

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING HELD IN THE VIA ZOOM**  
**ON WEDNESDAY, 19TH MARCH, 2025 AT 10.00 AM**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** *Councillors: Ruth Brown (Chair), Val Bryant, Rhona Cameron and Claire Strong*

**In attendance:** *Faith Churchill (Democratic Services Apprentice), Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Robert Filby (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager) and Rebecca Webb (HR Services Manager)*

**UNISON:** *Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews*

**Also Present:** *There were no members of the public present.*

**22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

*Audio recording – 1 minute 33 seconds*

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Daniel Allen.

**23 MINUTES - 8 JANUARY 2025**

*Audio Recording – 1 minute 48 seconds*

Councillor Brown proposed and Councillor Claire Strong seconded and, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 8 January 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

**24 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 16 seconds*

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be recorded.
- (2) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

**25 SCF MINUTES**

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 32 seconds*

The Service Director – Resources presented the item entitled 'SCF Minutes', alongside the Minutes from the meetings of December 2024 and January 2025 and highlighted the following:

- Staff restructuring had been discussed.

- An update on IT had been received on passwords and social engineering and the risks that were posed by these to officers were explored in more detail.
- Conflicts of interest had been discussed as there had been a change to the policy.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Rhona Cameron

In response to questions, the Service Director – Resources advised that:

- Details of the Museum staff restructuring would be provided to Members after the meeting.
- It would not always be appropriate for Members to attend the Staff Consultation Forum meetings, however, some Members such as the Leader of the Council occasionally attended Staff Briefings to give updates. They would look to invite Members to briefings where they contained topics relevant to Members.

In response to questions, the Human Resources Services Manager advised that:

- The items for discussion at the January and February meetings had been merged into one meeting that took place in late January, which explained why there were only two sets of Minutes instead of the usual three.
- Robust consultation processes were undertaken when internal recruitment and restructuring took place. During these processes, feedback and concerns were accounted for and any questions were responded to.
- Change management could be difficult for staff members and both sensitivity and clear communication were critical to managing this effectively.
- Staff progression to senior roles required coaching and support to ensure that they could manage those that had previously been their colleagues.
- Confidence raising workshops were not ongoing for staff, however, the Committee had highlighted their interest in this at the last meeting and consequently, they would look at it as part of the Gender Pay Gap Action Planning.

In response to questions, Councillor Val Bryant advised that she had attended a District Councils' Network conference with some of the Senior Leadership Team regarding the Devolution White Paper and many councils were in the same position regarding change management.

Councillor Ruth Brown highlighted the importance of having staff progression routes within the Council.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee noted the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum for December 2024 and January 2025.

## 26 HR INFORMATION NOTE

*Audio recording – 14 minutes 57 seconds*

The Human Resources Services Manager presented the Information Note entitled 'HR Update' and advised that:

- Paragraph 3.2 provided an update on recruitment. The table within this highlighted key recruitment data and the key performance indicator for Q3 compared with the previous year. The quarterly target for this had been met.

- Compared to the previous year, there were a similar number of vacancies including apprenticeships in Communications, Careline and Human Resources. A similar number of vacancies were also filled at the first attempt in both quarters although there was one Senior Planning Officer position that had remained vacant.
- Turnover was approximately 9% and she was aware that the Committee had requested a comparison on turnover data. Using the LGA benchmarking tool would be the best way to compare the data but it would not be available until the end of the financial year. They would continue with quarterly monitoring and annual figures on turnover until the data had been made available.
- UNISON had submitted a claim for a £3,000 pay increase on each spinal point. Once the national briefings for employers had taken place, it was expected that an offer would be made by the employers. They would continue to monitor this and provide updates to the Committee.
- National Apprenticeship Week took place in February and the Communications Apprentice developed the communications for the Council that week with a quote from one of the Service Directors who had started as an apprentice at the Council.
- Graduates had almost completed their first of four rotations within Council service areas and would be moving onto their second rotation soon. There would be further recruitment through the graduate scheme later this year.
- Paragraph 3.7 provided an update on learning and development. They continued to raise staff awareness on the resources that were available to them on the learning management system and there were several development activities on there that were linked to the Staff Survey Action Plan.
- The Inclusion Group meeting in February focused discussion on equalities data and provided feedback on a poster that had been developed to promote support to staff as a result of the Action Plan.
- The Equalities Diversity and Inclusion E-Module was at an 86% completion rate and saw a 6% increase on this in January. They would continue to work with department managers to increase this figure further.
- 8.84 days per full-time employee were lost due to absence over the last twelve months which was slightly down on the previous report.
- COVID cases had reduced, but there had been a high number of flu and cold cases although this had been expected for the time of year.
- Several employees that were previously on a long-term absence had completed return to work procedures.

Councillor Ruth Brown thanked the Human Resources Services Manager for her report and highlighted that the return of many staff from long-term absence was good to see.

## 27 DISCUSSION PAPER - STAFF SURVEY 2024

*Audio recording – 21 minutes 26 seconds*

The Service Director – Resources presented the Discussion Paper entitled ‘Staff Survey 2024’ and advised that:

- The first paragraph of the report gave background on the Staff Survey and detailed how it had been conducted.
- The Action Plan contained a long list of actions that were developed to address the comments and concerns that had been raised from the survey.
- Feedback from the survey as well as general comments from staff indicated that the Council was a good place to work but the Leadership Team acknowledged that there would always be room for improvement in this area.
- There was a focus on certain situations where staff did not feel safe and specific actions had been developed to address these.

