

# NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



3 October 2025

Our Ref Joint Staff Consultative Committee 15  
October 2025  
Contact. Committee Services  
Direct Dial. (01462) 474655  
Email. [committee.services@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:committee.services@north-herts.gov.uk)

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

District Councillors: Ian Albert, Daniel Allen, Keith Hoskins, 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, Louis Franklin and Tiranen Straughan.

## NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

## MEETING OF THE JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

to be held as a Virtual Meeting

## VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM

On

**WEDNESDAY, 15TH OCTOBER, 2025 AT 2.00 PM**

Yours sincerely,

Isabelle Alajooz  
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**

<b>Item</b>		<b>Page</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR THE CIVIC YEAR 2025/26</b> To elect a Chair for the Joint Staff Consultative Committee for the Civic Year 2025/26.	
<b>2.</b>	<b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b> Members are required to notify any substitutions by midday on the day of the meeting.  Late substitutions will not be accepted and Members attending as a substitute without having given the due notice will not be able to take part in the meeting.	
<b>3.</b>	<b>ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR FOR THE CIVIC YEAR 2025/26</b> To elect a Vice-Chair for the Joint Staff Consultative Committee for the Civic Year 2025/26.	
<b>4.</b>	<b>MINUTES - 18 JUNE 2025</b> To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 18 June 2025.	(Pages 5 - 12)
<b>5.</b>	<b>CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS</b> Members are reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Declarable Interest and are required to notify the Chair of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item. Members declaring a Declarable Interest, wishing to exercise a 'Councillor Speaking Right', must declare this at the same time as the interest, move to the public area before speaking to the item and then must leave the room before the debate and vote.	
<b>6.</b>	<b>HR INFORMATION NOTE</b> INFORMATION NOTE OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES 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 13 - 18)
<b>7.</b>	<b>DISCUSSION PAPER - EMPLOYER VALUE PROPOSITION</b> To receive a discussion paper on the Employer Value Proposition.	(Pages 19 - 20)

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| 8. | <b>SCF MINUTES</b><br>To receive the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums from June, July and September 2025. | (Pages<br>21 - 32) |
| 9. | <b>SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS</b><br>To consider topics for discussion at a future meeting of the Committee.     | (Pages<br>33 - 34) |

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**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING HELD IN THE VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM**  
**ON WEDNESDAY, 18TH JUNE, 2025 AT 10.00 AM**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** *Councillors: Ian Albert (Chair), Daniel Allen, Keith Hoskins, Bryony May and Claire Strong.*

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

**Staff Consultation Forum:** *Louis Franklin*

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

**1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

*Audio recording – 0 minutes 7 seconds*

Councillor Keith Hoskins proposed and Councillor Claire Strong seconded and, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor Ian Albert be elected as Chair for this meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee.

There were no apologies for absence from Members.

**2 MINUTES - 19 MARCH 2025**

*Audio Recording – 2 minutes 30 seconds*

Councillor Ian Albert, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Claire Strong seconded and, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 19 March 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

**3 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

*Audio recording – 3 minutes 36 seconds*

*N.B. The SCF staff representative joined the Zoom call at 10.04.*

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be recorded.
- (2) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

## 4 SCF MINUTES

*Audio recording – 3 minutes 59 seconds*

The Director – Resources presented the item entitled ‘SCF Minutes’, alongside the Minutes from the meetings of March, April and May 2025 and highlighted the following:

- IT updates covering a variety of topics had been received.
- The new directorate structure which came into effect on 1 April was discussed.
- Quarterly updates on property services would now be given by the Facilities Team Leader rather than the Director – Resources as it was no longer under the remit of the Resources Directorate.
- Discussion about virtual parking permits replacing physical permits had taken place.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Ian Albert

In response to questions, the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager advised that all Members would be informed of the passing of one of the former Chief Executives at the next Full Council meeting.

In response to questions, the Director – Resources advised that most property issues had been resolved and staff were generally content.

In response to questions, the SCF staff representative advised that they had not heard any complaints from staff regarding the changes from physical to virtual parking permits and agreed with the comments from the Director – Resources about recent SCF meetings being quiet, which was usually a good indication of staff morale.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee noted the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum for March, April and May 2025.

