

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



31 May 2024

Our Ref Joint Staff Consultative Committee 12 June 2024
Contact. Committee Services
Direct Dial. (01462) 474655
Email. committee.services@north-herts.gov.uk

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

District Councillors: Daniel Allen (Chair) Ruth Brown (Vice Chair) Val Bryant, Rhona Cameron and Claire Strong.

Substitutes Councillors: Sadie Billing, Joe Graziano, Dominic Griffiths, Chris Hinchliff, Keith Hoskins MBE and Nigel Mason.

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

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

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

to be held as a Virtual Meeting

VIA ZOOM

On

WEDNESDAY, 12TH JUNE, 2024 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	
2.	MINUTES - 13 MARCH 2024 To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 13 March 2024.	(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.	STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM MINUTES To receive the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum meetings from March 2024, April 2024 and May 2024.	(Pages 9 - 22)
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 23 - 28)
6.	DISCUSSION PAPER - RECRUITMENT UPDATE To receive the discussion paper - Recruitment Update.	(Pages 29 - 30)
7.	FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS To consider the subjects for debate at future meeting of the Committee.	(Pages 31 - 32)

Public Document Pack Agenda Item 2

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM
ON WEDNESDAY, 13TH MARCH, 2024 AT 10.00 AM

MINUTES

Present: Councillors: Tom Plater (Chair), Terry Hone and Claire Strong

In attendance: Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Caroline Jenkins (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Rebecca Webb (HR Services Manager) and Sjanet Wickenden (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer),

UNISON: Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews (Unison representative)

Staff Consultation Forum : Louis Franklin, Digital Services Officer

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

84 ELECTION OF A CHAIR

Audio recording – 26 Seconds

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

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

85 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 30 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Elizabeth Dennis.

N.B Councillor Raj Bhakar provided apologies ahead of the meeting, however this was not announced during the meeting itself.

86 MINUTES - 6 DECEMBER 2023

Audio Recording – 3 minutes

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

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 6 December 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

87 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 44 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.

88 STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM MINUTES

Audio recording – 4 minutes 7 seconds

The Service Director – Resources presented the item entitled ‘SCF Minutes’, alongside the Minutes from the meetings of December 2023 and January 2024 and highlighted the following:

- Three restructures had been reported. These have now progressed and been taken forward.
- A new CRM system had been installed and training was being undertaken by staff.
- Reported a temporary power outage at DCO.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum for 6 December 2023 and 31 January 2024.

89 HR INFORMATION NOTE

Audio Recording – 5 minutes 37 seconds

The Human Resources Services Manager presented the Information Note entitled ‘HR update’ and advised Members that:-

- Internal secondments had enabled current employees to develop their skills.
- Unfilled vacancies continued, especially in hard to fill roles such as Legal and IT. Other roles had been advertised, skills developed internally or trainees had been recruited to develop into roles.
- The staff survey had been launched, there had already been a good response from staff. The results would be reviewed when the survey closed in April 2024.
- Since the publication of the agenda, a green book pay claim had been received from the unions which was for £3000 or 10%, whichever is greater, on all spinal column points. Negotiations would begin and regional pay briefings would be arranged.
- There were currently 8 apprentices in post, with 1 apprentice securing a permanent role with the Council. National Apprenticeship Week was also marked with articles on social media about the current apprentices.
- The Inclusion Group had discussed over 55s in the workplace and how the Council can ensure continued support. Staff discussed using flexi time to support their own wellbeing and suggestions on keeping general IT skills up to date. The IT team would look at providing IT champions to provide support.
- Work continued on raising awareness of micro aggressions and unconscious bias.
- It was noted that an increase in staff absences was expected in Autumn and Winter months due to minor ailments.
- Figures from January 2024 had not yet reached the levels of October and November 2023, but levels were higher than this time last year.
- It was noted there was also a national increase in sick absence, with a reported increase of 5.8 days to 7.8 days per employee, per year. Monitoring would continue and advice and support would be available to manage absence.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Clare Strong
- Councillor Tom Plater

In response to questions, the HR Services Manager stated:

- The staff survey would close at the end of April and 130 responses had been received to date from 380 total staff. HR were expecting more and would continue to chase on this.
- It was questioned as to how long the 5 outstanding unfilled staff vacancies had been available. The information on how long the 5 unfilled staff vacancies had been outstanding was not available at the meeting but would be gathered and circulated to members.
- It was confirmed that musculoskeletal refers to broken bones or back problems, which can be work related.
- HR confirmed they contact managers to look at reason behind absences and provide support and guidance to individuals and their circumstances.

