

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



12 June 2026

Our Ref Joint Staff Consultative Committee 24 June 2026
Contact. Committee Services
Direct Dial. (01462) 474655
Email. committee.services@north-herts.gov.uk

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

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

Substitutes Councillors: Sadie Billing, Ruth Brown, Joe Graziano 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, 24TH JUNE, 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
<p>1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE 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>2. MINUTES - 22 APRIL 2026 To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 22 April 2026.</p>	(Pages 5 - 10)
<p>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.</p>	
<p>4. SCF MINUTES To receive the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums from May and June 2026.</p>	(Pages 11 - 18)
<p>5. HR INFORMATION NOTE 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 19 - 24)
<p>6. UPDATE PAPER - DRAFT EHRC CODE OF PRACTICE ON SINGLE SEX SPACES To receive an update paper on the Draft EHRC Code of Practice on single sex spaces.</p>	(Pages 25 - 26)
<p>7. DISCUSSION PAPER - MENOPAUSE AT WORK To receive a discussion paper on Menopause at Work.</p>	(Pages 27 - 28)

8. SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

To consider topics for discussion at a future meeting of the Committee.

(Pages
29 - 30)

This page is intentionally left blank

Public Document Pack Agenda Item 2

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



Staff Consultation Forum Meeting Minutes – 6th May 2026

Present:

Director- Resources: Ian Couper
HR Services Manager: Rebecca Webb
Staff representatives: Tiranán Straughan, Louis Franklin, Christina Corr, Christine Howe, Katie Thomas, Melanie Ferdaous
Technical Operations Manager: Mark Robinson
Union representative: Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews
Director – Customers – Jo Dufficy
Director – Place – Nigel Smith
Notes: Ruby Lewis

Circulation: Global

Chair for Meeting: Louis Franklin

1 Apologies

Martin Trotter, Dee Levett

2 IT update

MR: Our penetration test was carried out last month, identifying the lowest number of issues we have ever had. Where there were issues, these were mostly regarding common words being used. There are already plans underway for the further issues identified.

We are in the process of updating our core directory and updating the last of our 2016 servers, we are engaging with departments around this.

We rolled out 330 laptops in 2025/2026, and we are now in full device support.

Our helpdesk survey for 2025/2026 came in, feedback was positive and we are looking at some improvements.

The Information Team received 206 FOI requests for quarter 1 this year.

Q: Is there access to computers if you do not have your laptop at DCO?

A: No, laptops are built to the individual. If a user forgot their laptop, they would need to go home and get it. To build a laptop, the turnaround is 2/3 hours if everything goes smoothly.

3 Restructures

JD: Nigel and I are here to discuss a restructure currently in consultation for MSU and parking. For MSU, the proposal is to decentralise and transport the support directly into the teams. This is to provide a direct capacity to service teams, in preparation for LGR and there was a residual aspect to the Leadership Team restructure that was to reduce the span of parking. Consultation opened on the 20th April and is running until the 20th May. We had a Unison representative at the consultation meeting and have had formal and informal 1:1's with those who are impacted. Within the team, MSU has 4 distinct areas, one is parking. The proposal



is that the team leader and their team will move into Nigel's area, those supporting Regulatory will move into the directorate and report to Linda Hopkins as the team leader. The people that support housing will move into Regulatory and those who support Green Space will move to that team. There is a Systems and Support Officer role, this will move into IT. The final team that deal with land charges, legal support, parking permits and fleet vehicles will move into Customer Services. An alternative proposal has suggested it may be a better fit to move into the Legal Team, which will be considered as part of the consultation. Further down the line, fleet vehicles and parking permits will move into waste. In terms of the process, there has been some good constructive discussions and no significant objections. There have been some questions around timings with LGR and questions of if we should wait, but this is to help prepare for LGR. We are collating feedback as we go through, and this will be shared with everyone involved.

NS: Louise Symes currently has a very wide span of duties. In the first instance we are looking at giving the team clearer focus and remit. We also want to simplify reporting lines and arrange into two teams. As part of that, we are redefining some roles and key posts. We are running in parallel as one consultation with the same closing and opening times. Staff have been generally supportive.

Q: How will dismantling the MSU create capacity, where will the increase in capacity come from. Service areas will only have a finite amount of support, if staff remain within the MSU, the level of support given to service areas can be adjusted as required.

A: In terms of capacity, it is not increasing headcount, it is working closer with service teams and them having the support more on hand. In 2024 the Careline admin support moved out of MSU and joined Careline, and that has worked really well. They work much closer together and can communicate more effectively. It has had a really positive impact. It's expected that the benefits would be replicated. The workload and priorities have changed as part of this. In practice, there are generic Job Profiles, but people work in specific areas. This is also about putting people and teams in the best possible position ahead of LGR, and there is a lot of work to prepare for that.

