

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD
IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
WEDNESDAY 4 JUNE 2025, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Rachel Carter (Chair)
Councillors M Connolly, M Swainston and
D Willcocks

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Michele Aves	- Committee Support Officer
Peter Dickinson	- Health and Safety Officer
Elly Starling	- Human Resources Strategic Lead

60 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR FOR 2025/26

It was moved by the Councillor Connolly and seconded by Councillor Willcocks that Councillor Swainston be appointed as Vice -Chair of the Human Resources Committee for 2025/26. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that Councillor Swainston be appointed as Vice -Chair of the Human Resources Committee for 2025/26.

61 APOLOGIES

There were apologies for absence from Councillor Butcher and Councillor Deffley.

62 MINUTES - 5 FEBRUARY 2025

It was moved by Councillor Swainston and seconded by

Councillor Connolly that the minutes of the meetings of the Human Resources Committee held on 5 February be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meetings of the Human Resources Committee held on 5 February 2025, be confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chair

63 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting, including the officers who were present.

64 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

65 HEALTH AND SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

The Health and Safety Officer introduced the report which gave an overview of all aspects of health and safety for the council over the past year. He said that there was nothing of any real significance to note, and that he was happy to take any Members questions.

Councillor Connolly referred to paragraph 3.2 of the report and said that she was pleased to see that a review of contract management, inspection regimes and compliance monitoring was to be undertaken. She asked if the leisure contractor (SLM) would be included in this process and requested that Members receive feedback on the outcomes of the review.

The Health and Safety Officer said that SLM would be included in the review – with any unusual patterns investigated. He confirmed that Members would receive such feedback.

Councillor Connolly referred to paragraph 5.24 of the report which referred to the work undertaken to encourage colleagues to report incidents and near miss events. She noted that the incidents and near misses, as listed on page 148 of the report, were quite significant and included harassment. Councillor Connolly and asked if these were downplayed, and if data from reporting was used to aid the prevention of such events.

The Health and Safety Officer said that the council was mindful of the impact which such incidents had on staff, and that measures were in place to help. He said that everybody's tolerance was different, with more experienced officers able to filter out, and that certain service areas, such as Benefits and Planning, tended to evoke the more emotive/ extreme reactions from customers. He said that such events should be reported to enable the data to be used to mitigate offender's impact on staff.

It was moved by Councillor Willcocks and seconded by Councillor Connolly, that the recommendations, as detailed, be approved. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, this motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Annual Health and

Safety Report 2024/25 be considered, and

(B) any comments/amendments provided to the Service Manager of Human Resources and Organisational Development and the Health and Safety Officer.

66 POLICY UPDATES

The Human Resources Strategic Lead introduced the report which detailed the update of four policies, as part of the ongoing wider policy review. She said that the policies which were used most frequently would be reviewed first, using best practice and input from Unison to make them more user friendly and remove repetition.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that the reviewed policies had already been before the Local Joint Panel and had now come to the Committee for approval. She said that changes had been made to the Sickness Policy to enable earlier support to be given to staff and that the Expenses Policy had been updated in line with HMRC rates.

The Chair thanked the Human Resources Strategic Lead for the report and sought confirmation that the reviewed policies formed part of an ongoing body of work. She also asked how many policies required review.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that this was correct, and that all policies were to be reviewed with a

full retention schedule. She said that there were approximately 20 policies, with 10 which were used regularly. She reiterated that Human Resources would work alongside Unison to review these before they come before Members.

Councillor Connolly said that she appreciated the simplification of the policies. She referred to paragraph 6.3 of the Sickness Policy and questioned why a reason and estimated duration of absence needed to be given should it be less than 7 days (thus self-certificated), noting that a staff member may be anxious about the nature of their absence, for example, should they be undergoing fertility treatment.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that this may require review post road testing of the policy, and that there were always exceptions. She said that staff could contact Human Resources for advice and/or request private conversations should they be uncomfortable with their manager.

