

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



6 June 2025

Our Ref Joint Staff Consultative Committee 18 June 2025
Contact. Committee Services
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To: Members of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee of North Hertfordshire District Council

District Councillors: Ian Albert, Daniel Allen, Keith Hoskins MBE, Bryony May and Claire Strong.

Substitutes Councillors: Sadie Billing, Ruth Brown, Joe Graziano, 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, Melanie Ferdaous, Louis Franklin, Reina Gendle, Tiranah Straughan and Katie Thomas.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

to be held as a Virtual Meeting

VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM

On

WEDNESDAY, 18TH JUNE, 2025 AT 10.00 AM

Yours sincerely,

Jeanette Thompson
Director – Governance

****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 the day before 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 - 19 MARCH 2025 To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 19 March 2025.	(Pages 5 - 10)
3.	CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS Members are reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Declarable Interest and are required to notify the Chair of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item. Members declaring a Declarable Interest, wishing to exercise a 'Councillor Speaking Right', must declare this at the same time as the interest, move to the public area before speaking to the item and then must leave the room before the debate and vote.	
4.	SCF MINUTES To receive the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum meetings from March, April and May 2025.	(Pages 11 - 22)
5.	HR INFORMATION NOTE INFORMATION NOTE OF THE HR SERVICES MANAGER To update the Joint Staff Consultative Committee on the progress made in the last quarter completing HR work and projects and supporting people issues.	(Pages 23 - 28)
6.	DISCUSSION PAPER - SUCCESSION PLANNING AND FUTURE PROOFING To receive a discussion paper on Succession Planning and Future Proofing.	(Pages 29 - 30)
7.	DISCUSSION PAPER - MICROAGGRESSIONS AND UNCONSCIOUS BIAS IN THE WORKPLACE To receive a discussion paper on Microaggressions and Unconscious Bias in the Workplace.	(Pages 31 - 32)

8. SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

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

(Pages
33 - 34)

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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE VIA ZOOM
ON WEDNESDAY, 19TH MARCH, 2025 AT 10.00 AM

MINUTES

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

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

UNISON: *Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews*

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

22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 33 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Daniel Allen.

23 MINUTES - 8 JANUARY 2025

Audio Recording – 1 minute 48 seconds

Councillor Brown proposed and Councillor Claire Strong seconded and, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 8 January 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

24 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 16 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.

25 SCF MINUTES

Audio recording – 2 minutes 32 seconds

The Service Director – Resources presented the item entitled 'SCF Minutes', alongside the Minutes from the meetings of December 2024 and January 2025 and highlighted the following:

- Staff restructuring had been discussed.

- An update on IT had been received on passwords and social engineering and the risks that were posed by these to officers were explored in more detail.
- Conflicts of interest had been discussed as there had been a change to the policy.

The following Members asked questions:

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

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

- Details of the Museum staff restructuring would be provided to Members after the meeting.
- It would not always be appropriate for Members to attend the Staff Consultation Forum meetings, however, some Members such as the Leader of the Council occasionally attended Staff Briefings to give updates. They would look to invite Members to briefings where they contained topics relevant to Members.

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

- The items for discussion at the January and February meetings had been merged into one meeting that took place in late January, which explained why there were only two sets of Minutes instead of the usual three.
- Robust consultation processes were undertaken when internal recruitment and restructuring took place. During these processes, feedback and concerns were accounted for and any questions were responded to.
- Change management could be difficult for staff members and both sensitivity and clear communication were critical to managing this effectively.
- Staff progression to senior roles required coaching and support to ensure that they could manage those that had previously been their colleagues.
- Confidence raising workshops were not ongoing for staff, however, the Committee had highlighted their interest in this at the last meeting and consequently, they would look at it as part of the Gender Pay Gap Action Planning.

In response to questions, Councillor Val Bryant advised that she had attended a District Councils' Network conference with some of the Senior Leadership Team regarding the Devolution White Paper and many councils were in the same position regarding change management.

Councillor Ruth Brown highlighted the importance of having staff progression routes within the Council.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum for December 2024 and January 2025.

