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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

7 March 2025

Our Ref Joint Staff Consultative Committee 19 March 2025
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, 19TH MARCH, 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

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 - 8 JANUARY 2025 (Pages 5 - 10)

To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 8 January 2025.

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 (Pages 11 - 20)

To receive the Minutes of the Staff Consultatoin Forum meetings from December 2024 and January 2025.

5. HR INFORMATION NOTE (Pages 21 - 26)

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.

6. DISCUSSION PAPER - STAFF SURVEY 2024 (Pages 27 - 34)

To receive a discussion paper on the Staff Survey carried out in 2024.

7. DISCUSSION PAPER - NEURODIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE (Pages 35 - 36)

To receive a discussion paper on Neurodiversity in the Workplace.

8. SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS (Pages 37 - 38)

To consider topics for discussion at a future meeting of the Committee.

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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE VIA ZOOM
ON WEDNESDAY, 8TH JANUARY, 2025 AT 10.00 AM

MINUTES

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

In attendance: *Faith Churchill (Democratic Services Apprentice), Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager) and Rebecca Webb (HR Services Manager)*

UNISON: *Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews*

Staff Consultation Forum : *Reina Gendle*
Also Present: *There were no Members of the public present.*

15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Daniel Allen.

16 MINUTES - 9 OCTOBER 2024

Audio Recording – 2 minutes 39 seconds

Councillor Ruth Brown, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Rhona Cameron seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 9 October 2024 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

17 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 24 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.

18 SCF MINUTES

Audio recording: 3 minutes 48 seconds

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

- There had been increased attendance at meetings with more representatives volunteering.
- During October, thanks were given to all volunteers who had helped during the recent flooding in Hitchin and a request had been made for more volunteers to help with any incidents in the future.
- There had been thanks received in November for the Corporate Peer Challenge Review and the Officers who supported the process.
- A revised Conflict of Interest Policy was launched in December.
- In response to questions from Councillor Claire Strong, the Service Director – Resourses stated that the disinfectant spray was safe for staff use.

Councillor Ruth Brown expressed positive feedback to the IT team for their work to keep the Council safe from cyber attacks.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum for October, November and December 2024.

19 HR INFORMATION NOTE

Audio recording: 7 minutes 28 seconds

The Human Resources Services Manager presented the Information Note entitled 'HR Update'.

- Recruitment key performance indicator shows number of vacancies filled first time and the comparison shows quarter two for year 2024/2025 vs quarter two for previous year.
- During the second quarter this year, there had been 6 more vacancies compared to the same period last year and two more vacancies were not yet filled.
- Various roles had been recruited to this quarter including some posts in hard to fill areas such as Environmental Health and IT.
- There were still some unfilled posts within this period.
- Work was continuing with recruiting managers where a post had yet to be filled, to look at the role and to suggest amendments or changes within the job description or the advertising process to achieve more success with future recruitment.
- A national recruitment campaign for local government was launched in November 2024. Councils were asked to support the campaign by using materials as a part of their recruitment adverts and an advert had been published in the December Outlook magazine. There were plans to continue to use the materials provided to enhance branding of the Council on social media and customer facing locations.
- Turnover had remained below 9% since April.
- National Pay Bargaining Outcome – pay award was agreed in October 2024. This had been backdated to April and paid to employees in November. The 2025 National Pay Bargaining had now started. There was a Regional Employees Briefing arranged for next month.
- There were 12 apprentices now in posts who were completing various apprenticeships. Areas included business admin, ICT technician, digital marketing and a digital support technician. The levy provided varied apprenticeships that fitted within the varied service areas of the Council.
- Graduates from the National Graduate Scheme started in October and have settled in well. Each graduate completed four rotations lasting six months each covering a variety of services and projects.
- A new learning management system launched in July. Since then, mandatory training on that platform was being phased in.
- Following the launch of the digital and data academy by the digital team, two additional employees had participated which brought the total to 22. Apologies for the error on the paper which stated 20.