The Chair asked if managers were trained on how to implement the revised policies.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that sessions with managers would to be arranged, with surgeries offered for tricky cases. She added that flow charts were included in each of the revised policies.

Councillor Swainston said that it was important that the policies were easy to follow and asked how this would be reviewed.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that managers performance would be monitored. She said that most managers followed the processes and should they not this would be escalated to Human Resources and/or the relevant Director.

It was moved by Councillor Connolly and seconded by Councillor Swainston, that the recommendations, as detailed, be approved. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, this motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that A) the revised Sickness Absence Management Policy (Appendix 1) be approved; and

(B) that the revised Grievance Policy (Appendix 2) be approved.

(C) that the revised Expenses Policy (Appendix 3) be approved; and

(D) that the revised Appeals Policy (Appendix 4) be approved.

67 EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND WELLBEING REPORT 2024/25

The Human Resources Strategic Lead introduced the report which detailed the changes seen in employee health and wellbeing over the past 12 months. She drew Members attention to the key issues within the report, to include the council's ageing workforce and an increase in

serious staff illnesses (which was mostly made up of short-term mental health issues).

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that mental health first aid staff had now attended their 13-week training, and a room was being converted for staff to use as a 'safe space' – being furnished with recycled furniture from disused council offices.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that a new employee assistance provider was in place, which gave staff a fuller experience, and schemes such as 'should I stay, or should I go?' were being developed to help those employees who were contemplating leaving the council. She said that Human Resources understood the issues at East Herts, and that compared to other local authorities the council was in a good position.

The Chair thanked the Human Resources Strategic Lead for the report.

Councillor Swainston said that the report was thorough, and the comparisons within it reassuring.

Councillor Connolly referred to paragraphs 5.5 and 5.6 of the report and asked how the categories of stress and mental health were defined.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that stress was defined as an employee feeling overwhelmed, and unable to cope day to day, whereas mental health was usually a medical condition.

Councillor Connolly asked if the definition came from the employee.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that it came from the employee, their primary physician or occupational health.

Councillor Willcocks asked if the mental health boot camp

mentioned in the report was full time.

The Health and Safety Officer said the 13-week duration was not full time and consisted of 3.5-hour online sessions, with a 1-day meet for participants. He added that the council's new employee assistance scheme also offered counsellors who could help with all issues, to include money and family pressures.

Councillor Willcocks asked if there would be a list made available of the mental health first aiders. He noted that in his workplace such staff also wore an easily identifiable lanyard.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that as agreed with Leadership Team, a list would be available to staff, and that communications would be used to promote this. She said that the scheme would be reviewed and may grow in line with local government reform.

Councillor Connolly asked if mental health first aiders would be offered counselling/ debriefings themselves.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that Human Resources were consulting with other local authorities about this. She said that larger authorities (such as County Councils) had such specialists, but as East Herts did not options were being explored, such as using occupational health. She added that staff with deep seated issues would not be offered help via a mental health first aider.

It was moved by Councillor Willcocks and seconded by Councillor Connolly, that the recommendations, as detailed, be approved. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, this motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) the annual Employee Health and Wellbeing Report 2024/25 including the actions (in section 8.0) planned for 2025/26 be considered; and

(B) any comments be provided to the Strategic HR Lead.

68 LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT REPORT 24 - 25

The Human Resources Strategic Lead introduced the report which gave detail on the learning and development undertaken in 2024/25. She said that due to budget restraints training remained self or e-learning where possible.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that a learning and development specialist was wanted for the vacant management post within Human Resources, with plans for train the trainer and knowledge exchange sessions planned to enable upskilling internally.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that Human Resources wished to run a 2-day team manager module, and that they intended to review the future manager's programme. She added that information from staff PDR's would be used to identify what learning employees required.

