

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD VITRUALLY VIA ZOOM
ON WEDNESDAY, 22ND APRIL, 2026 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 (PA - Director Governance), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Robert Filby (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer) and Rebecca Webb (HR Services Manager)*

UNISON: *Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews*

Staff Consultation Forum: *Louis Franklin*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting there were no members of the public present.*

25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 2 seconds

There were no apologies for absence received.

26 MINUTES - 28 JANUARY 2026

Audio Recording – 2 minutes 11 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Chair, moved the Minutes for approval and, following consensus from Members, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 28 January 2026 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

27 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 31 seconds

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.

28 **SCF MINUTES**

Audio recording – 3 minutes 18 seconds

The Director – Resources presented the item entitled ‘SCF Minutes’ alongside the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums for January, March and April 2026 and highlighted the following:

- The February Forum had been cancelled and the January Forum moved to later in the month due to staff returning from the Christmas shut down period.
- An extra clean of the multi-storey car park had been arranged following feedback.
- Staff had been kept informed on the decision to surrender the multi-storey car park lease to provide them with reassurance on car parking spaces.
- A presentation on Microsoft Copilot and relevant guidance had been given at the January Forum.
- A new process led by IT to track starters, leavers and movers at the Council had been discussed.
- Race Equality Week had been discussed and considered by the Staff Consultation Forum (SCF) and Inclusion Group, and resources related to this had been made available on the Intranet.
- The Director – Regulatory had attended the April Forum and attendance by other directors at future forums would be investigated.

The following Members asked questions:

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

In response to questions, the Director – Resources advised that the Chief Executive no longer attended Staff Consultation Forums as the Chief Executive Coordinating Group took place at the same time, and SCF Staff Representatives had expressed a preference not to alter SCF meeting times when consulted.

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

- No feedback had been received on the new Employee Assistance Programme yet, but lots of staff Members had signed up to this following the in-person staff briefing and they would continue to monitor feedback.
- 190 responses had been received from the Staff Survey, which was slightly lower than in 2024, but it was noted that this survey was shorter and focused on a smaller area compared to the previous one.
- Analysis from the Staff Survey and any action plan from this would be presented to the Leadership Team, and to the Committee at a future meeting.

The Chair confirmed that no Members objected to the approval of the SCF Minutes and, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums for January, March and April 2026.

29 HR INFORMATION NOTE

Audio recording – 10 minutes 38 seconds

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

- Vacancies filled at the first attempt had decreased to 58.8% due to several factors as detailed at paragraph 3.2 of the information note.
- However, several positions had been successfully filled and offers made to candidates for the two unfilled Civic Enforcement Officers vacancies.
- Rolling 12-month staff turnover was at its lowest percentage for several years at 6.7% shown at paragraph 3.3, but it was recognised that turnover still affected certain service areas, and HR continued to support them.
- Days lost per employee due to long-term and short-term absence and reasons for these had been detailed at paragraph 3.4.
- The new applicant tracking system for recruitment would be tested alongside the existing system to begin with, and if successful, all vacancies would be moved to the new system.
- An update on pay bargaining for the 2026/27 financial year had been detailed at paragraph 3.6.
- 8 apprentices were in-post, and another apprentice had been appointed to a permanent role. A Climate Change Apprentice had recently been recruited, and opportunities for apprenticeships in HR and Revenues were upcoming.
- 3 graduates were currently in-post and they would recruit another graduate for the start of October 2026 as 2 of the existing graduates would be leaving.
- Learning and development continued to be provided to staff to navigate change.
- Staff continued to be signposted to resources on employee wellbeing, and the personal development morning in April focused on stress management and building resilience.
- The new Employee Assistance Programme had been launched this month.
- The Council had taken part in a 5-day challenge as part of Race Equality Week in February, and resources from Race Equality Matters had been shared to all staff daily to increase their awareness and understanding of racism.
- Inclusion would be a regular item at staff briefings to ensure continued engagement on diversity, equalities and inclusion topics.
- A short staff survey had been carried out in March, which focused on wellbeing and communications and engagement on Local Government Reorganisation. Outcomes from the survey would be shared with the Leadership Team and this Committee at a future meeting.
- Stay questionnaires had been carried out to reduce the gender pay gap and establish why staff wanted to work for the Council, which would help to retain happy and engaged employees as detailed at paragraph 3.14.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Bryony May
- Councillor Daniel Allen

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

- The previous staff survey was carried in 2024 and covered several topics as surveys were conducted every 2-3 years rather than on a regular basis.
- Staff surveys would be shorter from now on to increase engagement, while also keeping in mind survey fatigue from Local Government Reorganisation related surveys.
- New starters would be able to give direct feedback to HR.

- Feedback mechanisms such as a physical survey and question and answer sessions at the next staff conference would be investigated.

The Chair thanked the HR Services Manager for their presentation of the information note.