26 HR INFORMATION NOTE

Audio recording – 14 minutes 57 seconds

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

- Paragraph 3.2 provided an update on recruitment. The table within this highlighted key recruitment data and the key performance indicator for Q3 compared with the previous year. The quarterly target for this had been met.

- Compared to the previous year, there were a similar number of vacancies including apprenticeships in Communications, Careline and Human Resources. A similar number of vacancies were also filled at the first attempt in both quarters although there was one Senior Planning Officer position that had remained vacant.
- Turnover was approximately 9% and she was aware that the Committee had requested a comparison on turnover data. Using the LGA benchmarking tool would be the best way to compare the data but it would not be available until the end of the financial year. They would continue with quarterly monitoring and annual figures on turnover until the data had been made available.
- UNISON had submitted a claim for a £3,000 pay increase on each spinal point. Once the national briefings for employers had taken place, it was expected that an offer would be made by the employers. They would continue to monitor this and provide updates to the Committee.
- National Apprenticeship Week took place in February and the Communications Apprentice developed the communications for the Council that week with a quote from one of the Service Directors who had started as an apprentice at the Council.
- Graduates had almost completed their first of four rotations within Council service areas and would be moving onto their second rotation soon. There would be further recruitment through the graduate scheme later this year.
- Paragraph 3.7 provided an update on learning and development. They continued to raise staff awareness on the resources that were available to them on the learning management system and there were several development activities on there that were linked to the Staff Survey Action Plan.
- The Inclusion Group meeting in February focused discussion on equalities data and provided feedback on a poster that had been developed to promote support to staff as a result of the Action Plan.
- The Equalities Diversity and Inclusion E-Module was at an 86% completion rate and saw a 6% increase on this in January. They would continue to work with department managers to increase this figure further.
- 8.84 days per full-time employee were lost due to absence over the last twelve months which was slightly down on the previous report.
- COVID cases had reduced, but there had been a high number of flu and cold cases although this had been expected for the time of year.
- Several employees that were previously on a long-term absence had completed return to work procedures.

Councillor Ruth Brown thanked the Human Resources Services Manager for her report and highlighted that the return of many staff from long-term absence was good to see.

27 DISCUSSION PAPER - STAFF SURVEY 2024

Audio recording – 21 minutes 26 seconds

The Service Director – Resources presented the Discussion Paper entitled ‘Staff Survey 2024’ and advised that:

- The first paragraph of the report gave background on the Staff Survey and detailed how it had been conducted.
- The Action Plan contained a long list of actions that were developed to address the comments and concerns that had been raised from the survey.
- Feedback from the survey as well as general comments from staff indicated that the Council was a good place to work but the Leadership Team acknowledged that there would always be room for improvement in this area.
- There was a focus on certain situations where staff did not feel safe and specific actions had been developed to address these.

- Workloads and pay were recurring points of discussion at the Council and comments had been raised on these in the Staff Survey. The Council were limited with their resources to action these points, however, they would still look to find solutions to them where possible.
- There were false notions that training budgets had been cut and an action had been developed to reassure staff that this had not taken place.
- A Staff Conference would be likely to take place across three to four days in the autumn.
- Appendix A detailed the Staff Survey Action Plan which had been discussed at the Staff Briefing and published onto the intranet.

The following Members asked questions:

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

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

- Engaging with four hundred people in one large venue for the Staff Conference would be difficult, however, they could look into it and compare it with the current plan in place.
- It would be best for the Customer & Digital Services Manager to give information on the staff provisions within the Customer Service Team and so the question in relation to this would be answered after the meeting.
- Customer Service officers generally received one of the lowest grades of pay, however, they were not neglected in terms of support and had access to the same resources that were available to all staff.
- Recruitment to the Customer Service Team would continue to be an issue but progress had been made on this and they would continue to work to secure its future in terms of staffing.
- UNISON wanted the Council to provide updates on Local Government Reorganisation in meetings with them going forward. The Council already provided updates in staff briefings on this topic.
- Cabinet agreed a risk in relation to Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution on 18 March. This included HR implications on getting to the stage of devolution, and the impact on staff in terms of change.
- The Devolution White Paper had brought a lot of uncertainty to the Council but they did not want this to cause undue concern amongst staff members.
- Cabinet had expressed their desire to see staff surveys to check in on staff wellbeing and this would be carried out in due course.
- A small number of comments in the Staff Survey were in relation to the working relationship with Members and there was training already available on this which the Action Plan acknowledged.
- Since the Staff Survey, training had been provided to Members on the working relationship with officers and this would be undertaken yearly going forwards.
- Officers were given confidence to report any concerns they had about working with Members but the reverse of this was also encouraged where Members had concerns about officers.
- They were open to conversation with Member Development Champions and Group Leaders.

