

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



19 January 2026

Our Ref Joint Staff Consultative Committee 28
January 2026
Contact. Committee Services
Direct Dial. (01462) 474655
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To: The Chair and Members of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee of North Hertfordshire District Council

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

Substitute 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: Christina Corr, Melanie Ferdaous, Louis Franklin, Christine Howe, Tiranan Straughan, Katie Thomas and Martin Trotter.

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, 28TH JANUARY, 2026 AT 10.00 AM

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

Item		Page
1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	Members are required to notify any substitutions by midday on the day of the meeting. Late substitutions will not be accepted and Members attending as a substitute without having given the due notice will not be able to take part in the meeting.	
2. MINUTES - 15 OCTOBER 2025	To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 15 October 2025.	(Pages 3 - 8)
3. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS	Members are reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Declarable Interest and are required to notify the Chair of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item. Members declaring a Declarable Interest, wishing to exercise a 'Councillor Speaking Right', must declare this at the same time as the interest, move to the public area before speaking to the item and then must leave the room before the debate and vote.	
4. SCF MINUTES	To receive the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums from October, November and December 2025.	(Pages 9 - 20)
5. HR INFORMATION NOTE	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 21 - 26)
6. DISCUSSION PAPER - MANAGING CHANGE	To receive a discussion paper on Managing Change.	(Pages 27 - 28)
7. SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS	To consider topics for discussion at a future meeting of the Committee.	(Pages 29 - 30)

Public Document Pack Agenda Item 2

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM
ON WEDNESDAY, 15TH OCTOBER, 2025 AT 2.00 PM

MINUTES

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

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)*

UNISON: *Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews*

Staff Consultation Forum: *Melanie Feradous and Louis Franklin*

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

9 ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR THE CIVIC YEAR 2025/26

Audio recording – 1 minutes 56 seconds

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

RESOLVED: That Councillor Daniel Allen be elected as Chair of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee for the Civic Year 2025/26.

10 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 3 minutes 3 seconds

There were no apologies received from Members.

11 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR FOR THE CIVIC YEAR 2025/26

Audio recording – 3 minutes 17 seconds

Councillor Keith Hoskins proposed and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, it was:

RESOLVED: That Councillor Claire Strong be elected as Vice-Chair of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee for the Civic Year 2025/26.

12 MINUTES - 18 JUNE 2025

Audio Recording – 4 minutes 23 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Ian Albert seconded and, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 18 June 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

13 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 52 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.
- (3) The Chair informed Members that the discussion paper on the 'Implications of the UK Supreme Court Judgement on Single Sex Spaces on the Workplace' would be discussed at a future meeting as the guidance from the Equalities and Human Rights Commission had not yet been published.

14 HR INFORMATION NOTE

Audio recording – 5 minutes 28 seconds

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

- Recruitment data for Q1 compared to the same quarter in the previous two years was shown under paragraph 3.2.
- 85% of vacancies had been filled at the first attempt which met the 75% target.
- Vacancies in Q1 were double what they were in the same quarter last year.
- 3 vacancies across Governance and Environmental Health had not been filled, however, the positions had been temporarily filled or readvertised since the information note had been published.
- Over the last year, 22% of vacancies had been filled by internal candidates.
- Paragraph 3.3 highlighted staff turnover which was higher than Q1 last year, however, the Local Government Association benchmarking system revealed that their staff turnover was in line with other local authorities.
- Staff turnover would be monitored as Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) approached.
- Absences had decreased in recent months due to a reduction in long-term absences as shown in the data at paragraph 3.4.
- High levels of mental health absences were still present, and the HR Team continued to provide support and raise awareness for this.
- Nationally, absences had increased significantly to 9.4 days lost in the last year.
- Paragraph 3.5 detailed the 3.2% pay award that had been agreed in July and paid to staff in August.
- The apprenticeship mentoring scheme had been refreshed to allow graduates to become mentors and new apprentices would be assigned apprentice buddies to support their induction into the Council and the apprenticeship programme.
- A new graduate had joined the Council earlier this month and managers across the Council continued to give positive feedback on the impact of graduates.
- Paragraph 3.8 gave an update on recent learning and development events that were linked to the Staff Survey Action Plan and management development.
- Employee wellbeing arrangements and recent occasions that had been publicised to all staff were set out in paragraph 3.9.
- As part of National Inclusion Week in September, the Council provided staff with resources and a webinar focused on becoming an active bystander which was also a topic at the October meeting of the Inclusion Group.

