Procurement and Performance Manager post. The creation of the proposed new role will address key objectives within Careline with regards to performance management, analysing data and improving service delivery by tracking KPI's and enabling evidence-based decision making. The role will involve procurement management through optimising the procurement process and negotiating with vendors in line with the organisation's needs. In turn this will lead to cost savings and operational efficiency. The role will also involve project management through overseeing project lifecycles, enhancing success rates and mitigating risks in line with the organisation's strategic objectives which will support the growth and innovation of Careline.
- No other service areas are directly impacted by the proposed restructure. The proposal has received positive feedback from the team and the consultation period is due to close on Monday 6th November 2023.

4. NHC Update

- Cabinet will be meeting in the middle of this month, one of the bigger items going to Cabinet is a report on the new Waste Contract as the contract bids received so far have been much higher than the budget. As such the council is looking for new options around the specifications of this contract. Due to details on costing and bidders, the report is subject to commercial confidentiality.
- Meeting Free Fridays have been officially launched after receiving and considering all the feedback from Councillors.
- The Council has not released any statements on the current conflict in Israel and Palestine. Information will be sent to Councillors this week regarding any potential tensions in the community or protests in the local area. If staff are aware of any issues, then please let their manager know. Staff are also reminded that the Employee



Assistance Program is available for advice and emotional support 24/7. The EAP can be accessed here: [Employee Assistance Programme \(EAP\) | Intranet \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#).

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- An update was given on the 2023 pay negotiations which at the time of the meeting were ongoing. (Following the SCF meeting there was a further update confirming the pay award had been agreed: This award will be reflected in November salaries and the increase will be backdated to 1 April 2023. There are a small number of employees on additional responsibility, pay protection or in receipt of IT standby and these payments will be rectified for December pay. [Updated Pay Scales](#) can be found on the intranet.)
- The next Personal Development Morning will be held next Friday morning and focuses on sustainability. Managers have been sent information about the events being held. There is an online interactive sustainability themed session being hosted by our Climate Change & Sustainability Manager, and a training session held by IT on Info@Work. There is also an upcoming workshop on the 16th of November about Effective Meeting Skills which will work in line with Meeting-Free Friday. This workshop is available to book on [GROWzone](#).
- For World Mental Health Day on Tuesday the 10th of October, an Insight article was put together to raise awareness and signpost all the mental health support and training available for staff. The article is available to read on [Insight](#).

5. Employee Queries

Q: Officers have reported that used cups and belongings are still being left in meeting rooms. Can a reminder be sent for all staff to be ensure they do not leave anything in meeting rooms and that desks and meeting rooms are tidied after use?

A: A global email will be sent to remind staff on the expected etiquette for the tidying of meeting rooms and the washing up of dishes.

Q: The organisation settings on Outlook calendars have recently been adjusted to automatically change hour-long meetings to 50 minutes, and 30-minute meetings to 25 minutes. This requires members of staff to manually adjust the appointment length each time and can be counterproductive as a time-saving measure. Can clarification on the purpose of these new settings be provided, and could the old settings be restored to stop staff having to manually edit meeting durations?

A: This was a joint decision by Leadership Team and ties into effective meeting practices to support the Meeting-Free Friday initiative. The setting allows staff to consider the length of time needed for their appointments and can make meetings more efficient. The new setting also spaces out meetings with short rest breaks in between which can improve staff wellbeing and time management on workdays with back-to-back meetings. The implementation of this setting was outlined in the global email about Meeting Free Fridays. Further staff feedback on the implementation of these settings is welcome.



6. IT Update and Queries

Q: As staff are now returning to work in the office more regularly, can the small meeting rooms be updated with larger TV screens?

A: The meeting rooms with a person capacity of 2-3 already have screens quite large for the size of room. There are currently no plans or an allocated budget to replace these screens. If there is a suitable requirement to increase the size of these screens when IT are due to replace them, getting larger TV screens will then be considered.

Q: Some of the larger TV screens in meeting rooms are also at a height which mean they cannot be used comfortably. Are IT able to add adjustable arms to these TV screens?

A: Due to the weight of the TV screens in the committee meeting rooms and the council chamber, it is not possible to safely make them height adjustable. However, if this query concerns the larger screens in meeting rooms 3 and 4 of each floor, IT can change the height of these screens. The screens are currently close to their maximum height, but these can be lowered if necessary. Lowering these screens will involve removing the screen from the base so this is not something staff members would be able to do themselves. Due to the requirement of a floor mounted stand for these meeting rooms and the size/weight of the TV screens, a flexible height adjustable stand like the brackets installed onto the desk monitors in the DCO would not be suitable.

If staff would like to request any TV screen to be height adjusted or to discuss access requirements with IT, please contact Daniel Crowhurst or log a ticket on the IT Helpdesk.

