

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

21 September 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 2023/23 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 New Ways of Working

Teams continue to develop how they work, balancing the benefits of remote working with the benefits of face-to-face team working.

Covid related absences have levelled off (see 3.11) and the Council continues to supply lateral flow tests for employees in certain public facing roles.

Our desk booking system remains in place, ensuring those attending the office have a suitable place to work.

3.3 Recruitment & Retention

The table below shows a comparison of recruitment statistics from May – July 2022 to the same period in 2021.

	VACANCIES		APPLICATIONS		SHORTLISTED		OFFER		NOT FILLED		INTERNAL	
	APP*	REG*	APP	REG	APP	REG	APP	REG	APP	REG	APP	REG
May - July 21	2	18	21	70	14	47	2	18	0	0	0	11
May - July 22	4	19	51	49	23	24	3	16	1	3	0	4

*APP denotes an apprentice vacancy

*REG denotes a regular / non-apprentice vacancy

The number of job vacancies has remained similar, but the ratio of regular/ non apprentice applications received to vacancies has reduced from 3.9 last year to 2.6 this year. Conversely the number of applications for apprentice posts overall has risen compared to the same period last year.

This quarter we have successfully filled 19 jobs including 3 apprentice posts, Careline Team Leader, two Environmental Health Officer posts, Electoral Services, and one Customer Service Assistant. It is also interesting to note that a smaller number of posts were filled by internal candidates this quarter. This can vary depending on the type of job and skill sets being sought.

There were 4 vacancies that were not successfully filled this quarter, whereas last year all vacancies were filled. Those unfilled were: Civil Enforcement Officer, Customer Service Assistant, Environmental Health Officer EHO (Food Safety) and Licensing and Community Protection Apprentice. The Licensing Apprentice vacancy has since been filled with a suitable applicant who initially applied for another apprentice post. The EHO post is being reviewed to offer as a trainee post, and the other posts are due to be readvertised.

We continue to work with the managers that have posts that were not successfully filled and managers of our traditionally hard to fill posts. As part of this support a Welcome Payment has been introduced to encourage recruitment and retention for posts meeting certain criteria.

Mindful of the changes in the labour market, work on the Recruitment Refresh project continues, and the team have gathered feedback from Senior Management Group (SMG) and the Apprentice group, which will help to steer the changes that will be made.

3.4 Leavers and Turnover

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

Year (1 April – 31 March)	Turnover Rate
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%

The current 2022/23 year has seen our labour turnover rate start to decline slightly and it appears to have stabilised at around 10.5%.

However, the labour market conditions mean that we should expect an increased turnover rate over the coming months, as the ONS report a high vacancy rate which means more jobs are available. Several HR workstreams will assist in reducing the

impact of this on services across the Council. Aspects of this work are detailed in this report.

3.5 Apprenticeships

We have 11 apprentices in post and our current group are completing a range of Apprenticeships including Business Administration, HR Support, Digital Marketing, Information Communication Technician, Community Health & Wellbeing, Finance and Cultural Learning.

We encourage our Apprentices to meet regularly as a group to provide cross team learning and allowing them to provide feedback on ongoing projects within the organisation.

Along with HR, some of our current apprentices recently attended a Career Fairs and local schools to continue to promote apprenticeships at the Council.

Three of our recent apprentices have been successful in securing further fixed term or permanent roles with the Council.

3.6 Pay

National Pay bargaining 2022

On 6 June the Unions tabled their pay claim:

- A substantial increase with a minimum of £2,000 or the current rate of RPI (whichever is greater) on all pay points

Following a set of National Pay Briefings, the National Employers issued a final pay offer to the Unions on 25 July:

- With effect from 1 April 2022 an increase of £1,925 on all pay points

The Unions are carrying out consultation with their members and an outcome is not expected until late October/ November.

3.7 Employee Benefits

The review of employee benefits is underway with aims to ensure we offer a valued reward package to support recruitment and retention. An employee survey was carried out and the results are being analysed along with research into options available. It's clear that many of the benefits already in place at the Council are highly valued but there are areas for potential improvements that will benefit our employees in the future.

Following the analysis and research, options will be presented to Leadership Team.

3.8 Mental Health and Wellbeing

Given the increased concerns around the cost of living and rise in energy prices, we have launched a financial wellbeing intranet page, this signposts staff to a variety of resources that can offer support.

We have also launched a scheme to offer a short-term salary advance to support employees during difficult times. This scheme has been welcomed by the union and Staff Consultation Forum and we have already processed two applications.

We continue to promote the wellbeing resources that are available to staff through a variety of means; almost a third of staff are using the Headspace App and the specialist eLearning modules produced by MIND are available to all staff through the GROW Zone – these have been accessed almost 100 times.

3.9 Learning & Employee Engagement

There is a focus on developing Learning and Development activities and associated resources, that support our People First priority. The intention is to ensure all staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge to ensure that everything we do in engagement, service delivery and effective collaborative working, delivers on the priority.

HR continue to work with the Leadership Team and Senior Managers to ensure that we continuously develop our workforce.

3.10 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. A more specific action plan that takes on recommendations from the recent SIAS audit was reviewed by the Shaping our Future steering group at the July meeting.

The graphics to support our values have been finalised and will be launched shortly by being displayed in DCO and other staff locations as well as through our IT platforms, documents etc. This will support the work to embed the values at the Council – Together, Listening, Learning, Adaptable and Inclusive.

3.11 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Inclusion group met in June 2022 to discuss experiences relating to Marriage & Civil Partnership, Pregnancy, Maternity, Paternity (including fertility and adoption).

This meeting included a guest speaker (Service Director, Place) who talked about her experiences and working journey so far.

The group have requested that all colleagues include a photo on their Microsoft work profile for internal use. This is to raise awareness of diversity within the Council as well as supporting colleagues who may not have met each other in person and help new starters feel welcome and get to know the people they work with.

The next meeting is due to take place in September and the group will consider the Shaping our Future action plan and our Values.

3.12 Absence

Employee absences relating to COVID-19 have declined since their peak in January – March 2022. However, they remain at a much higher rate than summer 2021. A summary of the number of cases and days lost by quarter is shown below, with July – September 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	22	75.5	21	109.5					43	185
OVERALL TOTAL									113	514.5

The HR team are currently supporting managers with 7 long-term absence cases which include several chronic illnesses, as well as a couple of employees recovering from planned surgery. We work alongside Occupational Health to ensure that advice is shared with managers as well guidance on phased return to work programmes and appropriate adjustments.

Short-term absences remain relatively high, with Covid absences a significant factor as well as an increase in other minor infections which declined during the pandemic and periods of Covid restrictions.

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
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	1.00
Apr-22	0.35	0.45	0.80
May-22	0.31	0.20	0.51
Jun-22	0.25	0.37	0.62
Jul-22	0.29	0.45	0.74
Total	3.25	4.74	7.99

4.0 NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 Progress against the HR Service plan and Shaping our Future action plan will be reported to quarterly JSCC Meetings.

5.0 CONTACT OFFICERS

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