

20 December 2024

Our Ref Joint Staff Consultative Committee  
8 January 2025  
Contact. Committee Services  
Direct Dial. (01462) 474655  
Email. [committee.services@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto: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, 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 Reina Gendle, Katie Thomas and Tiranana 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, 8TH JANUARY, 2025 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**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b> 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.	
<b>2. MINUTES - 9 OCTOBER 2024</b> To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 9 October 2024.	(Pages 3 - 8)
<b>3. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS</b> 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.	
<b>4. SCF MINUTES</b> To receive the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum meetings from October 2024, November 2024 and December 2024.	(Pages 9 - 20)
<b>5. HR INFORMATION NOTE</b> 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 21 - 26)
<b>6. DISCUSSION PAPER - MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT</b> To receive a discussion paper on Mental Health Support.	(Pages 27 - 28)
<b>7. SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS</b> To consider topics for discussion at a future meeting of the Committee.	(Pages 29 - 30)

# Public Document Pack Agenda Item 2

## NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM  
ON WEDNESDAY, 9TH OCTOBER, 2024 AT 10.00 AM

#### MINUTES

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

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

**UNISON:** *Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews*

**Staff Consultation** *Louis Franklin*

**Forum :**

**Also Present:** *There were no Members of the public present.*

*Reina Gendle attended as an observer.*

#### 8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

*Audio recording – 1 minute 35 seconds*

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Val Bryant.

#### 9 MINUTES - 12 JUNE 2024

*Audio Recording – 1 minute 52 seconds*

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Claire Strong seconded and it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 12 June 2024 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

#### 10 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 26 seconds*

*N.B. Councillor Ruth Brown joined the Zoom meeting at 10:03.*

- (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.

## 11 SCF MINUTES

*Audio recording 3 minutes 20 seconds*

The Service Director – Resources presented the item entitled ‘SCF Minutes’, alongside the Minutes from the meetings of June, July, August and September 2024 and highlighted the following:

- The Staff Consultation Forum (SCF) had been successful in recruiting new members but there were still vacancies.
- The SCF Representatives could be contacted to raise employee queries and provide feedback at future meetings.
- There had been a request for Election staff in June and this was successful.
- The minutes detailed any current and ongoing department restructures.

In response to questions from Councillor Claire Strong, the Service Director – Resources stated that an additional two standing desks were going to be installed and the usage of these could be monitored through the desk booking system.

It was confirmed that the standing desks at the Council Offices were height adjustable.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee noted the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum for June, July, August and September 2024.

## 12 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:

- There was a new Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for recruitment and this was shown in the table at paragraph 3.2 of the report.
- There were fewer vacancies in the period April to June compared to 2023.
- There had been 3 unfilled vacancies. These were, for the Senior Environmental Health Officer, IT Helpdesk Support Officer and the Information Officer.
- Work was ongoing with the recruitment team to fill these vacancies and two of the roles had now been readvertised as career graded positions.
- There would be a launch of the National Recruitment Campaign in November which would highlight a variety of Local Authority careers. The campaign will be supported by social media adverts and would run alongside the current recruitment branding.
- Staff turnover had been below 9% since April 2024.
- Union balloting was ongoing for industrial action regarding the national pay bargaining and an update was expected in late October.
- Since 2013 there had been 81 apprentices hired, of which 35 were employed after completing their apprenticeships and 19 were still working for North Herts.
- Two graduates had commenced employment with the Council under the National Graduate scheme, and they would be rotate between 4 departments, spending 6 months in each area.
- Positive feedback had been received for the new Learning and Development systems which was launched in July and included mandatory training modules as well as bite sized learning.
- A Digital and Data Academy had been launched alongside a specialist training provider and 20 members of staff had signed up for various courses.

- The September Inclusion group discussed the inclusion-based staff survey and neurodiversity in the workplace. They also marked National Inclusion week with a webinar, personal development morning and updated E-learning tools.
- Staff absences had decreased over the summer months and HR continued to support managers and staff absent with mental health or chronic health conditions.

The Service Director – Resources provided an update on the staff survey and highlighted the following:

- Staff members had received two feedback sessions on the survey results and work was ongoing with various groups to look at the consistency of the results and any trends from comments.
- The plan was to share action plans with staff in December or January highlighting general and specific actions.
- 2% of staff had responded to the survey stating that they did not feel safe in the workplace.
- 15% of staff felt that the organisation did not care about their wellbeing.
- Work was ongoing to address the work safety concerns, however as the survey was anonymous this was not straight forward. Staff had been reminded that help was available from their managers, senior managers and through emailing HR help.
- The survey highlighted that the Leadership team were thought of as inaccessible and work had commenced on addressing this.
- There would be continued use of the intranet to increase staff awareness and inclusion.
- There were positive responses regarding the Learning and Development offered to staff, however it was highlighted that staff felt that they did not have time to access it.
- 90% of staff said they would recommend working at North Herts Council.
- Flexible working was highlighted as the best working benefit although it was acknowledged that this was not possible for all areas of Council business.
- There would be feedback at staff briefings and to the Senior Manager Group with action plans expected to be in place from around January 2025.

The following Members asked questions:

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

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

- The turnover rate was reasonable and the rate had remained steady, other than just after Covid.
- Details of the turnover for other Local Authorities would be circulated outside of this meeting.
- The Mental Health First Aiders were part of the ongoing preventative work to assist staff before a crisis.
- Information was available on the Hub regarding occupational health and signposting to external agencies.
- The E learning modules had been updated and included spotting the early signs of mental health issues and to raise staff awareness.
- Timescales were not attached to the survey questions, if was therefore unclear if the results related to specific incidents or were from historical events.
- The survey was anonymous, and staff have been encouraged to discuss any safety concerns with their managers or the HR team.
- Public facing staff were provided with support as well as training and development tools.

- Mental health support was also available through the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).
- There should be a hand over during a notice period to ensure the continued smooth running of the department.

In response to questions, the Learning and Development Manager stated that:

- There were no figures relating to the usage of the Mental Health First Aiders, however they were in use and provided support and signposting, HR were only involved when their input was necessary.
- There were 10 Mental Health First Aiders, who had regular team meetings.
- New staff were made aware of the existence of Mental Health First Aiders.

In response to questions, the Services Director - Resources stated that:

- The survey was anonymous, details surrounding the 2% of staff who did not feel safe in the workplace had been reviewed but were also still being reviewed to identify future actions.
- The HR team supported staff when specific incidents occurred, the EAP also offered in the moment support.

The SCF Representative stated that any cases on the Portal system would turn red and be reassigned to a manager when overdue and that the Council were supporting '#servicewithrespect' which had been featured in a recent email circulated to all staff and Councillors.

### 13 DISCUSSION PAPER - COACHING

*Audio recording – 33 minutes 18 seconds*

The Learning and Development Manager presented the Discussion Paper entitled 'Coaching' and highlighted the following:

- That coaching and mentoring skills were development techniques based on the use of one-to-one discussion and used to enhance skills.
- Mentoring involved putting information and ideas into a person to increase their knowledge.
- Coaching pulled out the knowledge, skills and thoughts of an individual and provided a space to assist their progress, building confidence and improving relationships.
- Coaching was nonjudgmental and gave the individual the space to think and explore their options.
- Coaching had been established for over 10 years at North Herts Council. The in-house coaching network were qualified through the Institute of Leadership (ILM) and were required to take part in supervision and continuing professional development.
- Coaching was a key leadership and management tool used to support the performance of an organisation or individual and was an alternative to traditional training methods.
- Coaching was a development tool to support people thinking through challenges and opportunities.
- Some examples of suitable coaching situations were highlighted in the report.
- Coaching and mentoring provided a cost-effective method to enhance skills.

In response to questions from Councillor Claire Strong, the Learning and Development Manager stated that coaching was available to anyone who required it and that the Senior Leadership Team were great supporters of coaching.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee commented on and noted the Discussion Paper on Coaching.