- The Inclusion group met in November, where discussions were focused on the Peer Review, Gender Pay Gap and the White Ribbon Action Plan.
- Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion E-learning which was launched in October 2024 currently had an 80% completion rate. There were plans to work alongside the inclusion group and managers to increase this figure.
- A neurodiversity network launched in December 2024 with the first meeting being well attended.
- Update on Gender Pay Gap Data – the mean pay gap for 2024 was 14.6%. Overall, there had been a steady improvement in gender pay gap at the Council. The updated action plan included support for flexible working, the mentoring scheme for women and encouraging female applicants to apply for senior roles.
- Absence update – there had been slightly over nine days lost to sickness absence per full time employee. There was an increase in absences of up to one week for all types of absences except for COVID. HR provided support for all employees on long-term absence.

The following Members and Officer representatives asked questions:

- Councillor Rhona Cameron
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Reina Gendle

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

- The annual salary budget for apprentices, managed by the leadership team, was maximised each year.
- The was a limitation on apprenticeship vacancies due to staff capacity to support them, some departments lack the capacity to manage apprentices.
- The gender pay gap was improving slowly. Changes being made were focused on the long-term goal, unless there were significant changes in terms of work force profile, there would be no quick change to the pay gap. Action plan was to make small incremental progress that were ongoing.
- Currently no target had been set. The ideal target for the gender pay gap would be 0% but it was more likely to be hovering around lower numbers. The Council was above average in terms of the pay gap compared to other Councils.
- ‘Confidence for women’ workshops had previously been run and had been well attended and received by staff. External adverts explicitly encouraged female applicants to apply for senior roles.
- The Council was taking steps towards transparent interviews and this was being trialled on various roles, but not on all of them. There was information on the website about how to request questions before an interview if an applicant required that adjustment. HR was encouraging recruiting managers to consider sharing interview questions beforehand. A trial was ongoing and feedback from candidates and managers was being reviewed.
- Job adverts were seen by all internal staff with particular encouragement for female applicants. Action plan included development focused on confidence for women and the mentoring scheme ensuring women had the confidence to apply. Flexibility was crucial for supporting women in senior positions.
- The current benchmarking tool did not cover what was required to make a comparison on turnover rate, HR was waiting for data to be on the benchmarking tool to be able to compare the turnover rate. It had been noted that a comparison was needed in turnover rate as well as in staff absence.
- More workshops for women were on the list for action but this was not currently a main focus.

- The Estate Surveyor vacancy had been temporarily filled. The HR team were in contact with recruiting manager to fill this vacancy on a permanent basis.

20 DISCUSSION PAPER - MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Audio recording: 40 minutes 41 seconds

Councillor Ruth Brown suggested going straight into the discussion on the Mental Health Support Paper.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Claire Strong

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

- There was no figure available for the uptake of the Employee Assistance Programme. Feedback received around counselling sessions had been positive.
- Plans for Mental Health Support Day – Highlighting of bite size E-learning and sign posting for external support. Looking at increased communications and potentially focused E-learning for staff. There was a suggestion for an open coffee morning to encourage staff interaction around mental health and wellbeing. There had been a suggestion to look into 'I'm Fine' campaign and 'Ask Twice' campaign.
- HR advised that they could consider an event to support World Mental Health Day on 10 October 2025, and Members offered to provide support at this event.

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

- In response to the staff survey the Council was looking into how managers could support staff during 1-1's in terms of mental health by asking 'Are You Okay?' in a meaningful way. Also how to support and equip managers to ask these questions.

RESOLVED: That the Committee commented on and noted the Discussion Paper on Mental Health Support.

21 SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

Audio recording: 51 minutes 16 seconds

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

- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Claire Strong

The following points were made as part of the discussion:

- Priority for discussion topic for the meeting in June to be focused on unconscious bias in the workplace and micro aggressions.
- The relevant results of the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan.

In response to points raised in discussion, the Service Director – Resources advised that the staff survey results would be ready to be presented in March.