- Paragraph 3.11 described the first all-staff events that the Council held in September and feedback from these would be used to improve future events.

The following Members asked questions:

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

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

- Staff that left the Council did so at various stages in their careers including retirement, but some left early in their careers as the Council had a small and flat organisational structure.
- The Council was focused on staff development which could help with retention but also work against them if opportunities for staff to progress within the organisation were not available.
- Approximately 20 staff attended the mental health lunchtime walk and these would be organised more regularly and at different locations in response to staff requests.
- The Wellbeing Room had been launched recently and advertised to staff through various means. New staff would be made aware of it during inductions and its usage would be monitored along with any feedback received on it.
- Remote working could be linked to staff feeling isolated, and managers were reminded to undertake regular 1-1s with staff who mainly worked remotely.
- There were many opportunities for staff to contact others and socialise outside of their teams.
- It would be difficult to measure the impact that LGR would have on their ability to recruit as variances in recruitment were natural.
- Approximately 200 staff attended the all-staff events and positive feedback had been received on them, particularly on the transparency that had been provided on LGR despite the lack of some information on this.
- The sessions on team building and resilience and the opportunity to meet other teams face-to-face had also been well received by staff.
- The proportion of part-time to full-time staff that attended was unknown, but they were held on three different days and times to provide a range of options for staff of all working patterns to attend. A recording of the events was also made available as they recognised that it would not be possible for all staff to be present at them.
- No reasons for the failure to fill the vacancies in Governance had been learned from either managers or candidates.
- New apprentices were allocated longer serving apprentices as buddies.
- The White Ribbon programme was talked about within the Inclusion Group and was not currently available on the Council e-learning portal but could be investigated.

In response to questions, the Chair advised that:

- Attendance at all three staff events had been good and they would aim to hold them each year.
- Apprentices had brought good changes to the Council including improvements to the safeguarding process around licensing and the Council should be proud of their apprenticeship programme.

The Chair thanked the HR Services Manager for presenting the Information Note to the Committee.

15 DISCUSSION PAPER - EMPLOYER VALUE PROPOSITION

Audio recording – 30 minutes 10 seconds

The HR Services Manager presented the Discussion Paper entitled 'Employer Value Proposition' and advised that:

- An Employer Value Proposition (EVP) defined the core promise that an employer made to its staff outlining what they could expect in return for their work.
- A compelling EVP was crucial to attract candidates and keep staff motivated.
- The core components of an EVP were detailed as development, flexibility, inclusion, wellbeing and reward.
- In terms of development, the Council offered staff a range of training programmes and workshops to enhance their skills and advance their careers in addition to coaching and mentoring.
- Flexibility was offered to staff through hybrid and remote working in addition to flexible hours which helped to promote a healthy work-life balance.
- Generous leave policies also enabled staff to take proper breaks away from work which benefitted both staff and the Council.
- Diversity and inclusion were at the heart of Council values to ensure that everyone was respected regardless of their background or identity and to achieve a sense of belonging among staff.
- It was important to the Council to create a healthy and supportive environment in which staff could thrive and have access to a variety of wellbeing initiatives and rewards including a comprehensive benefits package.
- The Council EVP was communicated to candidates through recruitment webpages and during interviews and could be found by existing staff through various means including The Hub or by simply talking to their managers.
- Members should consider the questions posed at the end of the paper.

The following Members asked questions:

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

The Chair highlighted that Members should be sharing job vacancies at the Council through social media and word-of-mouth where possible.

Councillor Claire Strong noted that it would be valuable if their graduate and apprenticeship schemes were included in the Council EVP, particularly to attract talent to the Council.

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

- Data from the Staff Survey had been published, and the headline data had been included on recruitment pages and in Council media.
- Graduate and apprenticeship programmes highlighted the commitment of the Council to staff development.
- The Council did not have a specific document on EVP as it was spread across their interfaces and expressed through work culture.
- Feedback on working at the Council had been communicated via staff surveys.
- The Council also received period feedback from candidates on the application process and their reasons for wanting to work at the Council.
- The Council regularly met with UNISON Members.
- The People Strategy would be another way of communicating their EVP to staff once formulated and UNISON would help to shape this.