## 5 HR INFORMATION NOTE

*Audio recording – 8 minutes 16 seconds*

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

- Paragraph 3.2 of the Information Note provided an update on recruitment. The table within this highlighted the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for Q4 and the recruitment data showed that this had been met. A comparison of data with the same quarter in the previous year was also shown within the table.
- 79% of vacancies were filled at the first attempt and most were filled at the second attempt, however, there were fewer vacancies in Q1 this year compared to the same quarter in the previous year.
- Paragraph 3.3 highlighted staff turnover which continued to be approximately 9%. This was higher than the previous year but the Local Government Association (LGA) benchmarking tool, Infinistats, illustrated that the percentage was broadly in line with other councils in the East of England.
- National Employers had offered a 3.2% increase across all NJC pay points, however, UNISON were still demanding an increase of £3,000 across all spinal column points and were advising their Members to reject the offer.

- Two apprentices had attended the LGA Apprentice of the Year event that took place in May. This was an online event which brought together apprentices across the country to encourage collaboration and the development of skills required to tackle challenges in local government.
- Graduates were in their second rotation of service areas and interviews for the second cohort had been completed. It was expected that the next graduate placement would start in Autumn 2025, subject to suitable candidates and their acceptance of the role.
- HR had developed short and focused bite sized training sessions for managers which were designed to develop their knowledge and skills in key areas. They would continue to develop these sessions based on feedback to fulfil the action on this detailed in the Staff Survey Action Plan.
- Employee Wellbeing was detailed at paragraph 3.8 and the Council had participated in Mental Health Awareness Week in May by signposting staff to internal and external resources and providing them with videos about maintaining positive mental health.
- The activities of the Inclusion Group (IG) were set out in paragraph 3.9 of the Information Note. Their meeting in June included a guest speaker from a charity called ProAge who worked to create inclusive workplaces.
- The IG had discussed the Supreme Court ruling on the meaning of sex within the Equalities Act and they would await the guidance that was due to be released on this later in the month.
- Additional guest speakers would be invited to attend future IG meetings to shift the focus of the group to other areas and to diversify their knowledge on equality, diversity and inclusion.
- 8.54 days were lost to sickness per full-time employee in the last 12 months which was lower than the previous figure reported at the last Committee meeting.
- This was due to a reduction in cold and flu absences as expected, with gastro and mental health related absences remaining similar to the previous quarter.
- Bite sized sessions were currently focused on upskilling managers to deal with short-term absences within their teams by equipping them with the skills to facilitate conversations with team members and be able to offer them appropriate support.
- HR continued to give support across the Council for long-term absences and involved occupational health where needed to support return-to-works and provide adjustments where necessary. Throughout that process, additional support was signposted to employees, particularly to the Employee Assistance Programme when appropriate.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Bryony May

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

- Office days differed between departments as they were managed by individual service managers and because of this, the general data they held on absence due to sickness could not be linked to working from home or the office specifically.
- The Council had encouraged home working for several years, therefore no recent change in absence from sickness could be linked to this.
- The LGA benchmarking system revealed that their figures on absence due to sickness were close to other authorities in the East of England. More information could be provided on that comparison to Members via email after the meeting.
- Two graduates were recruited last autumn on a two-year placement and their plan going forward was to recruit one graduate annually on a two-year placement to create overlap and allow the graduates to support each other.

- The central budget of the Council only allowed for approximately eight apprentices to be employed at any one time.
- Personal development mornings took place each month on a Friday and staff were provided with resources such as online courses and webinars. It was flexible when personal development was undertaken as they were aware that some staff did not work on a Friday and they were encouraged to pick it up on another day in their week.
- Managers were encouraged to carry out team activities for personal development mornings as long as all team members were present.

Councillor Ian Albert thanked the Human Resources Services Manager for presenting the Information Note to the Committee.

## **6 DISCUSSION PAPER - SUCCESSION PLANNING AND FUTURE PROOFING**

*Audio recording – 21 minutes 30 seconds*

The HR Services Manager presented the Discussion Paper entitled 'Succession Planning and Future Proofing' and advised that:

- Succession Planning focused on identifying and growing talent to fill leadership and business-critical positions.
- The Council was committed to the development and progression of current employees through various initiatives, and this commitment was crucial, especially with LGR approaching as teams would need to be prepared for evolving demands.
- Staff were encouraged to develop through both formal and informal training but were also supported to complete formal qualifications and take on opportunities in the form of secondments or 'acting up'.
- Discussions with line managers at Regular Performance Reviews (RPRs) and 1-1s were vital to this process along with HR support and advice.
- Succession planning and development could support retention but it was recognised that there would not always be a position for employees to progress into due to the flat organisation structure of the Council which meant that some individuals sought promotion opportunities elsewhere.
- However, the Council had benefited from former employees returning to the organisation when appropriate positions became available for them after gaining skills and experience at another authority.
- Where there had been staff turnover in senior positions over recent years, these had been filled by several internal candidates and there were examples of employees at all levels of the organisation achieving promotions within.
- In addition to developing staff for future roles, staff were also being prepared to adapt to change within the world of work.
- The apprenticeship levy had been incorporated as one of the tools for development and several staff were improving their digital skills by undertaking courses in AI for business value, data insights for business decisions and advanced software engineering to support the Council workforce of the future.
- However, any form of learning and development came with challenges, the primary one being a constraint on time and workload both inside and outside of working hours as the apprenticeship levy required 20% off-the-job learning. HR were supporting employees with this and encouraging them to find the best methods of learning to suit their needs.
- The future would bring new structures, roles, processes and technologies and it was vital that staff were not only prepared for these changes but could use them as an opportunity.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong



- Councillor Bryony May
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Keith Hoskins

Councillor Claire Strong highlighted that the Council had been successful with succession planning as there were recent examples of internal candidates filling positions in the Senior Leadership Team, however, it was recognised that they would not be able to satisfy all Members of staff with career opportunities.

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

- There was no formal process for recognising talent within the Council, however, RPRs and 1-1s could be used by managers to spot progression and HR provided guidance on appropriate training if a suitable career path had been identified.
- RPRs and 1-1s were continuous and an annual log of these was kept to aid planning for future conversations.
- A coaching and mentoring scheme was available for those who wanted to progress but lacked the confidence to do so.
- A confidence workshop, specifically targeted at women, to help address the gender pay gap would be provided by the Council.
- It was ensured that opportunities were equally available to all employees regardless of their working patterns.
- Job adverts specified that the Council were open to discussing work patterns with the right candidate.
- Staff were able to request flexible working due to the Flexible Working Policy and there were examples of employees utilising this, even in the Senior Leadership team.
- Recruitment was an ongoing issue for the local government sector although there had been some recent improvements on this.
- Recruitment could become more difficult for the Council if the instabilities of LGR impacted their ability to attract candidates. This situation would be monitored by tracking staff turnover.
- The Council would take advantage of the national recruitment campaign for local government and continue to market the Council as a great employer in order to combat the potential future recruitment difficulties arising from LGR.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee commented on and noted the Discussion Paper on Succession Planning and Future Proofing.

## **7 DISCUSSION PAPER - MICROAGGRESSIONS AND UNCONSCIOUS BIAS IN THE WORKPLACE**

*Audio recording – 35 minutes 32 seconds*

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

- Microaggressions were defined as negative comments or actions that targeted a marginalised group and were often linked to stereotypes.
- They could be intentional or unintentional and while their delivery could be subtle, their impact could be significant both on mental health and emotional wellbeing.
- Hostile work environments could result from the accumulation of unchallenged microaggressions over time and lead to a reduction in employee morale.
- How people thought could depend on their life experiences and sometimes they held beliefs and views about others that might not be right or reasonable.
- Unconscious bias led to automatic judgements based on stereotypes or preconceived notions and could result in the unfair treatment of individuals.

- Both microaggressions and unconscious bias could hinder diversity and inclusion efforts, affecting team dynamics and overall organisational performance.
- It was key to address these issues to foster a respectful and productive workplace.
- The Council were committed to creating an environment where all employees felt valued and respected which was supported through its 'Inclusive' value in the Council Values as well as the ongoing work of the Inclusion Group (IG).
- Failing to address these issues could have severe consequences such as increased staff turnover, decreased employee engagement, legal ramifications and a loss of reputation as an employer which could hinder recruitment and retention of good employees.
- By tackling the issues proactively, a supportive and inclusive work environment could be created, resulting in enhanced organisational performance and employee wellbeing.
- Several initiatives had been employed to combat the issues such as recruitment training which covered unconscious bias and e-learning modules which included equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Posters on microaggressions in the workplace were developed by the IG to promote awareness of this issue among employees.
- Personal development mornings had focused on unconscious bias and microaggressions.
- Members of the HR team, Senior Leadership team and IG had attended training on these microaggressions.
- Next steps to combat these issues included additional training for all staff to further develop their understanding on these topics and encourage them to consider their own behaviours, as well as promote inclusion, equality and diversity.
- They were planning to relaunch the Council values to further embed the 'Inclusive' value.
- Members were encouraged to share their perceptions of microaggressions and unconscious bias as it would help the Council to further understand these issues.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Keith Hoskins
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Bryony May
- Councillor Claire Strong

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

- Microaggressions could constitute comments or actions that did not specifically target a marginalised group, but they were more commonly aimed towards marginalised groups as detailed in their definition.
- Microaggressions could occur both face-to-face and online, including via social media.
- The HR team and IG were developing the skills of staff to be able to challenge microaggressions in the moment by recognising them, processing interactions and then responding correctly. Although, there would be difficulties in challenging them in the moment.
- It was important for staff to see that unconscious bias was present in everyone to make it easier for them to recognise it within themselves and challenge it when they saw it through their behaviour.
- Digital copies of the microaggression posters would be sent to all Members following the meeting.
- Work on microaggressions and unconscious bias would never be complete as the conversation on these issues was ongoing.
- HR and IG would drip feed messages on both topics to all staff to keep them present in their minds to encourage discussion and reflection.

