

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

22 April 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 3 October - December 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
Q3: Oct – Dec 2023	25	19	21	4	76.0%	75%
Q3: Oct – Dec 2024	23	18	22	1	78.3%	75%
Q3: Oct – Dec 2025	17	10	13	4	58.8%	75%

During Quarter 3, there was a drop in the number of vacancies compared to the same periods in the previous two years. This decline in overall vacancies along with the proportionally higher number of unfilled vacancies has resulted in us missing the target of 75% filled at first attempt.

We successfully filled vacancies including:

- Assistive Technologies Technician
- Careline Operator
- Data Officer
- Graduate Planning Officer

- Senior Contracts Officer (Waste)

Four positions were unfilled – two Civil Enforcement Officers, Enterprise Business Partner, and Environmental Health Scientific Officer.

3.3 Leavers and Turnover

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

Rolling 12 months	Turnover	
	Leavers	Monthly
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%
Jan-26	4	1.08%
Feb-26	0	0.00%
Mar-26	2	0.54%
Total	25	6.77%

Labour turnover of 6.77% is the lowest figure reported at year end for 20 years. This will in part be reflective of the jobs market where there are high unemployment levels and as a result we are seeing increased numbers of applications for vacancies.

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 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
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
Jan-26	3.97	5.01	8.97
Feb-26	4.45	4.73	9.18

Summary of absence reasons:

Dec 2025 – Feb 2026 Absence reason	Occasions of absence		
	Up to 1 week	1-3 weeks	Over 3 weeks
COVID 19 - suspected	1	0	0
Ear, Nose and Throat (Inc Cold/Flu)	62	1	2
Headaches (inc migraine)	4	0	0
Mental health (inc stress, depression)	9	4	12
Musculoskeletal	7	0	1
Other (inc Surgery)	26	7	8
Sickness / Vomiting / Gastro	20	0	1
Total	129	12	24

Following a period of fewer long-term sick cases, there has been an increase in early 2026, with several cases related to mental health or recovery from surgery.

This quarter has seen a similar number of Cold / Flu absences, with a small drop in overall short-term absences. The number of occasions 1-3 week absences has also dropped slightly.

3.5 Applicant Tracking System

Progress on implementation for our Applicant tracking system continues, with the launch planned for April. The digital platform will manage the end to end recruitment process, improving processes for hiring managers and the HR team as well as improving candidate experience.

3.6 National pay bargaining 2026/27 – National Joint Council (NJC)

The Unions submitted their pay claim for 2026/27 in December 25:

- 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 made their offer in March 2026:

- 3.3% on all pay points
- All other aspects of the Unions claim for 2026/27 have been rejected.

3.7 Apprenticeships

We currently have 8 apprentices in post and seen another apprentice successfully appointed to a permanent role. As the current apprenticeships come to an end, we

will see further recruitment for various opportunities including a Climate Change & Sustainability apprentice and an HR apprentice.

The government have recently de-funded several apprenticeships and we continue to work with training providers to ensure we can continue to develop exiting staff using the Levy.

3.8 National Graduate Scheme

Our three graduates have started their next rotations; each graduate must complete a minimum of 3 rotations during their 2 year placement.

We are delighted that managers are appreciating the impact that a graduate can have, and now have graduate rotations in new service areas, ensuring the graduates are able to gain a wide range of experience across the Council.

The national recruitment process is underway for the next cohort of graduates, and we are looking to recruit a further graduate to start in October 2026.

3.9 Learning and Development

We are continuing to provide resources to help staff to navigate this change, through or regular focussed Personal Development Mornings and in the training provided for staff and managers.

3.10 Employee Wellbeing

April saw the launch of a new Employee assistance programme (EAP), which provides confidential support for staff. The new platform includes counselling services as well as access to practical guidance and wellbeing support. The support is accessible in a variety of ways, including via live chat and through a digital app.

3.11 Electric Car Benefit Scheme

In March, our new Electric Car Benefit Scheme was introduced, providing staff with the opportunity to lease an electric car through salary sacrifice. This forms part of our overall package of benefits available for staff.

3.12 Inclusion

We took part in Race Equality Week at the start of February by participating in the 5 Day Challenge from Race Equality Matters. As part of this, bitesize resources were shared with all staff each day, with the aim of raising awareness and increasing our understanding of racism. We have received positive feedback on the resources, all of which remain available for staff.

Following a review of our Staff Briefings, Inclusion will be included as a regular agenda item at our 6 weekly briefing. The aim is to continue to increase awareness and engagement on all equalities, diversity and inclusion topics.

3.13 Staff Survey

In March we carried out a short staff survey, following on from our larger survey in 2024, to understand how Local Government Reorganisation is impacting our staff and

how supported they are feeling in the workplace. Analysis of the data collected is underway and will be used to guide and support next steps relating to development, engagement and support.

3.14 **Stay Questionnaires**

As part of our action plan to reduce our gender pay gap, we have carried out the first round of 'stay questionnaires' with senior female employees. The aim is to establish why employees wish to continue to work for the Council. Results will be analysed and used to help us retain happy and engaged 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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