## 14 SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

*Audio recording – 39 minutes 22 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 Rhona Cameron
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Ruth Brown

The following points were made as part of the discussion:

- The use of the Council building compared to the staff attending would be a good topic.
- A discussion on Trade Union disputes and equal pay could be considered.
- The action plan from the staff survey could be included.
- After the discussions today, staff mental health should be considered.
- Neurodiversity would make a good discussion paper.
- Could flexible working be discussed at a future meeting.

In response to points raised in discussion, the Service Director – Resources advised that:

- The forum was specifically for HR related matters and the occupancy of the building would be better suited at a different forum.
- It was unlikely that the action plan from the staff survey would be ready for the January meeting but could be available for the March meeting.

In response to points raised in discussion, the Human Resources Manager stated that:

- An equal pay review was carried out every 3 years and was due in 2025.
- There were currently more females than males employed by the Council.
- The details of the Gender Pay Gap for 2024 would be presented to the Committee when available.

The SCF representative informed the Committee that there was currently an inclusion audit taking place.

The Chair confirmed the topics of 'Mental Health' and 'Neurodiversity in the Workplace' for the next meeting of the Committee and this was agreed with Members present.

The meeting closed at 10.48 am

Chair

This page is intentionally left blank





## Staff Consultation Forum Meeting Minutes – 2 October 2024

**Present:** Anthony Roche  
Ian Couper  
Rebecca Webb  
Louis Franklin  
Christina Corr  
Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews  
Tiranan Straughan  
Katie Thomas  
Claire Bernard  
Mark Robinson  
Michelle Bell - notes

**Circulation:** Global

**Chair for Meeting:** Tiranan Straughan

---

### 1. Apologies

Andrew Betts, Dee Levett

Welcome to Katie, our new SCF rep.

### 2. Restructure Notices

None

### 3. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

### 4. NHC Update

#### HR and Employee Wellbeing Update (RW)

**Flu vaccinations** - As in previous years, free flu vaccinations are available to all Council employees who are not covered by the NHS roll out to help protect against the flu. This year, we will be offering flu vaccination vouchers instead of processing expense claims. A global email has been sent asking staff to confirm (using voting buttons) by 14 October if they require a voucher.

**National Inclusion Week** – Resources are still available including the recording of the [‘Being an Inclusive Colleague’](#) webinar, micro aggression posters and Growzone eLearning module. Positive feedback received that the posters are creating a talking point in the office. LF confirmed that discussions continued at the last Inclusion Group on 26 September and notes will be available shortly on the hub.

**World Mental Health Day – 10 October 2024** – A [World Mental Health Day training session](#) will take place next week and the Insight article signposts to external organisations and internal resources we have available for support:

[Mental Health First Aiders](#)  
[Employee Assistance Programme \(EAP\)](#)  
[GP Helpline](#)

### **General NHC Update (IC)**

**The new Council Plan for 2024-28** has been adopted and supersedes the previous Plan launched in 2022.

Our Vision: Working with you for a fairer, greener North Herts

Our Priorities: Thriving communities  
Accessible services  
Responsible growth  
Sustainability

RPR objectives should link to the Council Plan.

**Hitchin flooding** – IC thanked all staff who volunteered their support and worked alongside the emergency services. A flood warning is still in place although there is currently no flooding to properties.

Staff volunteers form an invaluable part of the Council's response to civil emergencies. To register your interest and to find out more about the different roles available, click [here](#).

### **5. Employee Queries**

Q: What is permitted as part of the personal development sessions i.e. going for walk and listening to a podcast?

A: It's suggested that individuals have a conversation with their line manager about what PDM looks like for them. More comms will be arranged to continue to raise awareness and ensure clarity.

Q: Front facing staff can't participate.

A: PDMs are open to everyone. We appreciate that not everyone can take part in the PDM on a Friday morning, and so everyone is encouraged to take part at a time that suits them and their teams. Helen is making contact with the teams who can't participate on Friday mornings to ensure we are supporting CPD.

