

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING HELD IN THE VIA ZOOM**  
**ON WEDNESDAY, 24TH JUNE, 2026 AT 10.00 AM**

**MINUTES**

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

**In attendance:** *Luca Benedito (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Robert Filby (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Anthony Roche (Chief Executive) and Rebecca Webb (HR Services Manager)*

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

**Staff Consultation** *Louis Franklin*

**Forum :**

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

**1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 31 seconds*

There were no apologies for absence received.

**2 MINUTES - 22 APRIL 2026**

*Audio Recording – 2 minutes 42 seconds*

Councillor Val Bryant, 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 22 April 2026 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

**3 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

*Audio recording – 3 minutes 44 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.

## 4 SCF MINUTES

*Audio recording – 4 minutes 6 seconds*

The Director – Resources presented the item entitled ‘SCF Minutes’ alongside the Minutes of the meetings from May and June 2026 and highlighted the following:

- Two sets of SCF minutes were provided due to meeting timings.
- The minutes followed the usual structure of service updates and responses to questions raised by Forum members.
- At the May Forum, a presentation and discussion took place on the MSU and Parking Services restructure, which had now completed the restructure process.
- At the June Forum, there was a request for UNISON provided information to staff on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and the support available. This session was scheduled for lunchtime on the day of the Committee meeting.
- Other HR-related updates would be covered separately by the HR Services Manager.

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 May and June 2026.

## 5 HR INFORMATION NOTE

*Audio recording – 6 minutes 13 seconds*

The HR Services Manager presented the Information Note entitled ‘HR Update’, and highlighted the following:

- Recruitment outcomes in Quarter 4 had improved with all vacancies filled and 91% first-attempt fill rate, significantly above the 75% target.
- Although leavers had increased in recent months, overall turnover remained comparable with April 2025, with no immediate concerns.
- Short-term absence had reduced by around one-third, and long-term absence cases had also reduced; mental health and musculoskeletal absences continued to form a significant proportion.
- The new Applicant Tracking System (ATS) launched in April was fully operational, with positive early feedback from candidates and managers.
- Unions had rejected the national employers’ 3.3% pay offer for 2026/27, and some were consulting members on industrial action. The pay award offer had been accepted for Chief Officers, which covered Director positions.
- Apprentice and graduate schemes continued, with several apprentices moving into permanent or external roles, and graduates had progressed into roles both within and out of the Council.
- Learning and development support continued ahead of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), including resources on resilience, communication skills and neurodiversity.
- The LGR Workforce workstream was looking to establish a countywide Employee Change Network, with a good number of volunteers from North Herts expressing interest in supporting this work.
- Early feedback on the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) was positive, with around 50 downloads of the wellbeing app.
- The first Employee Women’s Network session, focused on imposter syndrome and confidence, had taken place and received excellent feedback.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Keith Hoskins
- Councillor Bryony May
- Councillor Val Bryant

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

- Graduates rotated across departments throughout their placements. The graduate who stayed on is now in the Policy Team. One graduate had left following their placement, one remained in role and a new graduate would join in the autumn.
- Details of the specific roles apprentices progressed into would be provided after the meeting.
- 18 volunteers came forward to volunteer for the Employee Change Network, representing a wide range of grades and departments. They would receive training next month and the purpose of the role would be to support staff, gather questions, and feed issues into the Workforce Workstream.
- Neurodiversity awareness work was ongoing, with webinars and resources shared to help managers support staff effectively.
- The wellbeing app used by staff was part of the EAP and was different from the app offered to residents.
- Concerns about mandatory training volume were not widespread.
- Completion rates of mandatory training had increased since the introduction of the new Learning Management System (LMS).
- Staff have a set period to complete training, managers can view completion status of their staff on the LMS, and Leadership Team received reports to follow up on gaps.

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

## **6 UPDATE PAPER - DRAFT EHRC CODE OF PRACTICE ON SINGLE SEX SPACES**

*Audio recording – 21 minutes 1 second*

The HR Services Manager presented the Update Paper entitled 'Draft EHRC Code of Practice on Single Sex Spaces' and highlighted the following:

- The draft code reflected the Supreme Court judgment confirming that, for Equality Act purposes, sex means biological sex.
- The draft code does not remove Equality Act protections for trans people, who remain protected under the characteristics of gender reassignment.
- Although the code primarily concerns services, public functions and associations, there were practical implications for the Councils as both an employer and a public authority.
- The Council would need to take a careful, evidence-based approach balancing legal compliance with dignity, respect and inclusion of staff.
- The draft was still within the 40-day parliamentary period, and the Council would monitor parliamentary progress and the commencement date.
- Guidance from the LGA for local authorities was expected and would be reviewed once published.
- Workplace facilities, HR policies, workforce data arrangements and staff guidance would be reviewed once the final position is confirmed.
- Any changes would be supported by clear communication, manager guidance, and appropriate equality impact assessments.
- Services have been asked to identify any operational areas where facilities, service provision or risk assessments may need review.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Bryony May

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

- Staff were the primary focus of the HR review, but feedback would be provided to ensure clear communication to members of the public, particularly those who may feel hesitant about using Council facilities.
- Staff and members of the public would be treated consistently, and the Council would apply the law as set out in the final guidance.
- No particular staff concerns had been raised to date. HR had been able to support individuals and managers where questions have arisen, and work continued while awaiting confirmation of the final code.