90 DISCUSSION PAPER - FACE TO FACE vs ONLINE LEARNING

Audio Recording – 15 minutes 7 seconds

The HR Services Manager presented the Information Note entitled 'Face to Face vs Online Learning' and advised that:

- Since the pandemic, learning had changed which also includes apprenticeship training. During 2020, training sessions and meetings were held virtually. However, now the Council was using a mixture of online and 'in person' workshops and courses to provide training.
- The virtual new starter sessions started in 2020 to introduce the new staff and these are now held between alternate online and face to face sessions, to allow staff flexibility for their own personal situation.
- Training providers were benefitting from the use of online polls, breakout rooms and word clouds at online sessions.
- There were huge benefits to both methods allowing more flexibility regarding work patterns and preferences which helped to make training inclusive and accessible to all employees.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Clare Strong
- Councillor Terry Hone
- Councillor Tom Plater

In response to questions, the HR Services Manager stated that:

- Feedback forms were reviewed after each training course. Feedback received from online training provided during 2020 suggested that most staff did not want all training to remain online.
- If a certain training session worked better online as opposed to face to face, or vice versa, the comments from the feedback forms would highlight this.
- There was not a 100% answer to whether training result were better online or in person. Different trainings and meetings had different needs and scenarios. It was thought a balance between the two options was the most effective way to carry out training, dependant on the needs of the employee.
- Questions were asked about the more difficult training sessions, such as Safeguarding. Although some people preferred to have this training face to face, others were more

comfortable carrying this training out online, to be able to switch off their camera and take a break if needed. Trainers would also allow staff to exit the room if needed, so there was not one clear format that would work for everyone.

- It was felt that hybrid meetings did work well within the Council. Hybrid training sessions with some people in the room and some people online had not worked as well. This could be implemented if the need was there from staff members.

RESOLVED: That the Committee commented on and noted the Discussion Paper on Face to Face vs Online Learning.

91 DISCUSSION PAPER - LONG TERM ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

Audio Recording – 24 minutes, 0 seconds

The HR Services Manager presented the Information Note entitled 'Long Term Absence Management' and advised that:

- Long term absence was classed as more than 21 days sick. A policy was in place to provide appropriate support from line managers and Human Resources in these circumstances.
- The sick pay scheme supports employees whilst recovering.
- Support was offered to staff to return to work such as adjustments, redeployment and, on occasion, ill health retirement.
- In 2023 there were 49 cases of long-term sickness absence, resulting in 1000 lost working days. 40% of these cases related to depression, anxiety and stress. At 21 days sickness, a letter will be sent to the employee, reminding them of fit note requirements, the employee assistance programme, and to keep in touch with your line manager.
- A referral would be made to Occupational Health for a medical professional to see if any adjustments can be made for the return to work, including a possible phased return.
- Support is given to both line managers and employees.
- On return-to-work, Occupational Health would advise on possible modified duties and undertake regular reviews to address any concerns.
- On the occasions that the employee is unable to return, options of ill health retirement would be discussed with Occupational Health and the employee.
- Long term sickness can relate to mental health problems and the Council were looking into Wellness Action Plans that assist the employee to notice triggers for their mental health, addresses mental health problems and provides a better understanding for line managers to understand the needs of employees. These were being tested by some management and staff and feedback would be collated on how these work in practice.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Terry Hone
- Councillor Clare Strong
- Councillor Tom Plater

In response to questions, the HR Services Manager stated that:

- North Herts Council has signed up to the Green Book entitlement on sick pay, which is a standard. However, some other authorities have moved away from this entitlement.
- From the 2023 figures, it seemed that 49 cases of long-term absence were deemed high. However, it was noted that there was an aging workforce which came with specific health issues.

- No comparison had been carried out with neighbouring authorities, but this has been the standard for North Herts Council. The biggest difference had been the increase in mental health cases in the last few years.
- It was confirmed that sick pay starts on day 1 of the sickness absence.
- The Occupational Health service provided for the Council is outsourced to an external provider and employees would be referred to an Occupational Health advisor.
- In more detailed cases relating to ill health retirement, employees would be referred to a physician or GP who would provide a report of suggested support.
- There was currently no framework in place regarding Wellness Action Plans to support management and staff to have the conversation. This was not something everyone would be interested to use and would not be mandatory across the organisation. It was thought it could be a good tool to enable people to be more proactive about their own mental health.

RESOLVED: That the Committee commented on and noted the Discussion Paper on Long Term Absence Management.

92 FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS

Audio recording – 33 minutes, 16 seconds

The Chair led a discussion with Members regarding future topics to be discussed.

The Chair confirmed the topic of 'Recruitment and Retention of Staff', together with the result of the Staff Survey, would be discussed at the next meeting of the Committee and this was agreed with Members present.