Q: Are there any jobs that will be affected with job losses?

A: There is one post currently at risk, the MSU manager. They are involved in the consultation, and we are doing everything we can to look at alternative roles.

4 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

5 NHC Update (including HR and Staff Wellbeing Update)

We have approved some new posts in IT and HR in response to LGR and the increase in workloads in these two teams.
There are upcoming elections in Royston.



Provisional payslips are now available in Itrent. It will clearly say when it is provisional, but this should help us prevent and pick up on any errors early on.

May is women's health month: [Women's Health Month: Supporting Health, Wellbeing and Understanding](#)

There is upcoming bitesize training for managers and an RPR briefing. [Upcoming events](#)

We have now launched our new applicant tracking system, to replace our recruitment tool. We currently have two systems running but will be releasing guidance and training for managers shortly to transition to the new system.

Q: Is there an update on the pay award?

A: Currently there is no update, I will keep everyone updated.

6

Inclusion Group Update

The Hub pages for men and women's health have now been updated: [Men's Health](#)
[Women's Health](#)

There will be a follow up insight article in June about PCOS – polycystic ovary syndrome.

A short video was shared in the staff briefing, and REW resources are available on the hub: [Race Equality Week](#)

Digital Inclusion was discussed, the staff survey will be going out later today and the residents survey next week: [Have Your Say On Digital Inclusion Work – Staff Survey Now Open](#)

The first women's network meeting is on the 12th May at 10:00 via teams. Please contact the policy team if you would like to join.

7

Employee Queries

All members of SCF will now have access to the inbox so urgent enquires can be picked up quicker.

Green Update

8

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

9 Ideas/Suggestions

None

10 Any other business

None

11 Chair of next meeting.

Christina Corr

Have something to say?

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

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

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

Wednesday 3rd June 2026

Via Teams

Present:

Director- Resources: Ian Couper

HR Operations Manager: Jo Keshishian

Staff representatives: Tiranán Straughan, Louis Franklin, Christina Corr, Christine Howe, Katie Thomas, Melanie Ferdaous

Technical Operations Manager: Mark Robinson

Union representative: Dee Levett

Notes: Fallon Rumball-Nunan

Circulation: Global

Chair for Meeting: Christina Corr

1 Apologies

Martin Trotter

2 IT update

- Following feedback from the in-person staff briefing, audio issues have been addressed. Speakers have been repositioned to improve sound quality, and an induction loop is available for hearing-impaired staff.
- Work continues on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) preparations, including plans to introduce enhanced password security (12–14 characters).

Query:

Rising desks have been installed but are not yet available for booking.

Response:

This is in progress. IT is working with Property Services to ensure all factors are considered. An update will be provided once finalised.

3 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

4 NHC Update (including HR and Staff Wellbeing Update)

- **Pay award** – Trade unions have rejected the latest employer offer and are considering strike action. Further updates will be provided next month.
- **Personal Development morning** – This month's focus is neurodiversity. Resources, including podcasts and webinars, have been shared via email.
- **[LGR Change Network](#)** - Staff volunteers have been invited to become Change Champions. The deadline for expressions of interest due to close on Friday 5th June.

- **Wellbeing:** The latest Insight publication includes articles on wellbeing for men and women, supported by additional resources in the [Work-Life Toolkit](#).

5 [Inclusion Group Update](#)

- Next meeting scheduled for **16 July 2026**
- "[Little Voice](#)" video shared at the staff briefing

6 Employee Queries

- **Mandatory Learning:** Concerns raised regarding the volume and relevance of training (both in-person and eLearning), particularly for non-public-facing roles.
Action: IC to review with the Safeguarding Team.
- **Accessibility:** Difficulties reported accessing the building, particularly the 'arc', independently.
Action: Issue to be referred to HR (with consent) and Property Services to identify solutions.

7 Green Update

[5 Sustainability Briefing May 2026.pdf](#)

8 Ideas/Suggestions

- Suggestion to increase visibility and promotion of SCF ahead of LGR.
- Discussion held; several ideas proposed.
- A subgroup meeting has been arranged to take this forward.

9 Any other business

Arrangements underway to invite John Laurence (UNISON) to brief staff on LGR, following positive attendance at the previous session.

Next Meeting

Chair: Louis Frankling

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

This page is intentionally left blank

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

24 June 2026

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE: HR Information Note

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE: Director - Resources

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Executive Member - Resources

COUNCIL PRIORITY: All Priorities;

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 4 January to March 2026, with a comparison with the same period in the previous two years.

	Vacancies	Filled at first attempt	at Filled (total)	Unfilled	% filled first attempt	Target
Q4: Jan - Mar 2024	22	16	16	6	72.7%	75%
Q4: Jan - Mar 2025	19	15	17	2	78.9%	75%
Q4: Jan - Mar 2026	23	21	23	0	91.3%	75%

During Quarter 4, there was a slight increase in the number of vacancies compared to the same period in the previous two years. All vacancies were filled during this period which reflects the current recruitment market conditions where we are seeing an improved number of applications for the majority of our job adverts.

The vacancies successfully filled this period include:

- Civil Enforcement Officers
- Revenues Officers
- Senior Planning Officers
- Legal Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer
- Business Admin Apprentice (Democratic Services)

3.3 Leavers and Turnover

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

Rolling 12 months	Turnover	
	Leavers	Monthly
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	3	0.80%
Apr-26	4	1.06%
May-26	4	1.05%
Total	34	9.15%

The number of leavers has increased in the last couple of months which has increased the labour turnover – although comparable to the turnover at the end of April 2025 which was 9.15%.

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
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	3.78	4.47	8.25
Feb-26	4.17	4.46	8.63
Mar-26	4.42	4.45	8.86
Apr-26	4.65	4.30	8.95

Summary of absence reasons:

Mar – May 2026 Absence reasons	Occasions of absence		
	Up to 1 week	1-3 weeks	Over 3 weeks
COVID 19 - suspected	0	0	0
Ear, Nose and Throat (Inc Cold/Flu)	21	2	0
Headaches (inc migraine)	13	0	1
Mental health (inc stress, depression)	5	3	5
Musculoskeletal	4	2	3
Other (inc Surgery)	50	6	3
Sickness / Vomiting / Gastro	18	1	1
Total	90	14	13

This quarter has seen a drop in short-term absences by around a third compared to last quarter. The number of occasions of 1–3 week absences has remained stable, with the number of long-term absences (over 3 weeks) having dropped by half. The cases of mental health related and musculoskeletal absences make up most of the long-term cases which are being supported by our HR Business Partners.

3.5 Applicant Tracking System

The new Applicant Tracking System was launched in April and is now fully operational, following a short period of running both systems in parallel.

Initial feedback has been positive. We will continue to gather views from candidates and recruiting managers so that we can identify any further improvements as the system becomes embedded.

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.

The Unions have since rejected this offer, with some consulting with their members about industrial action. The employer offer has been accepted for Chief Officers, which covers our Director roles.

3.7 **Apprenticeships**

We currently have five apprentices in post and are in the process of appointing a further three. During this period, three apprentices were successfully appointed to permanent roles or extended fixed-term contracts with the Council. We took the opportunity to celebrate apprentices at a recent staff briefing.

In May, two of our current apprentices attended the Local Government Apprentice of the Year event. They found the experience valuable, particularly as it encouraged them to step outside their comfort zone and gave them the opportunity to meet apprentices in similar roles at other councils. All attendees also receive personalised feedback from Local Government East to support their ongoing development.

3.8 **National Graduate Scheme**

We have recently completed interviews for the next round of graduate recruitment and provided feedback to candidates. We expect to be notified of the outcome in July.

Our first graduates are now in the final few months of their fixed-term contracts with the Council. One graduate has secured a permanent role elsewhere, and we are delighted that the other has successfully moved into a new role within the Council.

3.9 **Learning and Development**

We are continuing to provide regular resources to support staff to navigate through Local Government Reorganisation, most recently to support resilience, communications skills and to educate about neurodiversity.

3.10 **Change Network**

As part of the Local Government Reorganisation programme, we have been working with councils across Hertfordshire to establish a county-wide employee change network.

The proposal has been well received at the Council, and several volunteers have come forward to join the network. They will receive training and development to support them in taking on these new roles.

3.11 **Employee Wellbeing**

Since the launch of the new EAP service in April, we have received positive feedback from several staff who have already accessed the services.

Following success of the previous wellbeing walks, a further walk is being arranged in June to support loneliness awareness week.

3.12 **Inclusion**

We are regularly providing resources to staff at our monthly staff briefing, most recently around the effects of racism in the workplace and speaking up for Inclusion. The Inclusion Group provided advice ahead of the digital inclusion survey and has created support and guidance for staff networks.

In May, the first employee Women's Network took place, led by colleagues from the Inclusion group. This session focussed on imposter syndrome and building confidence.

4. 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. CONTACT OFFICERS

Rebecca Webb	HR Services Manager	rebecca.webb@north-herts.gov.uk, Tel: 01462 474481
Ian Couper	Director: Resources	ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk Tel: 01462 474243

This page is intentionally left blank

JSCC Update Paper – Draft EHRC Code of Practice on single sex spaces

This paper provides a brief update on the draft revised EHRC Code of Practice on single sex spaces and highlights the main issues the Council intends to keep under review in relation to staff support and workplace practice.