RESOLVED: That the Committee commented on and noted the Discussion Paper on Employer Value Proposition.

16 SCF MINUTES

Audio recording – 45 minutes 10 seconds

The Director – Resources presented the item entitled ‘SCF Minutes’, alongside the Minutes from the meetings of June, July and September 2025 and highlighted the following:

- There had been no meeting in August due to the summer holidays.
- HR, IT and Building updates had all been received.
- Attendance at their meetings had been good and SCF staff representatives had received positive levels of engagement.

In response to a question from Councillor Claire Strong, the Director – Resources advised that the absence of the Chief Executive at the meetings in June, July and September was likely to be Local Government Reorganisation related.

In response to a question from Councillor Claire Strong, the SCF staff representative advised that the Chief Executive had attended the most recent meeting in October.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum for June, July and September 2025.

17 SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

Audio recording – 48 minutes 33 seconds

The Chair led a discussion on future topics for the Committee to consider and suggested ‘Trade Union Membership’ as a topic for discussion.

In response to a question from Councillor Claire Strong, the HR Services Manager advised that approximately 15% of employees were Members of UNISON but that this may have increased since Local Government Reorganisation was announced.

Members agreed two topics on ‘Change Management’ and ‘Implications of the UK Supreme Court Judgement on Single Sex Spaces on the Workplace’ for the next meeting of the Committee.

The meeting closed at 2.52 pm

Chair

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Staff Consultation Forum Meeting Minutes – 1st October 2025

Present:

Chief Executive- Anthony Roche
Director- Resources: Ian Couper
HR Services Manager: Rebecca Webb
Staff representatives: Louis Franklin, Christina Corr, Martin Trotter, Christine Howe, Melanie Ferdaous
Technical Operations Manager: Mark Robinson
Union representative: Kieth Fitzpatrick Matthews
Notes: Ruby Lewis

Circulation: Global

Chair for Meeting: Louis Franklin

1 Apologies

Tiranan Straughan
Dee Levett
Katie Thomas

2 Restructure Notices

None

3 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

4 NHC Update (including HR and Staff Wellbeing Update)

Staff event - We had approximately 200 people attend the staff event, thank you to everyone who took part or help to organise. We have had a good response on the feedback form, both positives and areas of improvement for next time.

Flu vaccinations - We are offering flu vaccinations through a voucher scheme for anyone who does not get one on the NHS. A global email has been sent containing the details, please respond by the 6th October.

[Mental health walk and wellbeing room](#) - On the 9th October we will be hosting a mental health walk and launching the wellbeing room. The wellbeing room will be a space to go for a mindful break to help staff look after their mental health, for example after a difficult phone call or interaction with a member of the public. The room will have Lego, colouring, cushions and plants however we are open to any feedback and suggestions.

[Be Calm](#) - An article will be put on insight to give further information on be calm – a wellbeing platform that can be used to help with anxiety, sleep aids and more.

5 Employee Queries

None

6 IT update

Upgrades on the 4th October - Certain systems will not be in use on this day between 15:00 and 19:30. All teams who need to be aware of this have been told. Further upgrades will happen soon, and notifications will be sent as and when.

VPN solution – will be rolled out soon, this will help improve resilience in the event of issues such as a power cut.

Impersonation attacks – new starters are being targeted. Information on this is included in the HR induction meeting and will also be included in the laptop handover policy.

Teams' retention policy – we are implementing a new retention policy that removes content from old messages for the purpose of FOI's SAR's etc, it is not yet decided how long the period will be. More information will be coming soon, we are happy to hear any feedback. There is a lot more to discuss, training and more information will be coming soon.

7 Green Update

[9 Sustainability Briefing September 2025.pdf](#)

8 Ideas/Suggestions

Q: Do we know if other councils have anything similar to SCF? How will things be implemented to ensure we still have SCF or similar in the new structure?

A: This level of detail has not yet been discussed. Every council will have its equivalent. It will be covered in the workforce work stream at some point.