- Sessions on microaggressions and unconscious bias would continue to be held at staff briefings, the Senior Management Group, and in the monthly staff Insight Magazine.
- There were inclusion-based questions in the Staff Survey last year and they would investigate the rollout of pulse surveys with a focus on inclusion.
- Actions on inclusion were detailed in the Staff Survey Action Plan. One of these was to continue to keep the discussion on microaggressions and unconscious bias ever present at the Council.
- Conducting a presentation on microaggressions and unconscious bias in the workplace prior to or during a Full Council meeting would be investigated.

Councillor Keith Hoskins highlighted that it was good to see the increasing awareness of these problems and showed how much progression had been made on attitudes in the workplace in recent decades.

Councillor Claire Strong highlighted that having regular conversations with employees about the topics was key as being on the receiving end of unconscious bias was not pleasant.

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

- Assumptions should not be made about anyone.
- It was natural for people to make mistakes but in order to tackle them it was better to ensure that people learned from them rather than being punished for them.
- The Staff Survey Action Plan included an action to ensure that managers were supported to facilitate meaningful conversations with staff during 1-1s and RPRs about their health and wellbeing.

In response to questions, the SCF staff representative advised that:

- Discussion on microaggressions had taken place at the IG on more than one occasion and this was a good starting point because it encouraged further conversations about the topic.
- Challenging microaggressions was more about positively influencing individuals to change their behaviours rather than punishing them for acting in a certain way.

In response to questions, the Chair advised that:

- There was value in spreading awareness on microaggressions and unconscious bias in the workplace by building the topics into inductions, training programmes and development as they were important issues.
- A presentation on microaggressions and unconscious bias in the workplace could be incorporated into a Full Council meeting where there were fewer items on the agenda.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee commented on and noted the Discussion Paper on Microaggressions and Unconscious Bias in the Workplace.

## 8 SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

*Audio recording – 58 minutes 30 seconds*

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

- Councillor Bryony May
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Daniel Allen

The following points were made as part of the discussion:

- It would be worth having a conversation on the Supreme Court ruling on the Equalities Act and how the Council would respond to this once the guidance was released.
- The Employer Value Proposition would be an interesting topic for discussion as talent retention was important for the Council.
- Discussion around Change Management would be valuable, particularly with LGR drawing closer, however, discussion on the topic should be delayed until more was known about the potential structuring of the unitary authorities.
- Change Management was identified as a large topic and it was suggested to have a sole discussion paper on this at a future meeting.

In response to points raised in the discussion, Councillor Daniel Allen suggested that they should invite the Executive Member for Local Government Reorganisation/Devolution to attend the Committee meeting at which Change Management would be discussed and this was agreed by the Chair.

Members agreed two topics on 'Implications of the UK Supreme Court Judgement on Single Sex Spaces on the Workplace' and 'The Employer Value Proposition' for the next meeting of the Committee and one topic on 'Change Management' for the Committee meeting taking place on 28 January 2026.

The Chair thanked the Human Resources Services Manager for presenting the discussion papers to the Committee.

The meeting closed at 11.09 am

Chair

## JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

15 October 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 1 April– June 2025, with a comparison with the same period in the previous two years.

	Vacancies	Filled at first attempt	Filled (total)	Unfilled	% filled first attempt	Target
Q1: April-June 2023	21	19	19	2	90.5%	75%
Q1: April-June 2024	10	7	7	3	70.0%	75%
Q1: April-June 2025	20	17	17	3	85.0%	75%

During Quarter 1, we had a double the number of vacancies than the previous year but a similar number to the same period in 2023. We successfully filled the majority of vacancies including two Director roles, Senior Urban Design & Planning Officer, Waste Contracts Officer and Safeguarding Support Officer.

Three positions were unfilled – two vacancies in Governance were offered but declined and no offer was made for the Scientific Officer role in Environmental Health.

### 3.3 Leavers and Turnover

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

Rolling 12 months	Turnover	
	Leavers	Monthly
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%
Mar-25	4	1.12%
Apr-25	0	0
May-25	0	0
Jun-25	1	0.27%
Jul-25	4	1.08%
Aug-25	6	1.64%
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>9.8%</b>

The table above shows the rolling labour turnover rate which is significantly higher than the same period last year where we reported turnover of 7.22%.

