

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

8 June 2022

*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 HR Update Information Note contains updates regarding the 2021/22 HR Service Work Plan and the People Recovery 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 People Recovery Plan

The pandemic and subsequent restrictions have had a significant impact on all the normal forward planning carried out by services including HR, as well creating difficulties for forecasting on the economy, labour, market, pay and pensions etc. The People Recovery Plan was developed as an alternative to the People Strategy for 2020-2026 and describes how HR processes have been adapted as a result of the pandemic, and how we are supporting our staff throughout this period of change.

Since restrictions have been lifted nationally, the general guidance around expectations has been updated for employees at the Council. Some measures remain in place with a focus on ensuring that everyone attending the office feels comfortable and the Council are supplying lateral flow tests for employees in certain public facing roles. We are seeing a gradual increase in the number of traditional office-based employees returning to working from the office for some of their working time, whilst many employees continue to work effectively from home.

Flexibility is important to our employees. We are developing a document which will explain the principles around the Council's new ways of working and guidance for managers and staff on how to apply the new ways of working in practice as we move towards a new normal.

3.3 Recruitment

We continue to see a relatively high number of vacancies although the number of leavers has started to slow down. During the last quarter, two of our apprentices were recruited to permanent roles (Licensing and Customer Service), as well as

appointments in Careline, Waste Services, Community Engagement and Electoral Services. The team have supported with temporary staff requirements in the Customer Service team to assist with the high levels of calls regarding Council Tax rebates.

There continue to be difficulties in recruiting for some professional roles where resource and skills are in short supply. We continue to work with these teams and colleagues from other Councils to try to find solutions.

The Kick Start Trainee Programme has now come to an end. One of the Council's trainees has been successful in securing permanent employment with the Council. The other two trainees have recently completed the scheme having had 6 months paid work experience which has developed their skills and knowledge which will be valuable in their future careers.

Work has begun on a Recruitment Refresh project with plans to update and modernise the current processes and information presented on our website. Over the coming months, this will ensure that the recruitment webpages better reflect the Council as an employer and improve the employee experience as individuals join the Council.

3.4 **Apprenticeships**

We have nine apprentices in post and our current group are completing a range of Apprenticeships including Customer Service Specialist, Business Administration, HR Support, Digital Marketing and Information Communication Technician.

Now that the Apprenticeship Levy Scheme is more established, we can offer a greater variety of Apprenticeships and are currently advertising for an Assistant Accountant Level 3 and a Cultural Learning Officer, together with further Business Administrations opportunities. We also have a Community Health & Wellbeing Apprentices starting in August. To promote working as an Apprentice with North Herts Council, there will be an article in the next edition of the Outlook magazine. We also have 2 Apprentices registered to participate in the EELGA Apprentice of the Year Event on 25th May.

3.5 **Pay**

National Pay bargaining 2021: The pay negotiations for the 2021 general pay award reached an agreement at the end of February 2022. A 2.75% increase was agreed for grade 1 and a 1.75% increase for grades 2-12. The pay award was applied to salaries from March 2022 and backdated to April 2021.

National Pay bargaining 2022: The Unions are expected to table their pay claim for 2022 in June. North Herts Council will continue to take part in the National Pay Briefings.

3.6 **Employee Benefits**

There are a range of benefits available for Council employees and these are key to our reward package, helping the Council to attract and retain staff, as well as playing a role in improving wellbeing. To ensure that we are offering a package that is valued, the team will conduct a review in the coming months. Employees views will be reviewed, and research conducted to establish the most valued benefits and considerations made for launching new opportunities.

This seems particularly important with the current economic situation, and employees salaries being eroded by inflation.

3.7 Mental Health and Wellbeing

Mental Health Awareness week took place in May and the team took the opportunity to highlight the HSE Working Minds campaign and remind employees of the support available to them.

Using the Public Health funding, we have launched MIND E-Learning modules on Growzone, to support those wanting to increase knowledge of mental health and/or how to support others.