The Chair suggested two topics ‘Staff Survey Action Plan’ and ‘Neurodiversity in the Workplace’ for the next meeting of the Committee and this was agreed with Members present.

The meeting closed at 10.58 am

Chair

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North Herts Council

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting Minutes – 22 January 2025

Present:
Managing Director: Anthony Roche
Service Director- Resources: Ian Couper
HR Services Manager: Rebecca Webb
Staff representatives: Tiranan Straughan, Louis Franklin, Christina Corr, Andrew Betts, Claire Bernard, Katie Thomas, Reina Gendle, Melanie Ferdaous
Technical Operations Manager: Mark Robinson
Culture and Facilities Service Manager: Robert Orchard
Assistant Curator: Matthew Platt
Union representative: Dee Levett
Notes: Fallon Rumball Nunan, Ruby Lewis

Circulation: Global

Chair for Meeting: Christina Corr

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1 **Apologies and introductions**

None

2 Restructure Notices

Leadership Team and Senior Management Restructure- AR presented the proposals and noted there has been lots of feedback which would be reviewed. The proposal is to re-balance the responsibilities of Leadership Team. Various changes are proposed including moving some teams to different directorates and making the temporary Service Director post permanent. The revised job profiles have not yet been issued because the initial feedback received indicated there would likely be further amendments. It was mentioned that there has been constructive feedback about the changes and this has generally included a lot of support. It was noted that frequently asked questions will be issued during the consultation period.

Museum Restructure- Structure was last reviewed in 2015. The proposal to restructure in recognition that the team are stretched, and are relying too heavily on a bank of casual staff. The proposal is to introduce a supervisor position. The supervisor role gives career progression opportunities for the team as well as improved communication. Feeback on the proposal has included sharing responsibilities within the team, but the supervisor role is essential for tasks such as authorising annual leave and peers cannot have responsibility over one another. There is also a proposal for a career graded Curatorial Assistant who will report into the cultural services manager.

A representative from the museum team shared that there are some concerns about this proposal such as a supervisor affecting the team dynamic and staff not feeling comfortable reporting into an ex-peer. A further concern is that the current job profile suggests that overseeing the running of the museum is already a

responsibility. It was also mentioned that there are staff members who are happy/accepting of the changes.

AR: What support could be put in place for the new supervisor?

RO: It appears there is a fear of micromanagement for many members of staff, the supervisor would receive support and development such as mentoring, coaching, training.. The role is open to 3 members of staff. A trial on a 1-year fixed term contract is being considered.

The consultation period has been extended from the 22nd to the 29th to ensure sufficient time to provide feedback. Efforts are being made to reassure staff and respond to questions and feedback.

3 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

4 NHC Update (including HR and Staff Wellbeing Update)

'The way of the Productivity Ninja' held on Thursday 16th January was well attended, and we received positive feedback.

Growzone: A reminder for staff to check they are up to date with essential learning and training opportunities. There is information on mental health support, including an article on men's mental health available on the Hub and Viva engage.

Multi Factor Authentication (MFA) for iTrent will be launched in March. It will require the Microsoft Authenticator app however there is an alternative option for staff who do not wish to do this.

Q: Why are we going to start using MFA on iTrent? Has there been any security breaches?

A: No, there has not been any security breaches however it is being put into place as a preventative measure.

Upcoming events:

RPR Briefing for New Starters on Monday 3rd February at 10am

New Starter Get Together on 11th February at 3pm

5 Employee Queries

Q: Are there any plans to have training on the new payment system for MSU?

A: All primary users have received training as a priority, but the plan is to train everyone. IC to investigate.

6 IT update

Simple Passwords: Following the new attack method ICT performed an internal security test on the weekend against all internal users Microsoft passwords to test the strength and complexity of passwords. Although the majority of passwords were found to be secure ICT were able to identify 33 user's passwords due to them not being complex enough. Even though they followed the minimum requirement of (upper, lower, number & special) a password such as "Football2022!" are still too simple. **Can all users please ensure when setting passwords they use the recommended 3 word method:** This is combines 3 random words with numbers and symbols.