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 (such as ending contracts of apprentices, and maternity cover).

In the most recent comparison figures with other local councils from the Local Government benchmarking tool, our percentage turnover remains broadly in line with the average for the East of England.

### 3.4 Absence

The absence figures are shown below as absence days lost per employee on a rolling basis. There has been a reduction in long-term sick cases which are monitored and supported carefully by the HR team. This reduction has contributed to the overall improvement in the number of days lost per employee.

Monthly rolling absence: days lost per employee			
	Long-term	Short-term	Total
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
May-25	4.08	4.42	8.50
Jun-25	3.82	4.26	8.08
Jul-25	3.73	4.24	7.97
Aug-25	3.70	4.11	7.81

Recent research from the CIPD\* (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) has found that there is a significant increase in employee sickness absence across the country with the average 9.4 days lost in the last 12 months, compared to 7.8 days lost in 2023. This highlights the importance of continued support for employees and managers in managing absence and wellbeing. Occupational health are involved where appropriate to provide support and return to work guidance and employees are signposted to various support throughout, including our employee assistance programme.

The top 3 causes of long-term absence at the Council in this period were mental ill-health including anxiety and depression, musculoskeletal issues such as back pain, and other long-term health conditions such as cancer.

Summary of absence reasons:

June – August 2025 Absence reason	Occasions of absence		
	Up to 1 week	1-3 weeks	Over 3 weeks
COVID 19 - suspected	2	0	0
Ear, Nose and Throat (Inc Cold/Flu)	12	1	0
Headaches (inc migraine)	8	1	1
Mental health	6	5	7
Musculoskeletal	3	1	1
Other	24	7	4
Sickness / Vomiting / Gastro	23	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>15</b>

This quarter the seasonal colds / flu absences have further declined as expected. Mental health absences have increased, in addition to other long-term absences which include pregnancy related cases, surgery and long-term, chronic illnesses.

\* [Workplace absence levels soar to nearly two working weeks per employee each year | CIPD](#)

### **3.5 National pay bargaining 2025 – National Joint Council (NJC)**

A 3.2% pay award was agreed in July and paid to employees in their August salary.

### **3.6 Apprentices**

We currently have 10 apprentices in post with adverts for our next apprentice opportunities in Customer Services and Accounts.

Our mentoring scheme for apprentices has been refreshed, allowing the current graduates the opportunity to mentor apprentices. We will also be providing new apprentices with an apprentice buddy at the start of their employment, to support them settling into the organisation and on their apprenticeship programme.

### **3.7 National Graduate Scheme**

Our newly recruited graduate joined us at the start of October; we have received positive feedback from Managers about the impact that the current graduates are making across the organisation and the value added on projects that they are supporting.

### **3.8 Learning and Development**

Recent Personal Development Mornings have focused on National Inclusion week, avoiding burnout and taking breaks and feeling safe at work (both physically and psychologically). The feeling safe focus links to our staff survey action plan and allowed an opportunity to highlight resources available, including e-learning, and how to access the right support. This information is available online and is displayed in our offices.

Bitesize manager skills sessions are taking place to support core management skills such as managing sickness absence and carrying out appraisals. These form part of our ongoing support for management development.

### **3.9 Employee Wellbeing**

During Mental Health Awareness week, we signposted staff to several internal and external resources to support the maintenance of good mental health, including the videos and factsheets from our Occupational Health provider.

Thursday 10th September was World Suicide Prevention Day. This year's theme, Changing the Narrative on Suicide, aimed to address stigma and promote open discussions. Information on starting conversations and resources for additional support have been provided for staff.

World mental health day was marked in October with a mental health lunchtime walk and an opportunity to talk to colleagues and signpost resources.

A wellbeing room has been created in the Letchworth offices for staff to use for mindful breaks from their working day with a view to supporting them to manage their mental health.



### **3.10 Inclusion**

National Inclusion Week 2025 took place from 15 - 19 September. In recognition of this event, staff were provided with a range of resources, as well as the opportunity to participate in a webinar focused on becoming an active bystander.

Our October Inclusion group meeting will discuss the skills learned from the webinar and how these might be used in practice at the Council.

### **3.11 2025 Staff Event**

In September we ran our first all staff event at Hitchin Town Hall. The session was run three times to help maximise the number of staff that could take part. It was a great opportunity to get lots of our staff together. It was one of the ideas that came out of our Corporate Peer Challenge.

The event covered key topics including Local Government Restructure, team building and skills development. Initial feedback about the event has been positive and will be reviewed and used to develop plans for the next event.