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

- Team Leaders were present in Careline and Customer Service making it possible for officers to step away from stressful situations if needed.

- The GROW Zone should be sending reminders to Councillors regarding training and this would be investigated.

In response to questions, Councillor Val Bryant advised that:

- She had spoken about the plans to mitigate the potential problems that would arise from the Devolution White Paper at the Cabinet meeting on 18 March.
- Monthly meetings were held with the Service Director - Customers, Assistive Technologies Manager and the Customer & Digital Services Manager to hear reports from their areas. At the last meeting, it was reported that they were not fully staffed, a lot of staff were new, and the call response rate was down in terms of the number of seconds it took for officers to answer the phones. She would feedback the concerns raised from this Committee to their next meeting.
- A major piece of work relating to staff support and wellbeing under the White Ribbon initiative was being carried out.
- The White Ribbon Working Party met every 6 weeks and they had created a 42-page Action Plan which addressed the working relationships between Members and officers. She would circulate this to Members of the Committee, but it would also need further circulation as the response rate from Members had been low.

Councillor Ruth Brown highlighted the need for more training on the relationship between officers and Members, however, she noted that Members who needed the training the most would probably not complete it.

RESOLVED: That the Committee commented on and noted the Discussion Paper on Staff Survey 2024.

28 DISCUSSION PAPER - NEURODIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Audio recording – 46 minutes 27 seconds

The Human Resources Services Manager presented the Discussion Paper entitled 'Neurodiversity in the Workplace' and advised that:

- Neurodiversity was an umbrella term to explain how some people had brains that worked differently to others.
- The Council was committed to supporting all employees and the subject had been discussed at the Inclusion Group in relation to work and life in general.
- Notification of neurodiversity allowed the Council to provide support in the form of suitable working arrangements both to those who had a formal diagnosis and to those who did not.
- Many did not have a formal diagnosis often due to choice or the difficulties associated with seeking a diagnosis.
- Multiple staff had declared their neurodivergence and the Council had implemented a range of support options for them to use but they recognised that some would be reluctant to share information about their neurodivergent traits.
- Some staff would not feel the need to share a formal diagnosis if they felt that they received empathy and support in the workplace.
- Education was a key part of supporting a neurodiverse workforce. In the past few years, a timetable of webinars had been scheduled during Neurodiversity Week to allow staff to further their knowledge and to support themselves or their colleagues.
- On-demand modules were available on the learning management system and articles in the Staff Insight magazine had been published to support inclusion and neurodiversity more widely.

- Transparent interviews had been introduced whereby candidates had sight of questions ahead of their interview to allow them to better prepare and present the best version of themselves.
- The Neurodiversity Network was requested through the Inclusion Group and the first meeting had been held in December 2024. It had been well attended and provided an opportunity for attendees to share personal experiences as well as resources on this topic.
- A range of adjustments were in place to support staff and promote neuroinclusive environments such as spell check software, additional screen display settings, quiet desks and extra time for written communication.
- No formal diagnosis was needed for the above adjustments to be requested.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Rhona Cameron
- Councillor Ruth Brown

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

- Staff had been encouraged to attend the modules on neurodiversity and recordings would be available for them to watch later if they could not attend.
- Trials on transparent interviews had been focused on junior post vacancies with a view to introduce them to senior post vacancies once hiring managers had refined their transparent interviewing skills to get the best out of candidates.

RESOLVED: That the Committee commented on and noted the Discussion Paper on Neurodiversity in the Workplace.

29 SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

Audio recording – 53 minutes 20 seconds

The Chair suggested two topics on 'Succession Planning and Development' and 'Microaggressions and Unconscious Bias in the Workplace' for the next meeting of the Committee and this was agreed with Members present.

The Chair thanked the Service Director – Resources and the Human Resources Services Manager for their presentations at the meetings that had taken place this Civic Year. She also thanked Members for their contributions.

The meeting closed at 10.58 am

Chair

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting Minutes – 5 March 2025

Present:

Managing Director: Anthony Roche
Service Director- Resources: Ian Couper
HR Services Manager: Rebecca Webb
Staff representatives: Tiranán Straughan, Christina Corr, Andrew Betts, Claire Bernard, Katie Thomas, Reina Gendle, Antonella Di Maria
Technical Operations Manager: Mark Robinson
Union representative: Dee Levett
Notes: Fallon Rumball Nunan, Ruby Lewis

Apologies: Louis Franklin

Circulation: Global

Chair for Meeting: Tiranán Straughan

1 Apologies and introductions

Louis Franklin

2 Restructure Notices

None

3 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

AR: An update on the leadership and senior management restructure was given in the staff briefing, following Full Council approval, changes will be in place from the 1st April.

4 NHC Update (including HR and Staff Wellbeing Update)

IC: Most information was covered in the staff briefing, the budget has been approved for next year, all proposed will go ahead.

RW: Pay Award 2025: There is an update on the pay negotiation for 2025, the Regional Employer briefings begun in February and ongoing. The Union claim is for at least £3000 across the majority of our spinal points. Once the Regional Employers have considered the feedback from Councils, they will respond to the Unions and make a pay offer.

Multi Factor Authentication: We have been trialling Multi Factor Authentication for iTrent, this will be launched on the 17th of March. Guides on how to use it will be available on the Hub and a link sent via a global email. Those who have taken part in the trial have found it very simple to use, as well as providing additional security.

Personal Development Morning: The next personal development morning is on Friday, Helen Bylett has sent out a global email containing some productivity resources on YouTube from productivity ninja, as well as some resources for neurodiversity week.

5 Employee Queries

None

6 IT update

MR:

- At the end of the month a new web filtering solution will be rolled out,.
- We are in the final stages of investigating the ability for users to send and receive large files.
- Our external PEN test has been carried out with positive outcomes.
- There has been an increase on cyber security incidents targeting NHC users which ICT are monitoring. ICT engage with staff on training but any further ideas on ways to improve peoples knowledge and understanding are welcome.

7 Building Services Update

IC: No updates, but happy to take any questions.

MR: There has been an issue with the TV license rights, this is on our radar but may need picking up and coordinating with IT.

AR: Is this the same issue that has come up before regarding broadcasting in community buildings?

MR: It is more than that, if you have any venue with the ability to access digital content, for example Netflix and iPlayer you need a license. It stems across the whole authority because all our laptops have access to it. It may lead us to need to block all services such as YouTube.

AR: I would suggest every council in the country has had one, it sounds like something all councils should be working together on.

8 Green Update

[2 Environment Briefing February 2025.pdf](#)

9 Ideas/Suggestions

None

10 Any other business

ADM: Virtual Parking Permits:

Following the launch of the virtual parking permits and various communication (global emails, insight article, information on the Hub and at staff briefing), nearly

all staff have applied for their virtual parking permit, and we currently have around 70 outstanding. The deadline is the **10th of March** and we are considering next steps and whether we presume those who have not applied by that point no longer need a permit.. Thank you to everyone who has applied and given feedback, this has been helpful, with most saying it was a very simple process. Those who are currently absent have been contacted by HR

There was a discussion about how the remaining staff could be encouraged to apply for their permits and a suggestion that the individuals and their line managers should be contacted. ADM confirmed this had already taken place. It was agreed that the MSU team would send a reminder to those who have not yet applied and highlight the simple process and that their paper permit is now expired. s

DL: Stewart Philip, who was the Chief Executive twice, has sadly passed away at the end of last year. I wanted to mention it so anyone who may have known him can be made aware.