7. Building Services & Facilities Update

- Floor 3 of the DCO has been cleared well and a lot of good work has gone into making it ready for letting. However, there have been multiple incidents of office items being dumped on this floor. Staff are reminded that Floor 3 is not to be used as a storage space at any time and to take responsibility for emptying the items left on this floor.
- The previous interest received in letting the Floor 3 has not been taken further, so the space will be marketed again to find a suitable letter.
- Whilst tables in the Committee Rooms (meeting rooms 2 and 3 on the 1st floor) can be moved (please consider health and safety when moving tables), they should be returned back to their standard layout at the end of each meeting. If they are able to, staff are asked to leave a donation in the honesty box when using the sanitary items provided in the women's toilets. Donations will help to re-stock the provisions so that it can continue to be self-funding. Staff are also very welcome to contribute items or additional donations too.
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- **Q:** Some of the desks in both meeting rooms and office spaces of the DCO do not look like they are being cleaned after use. Can a reminder be issued about this too?

A: Yes, staff will be reminded about cleaning desks before and after use. This can be included in the global email to be sent out about meeting room etiquette.



Q: There are a lot of items and stationary left on Floor 3 such as folders and envelopes, can these be reused by staff?

A: Yes, staff should seek to use these leftover folders and envelopes still on Floor 3 before ordering new ones. This will help the Council to finish clearing out the floor, is cost-effective and is better for the environment. These folders and stationery items should not be left for recycling if they can be repurposed.

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

8. Ideas/Suggestions

Q: Is there a picture of the correct layout for the meeting room on Floor 1? If so, could this picture be printed out and put in the meeting room to remind staff how the room should look?

A: Yes, something like this can be provided.

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

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JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

6 December 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 Aug – Oct 2023 to the same period in the previous two years.

	VACANCIES	APPLICATIONS	SHORTLISTED	OFFER - EXTERNAL	OFFER - INTERNAL	NOT FILLED
Aug-Oct 21	25	111	63	16	7	2
Aug-Oct 22	19	111	55	14	3	2
Aug-Oct 23	17	170	53	11	4	2

This quarter the number of applications were much higher due to 3 apprentice vacancies which attracted 117 applications in total, with 27 of these applicants shortlisted for interview. The vacancies that were filled include all 3 apprenticeships – IT, Communications and Enterprise, and Digital Marketing at Hitchin Town Hall, as well as Graduate Estates Surveyor, Senior Ecologist, and two Digital Services Officers.

Two vacancies which were not filled this quarter which were the two Environmental Health Technical Officers which were advertised together. The posts are currently being covered with temporary agency workers.

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

3.3 Leavers and Turnover

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

Rolling 12 months	Turnover	
	Leavers	Monthly
Nov-22	4	1.16%
Dec-22	2	0.58%
Jan-23	6	1.75%
Feb-23	1	0.29%
Mar-23	5	1.47%
Apr-23	4	1.15%
May-23	2	0.57%
Jun-23	6	1.73%
Jul-23	4	1.15%
Aug-23	2	0.57%
Sep-23	2	0.57%
Oct-23	3	0.85%
Total	41	11.84%

The table above shows the rolling labour turnover rate which has slowed slightly in the last 3 months.

In terms of feedback from leavers, there has been no significant change in the general responses which recommend the Council and an employer. There are occasions where leavers do not return the exit questionnaire and the HR team work to encourage responses to ensure a full picture.

3.4 National Pay bargaining 2023

On 1 November, the pay award was agreed for 2023:

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

Some joint work has also been agreed around broader family leave and pay issues raised in the unions' pay claim.

Despite having a mid-month pay run, we have worked with payroll to apply this award and the back pay for November pay day for current employees.

3.5 Apprentices

We currently have 11 Apprentices in post so are now at capacity until into the new year unless any circumstances change.

Our Apprentices are completing a range of Apprenticeships including Business Administration, Customer Service Specialist, HR Support, Community Health & Wellbeing, Finance, Public relations, Digital Marketing, Information Technology and Cultural Learning. We continue to develop our Apprentices offering them bespoke learning such as minute taking and presentation skills.

3.6 Learning and Development

The current contract for the Learning Management System is due for renewal in July 2024, we have begun the process of investigating other options to replace the current system.

The personal development day in November focussed on our priority of sustainability, an information for staff was held and this was well attended.

To support meeting free Friday, we ran an Effective Meeting Skills workshop – this consisted of two parts focussing on both chairing and participating skills – the session was at capacity, so we will be looking at offering this again before the end of the March.

3.7 Inclusion Group

The Inclusion group met in October and continue to focus on race discrimination and microaggressions and the related action plan. The group have attended training and are considering the best approach to increasing employee awareness of microaggressions and unconscious bias.

The group are also supporting a drive to increase employee photos on Microsoft Office and Teams. These photos are not available externally and will help support new starters and cross team working within a hybrid working environment.

3.8 Gender Pay Gap

Our 2023 Gender Pay Gap figures have been analysed and will shortly be published with the gender pay gap service. Data for 2022 and 2023 below:

Year	Mean	Median
2022	19.5%	19.3%
2023	15.5%	14%

There is a reasonable improvement in both mean and median pay gap for 2023.

When the data was available, a Gender Pay Gap action planning group was formed from the Inclusion group and the group have developed a refreshed action plan to support further improvement.

The action plan includes continuing to embed flexibility and positive work life balance at every level of the Council, developing a programme of events to develop employees for senior roles, and updating our recruitment documentation to explicitly encourage female applicants for senior roles. There is also ongoing research and benchmarking work supporting the action plan.

Whilst it we are noting an improvement for 2023, it's important that we are clear 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, and so work will be ongoing.

3.9 Absence

Absence levels are increasing, with October absences the highest in more than 12 months. 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
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
Sept	0.23	0.38	0.61
Oct	0.30	0.60	0.90
Total	3.34	4.24	7.58

Summary of absence reasons:

Absence reason Aug - Oct 23	Occasions of absence		
	Up to 1 week	1-3 weeks	3 weeks+
Ear, Nose and Throat (Inc Cold/Flu)	35	3	0
COVID 19 - suspected	23	2	0
Sickness / Vomiting	20	1	0
Other	14	1	1
Headaches (inc migraine)	8	0	0
Musculoskeletal	8	1	1
Mental health	4	6	4
Total	112	14	6

It's not unusual to see an increase of minor ailments causing increased sickness absence in autumn and winter months and the levels will continue to be monitored. Managers are reminded of the importance of communication during absence and carrying out return to work meetings to ensure returning employees are supported.

The HR team continue to work closely with managers to support the more complex absence cases including those related to mental health, which make up the majority of our current long term absence cases. There is ongoing support for employee wellbeing, which is detailed in the discussion paper.

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).

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JSCC Discussion - Providing support for staff wellbeing

Introduction

The Council is conscious of its responsibility to support the wellbeing of its employees. This is set out in Health and Safety Law as:

It is an employer's duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees and other people who may be affected by their business. Employers must do whatever is practical to achieve this.

The Council goes beyond the basic requirement by providing a wide range of direct support and additional helpful resources for employees to be able to face any wellbeing and mental health challenges. We recognise that it is not just about our duty of care and the legal and moral obligations to our employees, it also reflects that the right support contributes to creating an effective and efficient organisation. Placing importance on employee wellbeing helps us to create greater loyalty with our staff, contributes to better recruitment and retention and better staff engagement and productivity. This focus on wellbeing is in keeping with our values, in particular “*we work together and support each other to deliver the best we can*”.

As an organisation we provide:

- **Individual advice** from the HR Team and signposting to further support.
- **Relevant policies and procedures** to ensure a consistent fair treatment to all.
- **Flexible working options** to support work life balance and help to manage the demands of work, home and busy lives – this can include requests for reduction in hours, compressed hours, term time working, homeworking.
- **Access to trained Mental Health first aiders** – contact details for the MH First Aiders are available on the intranet and all contact is completely confidential (unless there is a safeguarding concern)
- **Regular wellbeing articles** signposting advice and support and giving tips.
- **Advice to managers** to enable them to provide the best support to their team members.
- **Funded Flu vaccinations for staff**
- **Your Financial Wellbeing Workshop** - designed to identify key topics that will help employees strengthen their financial wellbeing by enabling them to make informed decisions when it comes to their financial planning.
- **Menopause kitchen** – this bi-monthly drop-in session provides a safe place for staff to share experiences, discover what support and resources are available or just to find out what the menopause may be like.
- **The Social and Wellbeing group** –organise events for staff to enhance the employee experience and encourage interaction across teams, these activities include a monthly after work get together and other ad-hoc social activities such as cake sales in the office, summer lunchtime picnics and organised walks, designed to support those who may be feeling isolated.

We support our managers, so they are able to provide:

- Regular 1:1's
- Open-door policy
- Reasonable adjustments
- Support for Flexible working
- Encouragement to use annual leave allowance.

We offer access to several external provisions to support staff wellbeing:

- **Occupation Health** can advise on health issues and how they relate to an individual's role, so we can fully support them and their health.
- **Employee Assistance Programme** provides staff and their family with around the clock access to confidential, independent, professional information and emotional support.
- **North Herts BeWell** – a wellbeing and benefits platform which provides wellbeing content including mindfulness, sleep, mental health and fitness and nutrition and discounts and benefits.
- **GP Helpline** allows staff to have 24 hour access to a GP consultation service.
- **Support for staff who are Carers** - Employers for Carers membership which gives access to resources for employees and managers who have working carers as part of their team.

We also signpost staff to other sources of support through our intranet – these include:

- Fertility
- Miscarriage
- Additional Carer support
- Cancer support
- Bereavement support
- Financial wellbeing
- Women's health
- Men's health
- Domestic abuse

Finding the balance

Whilst we have a duty to protect the health, welfare and safety of our employees, there is also a balance to be struck. NHC remains the employer and as such the relationship with staff is contractual.

The organisation can provide some direct support, but it ultimately acts as a conduit to the support available.

Looking forward

We are continually reviewing the wellbeing offering. We will be engaging with staff through a staff survey to understand visibility and suitability of the wellbeing support available.

Date of JSCC		Discussion topic
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
	December	Providing support for staff wellbeing

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
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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