Examples would be: Knock5Bread*Pardon#40 or %BelieveStarterGenie61

ICT are looking to bring forward some planned projects to enhance password security which will remove the possibility of users setting anything deemed too simple and we ICT will update all once complete.

Emerging Social Engineering Threat: A new threat is emerging which combines email spamming and posing as remote assistance support from Microsoft.
The attackers first bombard the targets email inbox with a huge number of spam messages in a very short period. The target is alarmed and may suspect that an attack is underway. Shortly after, they receive a call from tech support via Microsoft Teams and the caller asks them to allow remote access to their system so they can solve the problem. Once remote access is gained then the attacker takes over the device.

As a reminder:

1. Only NHC ICT Staff can remote access users' devices to resolve issues.
2. Users must never allow any external person to remote control their device. (collaboration work with internal colleagues is allowed via Microsoft Teams).
3. Microsoft will **never ever** cold call/Teams Call an individual to resolve a technical problem for a work device or personal device at home.

Tablet replacements will soon be in place, IT are speaking to users to understand how much they use them and see if the tablet needs updating.

IT Team Update: The team leader post will be filled from February by a current member of staff so a new helpdesk post will be available for recruitment soon.

IT drop-in Sessions: Any requests for ideas for what to do for upcoming ICT drop-in sessions are appreciated as the last one was very well received. Plans to circulate the recording soon.

New Starters: In January there was more than 16 new starters. Reminder to managers that IT need at least 2 weeks' notice for new starters in order to get laptop set up ahead of their first day.

Revised Acceptable Use Policy will be circulated soon, plan is to upload to Growzone so this prompts users to sign and sends timely reminders if they haven't.

LF: I received a very convincing phishing email from what appeared to be Microsoft. Also suggested training on how to use AI in the workplace training for an ICT drop-in session

AR reminded staff that Microsoft will never directly contact you through email or by phoning you, if in doubt speak to the IT department

7 Building Services Update

Rising security concerns from unauthorised people accessing the DCO . The document circulated set out a guide to be put on the intranet and a sign to go near the rear door. Mainly giving staff permission to politely challenge.

Additional suggestions were made for an understanding that no one will hold the door open for each other and a scan in/out system to stop unauthorised people from accessing the building. Suggestions were also made about the door not shutting quick enough, meaning that people are easily able to follow in behind. Now that we have fewer people working from the office and more at home, it makes it harder to be able to recognise people who work for NHC, and all staff are reminded to wear their badge and question those in the building who are not wearing it.

Overall the process was supported, but with ideas to further strengthen if required.

8 Green Update
1 Environment Briefing January 2025

9 Ideas/Suggestions

None

10 Any other business

None

11 Chair of next meeting

Louis Franklin

Have something to say?

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

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

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

Representatives (and phone extension):

Christina Corr #4325 - Senior Technical Officer
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

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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

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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 embower 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?

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JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

19 March 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 the number of vacancies filled first time in Quarter 3 October – December 2024, with a comparison with the same period last year.

	Vacancies	Filled at first attempt	Filled (total)	Unfilled	% filled first attempt	Target
Q3 2024 (Oct-Dec)	23	18	22	1	78%	75%
Q3 2023 (Oct-Dec)	25	19	21	4	76%	75%

During the quarter this year, we had a similar number of vacancies including apprentices for HR, Communications and Careline. A similar number of vacancies were filled at the first attempt in both quarters.

- Vacancies filled during this quarter included apprentices roles (as above, Revenues Officers, Customer Service Officers, Community Partnership Officer, IT Helpdesk Team Leader, Planning Officer, and Careline Operators.

- The only vacancy that was not filled was a Senior Planning Officer in Strategic Development.