Uptake of the Headspace app continues to increase, and the app has helped us mark World Meditation day on 21 May with tips on how to meditate.

3.8 Learning & Employee Engagement

The Personal Development Sessions continue to be well received, every other month there is a specific theme with resources provided to support this. The remaining months allow employees to focus on their own personal or professional development. The theme for May was Financial Sustainability.

We are also running several core skills workshops to support staff to participate in groups that are crucial to the keeping North Herts Council inclusive, such as the Inclusion group and Staff Consultation Forum.

3.9 Shaping our Future

The team continue to work on the activities highlighted in the Shaping our Future action plan, which are aligned to the Council Plan priorities. This action plan was shared with the Shaping our Future steering group at the end of February. The next Shaping our Future steering group takes place in July 2022.

The graphics to support our values are being finalised and will be launched shortly. This will support the work to imbue the values at the Council – Together, Listening, Learning, Adaptable and Inclusive.

3.10 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Inclusion group met in March 2022 to discuss experiences relating to religion.

The group noted that there was little awareness of the Religious Observance policy, which outlines support for faith requirements at work. It was appreciated that not everyone needs to be an expert, but that raising awareness can help ensure that Religion is not a barrier. The group agreed that sharing more information about religions and their various festivals would be helpful to raise awareness.

The next meeting is due to take place in June and the group will focus on Marriage & Civil Partnership, Pregnancy & Maternity (including Fertility).

3.11 Absence

Rates of employee absence relating to COVID-19 were at their highest to date between January – March 2022. This level appears to be in decline in the first month of 22/23, which is in line with the national trends of infections in the ONS data. A summary of the number of cases and days lost by quarter is shown below, with April - June 2022 showing cases to date at the time of reporting.

	COVID absences									
	April - June		July - Sept		Oct - Dec		Jan - March		Total	
	Cases	Days lost	Cases	Days lost	Cases	Days lost	Cases	Days lost	Cases	Days lost
2020-21	1	4	2	6	7	27.5	9	38.5	19	76
2021-22	3	14	5	34.5	32	184	54	206	94	438.5
2022-23	6	25								

The HR team continue to actively support long term absence cases, with assistance from Occupational Health, by providing advice and information to managers and employees. There are a small number of ongoing cases of this nature.

Short-term absence continues to increase, with Covid absences being a significant factor during Jan-March. The increase is also linked to other minor infections and this is likely to relate to increased social interactions and the reduced Covid restrictions. There is HR guidance and support available for managers managing short term absence.

The absence figures for the rolling 12-month period are shown below as absence days lost per employee.

Rolling 12 months	Absence days lost per employee		
	Long-term	Short-term	Total
May-21	0.36	0.25	0.60
Jun-21	0.22	0.23	0.45
Jul-21	0.49	0.30	0.79
Aug-21	0.19	0.23	0.42
Sep-21	0.31	0.25	0.56
Oct-21	0.26	0.35	0.61
Nov-21	0.22	0.53	0.75
Dec-21	0.24	0.54	0.78
Jan-22	0.24	0.42	0.66
Feb-22	0.21	0.33	0.54
Mar-22	0.38	0.62	1.0
Apr-22	0.36	0.46	0.81
Total	3.48	4.51	7.98

3.12 Leavers and Turnover

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

Year (1 April – 31 March)	
2015/16	15.1%
2016/17	9.7%
2017/18	13.0%
2018/19	12.8%
2019/20	10.7%
2020/21	8.1%
2021/22	13.7%

We have completed the 21/22 year with a 13.7% turnover which is an increase from recent previous years. This increase is expected, based on national trends and labour market.

Looking ahead, it's expected that a higher rate of turnover will continue and several HR workstreams will assist in reducing the impact of this on services across the Council. Aspects of this work are detailed above and include the Benefits Review, the Recruitment Refresh project and Shaping our Future.

4.0 NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 Progress against the HR Service plan, and work on both the People Recovery plan and Shaping our Future action plan will be reported to quarterly JSCC Meetings.

5.0 CONTACT OFFICERS

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