- Workloads and pay were recurring points of discussion at the Council and comments had been raised on these in the Staff Survey. The Council were limited with their resources to action these points, however, they would still look to find solutions to them where possible.
- There were false notions that training budgets had been cut and an action had been developed to reassure staff that this had not taken place.
- A Staff Conference would be likely to take place across three to four days in the autumn.
- Appendix A detailed the Staff Survey Action Plan which had been discussed at the Staff Briefing and published onto the intranet.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Rhona Cameron
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions, the Service Director – Resources advised that:

- Engaging with four hundred people in one large venue for the Staff Conference would be difficult, however, they could look into it and compare it with the current plan in place.
- It would be best for the Customer & Digital Services Manager to give information on the staff provisions within the Customer Service Team and so the question in relation to this would be answered after the meeting.
- Customer Service officers generally received one of the lowest grades of pay, however, they were not neglected in terms of support and had access to the same resources that were available to all staff.
- Recruitment to the Customer Service Team would continue to be an issue but progress had been made on this and they would continue to work to secure its future in terms of staffing.
- UNISON wanted the Council to provide updates on Local Government Reorganisation in meetings with them going forward. The Council already provided updates in staff briefings on this topic.
- Cabinet agreed a risk in relation to Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution on 18 March. This included HR implications on getting to the stage of devolution, and the impact on staff in terms of change.
- The Devolution White Paper had brought a lot of uncertainty to the Council but they did not want this to cause undue concern amongst staff members.
- Cabinet had expressed their desire to see staff surveys to check in on staff wellbeing and this would be carried out in due course.
- A small number of comments in the Staff Survey were in relation to the working relationship with Members and there was training already available on this which the Action Plan acknowledged.
- Since the Staff Survey, training had been provided to Members on the working relationship with officers and this would be undertaken yearly going forwards.
- Officers were given confidence to report any concerns they had about working with Members but the reverse of this was also encouraged where Members had concerns about officers.
- They were open to conversation with Member Development Champions and Group Leaders.

In response to questions, the Human Resources Services Manager advised that:

- Team Leaders were present in Careline and Customer Service making it possible for officers to step away from stressful situations if needed.

- The GROW Zone should be sending reminders to Councillors regarding training and this would be investigated.

In response to questions, Councillor Val Bryant advised that:

- She had spoken about the plans to mitigate the potential problems that would arise from the Devolution White Paper at the Cabinet meeting on 18 March.
- Monthly meetings were held with the Service Director - Customers, Assistive Technologies Manager and the Customer & Digital Services Manager to hear reports from their areas. At the last meeting, it was reported that they were not fully staffed, a lot of staff were new, and the call response rate was down in terms of the number of seconds it took for officers to answer the phones. She would feedback the concerns raised from this Committee to their next meeting.
- A major piece of work relating to staff support and wellbeing under the White Ribbon initiative was being carried out.
- The White Ribbon Working Party met every 6 weeks and they had created a 42-page Action Plan which addressed the working relationships between Members and officers. She would circulate this to Members of the Committee, but it would also need further circulation as the response rate from Members had been low.

Councillor Ruth Brown highlighted the need for more training on the relationship between officers and Members, however, she noted that Members who needed the training the most would probably not complete it.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee commented on and noted the Discussion Paper on Staff Survey 2024.

## 28 DISCUSSION PAPER - NEURODIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

*Audio recording – 46 minutes 27 seconds*

The Human Resources Services Manager presented the Discussion Paper entitled 'Neurodiversity in the Workplace' and advised that:

- Neurodiversity was an umbrella term to explain how some people had brains that worked differently to others.
- The Council was committed to supporting all employees and the subject had been discussed at the Inclusion Group in relation to work and life in general.
- Notification of neurodiversity allowed the Council to provide support in the form of suitable working arrangements both to those who had a formal diagnosis and to those who did not.
- Many did not have a formal diagnosis often due to choice or the difficulties associated with seeking a diagnosis.
- Multiple staff had declared their neurodivergence and the Council had implemented a range of support options for them to use but they recognised that some would be reluctant to share information about their neurodivergent traits.
- Some staff would not feel the need to share a formal diagnosis if they felt that they received empathy and support in the workplace.
- Education was a key part of supporting a neurodiverse workforce. In the past few years, a timetable of webinars had been scheduled during Neurodiversity Week to allow staff to further their knowledge and to support themselves or their colleagues.
- On-demand modules were available on the learning management system and articles in the Staff Insight magazine had been published to support inclusion and neurodiversity more widely.

- Transparent interviews had been introduced whereby candidates had sight of questions ahead of their interview to allow them to better prepare and present the best version of themselves.
- The Neurodiversity Network was requested through the Inclusion Group and the first meeting had been held in December 2024. It had been well attended and provided an opportunity for attendees to share personal experiences as well as resources on this topic.
- A range of adjustments were in place to support staff and promote neuroinclusive environments such as spell check software, additional screen display settings, quiet desks and extra time for written communication.
- No formal diagnosis was needed for the above adjustments to be requested.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Rhona Cameron
- Councillor Ruth Brown

In response to questions, the Human Resources Services Manager advised that:

- Staff had been encouraged to attend the modules on neurodiversity and recordings would be available for them to watch later if they could not attend.
- Trials on transparent interviews had been focused on junior post vacancies with a view to introduce them to senior post vacancies once hiring managers had refined their transparent interviewing skills to get the best out of candidates.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee commented on and noted the Discussion Paper on Neurodiversity in the Workplace.

## 29 SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

*Audio recording – 53 minutes 20 seconds*

The Chair suggested two topics on 'Succession Planning and Development' and 'Microaggressions and Unconscious Bias in the Workplace' for the next meeting of the Committee and this was agreed with Members present.

The Chair thanked the Service Director – Resources and the Human Resources Services Manager for their presentations at the meetings that had taken place this Civic Year. She also thanked Members for their contributions.

The meeting closed at 10.58 am

Chair