3.3 **Leavers and Turnover**

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

Rolling 12 months	Turnover	
	Leavers	Monthly
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%
Dec-24	0	0
Jan-25	4	1.13%
Feb-25	4	1.13%
Total	**32**	**9.22%**

The table above shows the rolling labour turnover rate which overall is still tracking slightly lower than this time last year. A low number of leavers in November and December has been followed by higher numbers in January and February, bringing the annual turnover to over 9% for the first time since March 2024.

Unplanned exits from the council (such as resignations and dismissals) are the focus of the turnover calculation which does not include figures related to planned exits such as retirements and the end of fixed term contracts (e.g. apprentices, and maternity cover).

3.4 **National pay bargaining 2025**

The Trade Unions have made their pay claim for 2025. The National Joint Council claim is for:

- An increase of at least £3,000 across all NJC spinal column points
- A clear plan to reach a minimum pay rate of £15 an hour
- One extra day of annual leave for all staff
- A reduction in the working week by two hours, with no loss of pay

Regional employer pay briefings took place during February and it's expected that a pay offer from the employers will follow shortly.

3.5 **Apprentices**

National Apprenticeship Week ran from 10th – 17th February and our Communications Apprentice developed the communications for the week. This included several social media posts supporting the messages of “Skills for Life” and “NAW Official Supporter”, and a quote from a previous apprentice who is now a Service Director at the Council.

We are pleased to have also had 2 of our Apprentices nominated for awards by their Training Provider.

Since we started our apprentice scheme is 2017, we have submitted data to the Department of Education. It was recently announced that this data will no longer be required because of the additional administrative burden this places on public sector organisations and due to apprenticeships becoming firmly embedded in recruitment decisions.

3.6 **National Graduate Scheme**

We are pleased that our current graduates have had a successful first rotation at the Council and will be moving to their next service areas in April. The Council intends to continue to be part of the National Graduate Scheme, Impact and plans are being progressed to recruit a further Graduate as part of the 2025 cohort.

3.7 **Learning and Development**

We are continuing to introduce staff and managers to new elements in the Learning Management System include the Smart Café which gives access to bitesize learning.

3.8 **Inclusion Group**

The Inclusion group in February focussed their discussions on Equality Data and a review of posters to further promote support available for staff.

The importance of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion eLearning module, that was launched in October, now has an 86% completion rate, we are continuing to work with the Inclusion Group and managers to increase this figure.

3.9 **Absence**

The absence figures are shown below as absence days lost per employee.

Rolling 12 months	Absence days lost per employee		
	Long-term	Short-term	Total
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
Dec-24	0.22	0.49	0.71
Jan-25	0.19	0.54	0.73
Total	**4.55**	**4.29**	**8.84**

Summary of absence reasons:

Dec 2024 – Feb 2025 Absence reason	Occasions of absence		
	Up to 1 week	1-3 weeks	3 weeks+
COVID 19 - suspected	1	0	0
Ear, Nose and Throat (Inc Cold/Flu)	49	7	0
Headaches (inc migraine)	10	0	0
Mental health	6	2	1
Musculoskeletal	6	2	1
Other	18	4	2
Sickness / Vomiting / Gastro	20	0	1
Total	**110**	**15**	**5**

This quarter there has been seen a decrease in reported COVID-19 cases but still a high number of Cold/Flu type illnesses as would be expected at this time of year. Short term absences remain relatively high, but we have seen a return to work for a number of employees from long-term sick absences which has reduced the number of current cases.

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).

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JSCC Discussion Paper - Staff Survey 2024

March 2025

In 2024, we carried out a full staff survey, this was the first full survey that we had completed for some years. During the pandemic we completed smaller wellbeing surveys to understand the impact that COVID was having on staff and to plan the return to the office. This survey was an online form and was open to all staff, and to accommodate the very few staff who do not have regular access to a laptop in their line of work, paper copies were made available to staff via their Manager. This survey was an opportunity for staff to tell us how they were feeling and give feedback on a variety of subjects to help us understand what we do well and how we can do better. The survey responses were provided anonymously.

