

10 April 2026

Our Ref. Joint Staff Consultative Committee 22 April  
2026  
Contact. Committee Services  
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To: The Chair and Members of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee of North Hertfordshire District Council

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

Substitutes Councillors: Sadie Billing, Ruth Brown, Joe Graziano, Tim Johnson and Nigel Mason.

UNISON Representatives: Debbie Ealand and Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews.

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

**VIA ZOOM**

On

**WEDNESDAY, 22ND APRIL, 2026 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>
<p><b>1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b> Members are required to notify any substitutions by midday on the day of the meeting.</p> <p>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.</p>	
<p><b>2. MINUTES - 28 JANUARY 2026</b> To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 28 January 2026.</p>	(Pages 5 - 10)
<p><b>3. 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.</p>	
<p><b>4. SCF MINUTES</b> To receive the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums from January, March and April 2026.</p>	(Pages 11 - 26)
<p><b>5. HR INFORMATION NOTE</b> INFORMATION NOTE OF THE HR SERVICES MANAGER</p> <p>To update the Joint Staff Consultative Committee on the progress made in the last quarter completing HR work and projects and supporting people issues.</p>	(Pages 27 - 32)
<p><b>6. INFORMATION NOTE: LGA CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE FOLLOW-UP</b> INFORMATION NOTE OF THE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES</p> <p>This information note sets out the details of the various reports relating to the Corporate Peer Challenge and the follow-up. It then details the contents of the follow-up report that relate to HR matters, including capacity, Leadership Team, People Strategy, Learning and Development, and communicating with staff.</p>	(Pages 33 - 34)

- 7. DISCUSSION PAPER - RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY** (Pages 35 - 36)  
To receive a discussion paper on Recruitment and Retention in Times of Uncertainty.
- 8. SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS** (Pages 37 - 38)  
To consider topics for discussion at a future meeting of the Committee.

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# Public Document Pack Agenda Item 2

## NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM  
ON WEDNESDAY, 28TH JANUARY, 2026 AT 10.00 AM

#### MINUTES

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

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

**UNISON:** *Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews*

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

#### 18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

*Audio recording – 1 minute 35 seconds*

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ian Albert.

#### 19 MINUTES - 15 OCTOBER 2025

*Audio Recording – 1 minute 43 seconds*

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Claire Strong seconded and, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 15 October 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

#### 20 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 22 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 Code of Practice relating to this had not yet been approved.

## 21 SCF MINUTES

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 59 seconds*

The Director – Resources presented the item entitled ‘SCF Minutes’ alongside the Minutes of the meetings from October, November and December 2025 and highlighted the following:

- Updates had been provided on HR and comments had been received from staff on events in October.
- IT and Green updates had also been provided at the meetings.
- The usual questions and answers had taken place at all three forums.

Councillor Claire Strong emphasised that the Committee welcomed participation from staff at their meetings.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Keith Hoskins
- Councillor Daniel Allen

In response to questions, the Human Resources Services Manager advised that usage of the Wellbeing Room was not monitored, however, there was a feedback form and QR code which allowed users to provide feedback, and positive feedback had been received.

In response to questions, the Director – Resources advised that the cleaning schedule for the multi-storey car park could be shared with Members after the meeting.

The Chair highlighted that one Member, who had produced art for several cafes and restaurants across Letchworth, had offered to create a piece of art for the Wellbeing Room.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee noted the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums for October, November and December 2025.

## 22 HR INFORMATION NOTE

*Audio recording – 7 minutes 2 seconds*

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

- A comparison of recruitment data from Q2 2025 with Q2 2024 and 2023 had been shown in paragraph 3.2 of the report.
- The 75% recruitment target had been met in Q2 2025.
- Two positions had remained vacant, however, the casual role in Careline had since been filled and the Senior Planning Officer vacancy had been readvertised and would be followed by shortlisting for interviews.
- Labour turnover was 8.5% for 2025, which was higher than turnover in 2024 but lower than 2023 as described in paragraph 3.3.
- There had been a downward trend in long-term absences through 2025.
- Short-term absences had remained steady with a small decrease in summer and an increase in winter due to cold and flu as expected.
- A new Applicant Tracking System (ATS) would be delivered in 2026 to better manage the end-to-end recruitment process and form positive first impressions with candidates.
- A pay claim for 2026 had been submitted by the Unions in December for a £3,000 increase on all spinal pay points or a 10% increase in pay.

- 10 apprentices were currently in post, and recruitment was planned to replace those who were ending their apprenticeships in 2026.
- Graduates continued to have a positive impact across the Council including the launch of a new Council app, preparation for the Warm Homes Local Grants Scheme and the implementation of AI.
- Personal development mornings continued to be run monthly, with recent mornings focused on cyber awareness, meeting management and customer service.
- Work to provide skills to the Senior Managers Group to support staff through Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) would continue.
- Another wellbeing walk had been scheduled to coincide with the Samaritans campaign of Brew Monday following the success of the last walk.
- The October Inclusion Group meeting had discussed the Gender Pay Gap and the learnings from the Active Bystander Webinar.
- The next Inclusion Group meeting would focus on race inclusion as the Council would be participating in the 5 Day Challenge on Race Equality Matters.
- A steady decline on both the mean and median percentages for the Gender Pay Gap (GPC) had been seen at the Council over recent years.
- Work to reduce the GPG was ongoing as there was no quick fix, and this would include support for true flexible working, encouraging female applicants for senior roles, developing confident female employees, providing unconscious bias training to managers, and carrying out stay interviews with senior female employees to improve retention.
- Stay interviews would be one to one conversations with staff on why they might leave or stay which would help to improve retention and inform the Council on employee experiences.

