

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

15 October 2025

*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 the number of vacancies filled first time in Quarter 1 April– June 2025, with a comparison with the same period in the previous two years.

	Vacancies	Filled at first attempt	Filled (total)	Unfilled	% filled first attempt	Target
Q1: April-June 2023	21	19	19	2	90.5%	75%
Q1: April-June 2024	10	7	7	3	70.0%	75%
Q1: April-June 2025	20	17	17	3	85.0%	75%

During Quarter 1, we had a double the number of vacancies than the previous year but a similar number to the same period in 2023. We successfully filled the majority of vacancies including two Director roles, Senior Urban Design & Planning Officer, Waste Contracts Officer and Safeguarding Support Officer.

Three positions were unfilled – two vacancies in Governance were offered but declined and no offer was made for the Scientific Officer role in Environmental Health.

3.3 Leavers and Turnover

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

Rolling 12 months	Turnover	
	Leavers	Monthly
Sep-24	7	2.02%
Oct-24	4	1.16%
Nov-24	1	0.29%
Dec-24	0	0
Jan-25	4	1.13%
Feb-25	4	1.13%
Mar-25	4	1.12%
Apr-25	0	0
May-25	0	0
Jun-25	1	0.27%
Jul-25	4	1.08%
Aug-25	6	1.64%
Total	35	9.8%

The table above shows the rolling labour turnover rate which is significantly higher than the same period last year where we reported turnover of 7.22%.

Unplanned exits from the council (such as resignations and dismissals) are the focus of the turnover calculation which does not include figures related to planned exits such as retirements and the end of fixed term contracts (such as ending contracts of apprentices, and maternity cover).

In the most recent comparison figures with other local councils from the Local Government benchmarking tool, our percentage turnover remains broadly in line with the average for the East of England.

3.4 Absence

The absence figures are shown below as absence days lost per employee on a rolling basis. There has been a reduction in long-term sick cases which are monitored and supported carefully by the HR team. This reduction has contributed to the overall improvement in the number of days lost per employee.

Monthly rolling absence: days lost per employee			
	Long-term	Short-term	Total
Sep-24	4.73	4.54	9.28
Oct-24	5.05	4.22	9.26
Nov-24	5.02	4.06	9.09
Dec-24	4.94	4.26	9.19
Jan-25	4.54	4.30	8.84
Feb-25	4.26	4.26	8.52
Mar-25	4.12	4.38	8.51
Apr-25	4.04	4.50	8.54
May-25	4.08	4.42	8.50
Jun-25	3.82	4.26	8.08
Jul-25	3.73	4.24	7.97
Aug-25	3.70	4.11	7.81

Recent research from the CIPD* (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) has found that there is a significant increase in employee sickness absence across the country with the average 9.4 days lost in the last 12 months, compared to 7.8 days lost in 2023. This highlights the importance of continued support for employees and managers in managing absence and wellbeing. Occupational health are involved where appropriate to provide support and return to work guidance and employees are signposted to various support throughout, including our employee assistance programme.

The top 3 causes of long-term absence at the Council in this period were mental ill-health including anxiety and depression, musculoskeletal issues such as back pain, and other long-term health conditions such as cancer.

Summary of absence reasons:

June – August 2025 Absence reason	Occasions of absence		
	Up to 1 week	1-3 weeks	Over 3 weeks
COVID 19 - suspected	2	0	0
Ear, Nose and Throat (Inc Cold/Flu)	12	1	0
Headaches (inc migraine)	8	1	1
Mental health	6	5	7
Musculoskeletal	3	1	1
Other	24	7	4
Sickness / Vomiting / Gastro	23	2	2
Total	78	17	15

This quarter the seasonal colds / flu absences have further declined as expected. Mental health absences have increased, in addition to other long-term absences which include pregnancy related cases, surgery and long-term, chronic illnesses.

* [Workplace absence levels soar to nearly two working weeks per employee each year | CIPD](#)

3.5 National pay bargaining 2025 – National Joint Council (NJC)

A 3.2% pay award was agreed in July and paid to employees in their August salary.

3.6 Apprentices

We currently have 10 apprentices in post with adverts for our next apprentice opportunities in Customer Services and Accounts.

Our mentoring scheme for apprentices has been refreshed, allowing the current graduates the opportunity to mentor apprentices. We will also be providing new apprentices with an apprentice buddy at the start of their employment, to support them settling into the organisation and on their apprenticeship programme.

3.7 National Graduate Scheme

Our newly recruited graduate joined us at the start of October; we have received positive feedback from Managers about the impact that the current graduates are making across the organisation and the value added on projects that they are supporting.

3.8 Learning and Development

Recent Personal Development Mornings have focused on National Inclusion week, avoiding burnout and taking breaks and feeling safe at work (both physically and psychologically). The feeling safe focus links to our staff survey action plan and allowed an opportunity to highlight resources available, including e-learning, and how to access the right support. This information is available online and is displayed in our offices.

Bitesize manager skills sessions are taking place to support core management skills such as managing sickness absence and carrying out appraisals. These form part of our ongoing support for management development.

3.9 Employee Wellbeing

During Mental Health Awareness week, we signposted staff to several internal and external resources to support the maintenance of good mental health, including the videos and factsheets from our Occupational Health provider.

Thursday 10th September was World Suicide Prevention Day. This year's theme, Changing the Narrative on Suicide, aimed to address stigma and promote open discussions. Information on starting conversations and resources for additional support have been provided for staff.

World mental health day was marked in October with a mental health lunchtime walk and an opportunity to talk to colleagues and signpost resources.

A wellbeing room has been created in the Letchworth offices for staff to use for mindful breaks from their working day with a view to supporting them to manage their mental health.

3.10 Inclusion

National Inclusion Week 2025 took place from 15 - 19 September. In recognition of this event, staff were provided with a range of resources, as well as the opportunity to participate in a webinar focused on becoming an active bystander.

Our October Inclusion group meeting will discuss the skills learned from the webinar and how these might be used in practice at the Council.

3.11 2025 Staff Event

In September we ran our first all staff event at Hitchin Town Hall. The session was run three times to help maximise the number of staff that could take part. It was a great opportunity to get lots of our staff together. It was one of the ideas that came out of our Corporate Peer Challenge.

The event covered key topics including Local Government Restructure, team building and skills development. Initial feedback about the event has been positive and will be reviewed and used to develop plans for the next event.

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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