### **6. IT Update (MR)**

- Additional camera installed at rear entrance fire escape behind Careline and at HTH bar area.
- Windows 11 roll out complete – only authority in District to have completed.
- Citrix to be discontinued within the next month. Another solution will be implemented and Timesheets will require password.
- IT plan of work now available on Hub. Microsoft Planner is available for all staff to use.



- Asset Review – users are not responding which is holding up projects. Managers asked to prompt staff to reply when they are asked for their asset numbers.
- October is Cyber Awareness month – comms will follow.
- ICT drop in around personal cyber awareness and would welcome suggestions on how to get staff involved – quiz suggested.
- New helpdesk – feedback being looked at. Old version is now switched off.
- Senior Technical Officer has been appointed, hopefully starting before Xmas.
- Phishing reports go to LT to understand our vulnerabilities and raise awareness.

#### **7. Building and Facilities Update**

None

#### **8. Green Update**

TS gave brief overview of hot topics in this month's Environment Briefing which be read in full [here](#).

#### **9. Ideas / Suggestions**

None

#### **10. AOB**

Following the success of the Yorkshire 3 Peaks Challenge, SMG have been discussing a potential new challenge – London Bridges Walk. More details to follow.

**Chair for next meeting – Tiranán 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](mailto:propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk).

Alternatively, you can send any issues to the SCF inbox - [SCF@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:SCF@north-herts.gov.uk).

#### **Representatives (and phone extension):**

**Christina Corr #4325** - Senior Technical Officer

**Claire Bernard #4323** - MSU Admin Support Officer

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

**Louis Franklin #4262** – Digital Services Officer

**Tiranán Straughan #4842** – Housing Policy Officer

**Katie Thomas #5021** – Digital and Customer Service Apprentice

This page is intentionally left blank

**Staff Consultation Forum Meeting Minutes – 6 November 2024**

**Present:** Anthony Roche  
Ian Couper  
Rebecca Webb  
Louis Franklin  
Tiranan Straughan  
Katie Thomas  
Claire Bernard  
Mark Robinson  
Reina Gendle  
Dee Levett  
Geri Goodwin (item 2 only)  
Michelle Bell - notes

**Circulation:** Global

**Chair for Meeting:** Tiranan Straughan

---

**1. Apologies**

Christina Corr, Andrew Betts

Welcome to Reina, our new SCF rep.

**2. Restructure Notices**

**Revenues** - Geri Goodwin presented the proposed restructure for the Revenues and Systems team following the retirement of the Systems Technical Manager. The team have already been working under a temporary structure which will now be formally consulted upon.

The Systems Technical Manager role will be deleted with the key tasks being redistributed between the Senior Revenues Officers. These Officers will have a change of job title and their roles will go to a job evaluation panel (18 November) due to the significant changes. The Revenues Inspector role will also be re-evaluated due to significant changes. A new part time Revenues Project Manager role (fixed term contract up to two years) will be created.

Formal consultation opened on 23 October and will close on 21 November. Those directly impacted have been provided with the proposed amended job profiles.

**TUPE** – (update provided by Rebecca Webb in the absence of Chris Jeffery). Formal consultation has opened to transfer three members of Urbaser staff to NHC on 1 December. CSC staff have already been consulted as part of Digital Services restructure that has previously been to SCF. Crossover training will be arranged so that all staff can answer all queries. The Urbaser staff have visited DCO and have met with CJ.

**3. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting**

#### 4. NHC Update

##### **HR and Employee Wellbeing Update (RW)**

**Pay award** – has been agreed and processed for November pay to include back pay to 1 April 2024. Negotiations will now commence for 2025 and SCF will be kept up to date.

**Neurodiversity in the Workplace Network** – this will be a space for staff to share experiences or information and has been set up by the Inclusion Group. If you are interested, please respond to the poll here [Viva Engage - Conversation](#).

Q - is this just for staff who identify as having a neurodiversity? A – we would like to understand what format would work best by looking at the results of the poll. AR would encourage the new network to be as broad as possible.

**Wellbeing** – there will be articles in this month's Insight around financial wellbeing and how our benefit platforms can help you save money this Xmas and a reminder about the fitness plans available via Be-Well – linked below:

[Looking to get fit?](#)

[Discounts on Xmas food, presents & outfits!](#)

**Prevention of Sexual Harassment** – following a recent change in legislation, the [Bullying & Harassment](#) policy has been updated and new mandatory e-learning has been launched [Preventing sexual harassment training](#). It is vital that all employees know what they should do if they feel they are experiencing SH.

##### **General NHC Update (IC)**

**NI increase** – there is an indication from Government that they will fund the increase for public sector organisations so there will be no direct impact on next year's pay negotiations. We will need to ensure that the lower end of our pay scales remain above NML wage.

**By election (Royston)** – Cllr Sarah Lucas of the Labour and Co-operative Party was duly elected. There is still no overall control of the Council.

**Local Plan** – a new video has been launched on the website featuring Anthony Roche and Councillor Daniel Allen, click [here](#) to watch.

**Technology One** – the final stage of the new finance system has been implemented. A minor teething problem regarding payments has been rectified.

**Peer review** – a big thank you to all those involved with interviews and focus groups.

#### 5. Employee Queries

Q: Vending and coffee machines are often running low, especially at weekends.

A: IC will discuss with Property Services.

Q: Why is the hot water turned off over the Xmas shut down as there are still staff working 24/7?

A: IC will discuss with Property Services.

Q: Disinfectant sprays – label says professional use only and not suitable for certain surfaces - should staff be using them?

A: IC will discuss with Property Services.

Q: Can a list of examples be provided to clarify what is permitted during a personal development morning?

A: It would be difficult to provide a list of examples but the L&D team are working on some communications. SMG will be encouraged to have open conversations with their teams around personal aspirations and learning and development needs.

Q: MSU member off staff is interested in becoming SCF rep.

A: LF will check inbox.

## 6. IT Update (MR)

UK wide cyber-attack last week – NHC services unaffected at present. ICT will continue to monitor and mitigate risk where possible.

The emails sent out by MR to highlight Cyber Awareness month have received positive feedback. Stats show that 50% of these emails were opened with an average 15 second read time. Did you know that the Viva Insights button on your Outlook tool bar can tell you:

- How many people opened your email.
- The average time people spent reading your email.
- How many email recipients opened a document that you shared in the email as a link or as an attachment.

Last month's Drop-In session focussed on Personal Cyber Awareness and was attended by 19 people.

December's Drop-In session takes place on 6 December and focuses on applications and software that you already have at your disposal, book your place [here](#).

Staff – Kev Abbiss will take flexible retirement in the New Year and the new Senior Technical Officer starts in January.

Power outage last Monday – no problems caused from an IT point of view but has highlighted some issues around comms as IT staff on call were unable to get any mobile signal. The car park barrier would not open during the power cut and MR will investigate whether this can be added to the emergency generator back up.

Q – How long will the generator run for and who is responsible for topping up the fuel?

A – The generator holds 1000 litres of fuel which would last approx. one week and the Contractor is responsible for refuelling. In addition, the UPS would provide a further 9 hours back up in an emergency.

MR is aware that staff are reporting sound issues with their laptops although no calls have been logged with the Helpdesk. Staff are encouraged to raise a ticket if they are experiencing any issues.

**7. Building and Facilities Update**

None

**8. Green Update**

This month's Environment Briefing which be read in full [here](#).

A dedicated page for [Sustainability Development Sessions](#) has been created on the Hub with the next session taking place on 11 November.

**9. Ideas / Suggestions**

None

**10. AOB**

None

**Chair for next meeting – Louis Franklin**

**Have something to say?**

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

Issues relating to property e.g., broken lift, non-flushing toilets, etc. must always be reported to Property Services in the first instance: [propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk).

