

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

28 January 2026

*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 2 July - September 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
Q2: Jul - Sept 2023	17	14	15	2	82.4%	75%
Q2: Jul - Sept 2024	23	18	19	4	78.3%	75%
Q2: Jul - Sept 2025	24	21	22	2	87.5%	75%

During quarter 2 this year, we saw a slight increase in the number of vacancies than the same period in 2024, which was also an increase on the same period in 2023. We successfully filled the majority of vacancies including:

- Assistant Licensing Officer
- Communications Officer
- IT Technical Support Analyst
- Shared Service Manager for Waste
- Senior Planning Officer

Two positions were unfilled, another Senior Planning Officer and a casual role in Careline.

3.3 Leavers and Turnover

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

Rolling 12 months	Turnover	
	Leavers	Monthly
Jan-25	4	1.13%
Feb-25	4	1.13%
Mar-25	4	1.12%
Apr-25	0	0.00%
May-25	0	0.00%
Jun-25	1	0.27%
Jul-25	4	1.08%
Aug-25	6	1.64%
Sep-25	3	0.82%
Oct-25	3	0.82%
Nov-25	1	0.27%
Dec-25	1	0.27%
Total	31	8.5%

Labour turnover of 8.5% at the end of December 2025 is an increase on December 2024, which was 7.25%, but still an improvement on the figure for December 2023 which was 12.11%.

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

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 (eg apprentices, and maternity cover).

3.4 Absence

The absence figures are shown below as absence days lost per employee on a rolling basis.

Monthly rolling absence: days lost per employee			
	Long-term	Short-term	Total
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
Sep-25	3.47	4.29	7.76
Oct-25	3.46	4.49	7.95
Nov-25	3.56	4.50	8.05
Dec-25	3.56	4.48	8.04

Summary of absence reasons:

Sep - Nov 2025 Absence reason	Occurrences of absence		
	Up to 1 week	1-3 weeks	Over 3 weeks
COVID 19 - suspected	9	1	0
Ear, Nose and Throat (Inc Cold/Flu)	51	1	0
Headaches (inc migraine)	10	0	2
Mental health	7	6	4
Musculoskeletal	9	1	0
Other	32	8	3
Sickness / Vomiting / Gastro	31	0	1
Total	149	17	10

This quarter has seen an increase in both Covid and Cold / Flu absences, with the number of occasions of 1–7-day absences almost doubling, whilst 1-3 week absences remain stable and the number of long-term absences (over 3 weeks) has declined.

3.5 Applicant Tracking System

We are pleased to be beginning implementation for a new applicant tracking system (ATS). An ATS is a digital platform that helps to manage the end-to-end recruitment process. The recruitment system/ ATS is the first experience a candidate has with the Council and it's vital this is positive and runs smoothly. As well as increasing engagement with candidates and better presenting the Council as an employer, we are looking to streamline processes and increase automation with the new system, to reduce the administrative load on recruiting managers.

3.6 National pay bargaining 2026 – National Joint Council (NJC)

The Unions submitted their pay claim for 2026 in December:

- An increase of at least £3,000 or 10% (whichever is greater)
- A minimum pay rate of £15 an hour
- A two hour reduction in the working week
- An increase of one day annual leave

The National Employers are carrying out regional pay briefings in early 2026, once complete we expect an offer to be made.

3.7 **Apprenticeships**

We have 10 apprentices in post, with planned recruitment to replace those ending their apprenticeships in 2026.

One of our apprentices was recently successful in securing a permanent role before the end of the apprenticeship contract. They have moved into the permanent role whilst continuing their qualification. Two of our apprentices, who are due to finish their contract soon, have passed their end point assessment with distinction.

We also have several established members of staff who are completing training using the apprenticeship levy, allowing them to gain a qualification without impacting the training budget.

3.8 **National Graduate Scheme**

Our graduates continue to make a positive impact across the Council and have delivered a number of key projects during their placements, including:

Launching the North Herts Council App in December 2025, making it easier for residents to stay on top of bin collections, receive service disruption updates and have easy access to Councillor contact information.

Preparing the council for the Warm Homes Local Grant, enabling over 100 home upgrades for fuel-poor households.

Developing and leading the training of Co-pilot and writing policies for this and general AI use, across the council.

3.9 **Learning and Development**

Towards the end of 2025 our Personal Development Mornings focused on:

- Global Cyber Awareness month, with helpful tips about keeping safe online being shared by our IT team, and allowing staff the opportunity to drop in and meet the IT team and develop their digital skills
- National Customer Services Week and Sustainability.
- Hints and tips and refresh of skills to manage meetings effectively.

We are continuing to work with our Senior Managers Group to provide key skills to support staff throughout Local Government Reorganisation.

3.10 **Employee Wellbeing**

In December, we acknowledged that not everyone enjoys the festive season and provided staff with some practical tips to look after their wellbeing during this time. We also provided information about getting the right kind of rest during the winter months, to support physical and mental wellbeing, including the importance of switching off from technology where possible (Tech Timeout Tuesday).

The Wellbeing room was introduced to staff during our new starter event in the office in December. We have received positive feedback from those that have used the room.

The next wellbeing walk has been arranged to coincide with the Samaritans campaign of Brew Monday, where staff are being encouraged to get together and walk with colleagues.

3.11 **Inclusion**

October inclusion group discussed the Gender Pay Gap progress and considered skills learned from the active bystander webinar and next steps.

Our next Inclusion group will focus on race inclusion, with activities and discussion linking to race equalities week in February. We will be participating in the 5 Day Challenge using resources from Race Equality Matters, which will focus on a different theme each day and will help employees reflect and take actions to drive Race Equality.

3.12 **Gender Pay Gap**

We report on our Gender Pay Gap (GPG) annually. The data is extracted on 31 March each year and must be published by 30 March the following year.

The average gender pay gap in the UK is has been on a steady decline over recent years, currently reported as 12.8% (ONS).

We have made steady progress since we first started reporting in 2017. Recent years shown below:

Year	Mean %	Median %
2025	12.2	8
2024	14.6	13.1
2023	15.5	14
2022	19.5	19.3

There is no quick fix to a gender pay gap and so our work to reduce the gap must be ongoing.

Our progress has been supported by targeted actions including ongoing support for true flexible working at all levels of the Council and specifically encouraging female applicants for senior roles.

Upcoming actions include initiatives to further develop confident female employees, unconscious bias training for managers and carrying out stay interviews with senior female employees.

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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