

27 September 2024

Our Ref Joint Staff Consultative Committee
9 October 2024
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: Daniel Allen (Chair) Ruth Brown (Vice Chair) Val Bryant, Rhona Cameron and Claire Strong.

Substitutes Councillors: Sadie Billing, Joe Graziano, Dominic Griffiths, Keith Hoskins MBE, Tim Johnson 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 Tiranan 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, 9TH OCTOBER, 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 | 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 - 12 JUNE 2024 | To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 12 June 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. SCF MINUTES | To receive the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum meetings from June 2024, July 2024, August 2024 and September 2024. | (Pages 9 - 24) |
| 5. HR INFORMATION NOTE | INFORMATION NOTE OF THE HR SERVICES MANAGER To update the Joint Staff Consultative Committee on the progress made in the last quarter completing HR work and projects and supporting people issues. | (Pages 25 - 30) |
| 6. DISCUSSION PAPER - COACHING | To receive a discussion paper on Coaching. | (Pages 31 - 32) |
| 7. SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS | To consider topics for discussion at a future meeting of the Committee. | (Pages 33 - 34) |

Agenda Item 2

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE VIA ZOOM
ON WEDNESDAY, 12TH JUNE, 2024 AT 10.00 AM

MINUTES

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

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

UNISON: *Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews*

Staff Consultation Forum: *Louis Franklin*

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 44 seconds

There were no apologies for absence from Members.

2 MINUTES - 13 MARCH 2024

Audio recording – 2 minutes

Councillor Claire Strong noted that the minutes of the 13 March 2024 referred to her as 'Clare' and requested that this be amended to the correct spelling of her name 'Claire'.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Claire Strong seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 13 March 2024 be approved, as amended, as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

3 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 13 seconds

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

4 STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM MINUTES

Audio recording 3 minutes 32 seconds

The Service Director – Resources presented the item entitled 'SCF Minutes', alongside the Minutes from the meetings of March, April and May 2024 and highlighted the following:

- That the Staff Consultation Forum held monthly meetings where they discussed key issues. The Forum consisted of a Human Resources (HR) representative, the Service Director –Resources, the Managing Director and nominated members of staff. Any staff member can join the forum.
- There had been two restructures mentioned in the March agenda, in the Catering team and the Green Spaces team. The consultation period had now finished, and the restructures had been processed.
- The roof top solar panels had generated 10 megawatts of power per year for the years 2022 and 2023 and this was the expected level going forward.
- The SCF minutes included updates on green issues and promoted the IT drop-in sessions.

In response to a question from Councillor Claire Strong, the Service Director – Resources confirmed that during the Green Spaces restructure, one employee had reduced their working hours releasing a cost saving, however this saving had been appropriated to another employee, resulting in a neutral cost savings.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum for March, April and May 2024.

5 HR INFORMATION NOTE

Audio recording – 7 minutes 19 seconds

The Human Resources Services Manager presented the Information Note entitled 'HR Update' and highlighted the following:

- That the number of advertised vacancies had decreased over the last 3 years, however the number of applicants for these posts had increased as detailed at paragraph 3.2 of the report. The vacancies for the Revenues Officer and the Planning Compliance Officer were particularly popular.
- The Careline technician position had now been filled. However there remained two hard to fill vacancies, the Estates Surveyor and the Senior Environmental Health Officer.
- The staff turnover rate was now below 9%, further details regarding this data was discussed in the next agenda item.
- There had been 228 responses to the staff survey, and work was ongoing to analyse the data. The survey did show that 90% of employees would recommend North Herts as an employer.
- The Unions submitted a pay claim in February for pay award that was for at least £3,000 or a 10% pay rise. The National Employers made a full and final offer of £1,290 in May for all pay points and an offer of 2.5% for those above the pay points. The Unions were recommending that employees reject this offer.
- There were 7 apprentices currently in employment with vacancies advertised on the website.
- HR attended an apprenticeship fair in March and highlighted the careers and apprenticeships available at North Herts. Historically there had been a high number of applicants for apprenticeship vacancies.
- The Inclusion group met quarterly and in April discussed neurodiversity in the workplace and made recommendations on how to support neurodivergent employees.
- The days lost as absences per employee, and the absence reasons were outlined at 3.9 of the report. Short term absences had fallen with the change in seasons with long terms absences remaining the same. Support was being provided to Managers and staff who were absent for mental health reasons.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Rhona Cameron
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions, the Human Resources Manager stated that:

- There was a set budget for apprenticeships which was fully utilised.
- The apprenticeships had been successful in all service areas, with some apprentices being offered permanent positions.
- Work was ongoing with schools to promote the apprenticeship scheme and encourage work experience placements.
- The Council had joined the National Graduate Scheme and were currently interviewing for a graduate employee.
- The percentage of apprenticeships in permanent positions would be provided outside of this meeting.
- The new GrowZone system would be launched in July, with the system being more straight forward and easier to navigate.
- A discussion paper on Mental Health had been presented to the Committee in January 2024 and this would be forwarded to new Members.
- Regular articles were published to the Hub and the insight magazine to raise awareness of Mental Health support.
- HR provided support for Managers and employees with long term absences.
- The Estates Surveyor position had been covered temporarily by agency staff.
- The questions in the staff survey gave the opportunity for open text answers and these had generated large volumes of data. This data was taking longer than expected to analyse.
- It was anticipated that a summary of the staff survey would be presented at the next meeting of the Committee along with action plans.
- Work was ongoing to split the staff survey data into directorates, these would then be discussed with the relevant Service Directors. This information would then form part of the feedback and any action plans.

In response to questions, the Service Director – Resources advised that:

- The Estates Surveyor position was still being covered by agency staff however, a Senior Estates Surveyor had been employed for the last two months.
- Feedback from the staff survey would be provided at Staff Briefings and where required mini surveys would occur to provide further details.

Councillor Daniel Allen stated that there had been 228 responses to the staff survey, and this represented 70% of all staff.

The SCF Representative stated that the most recent Learning and Development morning had covered sustainability, and that highlights of the staff survey had been mentioned at the recent Staff Briefing.

6 DISCUSSION PAPER - RECRUITMENT UPDATE

Audio Recording – 28 Minutes 10 seconds

The HR Services Manager presented the Information Note entitled 'Recruitment Update' and advised that:

- The employment market was challenging in several services areas, including previously easy to recruit roles.
- The HR Team were working on improving how North Herts attracted and retained candidates.
- There was a national downward trend in vacancies, which generated a competitive market for good candidates.
- There had been changes to the social media adverts, including a new format, colours, and an increased use of images.
- The recruitment webpages had been updated to be more modern, informative and easier to navigate and, where possible they contained video contents and images of current employees and the district.
- The webpages highlighted that North Herts was a good employer and included a section with employee comments.
- There was an area on the website to focus on particular teams and it was anticipated that this would be used for hard to fill vacancies.
- There was improved content regarding how to apply for positions.
- For hard to fill vacancies and where there was a national skill shortage, candidates would be considered for career graded roles and they would be supported to develop with the role at the Council. These vacancies would be highlighted as Learning and Development opportunities on the webpage.
- Work was ongoing to modernise the recruitment documents and processes for both candidates and recruiting managers.
- Work was ongoing to create a candidate pack with more comprehensive details of the working terms and conditions and these would then be included in an online pack to candidates at the interview invite stage.
- A trial was being undertaken regarding transparent interviews, these provided candidates with their interview questions, 24 or 48 hours prior to the interview date. The results to date had been positive.
- A recruitment campaign aimed at encouraging people to work in Local Government had been trialled in north east England. There was a Local Government Association meeting in November, following which more details were expecting, including around potential funding.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Rhona Cameron
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Claire Strong

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

- There was a policy to develop talent within the Council, and this was particularly relevant in the areas with hard to fill vacancies.
- Employees were supported and offered opportunities to study and progress.
- There was a work from home policy on the website, and it was important to understand the differences between flexibility and hybrid working especially in different service areas.
- Managers were encouraged to discuss flexible working with candidates, and to highlight the other benefits of working at North Herts. The flexible working details and all other benefits were included in the candidate pack.
- It was noted that some candidates were highly skilled in answering interview styled questions, however this did not always enable them to perform the required role.
- Questions for the transparent interviews were given to candidates 24 to 48 hours before the interview. Managers would be required to test and probe the answers and to establish further details at the interview.
- Some interviews required candidates to take part in tests or to provide a presentation.

- There was a policy linked to professional qualifications and this included an expected period of post qualification employment to ensure that there was an achieved benefit.
- It was expected that the staff survey would generate further information that could be utilised to increase candidates interests in working for North Herts.

