

Public Document Pack

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM
ON WEDNESDAY, 28TH JANUARY, 2026 AT 10.00 AM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Daniel Allen (Chair), Claire Strong (Vice-Chair), Keith Hoskins and Bryony May*

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

UNISON: *Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting there were no members of the public present.*

18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 35 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ian Albert.

19 MINUTES - 15 OCTOBER 2025

Audio Recording – 1 minute 43 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Claire Strong seconded and, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 15 October 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

20 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 22 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.
- (3) The Chair informed Members that the discussion paper on the 'Implications of the UK Supreme Court Judgement on Single Sex Spaces on the Workplace' would be discussed at a future meeting as the Code of Practice relating to this had not yet been approved.

21 SCF MINUTES

Audio recording – 2 minutes 59 seconds

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

- Updates had been provided on HR and comments had been received from staff on events in October.
- IT and Green updates had also been provided at the meetings.
- The usual questions and answers had taken place at all three forums.

Councillor Claire Strong emphasised that the Committee welcomed participation from staff at their meetings.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Keith Hoskins
- Councillor Daniel Allen

In response to questions, the Human Resources Services Manager advised that usage of the Wellbeing Room was not monitored, however, there was a feedback form and QR code which allowed users to provide feedback, and positive feedback had been received.

In response to questions, the Director – Resources advised that the cleaning schedule for the multi-storey car park could be shared with Members after the meeting.

The Chair highlighted that one Member, who had produced art for several cafes and restaurants across Letchworth, had offered to create a piece of art for the Wellbeing Room.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums for October, November and December 2025.

22 HR INFORMATION NOTE

Audio recording – 7 minutes 2 seconds

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

- A comparison of recruitment data from Q2 2025 with Q2 2024 and 2023 had been shown in paragraph 3.2 of the report.
- The 75% recruitment target had been met in Q2 2025.
- Two positions had remained vacant, however, the casual role in Careline had since been filled and the Senior Planning Officer vacancy had been readvertised and would be followed by shortlisting for interviews.
- Labour turnover was 8.5% for 2025, which was higher than turnover in 2024 but lower than 2023 as described in paragraph 3.3.
- There had been a downward trend in long-term absences through 2025.
- Short-term absences had remained steady with a small decrease in summer and an increase in winter due to cold and flu as expected.
- A new Applicant Tracking System (ATS) would be delivered in 2026 to better manage the end-to-end recruitment process and form positive first impressions with candidates.
- A pay claim for 2026 had been submitted by the Unions in December for a £3,000 increase on all spinal pay points or a 10% increase in pay.

- 10 apprentices were currently in post, and recruitment was planned to replace those who were ending their apprenticeships in 2026.
- Graduates continued to have a positive impact across the Council including the launch of a new Council app, preparation for the Warm Homes Local Grants Scheme and the implementation of AI.
- Personal development mornings continued to be run monthly, with recent mornings focused on cyber awareness, meeting management and customer service.
- Work to provide skills to the Senior Managers Group to support staff through Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) would continue.
- Another wellbeing walk had been scheduled to coincide with the Samaritans campaign of Brew Monday following the success of the last walk.
- The October Inclusion Group meeting had discussed the Gender Pay Gap and the learnings from the Active Bystander Webinar.
- The next Inclusion Group meeting would focus on race inclusion as the Council would be participating in the 5 Day Challenge on Race Equality Matters.
- A steady decline on both the mean and median percentages for the Gender Pay Gap (GPC) had been seen at the Council over recent years.
- Work to reduce the GPG was ongoing as there was no quick fix, and this would include support for true flexible working, encouraging female applicants for senior roles, developing confident female employees, providing unconscious bias training to managers, and carrying out stay interviews with senior female employees to improve retention.
- Stay interviews would be one to one conversations with staff on why they might leave or stay which would help to improve retention and inform the Council on employee experiences.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Bryony May
- Councillor Claire Strong

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

- Frequency of stay interviews would depend on resourcing but they would be started this year with a select group of employees, with the plan to conduct them again next year with a different group of staff.
- There were no plans to change the apprenticeship scheme due to LGR as apprentices would be transferred to one of the new unitary authorities along with other staff.
- Stay interviews would be targeted at senior females first, then rolled out to more staff if successful.
- Workshops on being a confident female leader were planned, as well as a mentoring scheme for senior females.
- The Staff Consultation Forum had discussed the use of AI and the skills gap associated, and they would be working with IT to develop e-learning to address this.
- Some apprenticeships were focused on data and AI to enable development in this area.
- IT continued to run bitesize and drop-in sessions on anything IT related.
- Changes had been made to the Regular Performance Review framework to enable conversations between managers and employees on the skills and development that they felt were required for them now and in the future.
- The ATS would contact candidates automatically throughout the recruitment process, but it would also enable them to manually send reminders to candidates that had only partially completed an application when a deadline was approaching and this would improve engagement, particularly for harder to fill roles.