The following Members asked questions:

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

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

- Frequency of stay interviews would depend on resourcing but they would be started this year with a select group of employees, with the plan to conduct them again next year with a different group of staff.
- There were no plans to change the apprenticeship scheme due to LGR as apprentices would be transferred to one of the new unitary authorities along with other staff.
- Stay interviews would be targeted at senior females first, then rolled out to more staff if successful.
- Workshops on being a confident female leader were planned, as well as a mentoring scheme for senior females.
- The Staff Consultation Forum had discussed the use of AI and the skills gap associated, and they would be working with IT to develop e-learning to address this.
- Some apprenticeships were focused on data and AI to enable development in this area.
- IT continued to run bitesize and drop-in sessions on anything IT related.
- Changes had been made to the Regular Performance Review framework to enable conversations between managers and employees on the skills and development that they felt were required for them now and in the future.
- The ATS would contact candidates automatically throughout the recruitment process, but it would also enable them to manually send reminders to candidates that had only partially completed an application when a deadline was approaching and this would improve engagement, particularly for harder to fill roles.

The Chair thanked the Human Resources Services Manager for their presentation.

## 23 DISCUSSION PAPER - MANAGING CHANGE

*Audio recording – 24 minutes 23 seconds*

The Human Resources Services Manager presented the Discussion Paper entitled 'Managing Change' and advised that:

- The impact that change would have on employees through Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) was recognised and appreciated, and four key areas were focused on to support this.
- Clear, timely and transparent communication was essential to keep staff informed and engaged.
- The 2025 Staff Event included an update on LGR progress followed by a question-and-answer session.
- Ongoing LGR updates were also provided through staff briefings, FAQ sets and other channels, and further staff surveys were planned on this and other matters.
- Wellbeing formed a key part of managing change and a session to develop resilience had been provided at the 2025 Staff Event to reinforce commitment to this.
- Personal development mornings were opportunities for staff to focus on growth and learning through skills-based webinars and e-learning.
- Targeted workshops would continue to be delivered on resilience, change readiness and wellbeing with planned sessions on managing uncertainty and other topics.
- Some of the proposed LGR Reserve in the 2026/27 Budget would be for training and development to improve the chances of staff getting their desired roles at the end of LGR.
- Managers would play a key role in managing change by ensuring individual impacts were addressed early on and translating the impacts of LGR to employees.
- The Senior Management Group had attended training to embed change management principles at leadership level which covered the different impacts change could have.
- Skills development for managers would continue to ensure that they were aligned with key messages and ensuring discussions with staff about future development.
- Staff turnover and recruitment would be monitored as uncertainty and workloads would be likely to increase through LGR due to the largescale change.

Councillor Claire Strong suggested the creation of an anonymous questions box where employees could submit questions to management and the Chair agreed that having a box like this that could be sent to multiple Council facilities would be useful.

In response to a question from Councillor Bryony May, the Human Resources Services Manager advised that the Senior Leadership Team had been communicating LGR as an opportunity. However, it was acknowledged that everyone would feel differently about the topic, and that a delicate balance of communication was required for this.

The Chair thanked the Human Resources Services Manager for their presentation of the Discussion Paper.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee commented on and noted the Discussion Paper on Managing Change.

**24 SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS**

*Audio recording – 34 minutes 51 seconds*

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

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

The following points were made as part of the discussion:

- Employee retention in times of uncertainty should be discussed in the context of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
- Employee recruitment in times of uncertainty should also be discussed as there may be undercapacity in some areas at the end of LGR due to the difficulties that it may bring.
- If stay interviews had been conducted with staff by the next meeting, then these should be covered.
- Until the Government had decided on the structure of LGR in Hertfordshire, it would be difficult to discuss redundancies.
- Siloed working in the Council and opportunities lost from this should be considered.
- Union membership at the Council should be reported on.
- Feedback from the Corporate Peer Review should be a topic for discussion at the next meeting.

In response to points raised in the discussion, the Chair advised that the Council had approximately an 8% recruitment gap compared to the 10% national average.

In response to points raised in the discussion, the Director – Resources advised that a report on the Corporate Peer Review Follow Up would be presented to Cabinet in February, and at a future staff briefing, and that any relevant discussions from those could be brought to this Committee.

In response to points raised in the discussion, the Human Resources Manager advised that stay interviews could be covered as part of a Discussion Paper on Employee Retention and Recruitment.

Members agreed two discussion topics on 'Employee Retention and Recruitment in Times of Uncertainty' and 'Implications of the UK Supreme Court Judgement on Single Sex Spaces on the Workplace'.