In response to questions, the Service Director – Resources stated that:

- As a result of the previous staff survey, work commenced on making North Herts a more attractive place to work.
- There was work ongoing regarding genuine flexible working and ensuring that this was promoted to candidates and staff. This was especially relevant for hard to fill posts and to ensure a healthy work life balance.
- North Herts were a fully flexible employer and this needed to be emphasized throughout the recruitment stages.

Councillor Daniel Allen stated that the idea of a transparent interview was really enabling for a neurodiverse person.

The Unison Representative stated that they had taken part in transparent interviews in the past and that they found interviewees were more prepared and performed better, however they expressed some concerns over the use of AI for answers.

The SCF Representative stated that the Inclusion Group had recently discussed the pros and cons of transparent interviews and recommended that the Committee reviewed the minutes of the meeting. They also stated that the interview techniques of managers within North Herts had improved throughout their employment.

RESOLVED: That the Committee commented on and noted the Discussion Paper on Recruitment Update.

7 FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS

Audio recording – 45 minutes 43 seconds

The Chair led a discussion on future topics for the Committee to consider. The following Members took part in the discussion:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Val Bryant

The following points were made as part of the discussion:

- Coaching and Mentoring would be a good topic for the next meeting.
- The Staff Survey and Coaching and Mentoring would be good topics for the next meeting.
- The Succession Planning and Development topic was important, and this had been highlighted by the recent vacancies in the Estates Department and was also critical for any Service Director roles.
- The Succession Planning and Development topic would be more relevant after the peer review.
- Key critical employees should have longer notice periods and this should aid in the succession planning.
- Employees often displayed a lack of motivation during their notice period.
- Confidentiality conflicts could require an employee to leave our employment sooner than expected.

Wednesday, 12th June, 2024

- That holiday leave can often shorten the notice period.

The Chair confirmed the topics of 'Coaching and Mentoring' and 'Staff Survey Results' for the next meeting of the Committee and this was agreed by all the Members present.

The meeting closed at 10.52 am

Chair

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

05/06/2024

Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**), Rebecca Webb (**RW**), Claire Bernard (**CB**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Dee Levett (**DL**) Harrison Mcleod (**HM**) Drew Betts (**DB**) Mark Robinson (**MR**) Louis Franklin (**LF**) Tiran Straughan (**TF**)

Circulation: Global

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

1. Apologies

Ian Couper (IC)

2. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

Q: Was a decision made around inclusion group?

A: Not yet but will come back with a decision.

3. NHC Update

There is an open consultation regarding MSU and Careline, details have been circulated. Nothing to raise from SCF member regarding the matter. The consultation closes on Friday, so comments requested before then.

National pay negotiations continue. In February the Unions made a claim for 10 percent or £3000 on each spinal point (whichever is greater). The National Employers have made a pay offer of £1290 on every spinal point and have rejected other points from union such as increase in annual leave and reduction in the working week by 2 hours. The Unions have responded with disappointment.

Personal development morning this Friday focussing on sustainability and there will be further details from James via email.

The personal development morning for July was planned for 5th of July and will now be on 12th of July (moved due to elections). This will include further details about the new learning management system.

4. Employee Queries

Q: Can I send the SCF update to other teams such as Careline to ensure they are involved in the SCF?

It was noted that not every service area has a volunteer SCF rep but that the group were open to other volunteers. Various solutions were discussed regarding communication, and it was agreed that CB would send the update to a Careline group email and that LF would update Viva Engage ahead of each SCF meeting to prompt employee queries.

5. IT Update and Queries

Windows 11 roll out completed for over 100 users and we are awaiting feedback. There is also Microsoft training on the Hub. [Microsoft 365 training \(sharepoint.com\)](https://sharepoint.com)

6. Building Services & Facilities Update

No update

7. Green Update

No update

8. Ideas/Suggestions

None

9. AOB

NO AOB

Chair for next meeting – Louis Franklin (LF)

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

03/07/2024

Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**), Ian Couper (**IC**), Jo Keshishian (**JK**) Claire Bernard (**CB**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Tiran Straughan (**TS**), Dee Levett (**DL**), Mark Robinson (**MR**), Drew Betts (**DB**), Jo Doggett (**JD**), Frank Harrison (**FH**) and Harrison Mcleod – notes (**HM**)

Circulation: Global

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

1. Apologies

Louis Franklin and Rebecca Webb send their apologies.

2. Environmental health restructure

JD: Consultation for the restructure has started on the 12th of June and should finish on the 12th of July, a lot of the comments are positive, and the team has been informed on how to contact their union.

Environmental Protection & Housing (EPH) Team

We struggle to recruit Environmental Health Officers (EHO), so we have been operating on a skeleton crew and contractors which are supposed to be a short-term temp measure. Historically there has been long-term inconsistent leadership, strain on staff, low morale, risk to delivery of core functions.

Commercial team

Recognised increase in workload and demand and that is the current situation of EH

The aim of the restructure is to grow our own staff with career development and career progression by using existing vacant EHO posts to employ Technical Officers. So we can recruit people from grade 6 and develop them up to grade 10 allowing us to recruit from a wider and more local This should bring long term consistent management of the EPH team, more resources to deliver core functions

Phase 2 April 2025



Put in place carer grade scheme for Technical officers and regulatory officers to allow development over time.

Replace the air quality improvement officer and housing grant empty homes office posts in EPH.

Time scale: consultation ends on 12th of July with a meeting to report outcomes to the team, separate close of consultation meeting for posts that are affected, then begin recruitment in vacant posts. If there are no challenges, the appointment of new EPH manager at least one month before the departure of the current agency manager. Continuation of contractors in post on current arrangements where necessary to bolster capacity whilst growing our own. We hope to fill all phase one positions by December 2024 and then submit a growth bid in September to be approved by Q3 by SLT and then by Cabinet in February 2025.

No questions from the team

3. Changes to careline

AW: I'm here to present a contract change to admins and technology techs to their statement of particulars for the statutory hours between Christmas and new year and we are changing that to remove the line "to be taken between Christmas and new year" as Herts Careline do carry out work between these time periods and we will allow them to take the time elsewhere in the year. We have looked to make this change as demand increases so we need to accommodate. Any questions?

No questions asked.

4. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

No matter arising.

5. NHC Update

IC: Anyone can help with elections please spread the word and thank you to those that have volunteered. We have started work on a new council plan that will be in place for the next few years will be coming out in September. In terms of recent decisions there is the de carbonisation of leisure centres which will contribute to addressing climate change and getting £7.7 million in grant money.

No questions asked.

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update

JK:

- No further updates on national pay negotiations at the moment
- We have a new Grow Zone being launched on 12 July – which is more intuitive and straight forward to use and includes single sign on.
- This coincides with the next personal development morning – 12 July – which will give everyone the chance to log on and spend some time getting familiar with the new system.
- Our updated recruitment webpages were launched about 3 weeks ago, we have modernised the pages, included staff photos and made it easier to navigate. If you haven't had a chance to take a look I would encourage you to do so, and we welcome any feedback or suggestions for further improvement. [Jobs and careers | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/jobs-and-careers)
- Holiday flex window opens in August and there will be more information available on the Hub for those who are interested in purchasing more annual leave.

No questions

6. Employee Queries

AB: One of my colleagues in waste asked as we have shifted over to EV vehicles so more chargers at DCO however there has been a few occasions where non EV vehicles are parked in the charging bays is there a way to stop this?

IC: We can send out a reminder for people to avoid these spaces.

CB: With more people in the office there is less availability in the meeting rooms and room 2 floor 5 has been taken out of the meeting room booking system. Can we have it back?

MR: it is a storage room now and a further conversation with IC will need to be had but if there is missing equipment in meeting rooms, please log a ticket

AR: People can use my office as a meeting room if I'm not in DCO. Also to look at whether the Chair's room could become a meeting room.

TS: On days like today the car park is busy even on the top floor what should employees do if the car park is full and get a ticket from having to park on lower floors?

IC: we have been issuing some passes for the lower levels but we will look into a wider expansion if there are going to be a lot of events in Letchworth. We will also look to see when these happen so we can issue warring's about coming in.

7. IT Update and Queries

Finished installation of CCTV camera outside the main entrance due to the issue a couple years ago and we are going to roll out a new helpdesk within the next month and I will be contacting key people in the organisation to road test it, it is more simplified and easier to use now, and I might coincide that with the next staff briefing to quickly show it off.



Increase number of requests for working abroad in IT but RW and I spoke about a new policy HR are looking at. There are technical restraints, on specific countries, but I believe a new policy is coming.

150 new users on windows 11 but a follow up on questions are being asked so we are re-sending the video that explains it.

Training days looking for more requests on what staff need help with and want me to go over on these training days.

AB: I have had one from a user we have very old screens in Buntingford is there any plans to upgrade?

MR: No plans or budget to install new screens currently, its something we can look into but next year we have a bigger budget so maybe we can look at it next year but no promises

AR: Is there any way we can switch the screens round, as not all DCO desks are used at one time?

MR: Off the top of my head, I don't believe so, but I will need to do a quick review. Might have to look at on average how many people use screens at Buntingford so please put a request in and we will see what we can do.

IC: With overseas working it looks like short holidays maybe and only in the EU due to tax and HR implications.

8. Digital Services Update

9. Building Services & Facilities Update

No specific update.

MR: Any updates on floor 3?

IC: Nothing currently to report.

10. Green Update

No Green Update this time so we will be hopefully doing the next proper briefing for SCF and other platforms for August.

11. Ideas/Suggestions

CC: Can we have guests on top of the agenda next time

HM: Of course

DL: Please can we update the link on the agenda for the previous notes



12. AOB

Chair for next meeting – Louis Franklin

Have something to say?

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Representatives (and phone extension):

Christina Corr #4325 - Senior Technical Officer Revenues and Benefits

Claire Bernard #4323 - MSU Admin Support Officer

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

Louis Franklin #4262 – Admin Support Officer

Tiranan Straughan #4842 – Housing Policy Officer

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Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

07/08/2024

Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**), Ian Couper (**IC**), Louis Franklin (**LF**), Dee Levett (**DL**), Mark Robinson (**MR**), Jo Keshishian (**JK**), Harrison Mcleod (**HM**) notes

Circulation: Global

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

1. Apologies

Rebecca Webb, Christina Coor and Tiranan Straughan, Andrew Mills

2. Restructure Notices

IC – New structure for HR. We are going to use the money from two vacant posts to adjust the structure. This includes amending the Learning and Employee Engagement Business Partner post to a Learning & Development manager and creating an Assistant Learning and Development business partner. Job evaluation will determine their grades, there are no redundancies, and the proposal is cost neutral, Consultation has started and will close on 4th of September. No one wanted to attend SCF.

No questions from the group.

3. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

No Matters arising from previous notes.

4. NHC Update

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update (JK)

There is no further update on the pay award this month.

We are accepting Holiday Flex applications this month from anyone who hasn't already made an application for this holiday year. Staff can opt to buy up to 1 week's extra annual leave and the cost of this will be spread across 6 months (October-March). The scheme is proving to be very popular with over 40 applications made at the start of the holiday year.



The next Personal Development morning is on Friday 6th September and more information will be sent out to managers closer to the time. For those of you who haven't seen Insight yet this month, in Anthony's update he has described how he uses his Personal Development time to catch-up on some work-related podcasts whilst walking in the countryside.

Corporate Update (IC)

We are aware of the unrest around the country and will make sure staff are safe and comfortable there is not much else to highlight.

LF – would it be worth to send an email around about how to stay safe and make them aware of dangers.

IC- Yes of course, we have something we will send around.

DL- What about front of house staff?

LF- We are looking at remote control doors for front of house.

AR- I am aware that Herts county council have drafted a response that has been shared with HR and I know that other chief executives are doing internal messaging. We want staff to feel safe and we will let them know what we are doing to support vulnerable community groups to make sure they are safe

LF – The new grow zone is it meant to make us do the E-learning again? I had a reminder to complete some training that I did at the beginning of the year.

JK – Yes, the topics will be similar, but the content might be different so its important to complete them.

5. Employee Queries

No Employee quires

6. IT Update and Queries

MR - New helpdesk has gone out and no massive complaints, so it seems like it's working. There is some money for screens in Buntingford now, so we are getting those installed. 270 devices have converted onto the new windows 11 rollout. However, a lot of staff aren't coming back to us when they are contacted about the rollout and so we are having to do a lot of chasing.

IC- We are taking down integra and finalising the move to the new finance system. The final transition will take about a week.

7. Building Services & Facilities Update

IC- A message has been sent out reminding people to not allow people to tailgate in via the staff entrance / exit, as we have had an incident with a member of public wandering in the building, trying to find Customer Services.

LF – Do we have a sign on the back door pointing people to the front (reception entrance)?

IC – I will look into this.

8. Green Update

LF – there is a lot in the update this month, including with the solar scheme for business which is great. How wide are we publicising this?

AR – I am aware that we did publicise it, but there were certain criteria (eg size of roof, ownership of the building) and it's a trial, so it wasn't open to everyone. What I'm not aware of is the level of interest, but this will make us money and contribute towards our net zero policy.

LF –There is also some details about on our home solar panel scheme. See [link](#).

9. Ideas/Suggestions

No Ideas or suggestions

10. AOB

Agreed that due to low attendance the HR restructure information would be circulated by e-mail.

Chair for next meeting – Louis Franklin

Have something to say?

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Representatives (and phone extension):

Christina Corr #4325 - Senior Technical Officer Revenues and Benefits



**North
Herts**

Council

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 Minutes – 4th September 2024

Present: Ian Couper (**IC**)
Rebecca Webb (**RW**)
Tiranan Straughan (**TS**)
Louis Franklin (**LF**)
Dee Levett (**DL**)
Chris Jeffery (**CJ**)
Fallon Rumball Nunan (**FRN**) notes

Circulation: Global

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

1. Apologies

Anthony Roche, Christina Corr, Drew Betts, Claire Bernard and Mark Robinson

2. Restructure Notices

Chris Jeffery (CJ) joined SFC to present on the restructure in the Customer Services team. Amended structure charts were provided.

The main reason for the restructure is to include the Digital Services Team who were originally contracted for 12 months to sit within the Customer Services Team permanently; Customer and Digital Services.

In the 12 months the digital program has grown considerably and continues to increase. Currently the team are working on 6 ongoing projects. The inclusion of the Digital Services Team hopes to build own applications in house that will save money for the council. This in turn will save officers time, make processes more efficient and provide a better service to customers' long term.

Secondly, within the new waste contract it was agreed that that the customer services element would be coming back in house at NHC, aligning with East Herts Council. As a result, there will be a TUPE transfer of officers currently working within Urbaser. These new officers will be trained in our customer service processes and the current customer services team in turn will be taking waste calls.

The consultation closes on on Wednesday 11th September.

3. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

4. NHC Update

HR and Employee Wellbeing Update (RW)

- **Pay Award update:** The National Employers and Unions are still negotiating. The full and final offer of £1290 on each spinal point (2.5% on higher grades) has not been



agreed by two of the unions (Unite and Unison) involved and they are balloting for strike action.

- **Personal Development Mornings**: The September personal development morning has been moved to Friday 27th September to coincide with National Inclusion Week. Look out for information on some events we plan to run alongside the [Inclusion Group](#)
- next meeting is Thursday 26th September.

Corporate Update (IC)

- **Council Plan**: as a result of the recent election setting out the new vision and priorities for the next 4 years term alongside the financial strategy and government funding.
- **Corporate Peer Challenge**: This takes place in November and all staff have been invited to share views and talk to peers.

5. Employee Queries

Q: Are there plans to provide any more standing desks?

A: If there is demand we can look into adding more. IC will investigate the current usage figures and the availability on booking the current desk with IT team.

6. IT Update and Queries

None

7. Building Services & Facilities Update

The leak in the CSC is currently being investigated and will be fixed when the cause is identified.

8. Green Update

September Climate Change Briefing can be read in full [here](#).

9. Ideas/Suggestions

Another push for recruiting more SCF Representatives. Plan in place for articles, 'meet the team' and current representatives to spread the word. If you are interested in joining, more information can be found [here](#) or email SCF@north-herts.gov.uk.

10. AOB

- **Chair for next meeting** – Tiranan Straughan

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

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JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

9 October 2024

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------------|
| *PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT | AGENDA ITEM No. |
|---------------------------|-----------------|

TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE: HR UPDATE
 INFORMATION NOTE OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES SERVICES MANAGER

1. SUMMARY

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

2. STEPS TO DATE

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

3. INFORMATION TO NOTE

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

3.2 Recruitment & Retention

The table below shows our new key performance indicator– HR4, the number of vacancies filled first time in Quarter 1 April – June 2024, with a comparison with the same period last year.

| | Vacancies | Filled at first attempt | Filled (total) | Unfilled | % filled first attempt | Target |
|---------------------|-----------|-------------------------|----------------|----------|------------------------|--------|
| Q1: April-June 2024 | 10 | 7 | 7 | 3 | 70.0% | 75% |
| Q1: April-June 2023 | 21 | 19 | 19 | 2 | 90.5% | 75% |

During the first quarter this year, we had a much lower number of vacancies compared to the same period last year and therefore those vacancies not filled represent a higher proportion of the total.