The Chair thanked the Human Resources Services Manager for their presentation.

23 **DISCUSSION PAPER - MANAGING CHANGE**

Audio recording – 24 minutes 23 seconds

The Human Resources Services Manager presented the Discussion Paper entitled 'Managing Change' and advised that:

- The impact that change would have on employees through Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) was recognised and appreciated, and four key areas were focused on to support this.
- Clear, timely and transparent communication was essential to keep staff informed and engaged.
- The 2025 Staff Event included an update on LGR progress followed by a question-and-answer session.
- Ongoing LGR updates were also provided through staff briefings, FAQ sets and other channels, and further staff surveys were planned on this and other matters.
- Wellbeing formed a key part of managing change and a session to develop resilience had been provided at the 2025 Staff Event to reinforce commitment to this.
- Personal development mornings were opportunities for staff to focus on growth and learning through skills-based webinars and e-learning.
- Targeted workshops would continue to be delivered on resilience, change readiness and wellbeing with planned sessions on managing uncertainty and other topics.
- Some of the proposed LGR Reserve in the 2026/27 Budget would be for training and development to improve the chances of staff getting their desired roles at the end of LGR.
- Managers would play a key role in managing change by ensuring individual impacts were addressed early on and translating the impacts of LGR to employees.
- The Senior Management Group had attended training to embed change management principles at leadership level which covered the different impacts change could have.
- Skills development for managers would continue to ensure that they were aligned with key messages and ensuring discussions with staff about future development.
- Staff turnover and recruitment would be monitored as uncertainty and workloads would be likely to increase through LGR due to the largescale change.

Councillor Claire Strong suggested the creation of an anonymous questions box where employees could submit questions to management and the Chair agreed that having a box like this that could be sent to multiple Council facilities would be useful.

In response to a question from Councillor Bryony May, the Human Resources Services Manager advised that the Senior Leadership Team had been communicating LGR as an opportunity. However, it was acknowledged that everyone would feel differently about the topic, and that a delicate balance of communication was required for this.

The Chair thanked the Human Resources Services Manager for their presentation of the Discussion Paper.

RESOLVED: That the Committee commented on and noted the Discussion Paper on Managing Change.

24 SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

Audio recording – 34 minutes 51 seconds

The Chair led a discussion on future topics for the Committee to consider. The following Members took part in the discussion:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Bryony May
- Councillor Daniel Allen

The following points were made as part of the discussion:

- Employee retention in times of uncertainty should be discussed in the context of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
- Employee recruitment in times of uncertainty should also be discussed as there may be undercapacity in some areas at the end of LGR due to the difficulties that it may bring.
- If stay interviews had been conducted with staff by the next meeting, then these should be covered.
- Until the Government had decided on the structure of LGR in Hertfordshire, it would be difficult to discuss redundancies.
- Siloed working in the Council and opportunities lost from this should be considered.
- Union membership at the Council should be reported on.
- Feedback from the Corporate Peer Review should be a topic for discussion at the next meeting.

In response to points raised in the discussion, the Chair advised that the Council had approximately an 8% recruitment gap compared to the 10% national average.

In response to points raised in the discussion, the Director – Resources advised that a report on the Corporate Peer Review Follow Up would be presented to Cabinet in February, and at a future staff briefing, and that any relevant discussions from those could be brought to this Committee.

In response to points raised in the discussion, the Human Resources Manager advised that stay interviews could be covered as part of a Discussion Paper on Employee Retention and Recruitment.

Members agreed two discussion topics on 'Employee Retention and Recruitment in Times of Uncertainty' and 'Implications of the UK Supreme Court Judgement on Single Sex Spaces on the Workplace'.

It was also agreed that an update on the 'Local Government Association Corporate Peer Review Follow Up' would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.

The meeting closed at 10.46 am

Chair

This page is intentionally left blank