30 INFORMATION NOTE: LGA CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE FOLLOW-UP

Audio recording – 19 minutes 30 seconds

The Director – Resources presented the Information Note entitled ‘LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Follow-Up’ and advised that:

- This information note had been prepared in response to a request at the last Committee meeting, and the HR related information from the Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) Follow Up had been included.
- The Peer Review Team had identified positive activities and achievements undertaken by the Council, and there were few further actions to be taken.
- It was acknowledged that the Council would need resources to deliver day to day operations and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
- £450K would be allocated to HR and IT related staff resourcing as these areas had already faced additional pressures from LGR associated work.
- A report on further spending related to LGR would be presented to Cabinet in the summer.
- The People Strategy would be presented to the Leadership Team and this Committee once finalised.

In response to a question from Councillor Claire Strong, the Director – Resources advised that:

- The actions within the CPC Action Plan were being monitored by Cabinet and the Political Liaison Board, and there was only one action left to address, which related to the People Strategy.
- No new actions had been suggested during the follow up.

Councillor Daniel Allen suggested that Cabinet should acknowledge when all the actions from the CPC Action Plan had been completed and Members agreed with this.

31 DISCUSSION PAPER - RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY

Audio recording – 23 minutes 17 seconds

The HR Services Manager presented the Discussion Paper on ‘Recruitment and Retention in Times of Uncertainty’ and advised that:

- The Council was operating in a sustained period of uncertainty driven by Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), which could create recruitment and retention challenges.
- Ongoing skills shortages in specific areas, changing employee expectations and less competitive pay than the private sector were also impacting recruitment and retention.
- Risks from uncertainty included a loss of key skills and experience, reduced ability to recruit, increased pressures on remaining staff and less flexibility for part-time staff if not managed appropriately.
- Flexible and hybrid working, meaningful work, job satisfaction, supportive culture and relationships, stability, and pensions had been referenced by Senior Managers in stay questionnaires as key reasons for staying with the Council.

- Limited time for development and career progression and workload pressures associated with LGR had also been highlighted in the stay questionnaires.
- Uncertainty could not be removed, but it could be mitigated through clear and honest communication, protecting flexibility, continued support for hybrid teams, development engagement ahead of LGR, and targeted recruitment.
- These methods would enhance flexibility, meaningful work, supportive management, and trust, which were factors that mattered most to staff.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Keith Hoskins
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Daniel Allen

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

- An online, anonymous questions submission form would be created in response to previous requests from Members for a physical questions box as an online form would ensure access for those that worked remotely and at different sites.
- The new recruitment system would be live soon and help the Council to attract candidates as it would be more intuitive and easier to use, and communication with candidates would be better and more frequent.
- Completion timelines related to LGR were not always known, but they would endeavour to provide dates to staff where possible.

Councillor Claire Strong highlighted that:

- LGR would also be positive as there would be opportunities for staff to develop and reengineer their skills, but reassurance and confidence would need to be given to them to do this.
- Lessons could be learnt from other authorities who had already reorganised, including any negative experiences they had.

Councillor Bryony May advised that clear, written communication would help staff to distinguish which information was known and unknown and mitigate unsettled feelings around this.

Councillor Daniel Allen advised that it had taken 5-6 years for some authorities who had already been through LGR to implement everything they needed.

32 SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

Audio recording – 39 minutes 14 seconds

The Chair led a discussion on future topics for the Committee to consider. The following Members, UNISON Representatives, and SCF Staff Representatives took part in the discussion:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Louis Franklin
- Councillor Bryony May

The following points were made as part of the discussion:

- Relationships between the Council and unions should be discussed at a future meeting.
- UNISON had received a presentation on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and their members had expressed a desire to become more involved in this, which the UNISON Executive Committee was considering.
- The integration of the Staff Consultation Forum and this Committee with forums and committees in other authorities through LGR should be considered.
- It was hoped that there would be examples of good practice used by local authorities in the Code of Practice relating to the UK Supreme Court ruling on single sex spaces.
- Menopause and Work should be a topic for discussion at the next meeting.

In response to points raised in the discussion, the HR Services Manager advised that:

- The discussion paper on the Implications of the UK Supreme Court Ruling on Single Sex Spaces on the Workplace could only be discussed at the next meeting if the Code of Practice relating to this had been approved, but there was no timeline for this.
- Local authorities were awaiting the approval of the Code of Practice before considering any major changes in the workplace.
- The Code of Practice would impact customers, members of the public and staff, but this Committee would only discuss how staff would be affected.
- They would expect examples of good practice to be detailed in the Code of Practice, but they could not be sure of its contents until it was published.

In response to points raised in the discussion, the Chair advised that they should discuss the functions of the Staff Consultation Forum and this Committee in the context of LGR once they knew which local authorities they would be grouped with in a new unitary authority.

Members agreed two discussion topics on 'Implications of the UK Supreme Court Ruling on Single Sex Spaces on the Workplace', subject to the release of guidance in suitable time for the agenda, and 'Menopause and Work' for the next meeting of the Committee.

The meeting closed at 2.52 pm

Chair