Three vacancies were not filled:

- Senior Environmental Health Officer, there are continued difficulties in the sector in finding experienced and qualified professionals. The job has been changed to a career-graded position allowing us to recruit an individual with less experience who will be supported and given the opportunity to develop.
- IT Helpdesk Support Officer (Fixed term contract) – the successful candidate withdrew after the job was offered due being offered an alternative, permanent job. This job will be readvertised.

- Information Officer – we were unable to recruit to this specialist vacancy at the fully qualified level. The job will be readvertised as a career graded position.

3.3 National Recruitment Campaign

The National Recruitment Campaign is due to launch in November and the Council plans to support this campaign with local adverts and awareness raising. The tested assets are being provided to Councils as toolkits and we plan to use this to enhance our own recruitment branding.

3.4 Leavers and Turnover

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

| Rolling 12 months | Turnover | |
|-------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| | Leavers | Monthly |
| Oct-23 | 3 | 0.9% |
| Nov-23 | 5 | 1.4% |
| Dec-23 | 2 | 0.6% |
| Jan-24 | 0 | 0.0% |
| Feb-24 | 1 | 0.3% |
| Mar-24 | 1 | 0.3% |
| Apr-24 | 3 | 0.9% |
| May-24 | 1 | 0.3% |
| Jun-24 | 1 | 0.3% |
| Jul-24 | 2 | 0.6% |
| Aug-24 | 4 | 1.2% |
| Sep-24 | 6 | 1.7% |
| Total | 29 | 8.40% |

The table above shows the rolling labour turnover rate which was slower at the start of the year with an increase of resignations in the last few months. Annual turnover has remained below 9% since April.

3.5 National Pay bargaining 2024

Pay negotiations for 2024-25 are ongoing. The NJC Trade Unions have submitted their pay claim in February and the National Employers have made their pay offer:

The claim:

An increase of at least £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 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.

The offer:

‘full and final’ offer of £1290 on each spinal point (2.5% on higher grades)

Two of the three Unions involved are balloting for strike action and there will be further updates in the Autumn.

3.6 **Apprentices**

We currently have 8 Apprentices in post, having recently recruited to a handful of new posts.

Our apprentice scheme has been running since 2013 and in that time, we have recruited 81 apprentices. 35 of these individuals have stayed with the Council after completing their apprenticeship and 19 of those 35 still work for us.

3.7 **National Graduate Scheme**

We are pleased to be taking part in the LGA National Graduate Scheme, Impact. As part of this we have recruited two graduates who have started at the Council this month. Each graduate will have four rotations lasting 6 months each, covering a variety of service areas.

3.8 **Learning and Development**

Our new Learning Management system was launched in July and we have received positive feedback. It’s an intuitive system which includes a wealth of content and helpful features, such as a traffic light system for monitoring mandatory learning and various bite size learning.

Our Digital team has launched a Digital and Data Academy alongside a specialist digital training provider, with the aim of equipping staff with the skills to develop their careers, create efficiencies through new technology and increase confidence in analysing data. This is launching this Autumn, with 19 employees signed up for various courses including advance software engineering and data fellowships.

We continue to run personal development mornings every month. Our staff survey indicates that not everyone can take part on the set date each month and so we remind employees that the learning can take place at a time that works for individual employees (and their service areas).

3.9 **Inclusion Group**

The September Inclusion group took place during National Inclusion Week. Discussions covered inclusion-based staff survey results and neurodiversity in the workplace.

Various resources were made available to employees to mark National Inclusion week and further raise awareness, including an updated e-learning module, a webinar on how to be an inclusive colleague, and a video and posters raising awareness about microaggressions.

3.10 **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 |
| Sep-23 | 0.23 | 0.38 | 0.61 |
| Oct-23 | 0.30 | 0.60 | 0.90 |
| Nov-23 | 0.27 | 0.58 | 0.85 |
| Dec-23 | 0.31 | 0.29 | 0.60 |
| Jan-24 | 0.59 | 0.50 | 1.09 |
| Feb-24 | 0.55 | 0.31 | 0.86 |
| Mar-24 | 0.33 | 0.23 | 0.56 |
| Apr-24 | 0.28 | 0.29 | 0.57 |
| May-24 | 0.36 | 0.33 | 0.69 |
| Jun-24 | 0.49 | 0.43 | 0.92 |
| Jul-24 | 0.40 | 0.36 | 0.76 |
| Aug-24 | 0.37 | 0.31 | 0.68 |
| Total | 4.48 | 4.61 | 9.09 |