Chair

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Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

06/03/2024

Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**), Ian Couper (**IC**), Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Tiranah Straughan (**TS**), Dee Levett (**DL**), Mark Robinson (**MR**), Drew Betts (**DB**), Andrew Mills (**AM**), Robert Orchard (**RO**), Caelan Ballard – notes (**CB**)

Circulation: Global

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

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

Restructure Notices

Green Spaces Restructure

- The restructure aims to reflect significant changes to working practices and responsibilities of the Green Spaces team since the development of the current structure in 2004.
- The proposal includes one the transformation of an Area & Monitoring Officer post to an Environment and Tree Officer post which will report to a Senior Tree Officer post, also renamed from Parks & Open Spaces Officer.
- The roles now largely work with tree maintenance and wildlife reserves across the district, and as such will finish being regraded later this month to reflect new responsibilities and risks handled within the roles. Both roles will be career graded to reflect additional qualifications relating to arboriculture.
- The restructure will also facilitate the reduced working hours for a member of the team going forward. There is no change to the remaining Area & Monitoring Officer roles, but these will now cover the entire North Herts district.
- The restructure is cost neutral as funding will come from reduced monitoring of the Grounds contract.
- The consultation commenced on Tuesday the 5th of March with an aim to be implemented from the 1st of April. The proposals have been approved by the Leadership Team and the Environment and Tree Officer post is due to be evaluated next week. No feedback from the team has been received so far.

Catering Team Restructure

- There has been a review of operations since the creation of the last structure for the Catering Team was approved in 2023, with the addition of the café at North Herts Museum and café kiosk at Bancroft Gardens and the restructure follows recommendations set.

- The Café Kiosk in Bancroft Gardens will now be operated on weekends and school holidays only, as would be most financially beneficial for NHC. The new operating hours will be implemented for the coming summer season.
- Howard Park Kiosk will be managed in-house for a year as the current contract with SLL is ending. Both Kiosks will operate for 31 weeks during the summer season, with the Howard Park Kiosk operating 7 days a week during this period.
- The proposal outlines the creation of three Seasonal Kiosk Assistant roles; one will be allocated to the Bancroft Café Kiosk and two to the Howard Park Kiosk. These Seasonal Kiosk Assistants will operate on different hour contracts.
- One vacant Catering Supervisor post will be removed as it is no longer needed. The remaining Catering Supervisor and two Catering Assistants will be allocated to the North Herts Museum Café. An overtime budget of 16 hours per week has also been allocated for the 31 weeks both Kiosks will be operating.
- This restructure will not include any redundancy or change to working hours of existing staff. The consultation has now opened, with the Seasonal Kiosk Assistant role to be evaluated on the 7th of March.

Q: Has the team considered acquiring the kiosk at Letchworth Outdoor Pool in Norton Common?

A: This is not currently being considered as the kiosk is integrated into the new leisure contract.

2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

Q: What were the figures for the DCO solar panel cost savings raised in January's notes?

A: The solar panels have generated just over 10MW hours of electricity in 2022 and 2023 respectively, which has saved around £2000 in electricity each year. However, the amount of electricity generated will vary going forwards as it is dependent on the sun's intensity at any given point.

3. NHC Update

- The new budget was approved at Council last week, with no big changes. Some important items were raised; NHC has been successful in getting Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme funding which will allow for the decarbonisation of the leisure centres in the district and will include more solar panels and heat pumps. The budget has also allocated funding for the extension of the fitness facilities in Royston Leisure Centre and may also include the building of a learner's pool. The plans for leisure facilities are included in the capital program and some additional resources are being sought to help deliver these plans.
- The new budget also suggests an average pay increase of around 4%. Various ways of balancing the council budget are being explored for future years to lessen the shortfall expected.
- The Council has a Health & Safety group who meet quarterly to highlight health & safety concerns and raise issues. There are nominated representatives on the group,

but they cannot always attend. Looking at ways to encourage engagement and more representatives, as the group does have an important role.

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- The [Staff Survey](#) is open until the 28th of March and all staff are encouraged to complete it. All responses are anonymous, and the feedback will really help to gauge staff views on working at NHC and identify areas for improvement, so please have your say. Staff completing the survey will also have chance of winning one of ten £10 gift vouchers!
- An NJC pay claim has been received from the unions which includes a pay increase of £3,000 or 10% (whichever is greater) on all spinal column points, reviews of the gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps in local government, a two-hour reduction in the working week, with no pay detriment, an additional day of annual leave for personal well-being purposes (with term-time only staff also receiving a full day rather than a pro rata amount, that they can use at any time, including term time), and a phased approach to reaching a minimum pay rate of £15 an hour in a maximum of two years but sooner if possible. It may be some time before an agreement is reached. NHC will be attending the regional pay briefings in May.

Q: Some staff may not be aware that there is a new Health & Safety group and not know about the quarterly meetings. Could an article be published on insight to raise awareness of this?

A: Yes, an insight article can be made to explain what the group is and what is covered in the meetings.

4. Employee Queries

Q: There is an issue with the salaries being offered for roles in the IT team. It was recently noted that some trainee posts advertised at other local government organisations are offering salaries higher than trained staff at NHC. Could this be reviewed by HR?