The Chair thanked the Human Resources Strategic Lead for the report and asked for further information regarding council apprenticeships.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that there were currently 4 apprentices at the council. She said that there had been changes to apprenticeship funding and so new ways of working would be explored, to include 'piggybacking' with other local authorities where possible.

Councillor Willcocks asked if the cyber training was funded by IT.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that this training was funded via the IT shared service, and that other partnerships such as the Shared Anti-Fraud Service

(SAFS) also gave learning opportunities. She said that other such joint working initiatives may also open up under local government reform.

The Chair asked if the use of AI had affected job applications.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that it was easy to spot an application which had used AI. She said that the use of this technology was detrimental to a person's application as it did not allow them to showcase their attributes.

It was moved by Councillor Connolly and seconded by Councillor Swainston, that the recommendations, as detailed, be approved. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, this motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Learning and Development Report for 2024/2025 be considered; and

(B) any comments be provided to the Strategic HR Lead.

69 ANNUAL TURNOVER REPORT 24 - 25

The Human Resources Strategic Lead introduced the report which gave detail on staff turnover for the year 2024/25, including any trends identified and the findings from leaver's exit interviews. She said that vacancies within Planning remained difficult to recruit to, with many staff staying for approximately two years before leaving to work for a bigger authority – which the council could not compete with monetarily.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that in the last quarter of the year 6 people had been lost from Planning

which was unusual, and that Human Resources had lost 2 people, 1 retiring and the other leaving due to personal circumstances. She said that 2% of leavers had been via dismissal which showed that policies were being used.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that staff's behaviour may change with local government reform – with many choosing to stay in their current positions. She said that recruitment was expensive, with some vacancies being held due to restructure and to avoid redundancies. She added that 'killer questions' had now been added to the beginning of job application forms to weed out overseas applicants looking for sponsorship.

The Chair thanked the Human Resources Strategic Lead for the report.

Councillor Swainston said that the information from exit interviews was very encouraging.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that over 80% of leavers said they liked working at East Herts in their exit interviews. She said that the results of the staff survey would be brought before the Committee at the next meeting.

The Chair asked for further information on the use of agency staff.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that the use of agency staff was higher in Planning, with jobs having to be covered. She said that it would be good to have a memorandum of cooperation with other local authorities to enable costs to be capped across the region and understand the future footprint.

It was moved by Councillor Willcocks and seconded by Councillor Connolly, that the recommendations, as detailed, be approved. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, this motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Annual Turnover Report 2024/2025, including the actions (in section 11.0) planned for 2025/26, be considered; and

(B) any comments be provided to the Strategic HR Lead.

70 HR QUARTER 4 STATS 23/24

The Human Resources Strategic Lead introduced the report which echoed the previous agenda items and subsequent debates.

The Chair thanked the Human Resources Strategic Lead for the report and asked for further information on Martins Law.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that Martins Law came in the wake of the Manchester bombings and aimed to strengthen public safety by requiring premises with over a 200 occupancy to take measures to reduce the vulnerability of terrorist attacks. She said that BEAM, previously Hertford Theatre, already had such a policy in place and was also connected to the town link.

The Chair asked the Health and Safety Officer if there was anything of any significance within the Minutes of the Health and Safety Committee.

The Health and Safety Officer said that High Oak had now taken on the tenancy of the old building at Wallfields, with access to zone B in the staff car park and their own representative on the Safety Committee.

Councillor Willcocks asked if the council had any internships or placements for 16 – 21year olds.

The Human Resources Strategic Lead said that such placements raised issues relating to safeguarding and managed supervision, and that more thought would be given to this area as the new organisation was built.

It was moved by Councillor Connolly and seconded by Councillor Swainston, that the recommendations, as detailed, be approved. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, this motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Human Resources Management report for Quarter 4 (January – March 2025) be considered; and

(B) any comments provided to the HR Officer/Head of HR and OD regarding the content or formatting of the report.

71 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.30 pm

Chairman
Date