Current position

The draft Code of practice for services, public functions and associations, was laid before Parliament on 21 May 2026, Parliament has 40 days to review the code. If Parliament does not disapprove the code, the UK government will set a date for it to come into force. If commenced, it is likely to become an important reference point for how the Equality Act 2010 is applied in practice. The code was originally published in 2011 but has been updated to reflect subsequent legal developments, including the Supreme Court's judgement on the definition of sex.

What the draft Code says

The 2025 Supreme Court judgment clarified that, for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010, sex means biological sex.

What that means in practice

- For Equality Act purposes, the relevant sex classification is the sex recorded at birth
- This applies even if someone has a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC)
- This does not remove protection for trans people, they are still protected under gender reassignment
- "sex" and "gender reassignment" are treated as separate legal characteristics

Key considerations for employers

Although the draft Code focuses on services and public functions, several themes are relevant to the Council as an employer.

The supporting commentary around the draft Code stresses the importance of clear HR policies, employee training and awareness and documenting rationale for decisions.

Employment related next steps

The Equality Act 2010 remains the underlying law, but the Code is likely to become the statutory guidance for service providers and public authorities on compliance.

Work is planned to include:

- Review of workplace facilities
- Review and update HR policies and procedures
- Ensuring appropriate manager and employee awareness, guidance and training
- Consider implications on collection and reporting of workforce data

There are implications for the Council as a service provider and any future response will need to reflect both the Council's role as an employer and its wider public duties.

Services will undertake a review of their facilities and service provision to identify any areas where there may be compliance risks or where alternative arrangements may need to be considered. This may take the form of an Equalities Impact Assessment to record identified issues, risks and mitigations.

This page is intentionally left blank

JSCC Discussion Paper: Menopause at Work

Menopause is a natural stage of life, but its symptoms can affect people differently at work. These may include hot flushes, poor sleep, anxiety, headaches, fatigue and difficulty concentrating. For some employees, symptoms are mild; for others, they can affect attendance, performance, wellbeing and confidence.

Menopause is not a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, but how employers respond can raise risks linked to sex, age and disability discrimination. If symptoms have a substantial and long-term effect on day-to-day activities, they may amount to a disability, which could require reasonable adjustments. Employers should therefore consider menopause within health and wellbeing, equality, attendance and health and safety arrangements.

There is increasing expectation that employers take a practical and supportive approach to menopause. Acas, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, CIPD and GOV.UK all recognise menopause as a workplace issue linked to wellbeing, equality, absence, performance and staff retention, rather than simply a private health matter. Their guidance encourages employers to make support visible, equip managers to respond appropriately, consider reasonable adjustments where needed, and ensure workplace policies and processes are applied fairly and consistently.

Current guidance recommends personalised adjustments such as flexible working, rest areas, environmental changes and supportive manager conversations. NHS guidance also highlights the value of partnership working between employers, managers, staff and trade union representatives.

What the Council has already done

- Information for managers is available through the intranet and the HR team, helping managers understand menopause symptoms, hold supportive conversations and signpost staff to available support.
- Staff communications have been used to raise awareness of menopause as a workplace issue, promote available support and encourage an open and respectful culture.
- Menopause-related events and network activity have helped raise awareness, share experiences and encourage discussion of support needs in a constructive and inclusive way.
- A menopause information pack and intranet guidance provide staff and managers with practical information about symptoms, support options and sources of advice.
- Menopause support is linked to the Council's wider inclusion and wellbeing work, helping ensure it is considered alongside health, equality and staff experience.
- Occupational health support is available to help identify personalised workplace adjustments where appropriate, such as flexible hours, homeworking, breaks, temperature control, access to water, uniform flexibility or temporary changes to duties.
- The Council aims to take an inclusive approach, recognising that not everyone experiencing menopause will identify or disclose in the same way and that support should be responsive to individual needs.

- Flexible working and homeworking are already offered as standard in many roles, giving managers scope to support employees through practical adjustments that can help them manage symptoms and remain at work.
- The Council has built a good base of support overall, including access to an Employee Assistance Programme, occupational health and a GP helpline, alongside the information and awareness activity already in place.

Next steps

- Develop and publish a menopause action plan. Current guidance links this to employers with 250 or more employees and suggests it may become mandatory from spring 2027, subject to further legislation.
- Review visibility and awareness of support resources and update arrangements where necessary to ensure easy access to clear guidance and signposting.
- Consider training for managers on supportive conversations and continue to develop awareness to consider menopause when applying attendance, capability and performance processes.

Menopause is an important workplace issue linked to wellbeing, equality, inclusion and retention. Supporting employees well can help the Council create a workplace where people are able to contribute fully and give their best.

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
	June	Menopause and work
	June	An update on the Supreme Court ruling on single sex spaces

Page 19

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

This page is intentionally left blank