Any questions regarding Local Government Reorganisation can be emailed to HR and will be put in the FAQ being published on the hub.

9 Any other business

None

10 Chair of next meeting.

Louis Franklin

Growzone modules on meetings and how to chair can be found in the Meetings section of the online course's menu:



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

Louis Franklin #4262 – Digital Services Officer

Tiranan Straughan #4842 – Housing Policy Officer

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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Staff Consultation Forum Meeting Minutes – 5th November 2025

Present:

Director- Resources: Ian Couper
HR Services Manager: Rebecca Webb
Staff representatives: Louis Franklin, Tiranan Straughan, Melanie Ferdaous
Union representative: Dee Levett
Notes: Ruby Lewis

Circulation: Global

Chair for Meeting: Louis Franklin

1 Apologies

Debbie Hiscock
Christina Corr
Anthony Roche
Katie Thomas
Mark Robinson

2 Restructure Notices

None

3 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

4 NHC Update (including HR and Staff Wellbeing Update)

[Annual Leave](#)– We are now into the second half of the leave year. Reminders will be sent regarding the importance of planning and booking leave, and the positive impact this can have on wellbeing, mental health and productivity. The carry forward process will return to normal at the end of March 2026, meaning up to 1 week can be carried forward into the next leave year (pro rata for part time employees).

[Lunchtime mental health walks](#) - We received positive feedback on the first lunchtime mental health walk in support of world mental health day. We have asked the social group to consider setting this up as a regular event. All ideas or feedback on length, location and how often are welcome to be sent to Hrhelph or the social group.

[Menopause Awareness Month](#) – The next Menopause network is on the 13th November. There will be a guest speaker, everyone is welcome to attend.

[Men's Health](#) – Men's health awareness month is November. The Insight article and Hub page highlight the different types of support available.

Sexual Harassment reporting form – We are looking to launch an anonymous sexual harassment reporting form. As an employer, we have a duty to prevent sexual harassment, and this form will sit alongside other mechanisms for reporting issues. We appreciate there can be barriers to reporting, and having an anonymous form should help identify issues early and establish if there are any issues.

Q: Do we have many incidents of sexual harassment?

A: No, but an option to report anonymously will help us ensure we have a full picture allows appropriate action to prevent.

[Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution](#) – Anthony is attending an LGR meeting this afternoon.. The final proposal document will be going to Government by the end of November. Cabinet will make a decision on the North Herts Council preference for the 2,3,4 unitary options before it is sent to Government. We will then have to wait for Government to come back to us.

Peer Review – We have the corporate peer review on Monday 15th December. A request for staff volunteers will be put out soon.

Budget – The budget process for next year has started, we are currently uncertain of funding. There are no big changes planned but some changes need to happen due to the impact of LGR.

Q: Is the peer review meeting in-person?

A: Yes, most meetings are in person. Wait for the email to come out and there may be a hybrid option.

5 Employee Queries

Q: There has recently been a reminder sent out to managers about the Conflict of Interest forms, but there is a lot of confusion about the questions. The shares question is causing the most confusion, why would certain shares be a conflict of interest?

A: Technically speaking any organisation or outside business may have an impact. The questions are there to identify any potential conflicts of interest. If you declare something, it does not mean something will immediately happen. Everything is confidential, and they are stored in safe and secure place.

Q: There was some feedback that came as a result of the bystander video that went out last month for inclusion week. There was one section, where someone with first aid knowledge was able to help someone. Some people in my team do not know any first aid, and although the council has first aiders, it may be beneficial to run a general first aid session, so they know what do to if these situations were to ever arise.

A: It was unclear in the video whether the person was trained in first aid. The video was to highlight bystander effect, which is where individuals are less likely to step forward when others are present. Agreed more messaging around this could be arranged and the recorded webinar can be accessed [here](#)

We are on the look out for anyone who is based in the office that would be willing to be a first aid volunteer. Anyone who wants to volunteer should email Hrhelp.

Q: Is there a specific number of first aiders we have to have?

A: Yes, it is in proportion with the average number of people in the building on one day.

6 Green Update

[10 Sustainability Briefing October 2025.pdf](#)

7 Ideas/Suggestions

Q: I wanted to ask about the expectations of an SCF representative when joining committee meetings?