It was also agreed that an update on the 'Local Government Association Corporate Peer Review Follow Up' would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.

The meeting closed at 10.46 am

Chair

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## Staff Consultation Forum Meeting Minutes – 21<sup>st</sup> January 2026

### Present:

**Director- Resources:** Ian Couper  
**HR Services Manager:** Rebecca Webb  
**Staff representatives:** Christine Howe, Christina Corr, Katie Thomas, Melanie Ferdaous, Louis Franklin, Tiranan Straughan  
**Technical Operations Manager:** Mark Robinson  
**Customer and Digital Services Manager:** Chris Jeffery  
**Customer and Digital Project Manager:** Polly Simonds  
**National Graduate Management Trainee:** Keiran Cockayne  
**Union representative:** Dee Levett  
**Notes:** Ruby Lewis

**Circulation:** Global

**Chair for Meeting:** Louis Franklin

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### 1 Apologies

Anthony Roche  
Martin Trotter

### 2 Restructure and Consultation

Copilot Policy – Copilot is Microsoft's AI powered tool. The free version is currently available to all North Herts Council staff, and some staff hold a license that allows them to have more functions. Common uses for copilot include writing and rewording emails, drafting documents, research and summarising information, generating pictures and analysing data.

We are consulting on the Copilot policy which is required to set out guardrails and guidance for safe and appropriate use. The policy was developed by the digital team with input from IT and feedback from staff has also been considered. The policy has been approved by the Director of Customers, the data protection officer, technical operations manager and IT services manager.

Q: Are there plans to give more staff the licensed version?

A: Yes, we are aiming to get more licenses, a budget has been put in, and we are waiting for the outcome next month.

Q: Are there examples of things people could use it for with the unlicensed version?

A: The policy will provide guidance on how to use it properly, or the best ways to use it. To go alongside the policy, we are working on a universal user guide for the free version that will come out after the policy.

Q: I would not be confident about whether something would be suitable to input into copilot or not, will there be any extra training or guidance?

A: The general rule of thumb is that anyone without a license should not put any sensitive data into the chat. As for training, we will be developing training resources in the coming weeks to give people more confidence.

Q: How do you get the license?

A: We are looking to get a hold of more, digital services decide who gets the license, the process will become clear once we have the budget.

Q: Is there a limit on licenses?

A: They are purchased on a person-by-person basis and therefore dependant on budget.

Q: Will there be an e-learning module?

A: It would be a matter of scope and timing, digital services may pursue this in the future. Microsoft produce a lot of online training that is really good and accessible, and this will be signposted in the guides.

### **3 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting**

None

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

Learning and development – various opportunities coming up including manager bitesize sessions. Details available: [Upcoming events](#)

Neurodiversity network – this will be on the 26<sup>th</sup> February. The link will be share dvia Viva Engage and the Hub.

Annual leave – we are nearing the end of the leave year, please check your balance and the balance of your teams and arrange leave to be taken before the end of March. Carry over is back to normal at one week. Please take your leave as it is very beneficial for your wellbeing and productivity, if there are any issues please speak to your manager. For further details check the Hub: [Holiday Entitlement](#)

[Inclusion Group](#) – there is a review of inclusion group and we are looking at work works well and what could be done better. Please complete the survey to tell us what you think: [Have Your Say – Help Shape Our Refreshed Staff Inclusion Group](#)

EV lease scheme – this is currently being worked on and will go live in April time, more details to follow.

Corporate Peer Challenge – we have had the report this week which will go to scrutiny and cabinet, it is very positive.

[Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution](#) – the submission was in November, we are waiting for a decision from central Government about configuration and are expecting this decision around July.



Q: have we heard anything about pay negotiations?

A: there is no update since the last meeting. The unions claim in December was £3000 for each spinal point, or 10%, whichever was greater.

## **5 Employee Queries**

Q: Concerns have been raised over the volume of company vehicles and Careline vans parking on the lower level of the car park. People with medical needs who need the ground floor spaces are struggling to access them.

A: Please forward this to the Parking Services team.

Q: The stairwells are also not clean, they smell.

A: That is a question for the waste team, the stairs were cleaned last month.

Q: The tea and coffee supplies on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor, many products have expired, and we do not know who they belong to so do not want to throw them away.

A: Please email property services. A reminder may be needed to all staff to throw away expired things and keep the kitchen areas clean.

## **6 IT update**

MR: We had the IT systems power down last week. Another email will be coming shortly about another one. The new weekend will be the 7<sup>th</sup> February and comms will be sent out shortly.

The new roll out of the FOI system occurred, there have been a couple of minor tweaks already but please feed anything else back to the FOI team.

The new VPN will be rolling out gradually in the next month, you probably will not even notice the change, comms will also be coming for this.

The MFD's are being upgraded at the end of February or beginning of March.