A: HR can review this and see what may be done to aid recruitment to our own IT vacancies.

5. IT Update and Queries

- A new CCTV camera is being installed outside the front DCO entrance following the fire damage caused from an incident last year.
- The ICT Systems & DCO-wide power down is now planned for the 23rd of March, and a global email will be sent out to advise staff of this. The power down will facilitate the installation of electrical work relating to EV Charging and other essential ICT electrical work.
- A new system for Finance is coming in August, it would be greatly appreciated if anyone would like to be involved in the testing process. The new system being introduced will be much more efficient and user-friendly.

Q: What is the progress of the upgrades to the Council Chamber and meeting room 2?

A: The concrete cutting work and other pieces have been finished in both the Council Chamber and meeting room 2, and the AV in meeting room 2 is also fully installed. Instructions on using the new AV will be sent out soon. The microphone unit installations for the Council Chamber have been rearranged for Monday the 11th of March, after which the upgrades should be complete.

6. Digital Services Update

- The Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system went live on Monday 19th February. A thank you to staff for helping to make this such a smooth roll-out, and for providing feedback to the Digital Services team. If you need any assistance using the CRM, you can contact:
 - The Digital Services team Digital@north-herts.gov.uk
 - The Customer Services team CRM@north-herts.gov.uk
 - Digital Champions ([Digital Services Team \(sharepoint.com\)](https://sharepoint.com))
- The Digital Services team have now started work on the wider digital programme and further updates will be provided on the new Digital Transformation page on The Hub over the coming months.

7. Building Services & Facilities Update

- On Monday, a fault in the electrics of the roof of floor 2 caused a power outage across the DCO and tripped the heating on all floors. Heating has now been fixed on all floors of the DCO except floor 2, which will be fixed as quickly as possible.

Q: Have the new EV charging points been installed?

A: This is still in progress due to an issue with the electrics which has pushed back installation to the 13th of April, but confirmation on this will be sent out closer to the time.

Q: Despite previous communication about office etiquette, there are still reports of individuals eating strong-smelling at their desks instead of the designated canteen area. There have been other complaints of individuals smoking just outside of the DCO building. Could another email be sent out reminding staff of the expected office etiquette with eating in the office, as well as the smoking policy?

A: Yes, another email can be written to remind staff of the expectations of office etiquette regarding eating at desks, as well as the smoking policy.

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

8. Green Update

- Updates from March's Environmental Briefing include:
 - The Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 is now live, and details can be found on the [NHC web page](#). Residents can sign up via the HUG website or by calling the Energy Saving Trust.
 - The second round of Solar Together has now closed. 185 households in North Herts have accepted their Solar PV recommendation. The average 14-panel system within the scheme is 34% cheaper than the typical market price

for an equivalent system. Installations have now begun, with 213 completed in Hertfordshire so far.

- The Climate Hive now has 355 subscribers and continues to update users with the latest climate activity such as HUG2 updates, the latest surveys and consultations, funding, and skills opportunities.
 - NHC has been successful in its application for the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme and have now signed the Grant Offer Letter. The council have secured up to £7,743,224 from the fund for decarbonisation measures at leisure facilities in North Hertfordshire. These measures will include air source heat pumps, solar panels, and energy efficiency measures like insulation. A press release, agreed with Salix, has been released on [the website](#).
 - The Woodland Trust is giving away free trees to UK schools and communities. Applicants can apply for different tree packs. Apply before August 2024 at [Woodland Trust](#).
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- The full briefing, including other grants, discount schemes and updates is available to read on [the Hub](#).

9. Ideas/Suggestions

None.

10. Meeting Free Friday Feedback

- The Leadership Team are continuing to collect feedback on the new Meeting Free Friday initiative. There is a question on the initiative in the [Staff Survey](#), so staff are asked to share their thoughts when filling it in.

11. AOB

Q: Staff recently received an invitation to a JSCC meeting. What was this meeting and who is allowed to attend?

A: JSCC is the Joint Staff Consultation Committee which meets monthly to discuss HR topics and includes a discussion on what has been raised at recent SCF meetings. Recently an invite was sent out to all staff by accident, but an SCF member is invited to attend these meetings as a representative of the group and to ask and receive questions.

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

Tiranan Straughan #4842 – Housing Policy Officer

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

03/04/2024

Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**), Ian Couper (**IC**), Jo Keshishian (**JK**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Tiranan Straughan (**TS**), Dee Levett (**DL**), Mark Robinson (**MR**), Harrison McLeod (**HM**), Caelan Ballard – notes (**CB**)

Circulation: Global

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

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Louis Franklin and Rebecca Webb who was covered by Jo Keshishian.

2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

3. NHC Update

- The next Elections will be taking place in May and the Elections Team welcome any volunteers. You can register your interest by emailing elections@north-herts.gov.uk.

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

- The Staff Survey closed on the 28th of March with over 200 responses. Thank you to everyone who responded. The feedback received is very helpful and is being reviewed. The outcome of the prize draw for participants who entered their email will be announced shortly.
- The new holiday year has now begun, and a notice was uploaded to the Hub today which covers the 2024/2025 holiday entitlement which can now be viewed on iTrent. Statutory leave days have been booked for everyone as of today.
- Additional carry forward leave has also been added now, and spot checks are underway to ensure the correct amounts of carry-forward have been added where relevant.
- The next Personal Development Morning will be on Friday the 12th of April. This is a generic session, which will allow staff to ensure they are up to date with any essential corporate learning or complete any CPD that they have been planning.

4. Employee Queries

Q: Following on from the discussion about JSCC meetings in the last minutes, could a representative from the Inclusion group be invited to attend JSCC in addition to a representative from SCF?

A: It may be useful to discuss what is covered at the JSCC with the Inclusion Group so they are able to decide whether it would be beneficial for them to attend. If it would be useful for an Inclusion Group representative to attend the JSCC, this can be facilitated.

Q: It was proposed for the office chairs in the DCO to be cleaned, but this has not yet gone ahead. Can an update on this be given?

A: This would usually be due to be done in the Autumn, but looking to bring this forward.

Q: Following the [notice](#) on Insight about updating e-signatures for NHC's 50th anniversary, some staff have reported being unable to copy over the updated signature template. Could some more direction on this be sent out?

A: Comms will circulate the updated e-signature in an email which will be easier for staff to copy and paste into their existing signatures. There is also a new corporate Teams background with NHC's new 'Celebrating 50 years' slogan available for staff to use. Staff can find this under 'background filter' on Microsoft Teams.

5. IT Update and Queries

- The email filter solution currently in use at NHC will be changing to Mimecast after the Elections in May. The new system is cloud-hosted and will bring improvements to the email filters, better resiliency, and will also help to block unwanted junk and spam emails. More information on the new filter system will be circulated in due course, but a [notice has been uploaded to The Hub](#).
- The remote Windows 11 rollout should begin this month, and training videos are currently being prepared for staff to support them during the installation process and using the new operating system. Staff should be aware that laptops may take up to 40 minutes to load the first time they are turned on after the update. Users will be contacted by IT when the rollout reaches them.
- The IT survey which is sent alongside helpdesk tickets have been reviewed for feedback and responses have been collated. There were around 250 survey responses throughout the past year and feedback has been very positive with an average service satisfaction score of around 98%. The politeness and efficiency of the helpdesk service have also been mentioned. Staff are thanked for their feedback which has been passed on to management.
- Other IT projects are currently under preparation and will be rolled out later this year.

Q: Is IT equipment routinely checked?

A: Equipment is checked whenever problems are reported as there is too much to test on a regular basis. An asset audit is also currently underway so problems with equipment may also be identified through this. Staff are asked to log a ticket if they encounter any issues with equipment so that it can be tested and fixed.

6. Building Services & Facilities Update

Q: The lights in the DCO seem to be on at times, especially on the 4th floor, during the night and holidays when there are no staff working outside of Careline. Are the lights being left on?

A: The lights in the DCO are sensor controlled, meaning they must be triggered to turn on and then should automatically turn off. IC to raise with Property Services.

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

7. Green Update

Updates from April's Environmental Briefing include:

- The Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 is now live, and details can be found on the [NHC web page](#). Residents can sign up via the HUG website or by calling the Energy Saving Trust.
- The second round of Solar Together has now closed. 185 households in North Herts have accepted their Solar PV recommendation. The average 14-panel system within the scheme is 34% cheaper than the typical market price for an equivalent system. Installations have now begun, with 297 completed in Hertfordshire so far and 50 installations completed in North Herts.
- The Climate Hive now has 355 subscribers and continues to update users with the latest climate activity such as HUG2 updates, the latest surveys and consultations, funding, and skills opportunities.
- Local Nature Recovery Strategy - £5,000 is available for all Hertfordshire District and Borough councils from Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) for engagement activities to contribute towards Local Nature Recovery. We are engaging with colleagues at HCC on how best to use this.
- NHC has been successful in its application for the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme and have now signed the Grant Offer Letter. The council have secured up to £7,743,224 from the fund for decarbonisation measures at leisure facilities in North Hertfordshire. These measures will include air source heat pumps, solar panels, and energy efficiency measures like insulation. A press release, agreed with Salix, has been released on [the website](#).
- Letchworth Organic Gardeners present 'The Plight of the Bumblebee' - a talk by Holly Pringle from the Bumblebee Conservation Trust. Also talks about local initiatives by North Herts Council and local beekeeper Gary Hammond as well as plant stalls, refreshments, and a raffle. Saturday 20th April 2-5pm. Talk starts at 3pm. Free Church Hall, Leys Avenue, Letchworth. More info and admission prices [here](#).