## **4.0 NEXT STEPS**

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

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

## **5.0 CONTACT OFFICERS**

Authors

5.1 Rebecca Webb  
HR Services Manager  
01462 474481  
[rebecca.webb@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:rebecca.webb@north-herts.gov.uk)

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

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## JSCC Discussion Paper – the Employer Value Proposition

An Employer Value Proposition (EVP) defines the core promise an employer makes to its employees, outlining what they can expect in return for their work. A compelling EVP is crucial for attracting candidates, particularly in hard to fill roles, and keeping existing employees engaged and motivated. It encompasses both tangible (e.g. salary) and intangible benefits (e.g. company culture, career development opportunities, and work-life balance).

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### **Core components of a strong EVP:**

#### **Development**

We believe in the continuous growth and development of our employees. We offer a range of training programs, workshops, and courses to help employees enhance their skills and advance their careers. Our commitment to professional development (including paying for professional subscriptions) ensures that our employees are well-equipped to meet the challenges of their roles and achieve their full potential. We also support continued professional development (CPD).

#### **Flexibility**

We understand the importance of maintaining a healthy work-life balance and offering flexibility. We offer flexible working arrangements, including hybrid and remote working options and flexible hours, to help our employees balance their professional and personal lives. We also provide generous leave policies to support our staff in taking the time they need for rest and rejuvenation. Our flexi-time scheme allows employees to bank extra hours worked and take the time back at a time that suits them, subject to service needs.

#### **Inclusion**

Diversity and inclusion are at the heart of our values. We strive to create a workplace where everyone feels valued and respected, regardless of their background or identity. Our Inclusion group and networks foster collaboration, innovation, and a sense of belonging among our employees.

#### **Wellbeing**

Our aim is to create a healthy and supportive work environment where our employees can thrive both personally and professionally. We offer a range of wellbeing initiatives, including mental health support through signposting and mental health first aiders, an online wellness platform, financial wellbeing webinars, wellbeing group activities and access to counselling services.

## **Reward**

We offer a comprehensive benefits package to attract and retain employees. Our benefits include the Local Government pension scheme, generous leave entitlement, discounted gym membership, work parking permits, holiday flex salary sacrifice scheme, GP helpline service and various employee discounts. We regularly review our benefits to ensure they remain competitive, and we are in the process of introducing an Electric car salary sacrifice scheme.

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All the elements above support a positive and supportive organisational culture, and employee experience so that employees feel valued, engaged and motivated.

Our EVP is communicated to potential applicants on our recruitment web pages with elements being discussed during interviews and during the induction process at the HR welcome meeting. Employees can find out about our EVP through various methods including the Hub and Insight magazine, at SCF and Staff Briefings and during the Regular Performance review process with their manager.

## **Measures**

To continue to attract, retain and engage good people, we need to ensure our EVP remains relevant and effective. Measures of our EVP include turnover and absence rates, staff surveys, Staff Consultation Forum, leavers feedback, research and benchmarking.

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Do you think our EVP is clear to our employees and potential applicants?

How might we better communicate our EVP?

What role do Councillors have in promoting the Council as an employer?

## Staff Consultation Forum Meeting Minutes – 4<sup>th</sup> June 2025

**Present:** **Director – Environment:** Sarah Kingsley  
**HR Operations Manager:** Jo Keshishian  
**Staff representatives:** 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

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### 1 **Apologies and introductions**

Apologies were received from Anthony Roche, Ian Couper, Rebecca Webb, Melanie Ferdaous, Andrew Betts and Tiranah Straughan

### 2 **Restructure Notices**

None

### 3 **Matters Arising from Previous Notes**

None

### 4 **NHC Update (including HR and Staff Wellbeing Update)**

**JK:** We are still waiting on a further update for the pay award. The next personal development morning is this Friday, the 6<sup>th</sup> of June, an email will be circulated in the next few days with further information. A reminder will be published on the hub regarding Register of Interest forms. All staff must complete this form annually after recent changes to the conflict of interest policy.

**SK:** A further update regarding Local Government reorganisation will be given at the next staff briefing. The leisure decarbonisation project has been awarded to Wilmott Dixon. This project will cause disruption to the leisure centres and their users. The staff briefing will also provide further details on this. The waste contract was taken over in May. The team are gearing up for the upcoming change to the collection cycle.

### 5 **Employee Queries**

**Q:** If another member of staff wants to replace a current SCF staff representative, how is this done?

**A:** An email can be sent to Hrhelp

**MR:** We have had many queries regarding the tv screen in the canteen. This has been removed due to licensing issues and will now display the same messages as the screen located in the entrance. A new plug in for Outlook for Mimecast is coming soon. This will make it easier for blocked messages to be looked at. Large file send is also being introduced, making it easier to send and receive large files. We have begun to replace old laptops, over the next 3 or 4 months those who have been identified as needing a new laptop will be contacted. Please note we are not taking requests. There has been issues recently in meeting room 2 on floor 1. The desks with the IT equipment being moved has meant a lot of equipment has been broken. These desks will now be bolted down to prevent any further damage.

**7 Building Services Update**

None

**8 Green Update**

Read [here](#)

**9 Ideas/Suggestions**

HR will check SCF is highlighted in the new starter email.

**10 Any other business**

None

**11 Chair of next meeting**

Christina Corr

**Have something to say?**

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

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

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

**Representatives (and phone extension):**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Melanie Ferdaous** #4324 – Admin Support Officer

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**Staff Consultation Forum Meeting Minutes – 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2025**

**Present:**

**Director- Resources:** Ian Couper  
**HR Services Manager:** Rebecca Webb  
**Staff representatives:** Tiranah Straughan, Louis Franklin, Christina Corr, Andrew Betts, Christine Howe, Melanie Ferdaous, Katie Thomas, Martin Trotter  
**Technical Operations Manager:** Mark Robinson  
**Union representative:** Dee Levett  
**Notes:** Ruby Lewis

**Circulation:** Global

**Chair for Meeting:** Louis Franklin

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**1 Apologies and introductions**

Apologies were received from Anthony Roche and Christina Corr

Introductions were given to Christine, and Martin who will be replacing Andrew after attending SCF for 6 years.

**2 Restructure Notices**

None

**3 Matters Arising from Previous Notes**

None

**4 NHC Update (including HR and Staff Wellbeing Update)**

RW: There is currently no further update on pay negotiations..  
The next personal development morning is on Friday the 4<sup>th</sup> July, there is no theme to this personal development morning, so it is a good opportunity to look on Growzone and ensure you are up to date with all mandatory training.

There are various staff training events coming up including RPR for new starters and managers. [Upcoming Learning and Development opportunities](#)

Costco will be at DCO on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July to talk about options for membership.

[Costco Membership Event](#) Following the in-person staff briefing on Tuesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> July, the Costco membership team will be on-site from 12:00 PM to 2...

IC: The Council and employment committee in June confirmed Nigel and Isabelle will be the two new directors. End of year reports have gone through cabinet. We will be receiving news on our funding for the next 3 years soon.

Q: Have we had many responses from the community regarding the budget survey that recently got sent out?

A: As of Monday, we have had 489 responses. We will be promoting it some more shortly.

## **5 Employee Queries**

Q: Meeting rooms seem to be very much restricted to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> floor. Will the equipment in the meeting rooms be updates soon?

A: With regards to availability, a common issue is rooms being booked and then not being used. It is difficult for us to check whether people are booking rooms and then actually using them. Staff need to ensure the booking system is being used correctly. There are no current plans to update the equipment, we have not had any reports of any issues. Most of the kit is only 3 years old or were installed during covid.

Q: Is there any consideration regarding reviewing the pay grades, as there is a missing one that limits staff progression, thus having a knock effect to stymie staff progression below this?

A: We have not used Grade 13 for several years. There is some work being carried out around benchmarking our pay against other Councils. The outcome will be dependent on what we can afford.

## **6 IT update**

MR: We have two different laptop upgrades ongoing. The physical laptop upgrade, we have rolled out 43. It is still in early stages but will ramp up soon. It is dependent on the age of the laptop, the oldest laptops are being updates first, along with new starters. Any concerns regarding this, you can contact me directly.

## **7 Building Services Update**

### **Multi-Storey Car Park Cleaning**

Responsibility for cleaning the two multi-storey car parks has now transferred from Property Services to the Waste team/Veolia contract. Any cleaning-related issues should now be reported to Customer Services, who will log them into CRM for appropriate action.

### **Hand Sanitiser Units at DCO**

Hand sanitiser units were installed throughout the DCO during the Covid-19 pandemic. The supplier of these units and their refills withdrew from the European market in 2024.

As a result, refills are no longer available, and no compatible alternatives have been identified.

It is proposed to replace all units located in the lift lobbies.

All other units will be removed.



The free standing unit in the civic corridor will remain.

The unit in reception and the staff canteen were still full so not deemed necessary for replacement.

### **Air Conditioning**

Our air condition contractor will be working in the DCO week commencing 7<sup>th</sup> July carrying out air conditioning servicing.

