

## JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

5 July 2023

\*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 a comparison of recruitment statistics from February – April 2023 to the same period in the previous year.

	VACANCIES	APPLICATIONS	SHORTLISTED	OFFER - EXTERNAL	OFFER - INTERNAL	NOT FILLED
Feb 22-Apr 22	22	90	53	8	11	3
Feb 23 Apr-23	24	80	43	11	6	7

The number of job vacancies, applications and short-listing are quite similar year on year, but notably a higher number of vacancies remaining unfilled this year.

There were 7 vacancies that were not successfully filled:

Assistive Technologies Technician	Re-advertised and now filled
Contracts Lawyer	Covered via agency
Environmental Health Food Safety Officer	Re-advertised with interviews pending
Helpdesk Technical Support Officer	Re-advertised and now filled
IT Application Development Officer	Reviewing job role
Senior Planning Compliance Officer	Reviewing job role
Senior Town Centre Project Officer	Looking at alternative recruitment route

This period we have successfully filled 17 jobs including several catering posts for the new Bancroft Kiosk, Community Partnership Officer, 2x HR Business Partners, Principal Planning Officer, and Strategic Planning Officer.

### 3.3 Recruitment Refresh

Our new job profile document has been launched, which merges the job description and person specification and provides modernised and easy to use document for both managers and candidates. The new document includes our values graphics.

How We Work has been published on the recruitment pages of the website. The document will help candidates understand what working looks like for an employee at North Herts Council.

The aim of this project is to modernise our recruitment processes and content, to better describe North Herts Council as an employer, attract more applications and talent.

### 3.4 Leavers and Turnover

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

	Leavers	Headcount	Turnover	
			Monthly	Rolling
Jun-22	3	331	0.91%	<b>10.50%</b>
Jul-22	4	331	1.21%	<b>10.78%</b>
Aug-22	2	340	0.59%	<b>10.43%</b>
Sep-22	4	340	1.18%	<b>10.38%</b>
Oct-22	6	344	1.74%	<b>10.62%</b>
Nov-22	4	344	1.16%	<b>10.87%</b>
Dec-22	2	343	0.58%	<b>10.21%</b>
Jan-23	6	343	1.75%	<b>11.66%</b>
Feb-23	1	341	0.29%	<b>11.61%</b>
Mar-23	5	339	1.47%	<b>11.56%</b>
Apr-23	4	347	1.15%	<b>12.39%</b>
May-23	2	349	0.57%	<b>12.61%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>341</b>		<b>12.61%</b>

The table above shows the rolling labour turnover rate was fairly stable during the second half of 2022 but has started to increase again since January.

The HR team continue to review turnover data, and monitor responses to exit questionnaires, to understand the key issues as well as working with managers to provide support and advice where higher levels of turnover are causing concern.

### 3.5 Apprenticeships

We currently have 9 apprentices who are completing a range of Apprenticeships including Business Administration, Customer Service Specialist, HR Support, Community Health & Wellbeing, Finance, Public relations and Cultural Learning.

In May 2023, two of our Apprentices attended the Local Government Apprentice of the Year event. Over 130 Level 2 and 3 local government apprentices took part from across the country, making it the biggest event yet.

All those taking part were either current apprentices or qualified within the last 12 months. The theme this year was Net Zero, with each activity designed to draw on that theme while helping to develop successful workplace behaviours, linked to a range of apprenticeship standards. Each participant will receive an individual report with their scores for each activity and an Employer Checklist with suggested questions for line managers to use with their apprentices. The apprentices who attended found the experience challenging but enjoyed being pushed out of their comfort zones within a safe, supportive environment.

### **3.6 National Pay bargaining 2023**

Following the National employers pay offer in February, Unions consulted their members and are running ballots for industrial action. The ballots are disaggregated, and we expect to be advised of the outcome late in the summer.

The Unions pay claim for 2023 includes:

- 12.7% increase (RPI plus 2%)
- Additional day of annual leave
- 2hr reduction in working week

The National Employers pay offer:

- £1,925 increase on each pay point
- 3.88% increase on pay points above the NJC pay scales

In May, the Chief Officer pay award was agreed at 3.5%

### **3.7 Employee Benefits**

Since the staff benefits survey last year, the HR team have been working to improve the benefits on offer to those working for the Council, taking into account the survey responses and other feedback received. So far, the following have been introduced:

- Launch of an updated employee assistance programme
- Renewal of our GP Helpline contract giving 24/7 access to a GP consultation service
- Enhancements to grade and service holiday entitlements
- Refresh of service and retirement recognition awards
- Extension of the repayment period and raising of the maximum spend under the Workplace Bikes scheme

Still to come are:

- Shared Cost Additional Voluntary Pension Contribution Scheme – a salary exchange scheme to boost pension
- Electric Vehicle Leasing Scheme
- Review of our 'family leave' provision

### **3.8 Mental Health and Wellbeing**

The new Employee Assistance Programme was launched in April and gives staff various routes to access support including an online portal via an app, text messages and via phone. The app provides access to a mindfulness and meditation resource, a variety of wellbeing resources including podcasts and information sessions, access to fitness plans together with access to hundreds of recipes to support a healthy lifestyle.