The full briefing, including other grants, discount schemes and updates is available to read on [the Hub](#).

8. Ideas/Suggestions

None.

9. AOB

Q: North Herts Leisure centre is now being operated by Everyone Active, who have introduced the use of the Everyone Active mobile app which allows members to book swimming lanes and sports courts. However, transferring accounts from the previous app

is not working for some members and they are unable to use the app. Has this been investigated?

A: There have been a few issues with people's data being transferred by SLL to the new Everyone Active app. This has been handled proactively and Everyone Active are contacting users as well as circulating updates on [Facebook](#) to explain the account transfer process and how to book Leisure Centre sessions on the app and [online](#). Advice is also available on the troubleshooting web page. If their advice does not resolve or answer queries, users are asked to call North Herts Leisure Centre on [01462 679311](#) or visit in person for assistance.

Q: There appear to be changes to the swimming lane sessions available for booking at North Herts Leisure Centre since the transfer to Everyone Active. Users now need to book a swimming session on the app or online. Are these changes going to be permanent?

A: As Everyone Active is a different company, some changes to services and sessions will be introduced, but Everyone Active will notify and communicate any intended changes with users.

Chair for next meeting – Drew Betts

Have something to say?

If you have an issue that you think should be brought to the attention of the SCF, please contact any SCF representative via phone, email or in person. They will raise your issue at the next meeting. You will not be identified unless you want to be.

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

Representatives (and phone extension):

Christina Corr #4325 - Senior Technical Officer Revenues and Benefits

Claire Bernard #4323 - MSU Admin Support Officer

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

Louis Franklin #4262 – Admin Support Officer

Tiranan Straughan #4842 – Housing Policy Officer

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

01/05/2024

Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**), Ian Couper (**IC**), Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Dee Levett (**DL**) Harrison Mcleod (**HM**) Drew Betts (**DB**) Mark Robinson (**MR**)

Circulation: Global

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

1. Apologies

Louis Franklin (LF)

2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

No Matter arising from previous meeting.

3. NHC Update

AVC Wise have changed their name to My Money Matters, an article explaining the changes was published in Insight linked below.

[https://northhertsgovuk.sharepoint.com/sites/News/SitePages/Shared-Cost-AVC\)-scheme-providers%2C-formally-AVC-Wise-have-rebranded-to-My-Money-Matters.aspx](https://northhertsgovuk.sharepoint.com/sites/News/SitePages/Shared-Cost-AVC)-scheme-providers%2C-formally-AVC-Wise-have-rebranded-to-My-Money-Matters.aspx)

The next personal development morning is on Friday 10th May, a global email with details will follow. Inclusion group met last week and discussed neurodiversity in the workplace.

Everyone is welcome at Inclusion Group, so please keep an eye out for the next meeting date.

Thank you to everyone who took part in the staff survey, we had 228 responses. The working group has met to discuss the headline results and there is more work ongoing to analyse the data.

There has been some helpful feedback, some positive responses and some areas that need further review. More details to follow.

Following the recommendation from Inclusion Group, leadership team have attended training on microaggressions and further information on this will follow.

Elections will take place tomorrow (2/5/24) – a big thank you to everyone who is helping.

4. Employee Queries

No employee queries.

5. IT Update and Queries

ICT drop in sessions - the last one was last week with 25 attendees. We have received positive feedback and are looking for opinions on what staff want to learn about in these drop ins - any suggestions are welcome.

There is an email filter change phasing in from 10th May. It's being phased in gradually so we will find a balance on email getting through and being held. Article about email filter coming out so please take a look at it .

Q I have also heard positive feedback about ict drop ins, can you cover PDFs, there is a lack of confidence in this area.

A That's a good idea to look at PDF

Q When are we rolling out windows 11?

A New councillors will get it as default. We will then begin rolling out to all other councillors and also roll out for staff will start over the next couple of weeks.

Q Reason for asking is that it feels different, more than expected, things are in different places so we might need to think about support for these issues.

A We have already put together some videos for these issues and we are planning for specific Windows 11 drop-in sessions, we are looking for feedback from the first wave of testers about any other issues cropping up.

6. Building Services & Facilities Update

Nothing to update on

7. Green Update

Nothing to update on

8. Ideas/Suggestions

None.

9. AOB

No other business

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JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

12 June 2024

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

AGENDA ITEM No. 5

TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE: HR UPDATE

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES SERVICES MANAGER

1. SUMMARY

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

2. STEPS TO DATE

- 2.1 The information note contains updates regarding the significant and strategic activities from the HR Service Work Plan.

3. INFORMATION TO NOTE

- 3.1 The terms of reference for the Joint Staff Consultative Committee are to be the corporate interface with employees on major Human Resources issues and to be the Strategic HR Forum for North Herts Council Members.