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 – 2nd April 2025

Present: **Managing Director:** Anthony Roche
 Service Director- Resources: Ian Couper
 HR Services Manager: Rebecca Webb
 Staff representatives: Tiranah Straughan, Louis Franklin, Christina
 Corr, Claire Bernard, Katie Thomas
 Technical Operations Manager: Mark Robinson
 Union representative: Dee Levett
 Notes: Ruby Lewis

Circulation: Global

Chair for Meeting: Louis Franklin

1 Apologies and introductions

Mel Ferdaous

2 Restructure Notices

None

3 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

4 NHC Update (including HR and Staff Wellbeing Update)

RW: Following on from the museum restructure that was discussed a couple of months ago, I can confirm that once the consultation had closed, feedback was considered and all proposed changes were adopted. We have now recruited for the supervisor position and that person moved into the role yesterday.

There was a global email sent regarding annual leave as we have just moved into the new annual leave year. Over the next week, carry forward leave and holiday flex will be added to the system.

Q: Were there any issues with MFA?

A: There was a handful of queries, but they have since been worked through and we have had no major issues.

IC: A reminder to everyone that we are now under the new director structure. Also, a reminder to everyone that the financial year has ended, and ask for support from those who are involved in financial year end processes.

Q: It was the first financial year with the new system, how did it go?



A: Everything ok so far.

AR: To update on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), colleagues will have received email updates, and Hertfordshire have returned their submission. Government have said they will respond by week beginning 28th April. Further information is available on the Hub and this page is regularly updated:

[Devolution and local government reorganisation](#)

5 Employee Queries

CB: Many staff often wear headsets, particularly in careline. They have asked if there could be ear care facilities because it is causing people some issues. Alternatively, we could use one ear headsets.

MR: If there is a need for a different type of headset it will need to be raised with line managers. The default supply ones are part foam and part faux leather. We can get replacement pads or switch to single piece ones, but in a busy office environment this may not work too well.

Q: Do we have a programme for refreshing headsets? If someone is wearing it all day every day, they probably become worn quite quickly. It could be a good time to review if we are using the right type of headset.

A: We do not have a review process currently. If headsets are broken, we can replace them. We are happy to engage with people on it, however they are quite expensive, so it is a significant cost. If they need refreshing an IT ticket can be logged.

DL: In CSC we used to change our headset covers every 6 months, it could be done more often if it is needed due to people getting ear infections etc. It could be worth looking into for departments that use the headsets a lot.

RW: Our health cash plan is available ([Health Cash Plan](#)) for ear care options.

6 IT update

MR: We recently rolled out our new web filter, the transition has been quite clean. We had a few minor issues but they have been resolved very quickly. It is a better product and has saved money. A large file send piece has also just been purchased, meaning large files can be sent and received externally. It will only be given to certain individuals to start with. We also have a new ICT user acceptance policy that will be rolling out soon. It has gone through HR and unison. Once it has come back from the leadership team, it can be passed around and any questions will be answered, it will also be tied in with the learning management system. Heavier restrictions will be placed on the consequences if people do not sign it. Managers will also be requested to book an hour and a half time slot for new starters to come and collect their equipment and read the policy.

7 Building Services Update

IC: We need to change how the building services update is delivered in future due to the restructure. Perhaps a quarterly update that can be added to the agenda.

8 Green Update

[3 Environment Briefing March 2025.pdf](#)

9 Ideas/Suggestions

None

10 Any other business

None

11 Chair of next meeting

Christina Corr

Have something to say?

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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 – 7th May 2025

Present: **Chief Executive:** Anthony Roche
Director- Resources: Ian Couper
HR Services Manager: Rebecca Webb
Staff representatives: Tiranah Straughan, Louis Franklin, Christina Corr, Andrew Betts, Claire Bernard, Melanie Ferdaous
Technical Operations Manager: Mark Robinson
Facilities Team Leader: Debbie Hiscock
Union representative: Dee Levett
Notes: Ruby Lewis

Circulation: Global

Chair for Meeting: Christina Corr

1 Apologies and introductions

Apologies were received from Katie Thomas and Reina Gendle

2 Restructure Notices

None

3 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

CC: Is there an update on the replacement of headsets?