## **7 Green Update**

[1 Sustainability Briefing January 2026.pdf](#)

## **8 Ideas/Suggestions**

None

## **9 Any other business**

None

## **10 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

**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 – 4<sup>th</sup> March 2026**

**Present:**

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

**Circulation:** Global

**Chair for Meeting:** Christina Corr

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**1 Apologies**

Melanie Ferdaous

**2 IT update**

The MFD roll out is occurring right now. Please ensure you pick the new printer from now, the old queue will be gone from today. We are still proceeding with laptop rollouts.

**ICT Starter, Leaver & Mover Policy**

**[Section 5.5 POL - ICT Starters Leavers and Movers Policy](#)**

The leaver process is now live. The last part is a change to the form that you will out, the process has been streamlined. There are now distinct timelines on the starter process, for example we ask for 2 weeks' notice for starters or a minimum of 5 working days. We can never guarantee any less and the policy sets this out. There are now also leaver deadlines, where the account is deleted in line with Microsoft licensing. Part of the onboarding process is that the user has to accept the user acceptance policy, cyber awareness and data protection training before leaving the IT office. The idea is protection for the organisation. We are improving the form for starters, the form will not change but we now have a mover and leaver form, we are trying to ensure we capture every detail.

Q: We have tokens from DWP, sometimes people forget to return them. If you come across any, can they be put aside as they belong to DWP.

A: Yes, the leaver process will ensure that the department also gets notified of the leaver.

**3 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting**

Q: Has there been any feedback on the questions raised last time regarding parking and the cleaning of the stairs?

A: All questions have been acknowledged. The stairwell is a waste responsibility.

Q: Is there a rota for cleaning the stairwell?

A: The town centres have a continuous presence, but there is not a specific rota. Will ask for this to be put on the rota.

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

EV benefits scheme – the electric vehicles lease scheme will be launched later this month. The policy has been circulated to the SCF inbox for comment. It is in the process of being finalised and there will be tweaks. Please let me know of any other comments. The next staff briefing will provide some details of the scheme and there will be a webinar from the provider on the 19<sup>th</sup> March.

Employee Complaints policy – We are consulting on this policy which is a merge of our complaints resolution and our bullying and harassment policies.

New recruitment system – We are launching a new recruitment tool in the beginning of April. We are currently in the implementation phase and learning the system and there will be training and support for managers. The system will improve candidate experience and provides increased automation, streamlining processes for HR and hiring managers.

[Employee Assistance Programme \(EAP\)](#) – We will be using a different EAP from the 1<sup>st</sup> April. It will include similar if not the same services but will be with a different provider. Details will be shared shortly.

[Race Equality Week](#) – We took part in REW at the start of February. Resources were shared via global emails and are still available on the Hub. We have received great feedback on the resources which are all bitesize.

Personal Development Morning – The next personal development morning is on Friday the 6<sup>th</sup> March and focusses on productivity. A global email has been sent.

[Celebrating International Women's Day](#) - International Women's Day is on the 8<sup>th</sup> March. Video resources will be available on the Hub and Insight.

[Staff Survey](#) – The new staff survey has been launched, it closes on the 18<sup>th</sup> March at 10pm. Please complete the survey and share it with your team, it does not take more than 5 minutes and your feedback is appreciated

[2026/27 budget agreed](#) – budget for next year has been approved.

Multistorey car park – There is a report going to overview and Scrutiny about the multistorey car park, currently we lease it from the people who own the shopping centre and they want it back. It will still be used for staff parking until April 2028. After that, we do not know what the need will be for the building due to LGR.

Q: Please could the EV policy be re-sent to the inbox.

A: Yes

Q: It has been previously discussed how managers phrase questions in the recruitment process. Is this training on the new system a time to refresh on how the questions should be set up. At times the questions can be confusing from an applicant perspective.

A: Yes, it will be a good opportunity to refresh. There is guidance given to all hiring managers on how to phrase the questions, but we understand not all managers will look.

Q: The REW materials were really good, they were discussed a lot in Inclusion Group, and the discussion was very interesting. Everyone please feel free to join Inclusion Group, there is no requirement to contribute.

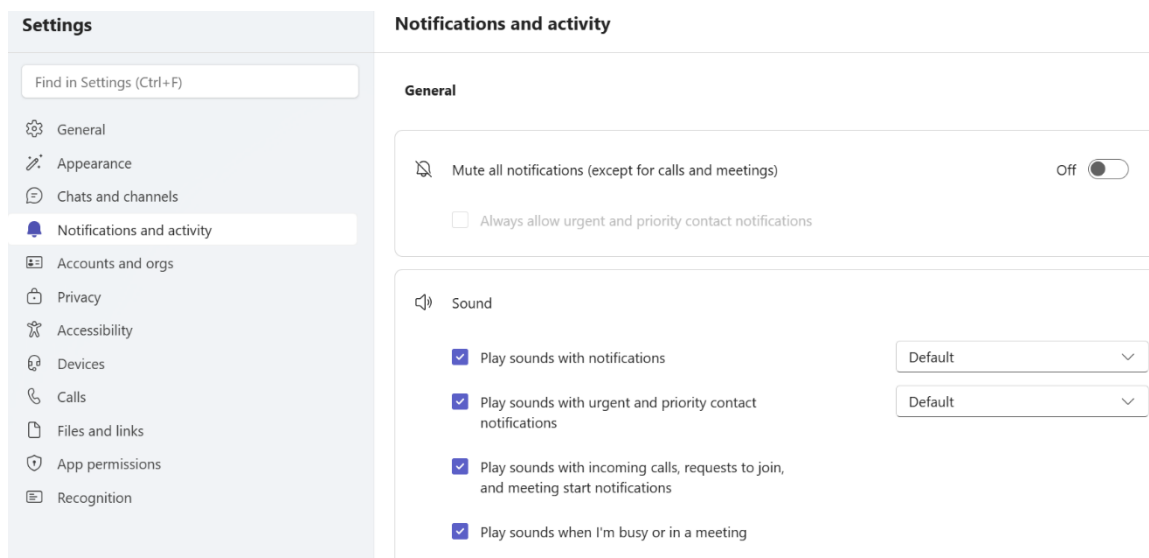
Q: Neurodiversity celebration week is coming up, are there any plans for that?