HR worked in collaboration with the Leadership Team, The Communications Team and The Inclusion Group to put together the questions and they were themed as follows:

- About You
- Leadership and Management
- My Team
- Inclusion
- Communication
- North Herts Council and the future
- Your opportunities for personal development and learning

Many questions were rated on a scale of 1-5, but there was opportunity for staff to include comments in a free text box.

Consultation and developing an action plan

Upon closure of the survey, a working group consisting of members of the HR Team, the Leadership Team and the Communications team were put together, this group then analysed the results and comments and developed a detailed action plan.

A high level summary of the results, further updates and testing of proposed actions (including seeking further ideas) has been presented at Staff Briefings and Senior Manager Group meetings. The results for some questions (where it was logical to do so) were also split into Directorates and shared with each Service Director. This then allowed further discussions within each service area. Whenever written comments from the survey were provided they were paraphrased, where necessary, to retain anonymity and confidentiality.

Action Plan

The action plan was introduced to staff at the Staff Briefing in early March. It was published in full on the intranet. The full action plan is attached at Appendix A. Key points to note are:

- As has been highlighted previously the results were generally positive, but there is always scope to improve.
- The action plan is grouped by themes and linked to our values (where relevant).
- We took the view that even though only a few people said that they didn’t feel safe at work, that even just one was too many and needed actions to be taken. The plan therefore deliberately includes a wide range of actions on this.
- There are a range of actions to help with the accessibility and approachability of Leadership Team.
- HR are working on a range of training and resources to help managers in supporting their teams.

- Workloads and pay are a theme in the staff survey, and more generally. There are limits to what we can achieve within the financial constraints we face. However, we have identified some actions to increase capacity, as well as actions to manage expectations of what is achievable.
- Providing clarity that training is important, that we haven't cut training budgets and trying to make time for training. We will also develop a new HR Strategy to inform the focus of future training needs.
- We are looking to introduce an annual staff conference to support our "Together" value.
- There are also links between the staff survey action plan and the Corporate Peer Challenge action plan.

Leadership Team- accessible and approachable/ provide leadership

Action	Target date/ Complete	Delivered by (where not complete)
Updated recruitment pages with introduction to Leadership Team	Complete	
Using Leadership Team introduction video in day 1 new starter e-mail	Complete	
Members of Leadership Team to chair the staff briefing on a regular basis	Ongoing	Comms
Meet the Leadership Team at Staff Briefings	Ongoing (annual)	Comms/ Leadership Team
Service Directors to have a meeting with new starters in their directorate	To start (where not happening already) on an ongoing basis	Directors
Service Directors to develop a plan of how they will engage with staff at Team Meetings	Ongoing	Directors
When not in the office, Leadership Team will add details of who is deputising in their Outlook calendar	Commenced and ongoing	Leadership Team
Updates in Insight on what Leadership Team are doing/ decisions made (as well as Anthony's monthly update)	From April 2025 onwards	Leadership Team
Regular in-person Senior Management Group meetings. Hybrid option available, but preference for in-person	Quarterly meetings ongoing	Comms

Feeling supported by managers

Action	Target date/ Complete	Delivered by (where not complete)
Bitesize training on effective 1:1s for managers, including asking "how are you?"	Launched and ongoing	HR
To review the Regular Performance Review process/ template to ensure it is easy to use, and focused on employee needs (including discussions about learning and development)	Summer 2025	HR
Create a management development programme to support managers	Autumn 2025	HR

Feeling safe and supported at work ("Inclusive")

Action	Target date/ Complete	Delivered by (where not complete)
Support for managers to ask "how are you?" at 1:1s, and encourage discussion	Ongoing (bitesize training produced)	HR
Emphasise contacting Monitoring Officer for any complaints about Councillor behaviour, and that action will be taken	Ongoing	HR/ Comms/ Monitoring Officer
Launch of micro-aggression resources	Complete	
Continue annual training for Councillors which includes Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and the Member-Officer protocol	Ongoing, annual	
Make the role of Councillors (e.g. Exec Members) clear in Committee Meetings in presenting reports, so that Officers do not feel pressured to answer Political questions	Commenced, and ongoing for new Councillors/ Exec Members	Chief Executive/ Directors
Develop training on dealing with challenging situations, including calling out inappropriate behaviour (including micro-aggressions)	Spring 2025	HR
Continue to support work with Corporate Enforcement Forum/ Health & Safety Group and Service Managers to develop lone working policies and use of technology when working out and about	Commenced and ongoing	H&S Lead
Promote sign-ups to White Ribbon (Ambassadors and Champions)	Commenced and ongoing	White Ribbon Steering Group
Training and support for White Ribbon Ambassadors and Champions to support them in their role as allies	Commenced and ongoing	White Ribbon Steering Group
HR to meet with managers/ teams to discuss training options (e.g. managing difficult conversations)	Spring 2025	HR
Updated Bullying and Harassment Policy with more information around sexual harassment	Complete	

Supporting high workloads

Action	Target date/ Complete	Delivered by (where not complete)
Improvements to recruitment pages to make the Council more attractive to decrease numbers of vacancies	Complete	
Process automation to reduce the time taken on repetitive tasks	Ongoing	Customer and Digital Services/ All
Building project management costs into significant capital projects so that provision for additional staffing support	Ongoing	Directors/ Finance
Ensure Councillors (especially Cabinet) are aware of the work pressures that we are already under and that there is not capacity for new work without more staff	Ongoing	Leadership Team
Budget bids for additional staff to help manage workload pressures (subject to agreement by Council)	February 2025	
Signed up to the LGA Graduate Scheme and recruited 2 graduates (2-year posts) which are providing support with Council projects	Complete	
Deliver productivity workshops (Productivity Ninja) for staff	Ongoing	HR
Look at options for productivity training for Senior Management Group	May 2025	HR
Provide materials for a productivity themed Personal Development Morning	May 2025	HR
Meet the Councillors slots at Staff Briefings and SMG so that mutual understanding of demands and pressures	Ongoing	Comms
Continue to run Working with Councillors training, to help negotiate what is achievable	Ongoing	HR
Reiterate commitment to have Meeting Free Friday for those that want to use it	April 2025	Managing Director

Pay and benefits

Action	Target date/ Complete	Delivered by (where not complete)
Benchmarking of our pay against other similar Local Authorities. Looking at roles where data is available. To determine if we generally pay less than others. Has been delayed by getting access to the data needed and working through the complexities of comparisons.	April 2025	HR
Where any disparities are identified, consider the options available to address any differences. This will be affected by affordability and ensuring fairness.	June 2025	Leadership Team/ Political Liaison Board
Continue to identify and deliver non-pay benefits, including salary sacrifice EV cars	April 2025, and ongoing	HR

Training and opportunities ("Learning")

Action	Target date/ Complete	Delivered by (where not complete)
All job opportunities are posted on the Hub	Complete	
Insight article on where to find jobs and how to apply	Complete	
Clear message that even when finances are limited, staff training and development (even when it costs money) is still valued and important	Commenced and ongoing	Service Director: Resources/ Managers
Improved communications (for all staff and specifically for managers) on the various types of training available, how to access them and use of GrowZone .	Commenced and ongoing	HR
Promote use of alternative time (or splitting of time across the team) for those that cannot make use of the monthly Friday training morning	Commenced and ongoing	Service Managers and HR
Opportunities for digital skills via Multiverse- launch and start of first cohort	Complete	
Further Multiverse opportunities and cohorts	Ongoing, as demand and opportunity available	Service Director: Customers
New HR Strategy will look at training needs linked to our overall strategies and succession planning	Autumn 2025	HR/ Leadership Team

Communication between teams ("Together")

Action	Target date/ Complete	Delivered by (where not complete)
Continue "Meet the Team" sessions at staff briefings, with support from Leadership Team to identify suitable teams	Ongoing	Comms/ Leadership Team
Encourage attendance at staff briefings and (if relevant) suggest alternative times for them to take place	Ongoing	SMG
All staff conference around once per year (due to space available aim for 3 or 4 sessions over a 2 week period) with interactivity and links to Council Plan and values	Autumn 2025 for first session	HR/ Comms/ with support
Encourage use of Teams groups to share ideas and discussion between teams (e.g. could be based on themes, similar projects)	Summer 2025	HR/ Comms/ All
Support the Social Group in providing outside work activities	Ongoing	Social Group/ All

Working time and flexible working

Action	Target date/ Complete	Delivered by (where not complete)
Article in Insight about use of flexi-time, but that need to consider service needs. Requirement to talk to your manager about what is possible.	Complete	
Updated guidance on how volunteer leave can be used	Complete	
Insight article giving examples of how volunteer can be used	Complete	
Continue to review what is happening at South Cambs in relation to 4-day week working	Ongoing	Chief Executive

Wellbeing and being healthy

Action	Target date/ Complete	Delivered by (where not complete)
Promotion of NH BeWell (as a replacement for Head Space)	Complete	
Publicise that exercise classes available via Spectrum	Complete	
Posters (and other materials) to promote the support that is available and how to access it	March 2025	HR
Regular communications about availability of the Employee Assistance Programme	Ongoing	HR
Review of our Health and Wellbeing support	November 2025	HR
Healthier items in the vending machines- Welcome suggestions within limitations of current vending machine. Otherwise depends when/ if we move to a new vending machine.	TBC	

Use of pronouns (“Inclusive”)

Action	Target date/ Complete	Delivered by (where not complete)
Update at staff briefing on approach to pronouns in e-mail signatures	Complete	
Article in Insight and new template published	Complete	

JSCC Discussion Paper - Neurodiversity in the Workplace

March 2025

Neurodiversity refers to a world where neurological differences are acknowledged and respected. It is an umbrella term used to explain the ways in which people's brains work differently.

North Herts Council are committed to supporting all employees and the subject of Neurodiversity has been discussed at our Inclusion Group, this allowed those in attendance to share lived experiences of neurodiversity both in the workplace and the impact on life in general.

At this meeting it was re-iterated that if the Councial are informed of an individual's neurodiversity it can help us to provide the relevant support, both to those who do have a formal diagnosis and those who do not. We recognise that many neurodivergent people do not have a formal diagnosis, either by choice or due to issues associated with seeking a diagnosis. We do have staff who have declared a neurodiversity, and we have been able to implement a range of support options.

We appreciate that some members of staff may be reluctant to share information about their neurodivergent traits if they do not have a formal diagnosis, but they may still have support needs. Some people may not feel the need to seek formal diagnosis if they receive empathy and support.

Ho do we support a neurodiverse workforce?

Awareness and Education: for the past few years, we have shared a timetable of webinars during Neurodiversity Week (17-23 March 2025) to allow people to further their knowledge and better support themselves or their colleagues. We also have on-demand modules available on our Learning Management System and articles in the staff magazine to support neurodiversity and inclusion more widely.

Review of the Recruitment Process: As part of this review, we have trialled transparent interviewing. Allowing candidates to have sight of interview questions ahead of time allows neurodiverse candidates to better prepare for the interview and present the best version of themselves.

Neurodiversity network: The network was requested through the Inclusion Group and the first meeting was held in December 2024, which was well attended. The first network meeting was open to anyone, i.e. those who identify as neurodiverse and those who may manage staff who are neurodiverse. A number of resources were shared and it provided an opportunity for attendees to share personal experiences.

Reasonable Adjustments: We have put in place a range of adjustments to support staff and promote a neuroinclusive environment. Examples of these are: encouraging use of spellcheck software, adapting the background colour of the screen, providing a desk in a quiet area, allowing extra time for written communication. No formal diagnosis is needed for reasonable adjustments to be put in place.

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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
2025	January	Supporting mental health
	March	Neurodiversity in the workplace
	March	Staff survey update

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

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