A: The Councillors welcome your input, you are welcome to attend and make comments if you wish. Contributions are welcome.

8 Any other business

None

10 Chair of next meeting.

Melanie Ferdaous

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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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

Louis Franklin #4262 – Digital Services Officer

Tiranan Straughan #4842 – Housing Policy Officer

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

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting Minutes – 3rd December 2025

Present:

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

Circulation: Global

Chair for Meeting: Melanie Ferdaous

1 Apologies

Anthony Roche
Christina Corr
Christine Howe

2 Restructure Notices

None

3 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

4 NHC Update (including HR and Staff Wellbeing Update)

Pay Negotiations – Pay negotiations for 2026 have begun. The claim from the Union has been received and needs to be considered by National Employers. Currently they are proposing £3000, or 10% - whichever is greater. They are also proposing for a shorter work week, and extra day of annual leave. We complete a questionnaire about what is affordable, and this is considered by National Employers. I will keep everyone updated at this meeting.

Wellbeing – We have supported Tech timeout this Tuesday, it is good for mental health and productivity. Lots of illnesses are going around at the minute, so it is worth reminding everyone of the [GP Helpline](#). December can be a difficult time for many people, and information about [Financial Wellbeing](#) can be found on the Hub.

Neurodiversity network – The next neurodiversity network is being arranged, and we are currently looking at a date in February.

[Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution](#) – A lot of global emails have been sent as the submission went in. Information can be found on the Hub.

5 Employee Queries

Q: Can the stairs in the multi-storey car park be cleaned, as they do not smell good.

A: This falls under waste management, any issues please let us know and we can send a team to deal with it. The multi storey stairs have been raised with the contractor.

Q: How often do they get cleaned?

A: There is a schedule, I am unsure of what it is.

Q: The lights in the car park are flickering, who is responsible for that?

A: Property services, the lights are due to be replaced soon.

6 IT update

A printer change is in progress, most users will not be affected. We will be making the change soon, as there may be some issues with migration as we are not able to put data into the new system. When you print from home now, you are then able to go into the office a few days later and print, we will not be able to migrate those across. Warnings will be sent to everyone. They are the same machines, just newer.

We are progressing with the VPN roll out, test users are being contacted to be booked in.

A reminder that to access IT out of hours, please call 444 at any time day or night. It will come up with a message saying it is out of hours, but you will then be pushed through. The facility is there for everyone to use, and the Christmas period will be covered.

Q: What is considered an emergency?

A: There is an element of common sense, if we get called out and it is not an emergency, we will say at that point.

7 Green Update

[10 Sustainability Briefing October 2025.pdf](#)

8 Ideas/Suggestions

Q: Can the meetings in January and February be merged?

A: The January meeting is currently scheduled for the 7th. We can cancel both the January and February meetings and put one meeting in the end of January.

9 Any other business

10 Chair of next meeting.

Louis Franklin

Have something to say?

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JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

28 January 2026

*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 2 July - September 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
Q2: Jul - Sept 2023	17	14	15	2	82.4%	75%
Q2: Jul - Sept 2024	23	18	19	4	78.3%	75%
Q2: Jul - Sept 2025	24	21	22	2	87.5%	75%

During quarter 2 this year, we saw a slight increase in the number of vacancies than the same period in 2024, which was also an increase on the same period in 2023. We successfully filled the majority of vacancies including:

- Assistant Licensing Officer
- Communications Officer
- IT Technical Support Analyst
- Shared Service Manager for Waste
- Senior Planning Officer

Two positions were unfilled, another Senior Planning Officer and a casual role in Careline.

3.3 Leavers and Turnover

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

Rolling 12 months	Turnover	
	Leavers	Monthly
Jan-25	4	1.13%
Feb-25	4	1.13%
Mar-25	4	1.12%
Apr-25	0	0.00%
May-25	0	0.00%
Jun-25	1	0.27%
Jul-25	4	1.08%
Aug-25	6	1.64%
Sep-25	3	0.82%
Oct-25	3	0.82%
Nov-25	1	0.27%
Dec-25	1	0.27%
Total	31	8.5%

Labour turnover of 8.5% at the end of December 2025 is an increase on December 2024, which was 7.25%, but still an improvement on the figure for December 2023 which was 12.11%.