A: We try to pick up on all different areas but there is only so much resource in HR. I will check in with the team to see what we are doing. The Neurodiversity Network meeting was last week.

## 5 Employee Queries

Q: The number of alerts we get from Teams when Insight articles are being published can be distracting. Is it possible to have fewer notifications?

A: This can be changed in your Teams settings.



The screenshot shows the Microsoft Teams settings interface. On the left is a 'Settings' sidebar with a search bar and a list of categories: General, Appearance, Chats and channels, Notifications and activity (highlighted), Accounts and orgs, Privacy, Accessibility, Devices, Calls, Files and links, App permissions, and Recognition. The main area is titled 'Notifications and activity' and is divided into 'General' and 'Sound' sections. In the 'General' section, there is a toggle for 'Mute all notifications (except for calls and meetings)' which is currently turned 'Off', and an unchecked checkbox for 'Always allow urgent and priority contact notifications'. The 'Sound' section has a speaker icon and four checked options: 'Play sounds with notifications', 'Play sounds with urgent and priority contact notifications', 'Play sounds with incoming calls, requests to join, and meeting start notifications', and 'Play sounds when I'm busy or in a meeting'. Each of the first two options has a dropdown menu set to 'Default'.

Q: Can a sign be put up by the back door to let staff know the other two organisations that work in the building?

A: The issue with this is people possibly making a copy of it, the issue will be picked up. Possibly a picture could be placed by the sign in sheets.

## 6 Green Update

[2 Sustainability Briefing February 2026.pdf](#)

## **7 Ideas/Suggestions**

Q: Could Inclusion Group be a subtopic on SCF. It could include an update on Inclusion every month? This will help tie it into other areas and spread the message.

A: Inclusion can be added as a standing agenda item and will ask Inclusion group for updates and attendance where possible.

## **8 Any other business**

None

## **9 Chair of next meeting.**

Louis Franklin

## **Have something to say?**

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

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

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## **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 – 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026**

**Present:**

**Director- Regulatory:** Jo Doggett  
**HR Operations Manager:** Jo Keshishian  
**Staff representatives:** Christine Howe, Katie Thomas, Louis Franklin, Tiranan Straughan, Melanie Ferdaous  
**Technical Operations Manager:** Mark Robinson  
**Assistive Technologies Client Services Manager:** Amanda Dell  
**Union representative:** Dee Levett  
**Notes:** Ruby Lewis

**Circulation:** Global

**Chair for Meeting:** Louis Franklin

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**1 Apologies**

Rebecca Webb, Ian Couper, Martin Trotter, Christina Corr

**2 IT update**

The forms for the new starter leaver and mover policy will be live from 5pm today. You will now be able to do the leaver and mover form online. Any tweaks necessary will be made later down the line. The link for the form will remain the same, so anyone who has it saved will not need to update it.

The printer roll out happened a few weeks ago. Everything was simplified as much as possible and we had very few issues.

Q: When we print hologrammed permits, the hologram is coming off on the rollers. The supplier says the issue is because the printer is running too hot.

A: There is no real solution. The heat is used to fuse the powder onto the paper and they have to be a certain heat to be able to do it. You can try feeding it via another route, but it may be that we need to look at working with the department to supply a lower capacity printer. That will need to be submitted via a change request, and we will need to look at budgets etc.

**3 Inclusion Group update**

The next meeting is Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> April. It will be on Teams and there is information available on [The Hub](#) including notes from the last meeting. There will be a regular Inclusion Group spot on the staff briefing agenda going forward. The anonymous feedback form has also been introduced for each meeting.

The Race Equality week articles were very well received and the Neurodiversity Network in February also had good feedback.



**4 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting**

NA

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

There was a short staff survey that closed last month, we had 190 responses and analysis of this is currently underway. The results will be shared.

The pay offer for April 2026 has recently been made by the National Employers Group. The proposed increase is 3.3% and this has been passed to the Unions. We are awaiting a response.

The [Electric Car Benefit Scheme](#) was recently launched. The Hub page has a recording of the webinar.

The HR team are currently busy with the implementation of the new recruitment system. Information about training will be sent to recruiting managers later this month.