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

- Discussions were ongoing with the Leadership Team on adapting services and spaces to comply with the legislation, and wider communication would follow to both this Committee and more generally to staff.
- Work was underway to address this due to the recent release of draft guidance; clarification will depend on parliamentary progress and LGA guidance.

The Chair confirmed that no Members objected and, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee noted the Update Paper on Draft EHRC Code of Practice on Single Sex Spaces.

## 7 DISCUSSION PAPER - MENOPAUSE AT WORK

*Audio recording – 28 minutes 59 seconds*

The HR Services Manager presented the Discussion Paper entitled 'Menopause and Work' and highlighted the following:

- Menopause was a normal stage of life, but symptoms can significantly affect attendance, performance, confidence and well-being for some employees.
- The aim was to ensure managers and staff understand what support is available and that the Council responded consistently and sensitively.
- Symptoms can vary widely; for some they are manageable, while for others they may affect sleep, concentration, attendance, or how they experience work.
- A supportive approach helped employees remain well, stay at work and continue contributing effectively, and supported wider aims around inclusion, well-being and retention.
- Menopause was not itself a protected characteristic under the Equality Act, but poor handling can create risks linked to sex, age or disability discrimination.
- In some cases, symptoms may amount to a disability if they have a substantial and long-term impact on day-to-day activities, meaning managers must take concerns seriously, consider reasonable adjustments and apply processes fairly.
- National guidance increasingly framed menopause as a workplace issue, emphasising visibility of support, good manager conversations, access to adjustments, partnership working and fair processes.

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- The Council already has a strong base of support including intranet information, HR guidance, staff communications, awareness activity, menopause resources, occupational health, the Employee Assistance Programme, GP helpline and flexible working options.
- Next steps included developing a Menopause Action Plan, reviewing visibility and accessibility of existing support, refreshing guidance, and considering management awareness-raising and training on supportive conversations, reasonable adjustments and fair handling of attendance and performance issues.
- Positive steps had already been taken, but the action plan would strengthen the approach and ensure employees experiencing menopause are treated with dignity, supported appropriately and able to contribute fully.

The following Members raised points on the Discussion Paper:

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

The following points were raised as part of the discussion:

- The information provided in the paper on the actions already taken by the Council, as well as the proposals for future development, were welcomed and marked a huge change from how the menopause was previously dealt with by organisations.
- It was important for managers to feel confident to have one to one conversations with employees experiencing menopause to understand what support was required.
- Some consideration should be given to Council employees who have other families members experiencing menopause.
- The menopause journey was different for all women and the symptoms experienced and timing can vary.
- It was important for women to understand menopause, but it was equally important that men understood the symptoms and impact of menopause symptoms.
- Previously menopause had not been discussed at work or with managers, but it was good to see that it was now acceptable.

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

- Support for employees affected by another member of their family experiencing menopause was already included in intranet information and will continue to form part of guidance.
- The Women's Network was expected to discuss menopause, and the Menopause Network had been running for nearly two years, which provided a space for staff experiencing menopause or supporting others.

The Chair confirmed that no Members objected and, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee noted the Discussion Paper on Menopause At Work.

## 8 SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

*Audio recording – 40 minutes 52 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 Claire Strong
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Bryony May
- Louis Franklin
- Anthony Roche

The following points were made as part of the discussion:

- Given the current heatwave experienced, some consideration should be given to how working from home arrangements were managed.
- Psychological safety at Work would be a potentially interesting topic to explore, but further clarification on what this entailed would be needed.
- There was potential for a discussion around the Employment Rights Bill and specifically any impact on Council staff.
- Whilst it was discussed at other Committees, it might be appropriate for this Committee to consider the training offer for staff to assist with the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process.
- It may be timely to discuss how SCF should operate under Local Government Reorganisation, as different authorities may have different approaches.

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

- A summary of items arising from the Employment Rights Bill could be provided, including impacts so far and upcoming changes.
- Psychological safety at work related to organisational culture, enabling staff to be themselves, make mistakes, and avoid blame-based environments.
- Future training plans to support LGR could be covered within the HR Information Note to allow space for other discussion papers.

In response to points raised, the Director – Resources advised that:

- Exit interviews had always been carried out and were about finding out why people had chosen to leave. 'Stay Interviews' were referenced in the new People Strategy and were different and focussed on why people remained with the Council and what could be done to help that continue.
- The People Strategy would be brought to the Committee once adopted.

In response to points raised, the Chief Executive advised that:

- Consideration of the future of this Committee could be presented to the next Committee meeting.
- JSCC and SCF would continue until 31 March 2028, when NHDC ceased to exist. The Committee may wish to consider how its role pivots to support LGR and what the future unitary authority should adopt as an equivalent forum.
- The Shadow Authority would be elected in May 2027.

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Following discussion, Members agreed on two discussion topics on 'Employment Rights Bill' and the 'People Strategy' for the next meeting of the Committee.

It was further requested that a discussion take place on the future of the Staff Consultation Forum as part of the Staff Consultation Forum minutes approval item and that information relating to staff training provisions be included in the HR Information Note.

The meeting closed at 10.54 am

Chair