Alternatively, you can send any issues to the SCF inbox - [SCF@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:SCF@north-herts.gov.uk).

**Representatives (and phone extension):**

**Christina Corr** #4325 - Senior Technical Officer

**Claire Bernard** #4323 - MSU Admin Support Officer

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

**Louis Franklin** #4262 – Digital Services Officer

**Tiranan Straughan** #4842 – Housing Policy Officer

**Katie Thomas** #5021 – Digital and Customer Service Apprentice

**Reina Gendle** #4188 – Careline Technical Administrator



**Staff Consultation Forum Meeting Minutes – 4 December 2024**

**Present:** Anthony Roche  
Ian Couper  
Louis Franklin  
Tiranan Straughan  
Katie Thomas  
Claire Bernard  
Mark Robinson  
Dee Levett  
Christina Corr  
Melanie Ferdaous  
Jeanette Thompson (item 3)  
Isabelle Alajooz (item 3)  
Michelle Bell - notes

**Circulation:** Global

**Chair for Meeting:** Louis Franklin

---

**1 Apologies and introductions**

Rebecca Webb

Welcome to Melanie who is here to observe.

**2 Restructure Notices**

None

**3 Policy Amendments (IA and JT)**

The Conflicts of Interests Policy has been updated and has already been reviewed by three Statutory Officers and Leadership Team. The aim is to make the policy more user friendly and we would welcome any feedback from SCF. The goal is to publish the amended policy in the New Year.

The existing policy includes a number of different forms for various scenarios e.g. budget, external work and private interests. The updated policy will be simplified to include a single form covering all scenarios.

Q Would the form need to be completed for volunteering at a Charity for one day?

A The form should be completed in all circumstances and we can make the policy more explicit to cover this.

Q Could MS forms be a consideration?

A There will be conversations outside of this meeting on how to make the form more user friendly and possibly digital.

Q The form will need to be accessible to external parties for recruitment.

A We are exploring ways this could work.



**4 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting**

None

**5 NHC Update**

**HR and Employee Wellbeing Update (IC in RW's absence)**

Personal development morning on Friday - no specific topic but a good opportunity to review and catch up on any outstanding learning on GrowZone.

We have two new starters in the HR Team – Georgie (who has transferred from CSC) and Ruby. If anyone is unsure who we are, details including photos, are available on the Hub [Human Resources - Home](#). Anyone in the team will be happy to help/ answer questions, but if in doubt, email Hrhelp.

Neurodiversity network - we have our first session on 12 December. This will be an informal group for staff to share experiences, support or information about neurodiversity.

Upcoming productivity workshop - 16 January – a really great online session and we would encourage everyone to take a look when the details are announced.

A reminder that some find the festive period difficult. It's important to look after your mental health and look out for others – there is various support available on the Hub.

[Staying mentally well over Xmas](#)  
[Christmas financial planning](#)  
[Financial Wellbeing](#)

Reminder about the GP helpline - available 24/7 [GP Helpline](#)

Finally a big thank you to those staff who are working over Christmas closedown to keep our vital services up and running.

**General NHC Update (IC)**

None

**6 Employee Queries**

None

**7 IT Update (MR)**

The Helpdesk Team Leader vacancy is being advertised.

Floor 3 meeting rooms are no longer bookable and have been removed from the room bookings app.

Internal phishing campaign results currently being reviewed. New starters being targeted. HR will reiterate importance of cyber safety at HR Welcome Chats and signpost to GrowZone module.

Drop in session this Friday will cover the tools you already have at your disposal and some clever hints and tips to help empower you. LF to add link to viva engage.

**8 Building and Facilities Update**

Debbie will be returning to work in mid December.

Property Services have been made aware of the hot water issues over shutdown and will ensure this is sorted.

**9 Green Update**

This month's Environment Briefing can be read in full [here](#).

**10 Ideas / Suggestions**

AR advised the Corporate Peer Challenge report will need an action plan and that one of the themes picked up was around staff engagement. This could be a potential agenda item for discussion at February's SCF.

**11 AOB**

Next SCF falling on bank holiday so will be rescheduled.

**12 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](mailto:propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk).

Alternatively, you can send any issues to the SCF inbox - [SCF@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:SCF@north-herts.gov.uk).

**Representatives (and phone extension):**

**Christina Corr** #4325 - Senior Technical Officer

**Claire Bernard** #4323 - MSU Admin Support Officer

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

**Louis Franklin** #4262 – Digital Services Officer

**Tiranan Straughan** #4842 – Housing Policy Officer

**Katie Thomas** #5021 – Digital and Customer Service Apprentice

**Reina Gendle** #4188 – Careline Technical Administrator

This page is intentionally left blank

**JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**

8 January 2025

*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 KPI 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
Q2 2024 (July - Sep)	23	18	19	4	78.3%	75%
Q2 2023 (July - Sep)	17	14	15	2	82.4%	75%

During the second quarter this year, we had six more vacancies compared to the same period last year and two more vacancies not filled.

Vacancies filled during this quarter include two Environmental Health Technical Officers, Environmental Protection & Housing Manager, four apprentices, Service Accountant and Senior IT Analyst. Vacancies that were not recruited to include Mechanical & Electrical Services Engineer, Estates Surveyor and Client Support and Repairs Officer.

### 3.3 National Recruitment Campaign

The National Recruitment Campaign launched in November 2024. The Council has used the publicity materials provided to produce adverts in the December Outlook magazine. Future use of the materials will include social media posts and in customer facing locations.

Example materials:



### 3.4 Leavers and Turnover

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

Rolling 12 months	Turnover	
	Leavers	Monthly
Dec-23	2	0.58%
Jan-24	0	0.00%
Feb-24	1	0.29%
Mar-24	1	0.29%
Apr-24	3	0.87%
May-24	1	0.29%
Jun-24	1	0.29%
Jul-24	2	0.58%
Aug-24	4	1.16%
Sep-24	7	2.02%
Oct-24	4	1.16%
Nov-24	1	0.29%
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>7.82%</b>

The table above shows the rolling labour turnover rate which overall is tracking as lower than this time last year, despite the uplift of resignations during August - October. Annual turnover has remained below 9% since April.

### **3.5 National pay bargaining 2024**

The 2024 Green Book pay award was agreed in October 2024 at £1290 on each spinal point (2.5% on higher grades). The uplift and back pay was applied for our November pay.

We await an update on the 2025 National pay bargaining process.

### **3.6 Apprentices**

We have 12 Apprentices employed, completing 8 different apprenticeships. The flexibility of the Levy means that we can offer apprenticeships that fit the service areas effectively.

### **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 in October. Each graduate will have four rotations lasting 6 months each, covering a variety of service areas.

### **3.8 Learning and Development**

We are continuing the phased roll out of mandatory learning on the new Learning Management System and providing guidance for managers on how to monitor this using the traffic light system.

Following the launch of the Digital and Data Academy alongside a specialist digital training provider, 2 additional employees have signed up to participate, 20 in total. The aim is to equip staff with the skills to develop their careers, create efficiencies through new technology and increase confidence in analysing data.

### **3.9 Inclusion Group**

The Inclusion group in November focussed their discussions on the Peer Review, Gender Pay Gap and Councils White Ribbon action plan.

The importance of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion eLearning module, that was launched in October, currently has an 80% completion rate, we will work with the Inclusion Group and managers to increase this figure.

A Nerodiversity network was launched in December, with the first meeting being well attended. It was a helpful and supportive meeting with various experiences and signposting shared for and by employees.

### **3.10 Gender pay gap**

The gender pay gap (GPG) is an equality measure that shows the difference in average earnings between women and men.

Under the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017, employers with 250 or more employees are required to publish statutory gender pay gap calculations every year.

The Councils 2024 GPG data is shown below, alongside the GPG from previous years.