Today is the first day of the new holiday year. A global email has been sent containing information on Holiday Flex and carry forward.

There is a survey on the hub to gauge interest in a [Women's Network](#). Please complete this and encourage other employees to do so.

We have entered a new contract with a different EAP provider. Details can be found on the Hub: [Employee Assistance Programme \(EAP\)](#)

Q: Why has the women's network been set up?

A: it was discussed at inclusion group. The groups usually discuss challenged and ways forward. The deadline for the survey is April 10<sup>th</sup>.

Following feedback from the Staff Briefing, we are looking at re-vamping the agenda to make it more engaging and helpful. People have shown interest in a day in the life of what staff in different areas do, and we are aiming to have more face-to-face meetings. Please come along where possible. Please contact Christine Crofts in Comms if you have any ideas for the agenda.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> March the decision for LGR was announced for some counties. A 5 unitary model has been agreed for Essex, this is interesting for Hertfordshire because it means it does not necessarily follow the idea that we will end up as a 2 unitary. Social care may be a deciding factor. It is reassuring that the government are not applying a blanket approach. We are anticipating to hear for Hertfordshire in late June or early July.



**Q:** Do we need to take travelling into work in office hours out of our time, and if so where do we record this? Does it need to be on our calendars?

**A:** Unless you are in a role where you are doing site visits, then travel to work time from your home would be your own time. Adding this to your calendars would be the preference.

**Q:** Does the sick leave policy need to be reviewed due to more working from home?

**A:** Please send the question to Hrhelp. If you are too unwell to work it needs to be taken as sickness and not annual leave or flexi. Itrent is flexible enough that a half day, or a few hours of sickness can be recorded.

### **Restructures – Careline CareServ Team**

**AD:** We have various teams in Careline, I am the manager for the Administration team. We have had various restructures and the team has grown from a team of 4 to a team of over 20. It is unsustainable for me to manage that number of people. I now have two seniors on a grade 5 and they are being proposed to become team leaders on a grade 6. The element they are not currently doing is the staffing element. They will be responsible for all aspects for who is in the team, including leave, overtime and any HR issues. On the Job Profile, it has gone from being 'experienced in' to having a 'proven ability'. The restructure will mean I line manage the two Team Leaders and they will have roughly 10 staff each. One additional part is that a member of the team who is currently on a repairs contract for grade 3 will now be working to a grade 4 Job Profile doing administration and repairs. We will no longer be recruiting to the grade 3 Job Profile. There are no proposed redundancies or backfill. The consultation opened on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March and will close on the 24<sup>th</sup> April. I have had 121's with all of the team and there has been no negative feedback.

**Q:** Is this a straight switch on roles, will it be the same people?

**A:** Yes. If they had no interest, we would have recruited for them. But the idea is that they will just move up to Team Leader.

**Q:** Will these people have to sit an interview?

**A:** No, they have been job matched and there is over a 70% match which means they can be slotted into the roles without an interview.

## **Green Update**

[2 Sustainability Briefing February 2026.pdf](#)

## **Ideas/Suggestions**

Q: Is it worth having someone from Safeguarding come to talk about their new courses?

A: We could ask for it to be added to the staff briefing, a wider audience would benefit.

Q: Could we switch up the Directors that come to SCF, to get different perspectives?

A: Yes, this can be considered if IC has annual leave we can offer out to different Directors.

## **Any other business**

None

## **Chair of next meeting.**

Louis Franklin

## **Have something to say?**

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

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

**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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**JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**

22 April 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 3 October - December 2025, with a comparison with the same period in the previous two years.

	<b>Vacancies</b>	<b>Filled at first attempt</b>	<b>Filled (total)</b>	<b>Unfilled</b>	<b>% filled first attempt</b>	<b>Target</b>
Q3: Oct – Dec 2023	25	19	21	4	76.0%	75%
Q3: Oct – Dec 2024	23	18	22	1	78.3%	75%
<b>Q3: Oct – Dec 2025</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>58.8%</b>	<b>75%</b>

During Quarter 3, there was a drop in the number of vacancies compared to the same periods in the previous two years. This decline in overall vacancies along with the proportionally higher number of unfilled vacancies has resulted in us missing the target of 75% filled at first attempt.

We successfully filled vacancies including:

- Assistive Technologies Technician
- Careline Operator
- Data Officer
- Graduate Planning Officer

- Senior Contracts Officer (Waste)

Four positions were unfilled – two Civil Enforcement Officers, Enterprise Business Partner, and Environmental Health Scientific Officer.

### 3.3 Leavers and Turnover

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

Rolling 12 months	Turnover	
	Leavers	Monthly
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%
Jan-26	4	1.08%
Feb-26	0	0.00%
Mar-26	2	0.54%
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>6.77%</b>

Labour turnover of 6.77% is the lowest figure reported at year end for 20 years. This will in part be reflective of the jobs market where there are high unemployment levels and as a result we are seeing increased numbers of applications for vacancies.