MR: We have a few in stock, refresh and replacement have taken place where people have requested it. A global email will not be sent as replacing all headsets will be too expensive.

CB: I have done what was previously suggested, the team have been told to raise a ticket or approach their line manager when a replacement is needed.

4 NHC Update (including HR and Staff Wellbeing Update)

RW: The pay claim coming in from the unions was for at least £3000 for most grades. An offer has been made for 3.2% across the board. The unions are currently arranging their meetings to consider the employer offer. One of the Unions has said that they are likely to reject, the other two have not made any comment. . A further update will be given when more information is available.

There has been a global email regarding the Staff Recognition Awards. These awards are for colleagues who go above and beyond and continuously represent our values. The closing date for nominations is the 30th May.



The next personal development morning will take place on the Friday 9th May. This is a good opportunity to complete any outstanding mandatory learning and other training sessions available on Growzone.

Managing stress support links have also been provided from the staff briefing last week.

IC: Referred to the recent Insight article from Anthony. The local County elections took place last week and that detailed the results. That article confirmed that we value inclusion in NHC, and we would like to reinforce that message. We are currently gearing up for the annual council in May, this will set out the new chair and any changes to Cabinet and committee membership.

5 Employee Queries

The HR recruitment application is due an update and IT are providing support with it. If there are any issues please e-mail HR help.

Staff have been coming and sitting on desks and not looking to see if it has been booked. The 4th floor is also having a lot of block booking. Desks are booked out and when you come in, they are empty. **Agreed to emphasise in the minutes that need to just book desks that you are going to use and cancel bookings as soon as you can if you don't need them.** HR to also check that desk booking is part of induction for new starters.

6 IT update

MR: We are starting to look at refreshing old laptops. We will contact you if we believe your laptop needs updating. Dell laptops have changed their model. 15-inch laptops are gone, and the choice is now between either 14 or 16 inches. We will try to standardise this but can only give what we have unless an Occupational Health referral requires anything specific. We are finalising the policy wording for the large file send. This will be a plug into Outlook for those who have permission where you can send and receive large files from external people very securely. There will be a notice out soon for those who will be given functionality.

7

8 Green Update

[4 Environment Briefing April 2025.pdf](#)

9 Ideas/Suggestions

None.

10 Any other business

None.

11 Chair of next meeting

Louis Franklin

Have something to say?

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Tiranan Straughan #4842 – Housing Policy Officer

Katie Thomas #5021 – Digital and Customer Service Apprentice

Melanie Ferdaous #4324 – Admin Support Officer

Reina Gendle #4188 – Careline Technical Administrator

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JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

18 June 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 4 (Jan – March 2025), with a comparison with the same period last year.

	Vacancies	Filled at first attempt	Filled (total)	Unfilled	% filled first attempt	Target
Q4 2025 (Jan-Mar)	19	15	17	2	78.9%	75%
Q4 2024 (Jan-Mar)	22	16	16	6	72.7%	75%

During the fourth quarter 2024/2025, we had fewer vacancies than the previous year. We successfully filled most vacancies including:

- Kiosk attendants for Howard Park and Bancroft Park,
- Electoral Services Manager,
- Green Space Manager,
- Senior Planning Compliance Officer and
- Senior Licensing Officer

Two roles were filled but not in the first attempt of interviewing – Information Officer and Contract Solicitor.

Two roles were unfilled – Catering Supervisor which has recently been recruited through the second attempt (in Q1) and Building & Facilities Surveyor which is recognised as a hard to fill role.

3.3 Leavers and Turnover

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

Rolling 12 months	Turnover	
	Leavers	Monthly
May-24	1	0.3%
Jun-24	1	0.3%
Jul-24	2	0.6%
Aug-24	4	1.2%
Sep-24	7	2.0%
Oct-24	4	1.2%
Nov-24	1	0.3%
Dec-24	0	0.0%
Jan-25	4	1.1%
Feb-25	4	1.1%
Mar-25	4	1.1%
Apr-25	0	0.0%
Total	32	9.2%

The table above shows the rolling labour turnover rate which is slightly higher than the same period last year.