Year	Mean %	Median %
2024	14.6	13.1
2023	15.5	14
2022	19.5	19.3

Overall, there is a steady improvement in the GPG at the Council. Action planning takes place each year with an aim to further improve the gap. The 2024 action plan includes continuing support for flexible working at all levels of the organisation, launching a mentoring scheme for women and encouraging female applicants to apply for senior roles at the Council.

### 3.11 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
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
Sep-24	0.50	0.31	0.81
Oct-24	0.61	0.27	0.88
Nov-24	0.25	0.42	0.67
<b>Total</b>	<b>5.04</b>	<b>4.05</b>	<b>9.09</b>

Summary of absence reasons:

Sept – Nov 2024 Absence reason	Occasions of absence		
	Up to 1 week	1-3 weeks	3 weeks+
Ear, Nose and Throat (Inc Cold/Flu)	34	0	0
COVID 19 - suspected	12	0	0
Sickness / Vomiting	27	1	1
Other	30	5	6
Headaches (inc migraine)	7	1	0
Musculoskeletal	9	4	1
Mental health	5	2	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>



This quarter there has been an increase in absences of up to 1 week for all types of absences except Covid which has remained stable. Absence cases of 1-3 weeks and over 3 weeks are broadly in line with last quarter.

Support continues to be provided for the cases of long-term absence, or where additional support to continue to be in work is required. Occupational Health are involved where appropriate, to ensure employees are supported with back to work plans and employees are signposted to various support throughout, including to our employee assistance programme.

#### **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](mailto:rebecca.webb@north-herts.gov.uk)
- 5.2 Ian Couper  
Service Director – Resources  
01462 474243  
[ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk)

This page is intentionally left blank

## Focus on Mental Health at North Herts Council

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

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

The Council has gone beyond this general requirement, we recognise that it is not just about our duty of care and the legal and moral obligations to our employees, it also reflects that the right support contributes to creating an effective and efficient organisation. Placing importance on employee wellbeing helps us to create greater loyalty with our staff, contributes to better recruitment and retention and supports staff engagement and productivity including supporting reduction in sickness absence. This focus on wellbeing is in keeping with our values, in particular *"we work together and support each other to deliver the best we can"*.

Mental health is just as important as physical health, and employers should approach it with the same level of care. It's better to prevent issues and people shouldn't wait until the verge of burnout to address mental health. We should provide support and take proactive steps to maintain mental wellbeing before problems arise.

The resources and support that the Council have available to support mental health include:

- **The GP Helpline** – This provides access to GP appointments 24/7 by phone or video call. This has been of particular benefit since the NHS surgeries have come under extreme pressure.
- **Employee Assistance Programme** - Our free employee assistance programme (EAP) provides employees with around the clock access to confidential, independent, professional information and emotional support and counselling sessions.
- **Wellbeing platform** – this includes various wellbeing support including advice on nutrition, fitness classes, wellbeing podcasts, and BeCalm which provides access to a library of information to support sleep, mindfulness, reducing anxiety through guided meditation.
- **Mental Health First Aiders** - we have trained Mental Health First Aiders in most front facing services, with staff able to contact any of the MHFA for confidential support and signposting to additional support where needed. We support our Mental Health First Aiders to ensure they stay mentally well with refresher training and a network group.
- **Support for staff returning to work** - staff returning to work after a period of absence are offered an appointment with Occupational Health to ensure a smooth transition back into the workplace – if an absence has been related to stress or other mental health issues, then a Wellness Action Plan is encouraged, where appropriate to fully support staff and managers.
- **Regular articles in our staff magazine** - we regularly remind staff of the support available, signposting to external resources and reminders of the importance of taking annual leave to support mental health.
- **Wellbeing modules available** Our learning management system hosts bitesize learning and other modules to support wellbeing in the workplace
- **Other training available to support mental wellbeing.**

This page is intentionally left blank

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
	January	Supporting mental health

Suggested discussion topics for future meetings
Employment rights bill
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 – planned for March 2025

This page is intentionally left blank