Throughout the month of May, staff had access to a Mental Fitness Hub through our Occupational Health providers. This contained a collection of videos, downloads and signposting links to help build resilience, boost confidence and give greater control over thoughts.

We ran a Building Resilience and Confidence virtual workshop in May, which was well attended, and we continue to review the wellbeing resources that we have available to staff.

### **3.9 Our Values**

April our personal development session focussed on our 'Together' value and it was great to see so many people attend the coffee morning at the Council Offices. Those that couldn't take part got together either in person or virtually and members of the team visited those not based at the Council Offices.

We have received positive feedback on the personal development mornings with staff using the time (either on the dedicated days or at other times to suit their workload) to develop their skills or catch up on their continued professional development. Other staff members have said that they use various meetings (such as the Inclusion Group or Staff Consultation Forum) to push themselves out of their comfort zone to further support their development.

### **3.10 Inclusion Group**

The Inclusion group met in March 2023 the session focussed on the gender pay gap and a further topic from Diverse by Design "Rethink your Equalities Training". It has been agreed that the Inclusion group will work alongside HR to further develop the action plan to support improvements in our gender pay gap.

At the staff briefing in June, members of the Inclusion group took the opportunity to explain what the group does and why it's important. The discussion highlighted the impact the group can have through making recommendations to Leadership Team which have included increasing awareness about use of pronouns, encouraging internal use of photos on Teams and providing feedback to support the improvement of recruitment processes.

### **3.11 Gender Pay Gap**

In March, we published our 2022 gender pay gap data. This showed an increase in both the mean and the median pay gap since the previous year. The mean figure for 2022 was 19.5% and the median 19.3%. Whilst the widening of the gap is disappointing, it highlights that there is no quick fix to resolving the issue of the gender pay gap especially for organisations with the type of gender profile the Council has. It should also be remembered that given the Council's size, just one staffing change can have a significant impact on the data and whilst more women have been recruited into

the senior leadership team in recent times, there is still further work to be done to increase the proportion of women in senior roles at the Council.

Since the Council began reporting back in 2017 our pay gap has decreased due to a focused effort, including increasing female representation at Leadership level, continuing to offer varied training and development opportunities, and expanding flexible and hybrid working options.

Other factors which continue to impact on our gender pay gap include the fact that the Council outsources services consisting of predominantly manual roles which traditionally attract males and have retained the services that traditionally attract females in house.

The 2023 gender pay gap data can now be calculated and will be reviewed over the summer to inform a refreshed action plan.

### 3.12 Equalities

The 2022 equalities data for staff, joiners and leavers has now been analysed. The figures show that the make-up of the Council's workforce, appointments, and leavers by protected characteristic remains very stable, though there are some points to note:

#### Age

- The number of employees in the age group 55–64 increased in 2022 and this remains the largest age group for those working at the Council comprising 28% of all staff. In 2021 just under 35% of the North Herts population was aged 45-64, which contrasts with 50% of Council employees being in this age bracket.
- 32% of leavers in 2022 were under the age of 25, which represents a large proportion of all staff exiting the Council. This together with a decrease in recruitment from the same age group means the age profile of the Council is increasing.

#### Disability

- The percentage of Council staff in 2022 who class themselves as disabled is 4%, a slight fall from 2021. There was however a strong increase in appointments from this group which rose from 1% in 2021 to 8% in 2022.

#### Ethnic Origin

- 8% of North Herts employees came from a non-white background in 2022, a small increase from the previous year. This compares with 12.5% of the population of North Herts district who come from a non-white background\* (\*ONS 2021).

#### Gender

- The proportion of staff who are female has remained largely unchanged at around two-thirds of all staff since this data began to be reported in 2015.

#### Data

- The current payroll system gives the facility for staff to record their equalities information. A full picture of its equalities profile enables the Council to better promote its diversity and inclusion agenda in an informed way. We encourage staff to provide their data and will continue to consider how to promote trust and understanding of why the data is collected and how it will be used. During 2022 across a number of characteristics (all except marital status) there has been an

increase in employees providing data. But there are still gaps, e.g. there is still no data on disability status or sexual orientation for over 20% of staff and no data on marital status or religion for 25% of employees.

### 3.13 Absence

Absence levels are improving with the period January to April 2023 having approximately 20% lower rates of total absence compared to those same months last year. This reduction relates to both short-term and long-term sickness cases.

The absence figures for the rolling 12-month period are shown below as absence days lost per employee, and the total of 7.75 days also shows the improvement compared to the last report where the rolling total was 8.28 days.

Rolling 12 months	Absence days lost per employee		
	Long-term	Short-term	Total
May-22	0.31	0.20	0.51
Jun-22	0.25	0.37	0.62
Jul-22	0.29	0.45	0.74
Aug-22	0.26	0.33	0.59
Sep-22	0.23	0.36	0.59
Oct-22	0.30	0.53	0.83
Nov-22	0.32	0.37	0.69
Dec-22	0.30	0.49	0.79
Jan-23	0.18	0.41	0.59
Feb-23	0.19	0.37	0.55
Mar-23	0.39	0.34	0.73
Apr-23	0.30	0.22	0.52
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.32</b>	<b>4.44</b>	<b>7.75</b>

## 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).

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