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 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
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
Jan-26	3.97	5.01	8.97
Feb-26	4.45	4.73	9.18

Summary of absence reasons:

Dec 2025 – Feb 2026 Absence reason	Occasions of absence		
	Up to 1 week	1-3 weeks	Over 3 weeks
COVID 19 - suspected	1	0	0
Ear, Nose and Throat (Inc Cold/Flu)	62	1	2
Headaches (inc migraine)	4	0	0
Mental health (inc stress, depression)	9	4	12
Musculoskeletal	7	0	1
Other (inc Surgery)	26	7	8
Sickness / Vomiting / Gastro	20	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>24</b>

Following a period of fewer long-term sick cases, there has been an increase in early 2026, with several cases related to mental health or recovery from surgery.

This quarter has seen a similar number of Cold / Flu absences, with a small drop in overall short-term absences. The number of occasions 1-3 week absences has also dropped slightly.

### 3.5 Applicant Tracking System

Progress on implementation for our Applicant tracking system continues, with the launch planned for April. The digital platform will manage the end to end recruitment process, improving processes for hiring managers and the HR team as well as improving candidate experience.

### 3.6 National pay bargaining 2026/27 – National Joint Council (NJC)

The Unions submitted their pay claim for 2026/27 in December 25:

- 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 made their offer in March 2026:

- 3.3% on all pay points
- All other aspects of the Unions claim for 2026/27 have been rejected.

### 3.7 Apprenticeships

We currently have 8 apprentices in post and seen another apprentice successfully appointed to a permanent role. As the current apprenticeships come to an end, we

will see further recruitment for various opportunities including a Climate Change & Sustainability apprentice and an HR apprentice.

The government have recently de-funded several apprenticeships and we continue to work with training providers to ensure we can continue to develop exiting staff using the Levy.

### **3.8 National Graduate Scheme**

Our three graduates have started their next rotations; each graduate must complete a minimum of 3 rotations during their 2 year placement.

We are delighted that managers are appreciating the impact that a graduate can have, and now have graduate rotations in new service areas, ensuring the graduates are able to gain a wide range of experience across the Council.

The national recruitment process is underway for the next cohort of graduates, and we are looking to recruit a further graduate to start in October 2026.

### **3.9 Learning and Development**

We are continuing to provide resources to help staff to navigate this change, through or regular focussed Personal Development Mornings and in the training provided for staff and managers.

### **3.10 Employee Wellbeing**

April saw the launch of a new Employee assistance programme (EAP), which provides confidential support for staff. The new platform includes counselling services as well as access to practical guidance and wellbeing support. The support is accessible in a variety of ways, including via live chat and through a digital app.

### **3.11 Electric Car Benefit Scheme**

In March, our new Electric Car Benefit Scheme was introduced, providing staff with the opportunity to lease an electric car through salary sacrifice. This forms part of our overall package of benefits available for staff.

### **3.12 Inclusion**

We took part in Race Equality Week at the start of February by participating in the 5 Day Challenge from Race Equality Matters. As part of this, bitesize resources were shared with all staff each day, with the aim of raising awareness and increasing our understanding of racism. We have received positive feedback on the resources, all of which remain available for staff.

Following a review of our Staff Briefings, Inclusion will be included as a regular agenda item at our 6 weekly briefing. The aim is to continue to increase awareness and engagement on all equalities, diversity and inclusion topics.

### **3.13 Staff Survey**

In March we carried out a short staff survey, following on from our larger survey in 2024, to understand how Local Government Reorganisation is impacting our staff and

how supported they are feeling in the workplace. Analysis of the data collected is underway and will be used to guide and support next steps relating to development, engagement and support.

### 3.14 **Stay Questionnaires**

As part of our action plan to reduce our gender pay gap, we have carried out the first round of 'stay questionnaires' with senior female employees. The aim is to establish why employees wish to continue to work for the Council. Results will be analysed and used to help us retain happy and engaged 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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## JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

22 April 2026

\*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE: LGA CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE FOLLOW-UP

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE DIRECTOR - RESOURCES

### 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This information note sets out the details of the various reports relating to the Corporate Peer Challenge and the follow-up. It then details the contents of the follow-up report that relate to HR matters, including capacity, Leadership Team, People Strategy, Learning and Development, and communicating with staff.

### 2. STEPS TO DATE

- 2.1 As per the request at the last meeting, to update the Joint Staff Consultative Committee on the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge follow-up, specifically those matters of most relevance to the Committee.

### 3. INFORMATION TO NOTE

- 3.1 The background paper (Cabinet report from 17 February 2026) sets out that the Council had an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge in November 2024. This was followed by a report which was considered by Cabinet in January 2025. In turn this was followed by an action plan that was approved by Cabinet in March 2024. The peer team carried out a return visit in December 2025. This resulted in a follow-up report which was attached to the Cabinet report (February 2026).
- 3.2 The Peer Challenge (initial visit and follow-up) covered a wide range of Council service areas and projects. The findings and comments from the follow-up report that are most relevant to this Committee (i.e. HR related matters) are detailed below.
- 3.3 **Capacity (pages 6 and 7 of the follow-up report).** The peers recognised what the Council had achieved, both in terms of North Herts specific projects and the contribution to the early work on Local Government reorganisation (LGR). The peers warned about trying to maintain the same pace of delivery and the need to avoid adverse impacts on staff. They recommended the need to revisit project prioritisation or to identify additional resources/ funding.
- 3.4 The capacity to deliver projects was considered as part of the budget setting process for 2026/27. However, the extent of the LGR work that will be required is a risk, which is reflected in the Council Delivery Plan. Across 2026/27 and 2027/28, £2m of funding has been allocated into a specific reserve for costs of LGR. This includes potential capacity for backfilling to help maintain service and project delivery.
- 3.5 **Leadership Team (pages 7 and 8).** The peers noted the permanent implementation of the 7<sup>th</sup> Director role, and the alignment of Executive Member and Director responsibilities. They also highlighted that following two retirements, both replacement