In the most recent comparison figures with other local councils from Infinistats, our percentage of resignations and dismissals were broadly in line with the average for the East of England.

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 – National Joint Council (NJC)

The National Employers have made a pay offer for 2025:

- an increase of 3.20 per cent to be paid as a consolidated, permanent addition on all NJC pay points

The Unions claim was for an increase of at least £3,000 across all NJC spinal column points. The National Employers have rejected the other parts of the Unions pay claim, such as an extra day of annual leave and a reduction in the working week.

The Unions are in the process of balloting their members.

3.5 Apprentices

Two of our apprentices attended the LGA East, Apprentice of the Year Event on 21st May. The event is a celebration of local government apprenticeship talent, including participants from across the country.

Our apprentices embraced every aspect of the event, bringing enthusiasm, adaptability, and a creative approach to every challenge.

One of our apprentices who attended, shared their thoughts on the experience: "I really enjoyed the event. It was well thought out and allowed us to work with a wide range of people across local government. The tasks were a little challenging, but that made it even better—it encouraged communication and collaboration, helping us work effectively in teams to come up with different ideas and solutions. I'd definitely recommend it to future apprentices".

3.6 National Graduate Scheme

Our graduates are now settled into their second rotation, and we have completed interviews for the next cohort. The recruitment process is managed by the LGA with candidates being shortlisted for us to interview, these interviews have taken place, and the graduates will shortly be notified of their offers. As applicants can receive offers from more than one employer in the scheme (as well as any other jobs that they apply for), our preferred candidate may not choose to work for us. If we are successful, the next graduate will start in Autumn 2024.

3.7 Learning and Development

The HR team ran the first bitesize training session for managers in May. These are short, focussed, online sessions with the aim of increasing managers knowledge and skills in key areas.

Personal development mornings take place once a month and provide employees with the opportunity to focus on their development. Recent focussed sessions include opportunities to complete mandatory training on our learning management system, stress management, productivity and our White Ribbon promise.

3.8 Employee Wellbeing

During Mental Health Awareness week, we signposted staff to a number of internal and external resources to support maintain good mental health, including the Mental Health Hub provided by Optima, which provided staff with access to videos and information on maintaining positive mental health.

3.9 Inclusion Group

The inclusion group in June included a guest speaker from Proage providing expert opinion on age inclusion, and a discussion regarding the recent Supreme Court ruling

(on the meaning of “man”, “woman” and “sex” in the Equality Act 2010) pending the guidance that is due to be released later this month.

We are investigating further guest speakers for future meetings to allow the group to develop their knowledge and thinking.

The Inclusion Group is open to all staff and is held quarterly, the next meeting is scheduled during National Inclusion Week in September 2025.

3.10 Absence

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

Monthly rolling absence: days lost per employee			
	Long-term	Short-term	Total
May-24	4.09	4.31	8.41
Jun-24	4.43	4.46	8.90
Jul-24	4.55	4.51	9.06
Aug-24	4.46	4.61	9.08
Sep-24	4.73	4.54	9.28
Oct-24	5.05	4.22	9.26
Nov-24	5.02	4.06	9.09
Dec-24	4.94	4.26	9.19
Jan-25	4.54	4.30	8.84
Feb-25	4.26	4.26	8.52
Mar-25	4.12	4.38	8.51
Apr-25	4.04	4.50	8.54

Summary of absence reasons:

March - May 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)	26	4	1
Headaches (inc migraine)	8	1	0
Mental health	1	4	3
Musculoskeletal	2	0	1
Other	21	7	1
Sickness / Vomiting / Gastro	19	0	1
Total	78	16	7

This quarter, the seasonal colds / flu absences have declined, and overall, the total number of absences has dropped by over 50% compared to last quarter. Mental health

cases remain similar to last quarter, along with similar numbers for gastro-related absences.

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

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JSCC Discussion Paper - Succession Planning and Future Proofing

‘Succession planning focuses on identifying and growing talent to fill leadership and business-critical positions in the future.’ (CIPD). It’s closely linked to talent management.

North Herts Council is committed to the development of our staff through various initiatives aimed at creating a skilled and adaptive workforce. This has always been important but especially so, in light of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), which highlights the importance of teams that are prepared for evolving demands.

