

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

18 October 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 May – July 2023 to the same period in the previous two years.

	VACANCIES	APPLICATIONS	SHORTLISTED	OFFER - EXTERNAL	OFFER - INTERNAL	NOT FILLED
May - July 21	20	91	61	20	0	11
May - July 22	23	100	47	19	4	4
May - July 23	22	170	69	16	3	3

Recruitment continues to be busy, with a similar number of job vacancies to previous years, and we have received a higher number of applications for many of our vacancies.

We have successfully filled 19 jobs including Climate Change and Sustainability Project Manager, Digital Communications Officer, IT Helpdesk Support Officer, and Senior Licensing Officer.

There were 3 vacancies that were not successfully filled:

Career Graded Estates Surveyor	Currently on hold
Senior Estates Surveyor	Covered via agency
Contracts Officer (Waste Services)	Re-advertised and now appointed

There are posts that remain unfilled but have not been advertised during this period.

3.3 Recruitment Refresh

As part of the recruitment refresh project, we have changed the way we use social media to attract candidates. The changes include a new style social media advert which uses images and focuses on key skills and experience or benefits of working for the Council. Employee have also been encouraged to share adverts on all platforms and we have increased variety of jobs boards used for adverts.

In the 5 months since making these changes we have seen an increase of 13% in views of our job vacancies website page, an increase in social engagement on jobs posts ranging from 87% on LinkedIn to 107% on Facebook and an increase in applications, as shown in 3.2. It's important to note that comparisons may be affected by the job roles that are advertised, as some roles will attract more applicants than others.

Further work is planned on improving our website and processes supporting recruitment and the HR team continue to work with recruiting managers, especially in service areas with hard to fill vacancies.

3.4 Leavers and Turnover

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

Rolling 12 months	Turnover		
	Leavers	Monthly	Rolling
Sep-22	4	1.18%	10.38%
Oct-22	6	1.74%	10.62%
Nov-22	4	1.16%	10.87%
Dec-22	2	0.58%	10.21%
Jan-23	6	1.75%	11.66%
Feb-23	1	0.29%	11.61%
Mar-23	5	1.47%	11.56%
Apr-23	4	1.15%	12.39%
May-23	2	0.57%	12.61%
Jun-23	6	1.73%	13.44%
Jul-23	4	1.15%	13.38%
Aug-23	2	0.57%	13.35%
Total	46		12.61%

The table above shows the rolling labour turnover rate.

All leavers are encouraged to complete an exit questionnaire to give feedback on their reasons for leaving, our pay and benefits, working relationships and the Council as an employer. Leavers can also request an exit interview to provide more detailed feedback if required.

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.

In terms of feedback, we see dissatisfaction regarding local government pay, but most of our leavers would recommend the Council as an employer. Any specific issues raised are discussed with management with a view to resolving problems and continuing to improve as an employer.

3.5 Apprenticeships

We have 7 Apprentices in post with a further 2 due to start in the coming weeks.

Our Apprentices are completing a range of Apprenticeships including Business Administration, Customer Service Specialist, HR Support, Community Health & Wellbeing, Finance, Public relations, and Cultural Learning. One of our recent Apprentices was successfully recruited into a permanent role within the Council. When this happens, we encourage the Apprentice to continue to complete their Apprentice qualification.

We offer our Apprentices specific learning opportunities during their time with us and as their contracts near completion, we also provide several support resources to develop their application and interview skills. We encourage them to apply for any suitable vacancies within the Council.

3.6 National Pay bargaining 2023

The Union ballots for industrial action on pay and other terms and conditions did not result in action at North Herts Council. No decision was reached at a meeting of the National Employers and Unions in September. Some industrial action continues and there is likely to be a further meeting in late October.

The Unions pay claim for 2023 includes:

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

In February 2023 the Employers issued their full and final pay offer:

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

3.7 Employee Benefits

As flu season approaches, we are offering flu vaccinations for employees who are not entitled to the vaccine through the NHS. This is being supported by Hertfordshire County Council and will support our employee's general wellbeing through the winter months.

A Shared Cost Additional Voluntary Contribution Scheme will be launched shortly, which will allow employees the opportunity to boost their pension.

3.8 Learning Together

Earlier this year, we began a pilot of a reverse mentoring scheme called Learning Together. The initiative involves pairing members of the Leadership Team with staff who are less senior, to help them think differently about their leadership and mindset, current and future issues, as well as culture and change at North Herts Council. The

aim is for both parties to learn from one another, share views and ideas, and support the mentor to build their confidence.

The pilot has worked well, with positive learning reported for both parties, and so the initiative will be expanded with more volunteers encouraged to take part. We now have another pair of volunteers who have started Learning Together.

3.9 Our Values

Since the last update, our Personal Development Mornings have focussed on our Learning and Listening Values, and we provided resources to managers and staff across the Council to encourage cross team learning. We also provided information for staff and managers to develop their skills to be able to have a coaching style conversation.

3.10 Inclusion Group

The Inclusion group meeting in June focussed on the Halo Collective, a group campaigning against hair discrimination in schools and workplaces. The discussion included experiences of race discrimination in general and the impact of microaggressions.

Following the meeting, an action plan has been created with proposals to Leadership Team to support a range of initiatives that continue to support our value of Inclusion. This includes provision of information and awareness raising about microaggressions and supporting employees on how to become an ally.

3.11 Absence

Absence levels have stabilised, and the rolling 12-month total is similar to the total for the previous 12-month period. The absence figures are shown below as absence days lost per employee.

Rolling 12 months	Absence days lost per employee		
	Long-term	Short-term	Total
Sept	0.23	0.36	0.59
Oct	0.30	0.53	0.83
Nov	0.32	0.37	0.69
Dec	0.30	0.49	0.79
Jan	0.18	0.41	0.59
Feb	0.19	0.37	0.55
March	0.39	0.34	0.73
April	0.30	0.22	0.52
May	0.26	0.26	0.52
June	0.15	0.28	0.43
July	0.28	0.32	0.60
August	0.45	0.21	0.66
Total	3.35	4.15	7.49

According to the latest sickness absence report produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) The number of days lost to sickness absence increased to a record high in 2022 after remaining relatively flat in the 10 years leading up to the pandemic.

In terms of absences at North Herts, during the 4-month period May – August 2023, there were 115 recorded absences:

- 93 absences were for 1 week or less, with over half relating to common ailments such as headaches, colds, and stomach upsets.
- 12 absences were for 1-3 weeks, with half of these categorised as stress, depression, or anxiety reasons.
- 10 absences were classed as long-term (3 weeks or more), with half of these also categorised as stress, depression, or anxiety reasons.

The HR team work closely with managers to support the more complex absence cases including those related to stress, depression, and anxiety. This can include an OH referral, use of a stress questionnaire (where the stress is deemed to be work-related), recommendation to use our Employee Assistance Programme, and often a phased return to work, with reduced hours and / or a reduced workload.

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).

5.0 CONTACT OFFICERS

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