Director posts had been filled by internal candidates. This reflects how the Council is growing its own talent, and is hopefully motivating for other employees who want to progress their career at North Herts.

- 3.6 **People Strategy (page 8)**. The peers heard about our work on developing a people strategy for the transition period through LGR. This was discussed at Leadership Team in February and key themes were agreed, which are retain and attract, develop and engage, and inclusion and wellbeing. This work will also include relaunching the organisation values to include an easily accessible description of what they mean, a new applicant tracking system for recruitment, continued work on retention including why our staff want to work for us and supporting employee wellbeing.
- 3.7 **Learning and Development (page 8)**. We have committed to making learning and development opportunities available to staff to put them in the best place in advance of LGR. We will also continue to offer apprenticeship and graduate placements.
- 3.8 **Communicating with staff (page 8)**. All the meetings that the peers had discussed the increased and improved communications and engagement with staff. This included the staff conferences that were held in September which were led by the Chief Executive and Leader. They also heard how staff were helping to shape the next iterations of these conferences. The meetings also covered the regular updates from the Chief Executive on LGR and that Directors are also taking turns in providing regular communications to all staff (e.g. through online and in person staff briefings). The peers noted the progress that had been made but also reflected that some staff would still want more.

#### 4. **NEXT STEPS**

- 4.1 The Peer Challenge follow-up was positive about the actions that had been taken since the first visit. The section above details that there is ongoing work. The Committee can comment on this and provide further comments and recommendations.

#### 5. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 5.1 Cabinet report on the Peer Challenge follow-up (17<sup>th</sup> February 2026). See minute 24. <https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=133&MId=3792&Ver=4>

#### 6. **CONTACT OFFICERS**

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## JSCC Discussion Paper – Recruitment and Retention in times of uncertainty

The Council is operating in a period of sustained uncertainty driven by Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), and this can create challenges for recruitment and retention.

In addition to uncertainty around LGR, there are ongoing skills shortages in certain service areas, changing employee expectations of work and less competitive pay (compared to the private sector). All these factors can impact recruitment and retention and it's vital that the workforce has the right skills and abilities to deliver services for North Hertfordshire.

### Recruitment and Retention Risks

- **Loss of key skills and experience:** particularly in scarce-skills roles due to uncertainty or external opportunities offering greater perceived stability.
- **Reduced ability to recruit:** as candidates may be cautious about joining an organisation undergoing reorganisation.
- **Increased pressure on remaining staff:** arising from vacancies and delayed recruitment or interim arrangements.
- **Equality impacts:** with part-time staff, carers and those reliant on flexibility at greater risk if workloads are not managed equitably.

### What our employees say

We have conducted the first round of stay questionnaires, where senior managers were asked to the factors that most strongly influence their decision to stay working for the Council. The key factors supporting retention based on this data are:

- **Flexibility:** (hybrid working, hours, autonomy) is the most significant retention factor.
- **Meaningful work and job satisfaction:** including seeing projects through and delivering outcomes for residents.
- **Supportive culture and relationships:** including cohesive teams.
- **Job security and pension:** which provide stability when combined with flexibility and leave.

The feedback also indicated some key pressures:

- Limited **time and clarity for development and career progression.**
- Increased **workload and pressure**, including LGR-related activity alongside business-as-usual and risk of burnout.

## What can we do?

While uncertainty cannot be removed, its impact can be mitigated through:

- **Clear and honest communication:** regular updates on LGR progress, clearly distinguishing between what is known, unknown and subject to change.
- **Protecting flexibility:** maintaining flexible and hybrid working as a core retention tool.
- **Further developing how we work together:** continued development, considered communication and support for hybrid teams.
- **Development and engagement:** encouraging career and development conversations, help employees prepare for roles in Unitary Councils, and highlight opportunities to retain motivation and skills.
- **Targeted recruitment messaging:** being open about change while clearly promoting flexibility, culture, purpose and support available to our employees.

While uncertainty is unavoidable, its impact can be reduced through clear communication, visible support and continued focus on the factors that matter most to staff: flexibility, meaningful work, supportive management and trust.

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
	April	Recruitment and retention in times of uncertainty

Discussion

Suggested discussion topics for future meetings
Employment rights bill
Managing short term absence
Flexible and hybrid working
Social media for recruitment
Careers coaching
Psychological safety at work
Learning from leavers feedback
Menopause and work

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