We encourage staff to develop in a number of ways, through both formal and informal training and development; we support staff to complete formal qualifications wherever possible, there are opportunities for secondments and ‘acting up’. Discussions with line managers at Regular Performance Reviews and 1-1s is vital to this process, along with HR advice and support.

Succession planning and nurturing talent can support retention, but we recognise that with the Councils flatter structure, there may not always be a role to progress into, which may result to individuals seeing opportunities elsewhere. Where there has been turnover, several senior roles at the Council have been filled by internal candidates in recent years and there are many examples of employees at all levels of the organisation achieving promotions within the Council.

In addition to developing staff for their next role, we are looking to the future and preparing them to adapt to changes in the world of work. We have incorporated the apprenticeship levy as one of the tools to facilitate staff development and we have several staff developing their digital skills and knowledge to support the workforce of the future. New roles and opportunities may also arise from LGR and we should ensure they are well placed to continue their development.

Utilising the apprenticeship levy, or any other form of learning and development undertaken by staff, does come with challenges. The primary issue is the constraint of time and workload on our staff. Many employees are already managing substantial responsibilities, and taking on additional learning can be impractical, so we support employees as much as we can to facilitate this.

The future will bring new structures, roles, processes, and technologies. It is vital that our staff are not only prepared for these changes but can also use them as an opportunity.

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JSCC Discussion Paper – Addressing microaggressions and unconscious bias in the workplace

A microaggression is a comment or action that negatively targets a marginalised group. They are often linked to stereotypes. They are often unintentional but can be intentional. Whilst they may seem subtle, the impact on an individual (or individuals) can be significant, particularly in relation to their mental and emotional wellbeing. They can accumulate over time, leading to a hostile work environment and decreased employee morale.

Unconscious bias is defined by ACAS: 'How a person thinks can depend on their life experiences. Sometimes they have beliefs and views about other people that might not be right or reasonable.' It leads to automatic and often unconscious judgments we make about others based on stereotypes or preconceived notions. That then leads to unfairness in how people are treated.

Both microaggressions and unconscious bias can hinder diversity and inclusion efforts, affecting team dynamics and overall organisational performance

It is crucial to address microaggressions and unconscious bias to foster a respectful and productive workplace. The Council is committed to creating an environment where all employees feel valued and respected. This is reflected in our value 'Inclusion' and supported by our Inclusion group.

Consequences of not addressing these issues

Failing to address microaggressions and unconscious bias can have severe consequences. It can lead to increased employee turnover, reduced job satisfaction, employee disengagement and potential legal ramifications. It can damage the Council's reputation and hinder its ability to attract and retain good employees. By proactively addressing these issues, we can create a more inclusive and supportive work environment, ultimately enhancing organisational performance and employee well-being.

Training and awareness raising

To combat these issues, the Council has implemented several initiatives:

- Our recruitment training for managers covers unconscious bias training to ensure fair and equitable hiring practices.
- Our Learning Management system provides various eLearning modules that all staff must complete, including Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion. These modules are designed to raise awareness and provide practical strategies for recognising and addressing unconscious bias in the workplace.
- The inclusion group have produced posters to further develop employee awareness of microaggressions and run personal development mornings focussing on unconscious bias and microaggressions.
- Inclusion group, HR and Leadership Team have attended training on microaggressions to deepen their understanding of these issues and to lead by example.

Next steps

Addressing microaggressions and unconscious bias is not just a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity. By fostering an inclusive and respectful workplace, the Council can ensure that all employees feel valued and empowered to contribute their best.

Additional training and awareness raising is planned to further develop employee understanding of inclusion, diversity and equalities. This includes bitesize sessions for managers and encouraging employees to consider their own bias. In addition, we plan to re-launch our values, which will further imbed the value of Inclusion.

Examples of our microaggressions posters:



Discussion points

Other ideas for addressing unconscious bias and microaggressions?

Are Councillors aware of the issues?

Date of JSCC		Discussion topic
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	
The Employer value proposition	
Change management	
Employee retention in times of uncertainty	

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