Summary of absence reasons:

| June-August 24 Absence reason | Occasions of absence | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------|-----------|
| | Up to 1 week | 1-3 weeks | 3 weeks+ |
| Ear, Nose and Throat (Inc Cold/Flu) | 16 | 1 | 0 |
| COVID 19 - suspected | 13 | 2 | 0 |
| Sickness / Vomiting | 17 | 3 | 0 |
| Other | 22 | 5 | 5 |
| Headaches (inc migraine) | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Musculoskeletal | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Mental health | 2 | 1 | 6 |
| Total | 78 | 14 | 12 |

Overall, we have seen a typical fall in the number of short-term absences for the summer period, but a marked increase of Covid-19 cases (just 6 in total in the previous quarter). Absence cases of 1-3 weeks are broadly in line with last quarter with the number of long-term absences doubling. The HR team are currently supporting these individuals, and their managers, where the absence reasons include a range of chronic health conditions and mental health conditions. We 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.

3.11 Staff Survey

We received positive feedback in our staff survey, including 90% of staff saying they would recommend the Council as an employer. There are inevitably areas that we can improve on, and leadership team HR and the communications team have reviewed the

responses, continued dialogue with staff through team meetings and staff briefings about what can be done to improve, and an action plan has been created. This plan will be discussed with staff before being finalised.

4.0 NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 Progress against the HR Service plan will be reported to quarterly JSCC Meetings.
- 4.2 This Committee receives this update, as well as getting to choose one or more discussion topics for each meeting. There is also the opportunity for the Committee to comment on what information is included in this report to help it act as the “strategic HR forum” (from Terms of Reference for the Committee).

5.0 CONTACT OFFICERS

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JSCC Discussion Paper: Coaching

What is workplace Coaching and how is it different to Mentoring?

Coaching and mentoring are development techniques based on the use of one-to-one discussions to enhance an individual's skills, knowledge or work performance.

Mentoring, training, consulting and advice are all things that put **in** information and ideas. A mentor tends to offer more technical and experiential advice and has skills and experience you are looking to develop yourself. This can be an informal arrangement through 1-1 meetings with a line manager, or a more formal arrangement such as our Reverse Learning scheme.

Coaching in contrast, pulls **out** the knowledge, skill, thinking, goals and commitment of the individual being coached. Coaching provides a dedicated space to work one to one with someone who can help you to make progress on your work goals. These may be about progression in your role, building your confidence, managing or improving relationships or any other aspect. Whatever your goal, your coach will work with you in a non-judgemental way to explore options, look at your current perspective on things and facilitate your thinking about what actions you want to take. A coach is not there to tell you what to do but can help you think things through in ways that you couldn't on your own.

Coaching at North Herts Council

The Council has a well-established internal coaching network who offer a high standard of coaching support and coaching has been used at North Herts for several years now. Our in-house Coaching Network are all ILM qualified and are required to take part in supervision and continuing professional development to ensure they have a high level of organisational understanding.

Coaching is one of the key leadership and management tools used by organisations to support and improve individual and organisational performance and here at North Herts Council it has been used for several years as an alternative to more traditional methods of training, to support staff through organisational change and as a developmental tool. Coaching can cover a wide variety of development areas and can support people to think through challenges and opportunities.

Some examples of situations where coaching is a suitable development tool include:

- Helping competent technical experts develop better interpersonal or managerial skills
- Developing an individual's potential and providing career support
- Developing skills and capability
- Developing a more strategic perspective after a promotion to a more senior role
- Handling conflict situations so that they are resolved effectively.

In a constantly changing environment there are considerable demands on Learning and Development. As such coaching and mentoring are potentially cost-effective development tools. Using internal coaching or developing the coaching skills of managers can provide a cost-effective method to enhance skills, knowledge and work performance.

How the Council continues to develop coaching as an alternative to more traditional methods of Learning and Development.

Whilst the culture and acceptance of coaching is established within the Council there is always more to do in terms of people taking the opportunity to be coached. The in-house Coaching Network are working hard to continue to raise the profile of coaching and to promote its benefits.

There are barriers that can inhibit the success of coaching, including individual resistance, time pressure and perception of it being a remedial tool, these barriers are addressed regularly at the group.

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| 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 |
| | October | Coaching |

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| 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 |
| Social media for recruitment |
| Succession planning and development |
| Microaggressions and unconscious bias in the workplace |
| Neurodiversity in the workplace |

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