In the most recent comparison figures with other local councils from the Local Government benchmarking tool, 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 (eg apprentices, and maternity cover).

3.4 Absence

The absence figures are shown below as absence days lost per employee on a rolling basis.

Monthly rolling absence: days lost per employee			
	Long-term	Short-term	Total
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
Sep-25	3.47	4.29	7.76
Oct-25	3.46	4.49	7.95
Nov-25	3.56	4.50	8.05
Dec-25	3.56	4.48	8.04

Summary of absence reasons:

Sep - Nov 2025 Absence reason	Occasions of absence		
	Up to 1 week	1-3 weeks	Over 3 weeks
COVID 19 - suspected	9	1	0
Ear, Nose and Throat (Inc Cold/Flu)	51	1	0
Headaches (inc migraine)	10	0	2
Mental health	7	6	4
Musculoskeletal	9	1	0
Other	32	8	3
Sickness / Vomiting / Gastro	31	0	1
Total	149	17	10

This quarter has seen an increase in both Covid and Cold / Flu absences, with the number of occasions of 1–7-day absences almost doubling, whilst 1-3 week absences remain stable and the number of long-term absences (over 3 weeks) has declined.

3.5 Applicant Tracking System

We are pleased to be beginning implementation for a new applicant tracking system (ATS). An ATS is a digital platform that helps to manage the end-to-end recruitment process. The recruitment system/ ATS is the first experience a candidate has with the Council and it's vital this is positive and runs smoothly. As well as increasing engagement with candidates and better presenting the Council as an employer, we are looking to streamline processes and increase automation with the new system, to reduce the administrative load on recruiting managers.

3.6 National pay bargaining 2026 – National Joint Council (NJC)

The Unions submitted their pay claim for 2026 in December:

- An increase of at least £3,000 or 10% (whichever is greater)
- A minimum pay rate of £15 an hour
- A two hour reduction in the working week
- An increase of one day annual leave

The National Employers are carrying out regional pay briefings in early 2026, once complete we expect an offer to be made.

3.7 Apprenticeships

We have 10 apprentices in post, with planned recruitment to replace those ending their apprenticeships in 2026.

One of our apprentices was recently successful in securing a permanent role before the end of the apprenticeship contract. They have moved into the permanent role whilst continuing their qualification. Two of our apprentices, who are due to finish their contract soon, have passed their end point assessment with distinction.

We also have several established members of staff who are completing training using the apprenticeship levy, allowing them to gain a qualification without impacting the training budget.

3.8 National Graduate Scheme

Our graduates continue to make a positive impact across the Council and have delivered a number of key projects during their placements, including:

Launching the North Herts Council App in December 2025, making it easier for residents to stay on top of bin collections, receive service disruption updates and have easy access to Councillor contact information.

Preparing the council for the Warm Homes Local Grant, enabling over 100 home upgrades for fuel-poor households.

Developing and leading the training of Co-pilot and writing policies for this and general AI use, across the council.

3.9 Learning and Development

Towards the end of 2025 our Personal Development Mornings focused on:

- Global Cyber Awareness month, with helpful tips about keeping safe online being shared by our IT team, and allowing staff the opportunity to drop in and meet the IT team and develop their digital skills
- National Customer Services Week and Sustainability.
- Hints and tips and refresh of skills to manage meetings effectively.

We are continuing to work with our Senior Managers Group to provide key skills to support staff throughout Local Government Reorganisation.

3.10 Employee Wellbeing

In December, we acknowledged that not everyone enjoys the festive season and provided staff with some practical tips to look after their wellbeing during this time. We also provided information about getting the right kind of rest during the winter months, to support physical and mental wellbeing, including the importance of switching off from technology where possible (Tech Timeout Tuesday).

The Wellbeing room was introduced to staff during our new starter event in the office in December. We have received positive feedback from those that have used the room.

The next wellbeing walk has been arranged to coincide with the Samaritans campaign of Brew Monday, where staff are being encouraged to get together and walk with colleagues.

3.11 Inclusion

October inclusion group discussed the Gender Pay Gap progress and considered skills learned from the active bystander webinar and next steps.