### **Door Maintenance**

Although final dates have yet to be agreed contractors will be working throughout the DCO undertaking fire door maintenance works. It's likely this work will start sometime in July.

### **Letchworth Multi storey car park**

New hold open fire doors are to be installed between the car park and the shopping centre. This is likely to take place late July. The doors are to replace an old fire shutter and to meet the requirements of Herts Fire Service.

Please direct any questions or concerns to the Property Services inbox.

## **8 Green Update**

Read [here](#)

## **9 Ideas/Suggestions**

LF: I will continue to upload brief notes from the meeting on Viva Engage, it helps to promote SCF and bring awareness to what the meeting is for.

The planning team will be approached about having a representative in SCF.

## **10 Any other business**

August meeting will not go ahead.

## **11 Chair of next meeting**

Katie Thomas.

### **Have something to say?**

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

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

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

**Melanie Ferdaous #4324** – Admin Support Officer

**Staff Consultation Forum Meeting Minutes – 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2025**

**Present:**

**Director- Resources:** Ian Couper  
**HR Services Manager:** Rebecca Webb  
**Staff representatives:** Tiranah Straughan, Martin Trotter, Katie Thomas  
**Technical Operations Manager:** Mark Robinson  
**Union representative:** Dee Levett  
**Notes:** Fallon Rumball-Nunan

**Circulation:** Global

**Chair for Meeting:** Katie Thomas

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**1 Apologies**

Louis Franklin, Christina Corr, Christine Howe, Melanie Ferdaous, Anthony Roche.

**2 Restructure Notices**

None

**3 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting**

None

**4 NHC Update (including HR and Staff Wellbeing Update)**

Pay Award

- The 2025 pay increase of 3.2% has been agreed and was processed in the August payroll.

All-Staff Event

- All are encouraged to book onto the upcoming event.
- Opportunity to connect with colleagues, refresh key skills, and contribute to the Local Government Restructure.

Annual Leave Reminder

- We are halfway through the annual leave year.
- Please check your leave balance and remind teams of the importance of taking breaks.
- Carry-over leave will return to the standard maximum of 37 hours (pro-rata for part-time staff) from April 2026.

National Inclusion Week – 15 September

- A global email will share resources.
- The 'Active Bystander' webinar will take place on 18 September.



Personal Development Morning – 5 September

- Staff are encouraged to use Inclusion Week resources and/or revisit [last year's webinar](#).

Mental Health Day – 9 October

- A staff walk will be held at midday, followed by cake.
- Launch of the new Wellbeing Room is planned. The room will provide a space for staff to take mindful breaks and aims to support staff to look after their mental health.
- Staff feedback and suggestions for the space are welcome.

Wellbeing Room Q&A

- Feedback was given regarding single occupancy vs shared usage.
- The Quiet Room remains available for individual use.
- No booking or sign-in will be required. Usage will be monitored informally via staff forums and feedback.

World Suicide Prevention Day – 10 September

- Theme: Changing the Narrative on Suicide
- Encourages open conversations and reducing stigma.
- Staff are reminded to check in if concerned about someone and to access support through HR, EAP, or a Designated Safeguarding Contact.

Insight Articles

- [Pension webinars \(SCAVC\)](#)
- [Support for carers](#)
- [Flexi Time](#)
- [6 Thinking Hats](#)

**5 Employee Queries**

None

**6 IT update**

Laptop Rollout: 100 complete. Staff will be contacted directly. Please do not chase.

Cyber Awareness Month: A staff poll is live. Please vote to share what you'd like to see covered.

Windows 10 Support Ending: From 14 October, Windows 10 will no longer receive security updates. If you're affected, contact IT to discuss upgrade options.

Homeworking Monitors: All new starters are now offered a choice of 27-inch or 24-inch monitors for homeworking.

**7 Building Services Update**

No update this month. Building Services reports are provided on a quarterly basis

**8 Green Update**



[9 Sustainability Briefing September 2025](#)

**9 Ideas/Suggestions**

None

**10 Any other business**

If you can please [Support Our Public Sector Challenge Team!](#)

**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.

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

**Martin Trotter** #4541 - Shared Service Contract Officer – Waste

**Christine Howe** #4832 - Client Services Support Officer

**Melanie Ferdaous** #4324 – Admin Support Officer

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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
	June	Microaggressions and unconscious bias
	June	Succession planning and future proofing
	October	The Employer value proposition

Suggested discussion topics for future meetings	
JSCC	Employment rights bill
	Managing short term absence
	Flexible and hybrid working
	Social media for recruitment
	Change management
	Employee retention in times of uncertainty
	Careers coaching
	Psychological safety at work
	Recruitment of Graduates
	Learning from leavers feedback

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