3.2 Recruitment & Retention

The table below shows a comparison of recruitment statistics from February 2024 – April 2024 to the same period in the previous two years.

Recruitment	VACANCIES	APPLICATIONS	SHORTLISTED	OFFER EXTERNAL	OFFER INTERNAL	NOT FILLED
Feb 22-Apr 22	22	90	53	8	11	3
Feb 23 Apr-23	24	80	43	11	6	7
Feb24- Apr24	13	157	56	9	2	2

During this quarter we have seen the number of vacancies fall but the number of applications increase. In particular, we received 43 applications for Revenues Officer, and 23 applications for Planning Compliance Officer. We have been successful in filling several other vacancies including the Careline Technician post which was unsuccessful last quarter, Senior Planning Officer (Strategic Sites and Major Projects), Seasonal Kiosk Attendants for Bancroft and Howard Park, and a Business Admin Apprentice for Licensing and Community Safety.

The two vacancies which were not filled this quarter were Estates Surveyor, and Senior Environmental Health Officer, where applications were low in numbers and of poor quality. We are still finding it hard to attract professionals with the right level of skill and experience in these service areas.

3.3 Leavers and Turnover

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

Rolling 12 months	Turnover	
	Leavers	Monthly
May-23	<u>2</u>	0.57%
June 23	<u>6</u>	1.73%
July 23	<u>4</u>	1.15%
Aug 23	<u>2</u>	0.57%
Sep 23	<u>2</u>	0.57%
Oct 23	<u>3</u>	0.85%
Nov 23	<u>5</u>	1.45%
Dec 23	<u>2</u>	0.58%
Jan 24	<u>0</u>	0.00%
Feb 24	<u>1</u>	0.28%
Mar 24	<u>1</u>	0.29%
Apr 24	<u>3</u>	0.84%
Total	<u>31</u>	8.85%

The table above shows the rolling labour turnover rate which has continued to slow over the last few months, resulting in the annual turnover falling below 9% for the first time in 3 years. Labour turnover looks at only unplanned leavers from the council and does not include figures related to planned leavers such as the end of fixed term contracts (e.g. apprentices, and maternity cover) as well as planned retirements.

3.4 Staff Survey 2024

The staff survey has taken place and the data and feedback is being analysed. Staff were asked a variety of questions on subjects including leadership and management, communications, inclusion, work life balance and wellbeing support. Further details on the results and subsequent actions will be communicated in the coming weeks.

3.5 National Pay bargaining 2024

Pay negotiations for 2024-25 have begun and the NJC Trade Unions submitted their pay claim in February:

- An increase of at least £3,000 or 10 per cent (whichever is greater) on all spinal column points.
- Reviews of the gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps in local government.
- A two-hour reduction in the working week, with no detriment
- An additional day of annual leave for personal or well-being purposes
- A phased approach to reaching a minimum pay rate of £15 an hour in a maximum of two years, sooner if possible.

Pay claims have also been received regarding Chief Executive pay and Chief Officer pay. The regional pay briefings took place in March.

On 16 May 2024, the National Employers made a full and final offer of a £1,290 (pro rata for part-time employees) increase to be paid as a consolidated, permanent addition on all NJC pay points 2 to 43 inclusive (this equates to a 5.77% increase at SCP 2 and a 2.5% increase at SCP 43). A 2.5% increase to be paid on all pay points above the maximum of the pay spine. This 2.5% increase was also offered to Chief Executives and Chief Officers.

3.6 Apprentices

We currently have 7 Apprentices in post, two of which are due to reach the end of their contract in the next few months. There has been approval to recruit 5 new apprentices with the start dates of these anticipated to be August/September.

We had representation once again this year, at the Local Government Apprentice of the Year event – apprentices who attend this always enjoy the experience, even though it can push them out of their comfort zone. It is a great opportunity to work with other apprentices across the country, and this exciting event provides the chance for apprentices to learn, network and showcase their skills, expertise, and initiative. Apprentices work in virtual teams, which are allocated on the day, to experience the opportunities, risks, and challenges involved in delivering successful local government services, in a developmental environment.

In March, members of the HR Team attended an apprenticeship fair targeted at school leavers. This allowed us to highlight the variety of different careers and apprenticeships on offer at the Council.

3.7 Learning and Development

A new supplier has been chosen for the Learning Management System and the process of project planning to transition to the new system is underway.

We are continuing to provide resources and learning sessions as part of the personal development days, the IT drop-in sessions are always very popular.

3.8 Inclusion Group

The inclusion group met in April and discussed neurodiversity in the workplace. This provided a platform for staff to discuss various challenges in the workplace and support mechanisms. The next meeting is scheduled for July.

3.9 Absence

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
May	<u>0.26</u>	<u>0.26</u>	0.52
June	<u>0.15</u>	<u>0.28</u>	0.43
July	<u>0.28</u>	<u>0.32</u>	0.60
Aug	<u>0.45</u>	<u>0.21</u>	0.66
Sept	<u>0.23</u>	<u>0.38</u>	0.61
Oct	<u>0.30</u>	<u>0.60</u>	0.89
Nov	<u>0.27</u>	<u>0.58</u>	0.85
Dec	<u>0.31</u>	<u>0.29</u>	0.60
Jan	<u>0.59</u>	<u>0.50</u>	1.09
Feb	<u>0.55</u>	<u>0.31</u>	0.85
March	<u>0.33</u>	<u>0.23</u>	0.55
April	<u>0.28</u>	<u>0.10</u>	0.40
Total	<u>4.00</u>	<u>4.06</u>	8.05

Summary of absence reasons:

Feb 24 – Apr 24 Absence reason	Occasions of absence		
	Up to 1 week	1-3 weeks	3 weeks+
Ear, Nose and Throat (Inc Cold/Flu)	29	1	0
COVID 19 - suspected	5	1	0
Sickness / Vomiting	17	1	0
Other	29	4	3
Headaches (inc migraine)	3	0	0
Musculoskeletal	7	4	0
Mental health	6	2	3
Total	96	13	6

Cases of short-term absences for cold/ flu and Covid-19 have fallen by 50% this quarter with absences of less than 1 week falling by approximately one third. Absence cases of 1-3 weeks and over 3 weeks are broadly in line with last quarter with several long-term sick cases having been resolved. Current long-term cases related to mental health issues and chronic health conditions.

The HR team continue to involve Occupational Health where appropriate to ensure employees are supported with back to work plans which may include reduced duties or working hours for their first few weeks back, in line with our policy.

4.0 NEXT STEPS

4.1 Progress against the HR Service plan will be reported to quarterly JSCC Meetings.

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

5.0 CONTACT OFFICERS

Authors

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

5.2 Ian Couper
Service Director – Resources
01462 474243
ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk

Discussion Paper: Recruitment Update

Since the pandemic, employment market conditions have presented challenges for us in recruiting into several service areas, including some which were previously relatively easy to fill. As a result, the HR team have been working to improve how we can attract and recruit candidates.

Although the ONS labour market overview for May 2024 shows an ongoing downward trend for vacancies, they remain above pre-pandemic levels. This means we continue to operate in a competitive environment for good quality candidates.

Attracting candidates

Social media adverts

In an effort to increase visibility of our vacancies, working with the Communications team, we have developed the format for social media adverts which includes some key bullet points and an employee photo, linking to the NHC jobs page.



Website

The recruitment pages of our website are being updated to provide a more informative and welcoming approach. The new pages will include:

- Increased video content
- Images of our employees at work
- Content explaining why we are a good employer
- A section on what our people say
- Information on selected teams
- Improved content on how to apply

We have adjusted the wording for our adverts and consider options for advertising on a per post basis.

Career Development

In some areas where posts are hard to fill, national skills shortages impact on our ability to recruit. We consider creating career graded roles to enable us to grow our own.

Our website, adverts and social media posts highlight our commitment to learning and opportunities to develop at the Council.

Modernising documents and processes

We continue to update our processes and documents to make the recruitment process as easy and effective as possible for both candidates and recruiting managers. We have merged our job description and person specification document to one, more user-friendly job profile.

The wording of other documents has been adjusted to be more welcoming and friendly whilst still providing clarity for candidates.

Flexible approaches to filling vacancies – some examples:

- Created a new term-time only contract when requested at interview, to secure a high-quality candidate who had the experience and qualifications for a hard-to-fill role.
- Developed a trainee / entry-level grade for a role when a recruitment campaign showed us there were no applicants with the right level of skills and experience.
- Trialled the use of Public Practice agency to source highly-skilled and experienced professionals for hard-to-fill roles in planning.

What's next?

Improved recruitment system

Our current recruitment tool is outdated, and work has started to review options for an alternative, more modern solution.

Candidate information pack

Candidate feedback has shown that we could provide more information about working for the Council at an earlier stage of the recruitment process and so we will be creating an online candidate information pack for applicants.

Process improvement

Processes will continue to be reviewed and automated where possible.

Trial of transparent interviews

A trial of transparent interviews has started, and we will collate feedback from both candidates and recruiting managers. Feedback so far has been positive.

Local government recruitment campaign

We will be engaging with the East of England Local Government Association on the national roll out of the local government recruitment campaign.

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
2024	March	Long term absence management
	March	Face to face vs online learning- striking a balance
	June	Recruitment update

Proposed JSCC topics

Suggested discussion topics for future meetings
Employment law - what can we expect in the next 12 months and beyond?
Managing short term absence
Flexible working
Coaching and Mentoring
Social media for recruitment
Succession planning and development
Microaggressions and unconscious bias in the workplace
Neurodiversity in the workplace

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