Our next Inclusion group will focus on race inclusion, with activities and discussion linking to race equalities week in February. We will be participating in the 5 Day Challenge using resources from Race Equality Matters, which will focus on a different theme each day and will help employees reflect and take actions to drive Race Equality.

3.12 Gender Pay Gap

We report on our Gender Pay Gap (GPG) annually. The data is extracted on 31 March each year and must be published by 30 March the following year.

The average gender pay gap in the UK is has been on a steady decline over recent years, currently reported as 12.8% (ONS).

We have made steady progress since we first started reporting in 2017. Recent years shown below:

Year	Mean %	Median %
2025	12.2	8
2024	14.6	13.1
2023	15.5	14
2022	19.5	19.3

There is no quick fix to a gender pay gap and so our work to reduce the gap must be ongoing.

Our progress has been supported by targeted actions including ongoing support for true flexible working at all levels of the Council and specifically encouraging female applicants for senior roles.

Upcoming actions include initiatives to further develop confident female employees, unconscious bias training for managers and carrying out stay interviews with senior female employees.

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 – Supporting employees through change

People are at the centre of many changes in the workplace, and the Local Government workforce face a significant change in the coming years – Local Government reorganisation (LGR). Recognising that change is challenging and appreciating the impact it will have on employees, the Council has taken steps in beginning to prepare.

Communication and Employee voice

Clear, timely and transparent communication is essential to effective change management. At the 2025 Staff Event, employees received an update on LGR progress and participated in a Q&A session with the Leadership Team. Ongoing updates are provided through staff briefings, email, FAQ sets, the staff magazine and the intranet, and engaged with employees through the first LGR staff survey. These communication channels will continue, with further engagement opportunities currently being developed.

Engagement with Regional and Branch Trade Union colleagues has commenced and will remain in place throughout the process. The Staff Consultation Forum will also receive regular updates.

Developing skills & wellbeing

At the Staff Event, we delivered a dedicated resilience session for all staff, marking the start of our structured approach to supporting wellbeing during this period of uncertainty. This session focused on coping strategies, stress management, and maintaining a positive mindset, reinforcing our commitment to staff wellbeing as organisational changes unfold, this was then re-iterated in the monthly staff magazine ensuring that all staff had access to the resources provided.

Our Personal Development Mornings have provided further opportunities for staff to focus on growth and adaptability. These mornings have been used for CPD activities, e-learning, and skills-based webinars, as well as IT bitesize learning sessions to enhance digital confidence. They also offer time for reflection and professional development, ensuring staff can build the capabilities needed for a changing environment.

Looking ahead, we will continue to deliver targeted workshops on resilience, change readiness, and wellbeing. Planned sessions will include practical tools for managing uncertainty, maintaining productivity, and supporting mental health.

Some of the LGR Reserve that we are looking to create as part of the 2026/27 budget is for training and development. This seeks to give our staff the opportunity to develop their

skills to get the best possible chance of getting the role that they want at the end of LGR. It is hoped that this helps empower staff, so that they be part of the change process.

Leadership and management

Managers at all levels play a key role in change management; they engage with employees on a day-to-day basis and ensure that individual impacts and emotions are supported and addressed at an early stage. Managers support the translation of what LGR means for the individual.

Open communication and transparency have a positive impact on change, increase engagement and build trust and at this stage, this can mean a response of ‘we don’t know yet’.

Our Senior Management Group have attended training to embed change management principles at leadership level. Through a targeted session, SMG explored change models to support them in leading teams through transition, re-iterating the message that change impacts people in different ways, and encouraging fostering open communication and modelling resilience.

Moving forward, skills development for managers will continue, we will ensure managers are aligned with key messages and we are updating our Regular Performance Review framework to support conversations about future careers and development with an LGR focus/ future skills focus.

Process & capacity

A clear and proper HR process and timeline for change is another key area which will be developed by our LGR workforce workstream and communicated when known.

It’s acknowledged that LGR will significantly impact workloads across the Council and increased capacity is being considered. Large scale change risks increased turnover and difficulty in recruiting which would further impact capacity issues and these measures will be monitored throughout.

We seek the Committee’s view on ideas of what else we can do to support our staff through this change.

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
2026	January	Change management

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

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