

## JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

6 December 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 Aug – Oct 2023 to the same period in the previous two years.

	VACANCIES	APPLICATIONS	SHORTLISTED	OFFER - EXTERNAL	OFFER - INTERNAL	NOT FILLED
Aug-Oct 21	25	111	63	16	7	2
Aug-Oct 22	19	111	55	14	3	2
Aug-Oct 23	17	170	53	11	4	2

This quarter the number of applications were much higher due to 3 apprentice vacancies which attracted 117 applications in total, with 27 of these applicants shortlisted for interview. The vacancies that were filled include all 3 apprenticeships – IT, Communications and Enterprise, and Digital Marketing at Hitchin Town Hall, as well as Graduate Estates Surveyor, Senior Ecologist, and two Digital Services Officers.

Two vacancies which were not filled this quarter which were the two Environmental Health Technical Officers which were advertised together. The posts are currently being covered with temporary agency workers.

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

#### 3.3 Leavers and Turnover

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

Rolling 12 months	Turnover	
	Leavers	Monthly
Nov-22	4	1.16%
Dec-22	2	0.58%
Jan-23	6	1.75%
Feb-23	1	0.29%
Mar-23	5	1.47%
Apr-23	4	1.15%
May-23	2	0.57%
Jun-23	6	1.73%
Jul-23	4	1.15%
Aug-23	2	0.57%
Sep-23	2	0.57%
Oct-23	3	0.85%
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>11.84%</b>

The table above shows the rolling labour turnover rate which has slowed slightly in the last 3 months.

In terms of feedback from leavers, there has been no significant change in the general responses which recommend the Council and an employer. There are occasions where leavers do not return the exit questionnaire and the HR team work to encourage responses to ensure a full picture.

### 3.4 National Pay bargaining 2023

On 1 November, the pay award was agreed for 2023:

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

Some joint work has also been agreed around broader family leave and pay issues raised in the unions' pay claim.

Despite having a mid-month pay run, we have worked with payroll to apply this award and the back pay for November pay day for current employees.

### 3.5 Apprentices

We currently have 11 Apprentices in post so are now at capacity until into the new year unless any circumstances change.

Our Apprentices are completing a range of Apprenticeships including Business Administration, Customer Service Specialist, HR Support, Community Health & Wellbeing, Finance, Public relations, Digital Marketing, Information Technology and Cultural Learning. We continue to develop our Apprentices offering them bespoke learning such as minute taking and presentation skills.

### 3.6 Learning and Development

The current contract for the Learning Management System is due for renewal in July 2024, we have begun the process of investigating other options to replace the current system.

The personal development day in November focussed on our priority of sustainability, an information for staff was held and this was well attended.

To support meeting free Friday, we ran an Effective Meeting Skills workshop – this consisted of two parts focussing on both chairing and participating skills – the session was at capacity, so we will be looking at offering this again before the end of the March.

### 3.7 Inclusion Group

The Inclusion group met in October and continue to focus on race discrimination and microaggressions and the related action plan. The group have attended training and are considering the best approach to increasing employee awareness of microaggressions and unconscious bias.

The group are also supporting a drive to increase employee photos on Microsoft Office and Teams. These photos are not available externally and will help support new starters and cross team working within a hybrid working environment.

### 3.8 Gender Pay Gap

Our 2023 Gender Pay Gap figures have been analysed and will shortly be published with the gender pay gap service. Data for 2022 and 2023 below:

Year	Mean	Median
2022	19.5%	19.3%
2023	15.5%	14%

There is a reasonable improvement in both mean and median pay gap for 2023.

When the data was available, a Gender Pay Gap action planning group was formed from the Inclusion group and the group have developed a refreshed action plan to support further improvement.

The action plan includes continuing to embed flexibility and positive work life balance at every level of the Council, developing a programme of events to develop employees for senior roles, and updating our recruitment documentation to explicitly encourage female applicants for senior roles. There is also ongoing research and benchmarking work supporting the action plan.

Whilst it we are noting an improvement for 2023, it's important that we are clear 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, and so work will be ongoing.

### 3.9 Absence

Absence levels are increasing, with October absences the highest in more than 12 months. 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
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
Sept	0.23	0.38	0.61
Oct	0.30	0.60	0.90
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.34</b>	<b>4.24</b>	<b>7.58</b>

Summary of absence reasons:

Absence reason Aug - Oct 23	Occasions of absence		
	Up to 1 week	1-3 weeks	3 weeks+
Ear, Nose and Throat (Inc Cold/Flu)	35	3	0
COVID 19 - suspected	23	2	0
Sickness / Vomiting	20	1	0
Other	14	1	1
Headaches (inc migraine)	8	0	0
Musculoskeletal	8	1	1
Mental health	4	6	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>6</b>

It's not unusual to see an increase of minor ailments causing increased sickness absence in autumn and winter months and the levels will continue to be monitored. Managers are reminded of the importance of communication during absence and carrying out return to work meetings to ensure returning employees are supported.

The HR team continue to work closely with managers to support the more complex absence cases including those related to mental health, which make up the majority of our current long term absence cases. There is ongoing support for employee wellbeing, which is detailed in the discussion paper.

#### 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**

Authors

- 5.1 Rebecca Webb  
HR Services Manager  
01462 474481  
[rebecca.webb@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:rebecca.webb@north-herts.gov.uk)
  
- 5.2 Ian Couper  
Service Director – Resources  
01462 474243  
[ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk)