Welcome to this employee handbook, which is a guide to our employment policies and benefits, and provides you with information on how you can contribute to Hertfordshire County Council, and Hertfordshire communities, and what you can expect in return.

Hertfordshire County Council aims to be a progressive employer. You are part of an organisation that values you as an individual; that wants you to feel fulfilled and happy in the work that you do; and that will provide you with the support, and the learning and development that you need to do a good job. We have a set of values which underpin everything we do to help ensure that we are running a high-quality and effective Council. We are committed to achieving diversity and equality of opportunity both as an employer and as a provider of services.

Our Corporate Plan sets out the high level ambition of the authority but, like all authorities; we are facing an ongoing significant financial challenge from increased demand and reduced finances. This will require us to continually review the way in which we provide services to the public. This places additional pressures and challenges on all our employees and we are committed to supporting them to deliver the new ways of working that will be necessary. Our transformation programme is about delivering these changes.

We know that we need to do things differently and to do so we have to continue to support and develop our staff. We want our future organisation to reflect the values of being citizen focused; making sure that every penny counts, acting with integrity, getting things right and learning from our experiences, and continuing to innovate. I would encourage all managers and teams to spend time looking at the values and see how they manifest themselves in their part of the business.

We all have an important part to play in delivering the Council’s objectives and the values provide a reference point to ensure that, although each of us has different work responsibilities, we are all working with common purpose. As our Corporate Plan says, we want Hertfordshire to remain a county of opportunity where people can have the opportunity to live healthy fulfilling lives in thriving prosperous communities, and you play a key role in making this happen.

So, play your part and think about how you can contribute to helping us achieve our goals and how you can make the most of development opportunities that come your way.

JOHN WOOD
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1. About your employee handbook

The purpose of this handbook is to give you information about Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) and what you can expect from us as your employer, and in turn what is expected of you, during your employment with us.

We value our reputation for putting equality and diversity at the heart of everything we do so you should always ensure you conduct yourself corresponding to the policies and procedures set out in this handbook. Detailed information on all the policies and procedures referred to in this handbook can be found on our intranet, Compass under the ‘employee area’. If you do not have access to Compass please talk to your manager or contact HR via Ask Us to obtain a copy of the policies.

This employee handbook should be read alongside your contract of employment. The content within this handbook is non-contractual and may be subject to change as the council revises its policies. If there is any inconsistency between this guide and your contract of employment, the terms of your contract of employment will take precedence.
2. Our values and behaviours

We have identified a set of values that underpin our culture and behaviour as an organisation. It is important that you can relate to these values and embed them into our services.

Citizen focussed
- we deliver services that have positive outcomes for the community
- we strive to empower citizens and communities, who are at the centre of everything we do
- we work with citizens to shape and design the delivery of services to meet their needs

Every penny counts
- we ensure that we make the best use of all available resources
- we aim to be both efficient and effective in everything that we do, delivering the best possible services at affordable prices
- we plan and prioritise our activity

Integrity
- we approach one another in an open, honest and ethical way
- we respect and value the diversity of individuals and embrace equality and diversity in everything we do
- we are committed to working collaboratively with partnership organisations

Getting it right
- we aim to get it right first time and continue to learn from our experiences
- we provide joined-up services, working as one organisation
- we accept responsibility for our own performance and for seeking feedback

Innovation
- we embrace change through being creative and taking ownership for what we do
- we support one another by seeking new ideas from both inside and outside the organisation on how best to improve services
- we recognise the importance of valuing and developing people across the organisation

Further details on our values and behaviours can be found on Compass under the ‘employee area’.
3. Equality and diversity

We are committed to achieving diversity and equality of opportunity both as a large employer and as a provider of services to the people of Hertfordshire. We strive to incorporate equality and diversity into everything we do, so it is an integral part of our business, and not an ‘add on’.

We recognise that in our society, groups and individuals continue to be unfairly discriminated against and we acknowledge our responsibilities to actively promote equality and combat discrimination.

All members of the community and other employees have a right to be treated with fairness and equity, therefore you should ensure that any policies relating to equality and diversity are complied with in addition to the requirements of the law.

Our Putting People First Policy demonstrates our wholehearted commitment to continued action in tackling inequality and promoting diversity.
Hertfordshire is a buoyant, prosperous county with one of the strongest economies in the country. We have a national reputation for developing community involvement and being a large and progressive employer. We work closely with our partner organisations to provide a number of services across Hertfordshire.

Services for adults

We work closely with the health service, district councils and voluntary organisations to plan, commission and deliver prompt, effective social care services. Our staff provide and arrange support, care and protection for adults who can’t manage without help, putting the users of our services and their carers at the centre of all that we do. We believe that everyone has a right to live as independently as possible and our efforts are focussed on helping people to gain and maintain control over their own lives wherever possible.

Services for children

Our services place the needs of the child at the centre of our work. We provide an extensive range of services to support every stage of development from the birth of a child to life long learning for adults and deal with all aspects of child and family education and welfare.

Services for all the community

We are dedicated to protecting life and property. Fire-fighters and safety officers work to keep our communities safe by promoting fire safety and issuing fire safety advice and certificates to businesses as well as rescuing people from fires, accidents and tackling chemical spillages.

Trading Standards protects consumers and businesses by investigating unfair and illegal business practice and helps ensure Hertfordshire has safe, strong and healthy communities.

We also seek to make Hertfordshire a better place to live, work and travel around. We look after the roads and public rights of way, promote public transport, manage the county council transport fleet, dispose of household waste, conserve and enhance the countryside and oversee plans for transport, major housing projects and mineral extraction. In addition we run a large scale warehouse and distribution operation as well as a procurement function. We also co-ordinate the provision of school meals and provide a catering service to educational establishments, throughout the county and neighbouring areas.

Our libraries provide books, CDs, DVDs and new technologies through a network of libraries. We also store historic papers and photos to help residents and visitors investigate Hertfordshire’s past.

Support services

Our support services ensure strategic management of the organisation. Services include Finance, Human Resources, Property, Performance and Improvement and Technology. We also bring together support services for our external and internal customers, and our work with partners. This includes Economic Development, Communications, Corporate Strategy, Customer Service Centre, Internal Audit, Legal Services, Member Services, Scrutiny and Statutory Services.
5. Herts Rewards

Working for Hertfordshire entitles you to a large variety of rewards and benefits. All employees of Hertfordshire County Council have access to the Herts Rewards scheme which, can be accessed from any computer or smart phone or via a telephone helpline.

To register please visit www.hertsrewards.co.uk

There are three strands to Herts Rewards which are outlined below:

Lifestyle
- flexible working arrangements
- discounts on your everyday shopping at supermarkets, DIY stores, clothes shops, mobile phone outlets and department stores through reloadable gift cards and discount vouchers
- discounts and cashback at many well known restaurant chains, entertainment venues, gyms and leisure centres
- discounts on holiday and leisure activities in the UK and abroad
- microsoft Home User Programme – saving you money on home software
- discounts on selected nurseries
- occupational maternity / paternity and adoption pay
- leave provision
- support groups including the Herts disABILITY Network, Black and Asian Support Group (BAAS), HCC Carers Group and the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Support Group
- carer’s – 2 for 1 cinema tickets

Financial
- pension scheme with employer contributions*
- independent financial advice
- childcare voucher salary sacrifice scheme
- season Ticket Loans
- lease Car Scheme
- car Purchase and Repairs Loan Scheme
- Credit Unions
- Give as You Earn

Wellbeing
- occupational sick pay
- discounted health insurance
- cycle to work salary sacrifice scheme
- carewell, a free and confidential 24 hour Employee Assistance Programme, which provides advice and support, including a counselling service
- access to discounts at local gyms, health and fitness centres
- on-site wellbeing activities and classes
- discounted healthcare, dental care and optical care

*Details of HCC pensions are on the Compass pages including contribution rates, benefits and scheme guides
6. Your working environment

Induction
Induction is an important part of understanding the council, your department, role and team. The induction you receive will be tailored depending on the department you work in and may contain some eLearning modules.

Your place of work
Here at HCC, we believe that work is about what you do, not necessarily where you do it. As a forward thinking authority we are leading the way by developing modern, flexible working environments for all our employees. We have created modern office buildings with cutting edge technology and facilities. The main offices are County Hall in Hertford; Apsley in Hemel Hempstead; Robertson House and Farnham House in Stevenage; and Mundells in Welwyn Garden City.

Electronic storage and document management allows remote access to files; extended opening hours offer more opportunity for flexible working; and new technology enables you to work away from your office base where appropriate.

Excellent catering facilities are available in each of the main buildings and other on-site benefits are regularly available, such as in-chair massage, exercise classes and reflexology.

We will reimburse approved travel (and other) expenses incurred in the course of your official duties, details of your entitlements can be found in the Business Travel and Subsistence Policy.

Organisational change
There will be times when it will be necessary to restructure parts of the organisation to improve our service delivery, efficiency or to deliver new initiatives. More information can be found in the Organisational Change (Redundancy and PAP) Policy.

Communication and keeping you updated
Communication is most effective when it is two-way. One to ones with your manager and the regular Team Talk Briefing email are examples of ways we will keep you informed of what is going on within the organisation. We also value your feedback and our staff suggestion scheme and staff surveys are just some of the ways you can give us your input.

Your health and wellbeing
Whilst we appreciate that you may occasionally be prevented from attending work through ill health, we have a responsibility to maintain service delivery and minimise disruption. We are therefore committed to managing sickness absence and believe that it is the responsibility of managers, union representatives and you to work together to promote a positive attendance culture. The Council is committed to helping you achieve a good work life balance and offers a wide range of rewards and initiatives through our wellbeing strategy Healthy Herts.

If you become unwell
If you are unwell and unable to attend work you must speak directly to your line manager within an hour of your normal start time. You should give a clear indication of the nature of the illness and a likely return date. If your absence is for seven days or less you must use the county council’s self-certification arrangement.
Keeping in touch when you are unwell
You must keep your manager informed throughout your period of sickness absence, on at least a weekly basis. The form of contact and frequency will be agreed between you and your manager.

Returning to work
A return to work interview will be carried out by your manager on your return in order to discuss the reason for absence and establish any further support needed. If your sickness absence reaches the trigger points detailed in the Managing Sickness Absence Policy your manager may invoke a formal review to look at any further action required to improve your attendance and wellbeing.

A healthy workplace
Hertfordshire County Council recognises and accepts its responsibility as an employer for providing a safe and healthy working environment for all of its employees. In accordance with its duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, HCC regularly reviews and publishes its Statement of general health and safety policy to all employees.

The policy covers HCC’s overall objectives for health and safety management; the responsibilities of staff at all levels with regard to health and safety. A local health and safety model policy is also available, to assist managers create a policy for premises they manage or, if considered appropriate, for their team or service. As part of your local induction your manager will provide you with any specific health and safety information necessary for your role and explain how identified risks will be controlled.

Our Working Time Guide ensures that you do not work excessive hours and have adequate breaks from work.

Employee representation
We recognise a number of trade unions which represent various employee groups.

One of the main aims of a trade union is to negotiate with employees about matters affecting their members and other employees. These negotiations are known as ‘Collective Bargaining’ and often result in a ‘Collective Agreement’ which can subsequently mean a change to your employment terms and conditions.

As an employee you have the right to be a trade union member if you so choose. Further details on the recognised trade unions can be found in our Trade Unions Policy.

If you choose not to be a trade union member, we have set up an employee representative group made up of HCC staff who have volunteered to provide an ‘employee voice’ on a number of key issues. More information and contact details can be found on Compass.
7. Developing your career

We are totally committed to giving you every opportunity to pursue your own personal development, raise your standards of performance and enhance your career prospects.

Through our Development Charter we will support you to undertake the learning and development you need to help you achieve and maintain a high standard of performance in line with the council’s values and behaviours and so help the organisation deliver the best possible services to the people of Hertfordshire. It is also vital that you recognise that learning is a personal responsibility therefore you are expected to take an active part in your learning and development.

Learning and development opportunities

We offer a wide range of on and off the job learning and development opportunities including courses for generic skills delivered by the Herts HR service and courses for technical skills and professional development delivered by service departments’ learning and development teams.

We also offer eLearning, which provides an opportunity for you to learn flexibly at a time that suits you and at a point when you need it. iLearn is our eLearning platform that allows you to choose from a wide range of online training modules that can be completed at your desk or from home via your own PC.

Career development

We actively encourage the use of career schemes to enable employees to develop and progress within their chosen career path.

Performance Management Development Scheme (PMDS)

You will have an annual review of your performance based on key objectives for the year and our values and behaviours. Any development needs identified will form part of your personal development plan.

Job opportunities

Job vacancies are published on www.hertsdirect.org

Secondments, job swaps and shadowing offer flexible approaches to working by giving you the opportunity to experience different working practices in a variety of different ways. The scheme enables increased awareness and knowledge of other teams and departments, broadening your perspectives and allowing you to develop transferable personal and professional skills. For further guidance on the framework for these schemes, please refer to our Secondment Policy.
8. Standards of conduct

Hertfordshire residents are entitled to demand the highest standards of conduct from all employees of the county council. We must ensure that nothing we do shakes the public’s confidence in our integrity.

Local government is rightly proud of its reputation for its standard of conduct and it is up to us all to ensure that these high standards are maintained in Hertfordshire.

Your activities as members of external companies or voluntary organisations are also subject to the standards set out in the Code of Conduct Policy. This section lays out some key points for your reference.

Whistleblowing

Our Whistleblowing Policy ensures that you are able to raise concerns of any reasonable suspicion of illegal or improper conduct without fear of recrimination.

Concerns of illegal or improper conduct include:

- Conduct which is an offence or a breach of the law
- Alleged miscarriage of justice
- Serious Health and Safety risks
- The unauthorized use of public funds
- Possible fraud and corruption
- Sexual, physical and verbal abuse, or bullying or intimidation of employees, customers or service users.
- Abuse of authority
- Other unethical conduct

HCC has a dedicated confidential email address for whistleblowing complaints: whistle@hertfordshire.gov.uk

Political neutrality

We serve the county council as a whole, in this way you must serve all councillors and not just those of any political group and must ensure that the individual rights of all councillors are respected.

You must follow every lawful expressed policy of the county council and must not allow your own personal or political opinions to interfere with your work.

Relationships

Mutual respect between you and councillors is essential to good local government. Close personal familiarity between employees and individual councillors can damage the relationship and prove embarrassing to other employees and councillors and should therefore be avoided.

You should always remember your responsibilities to the community you serve and ensure courteous, efficient and impartial service delivery to all groups and individuals within that community as defined by our policies.
Disclosure of Information and Confidentiality
Employees must treat all information about individuals, including other employees, customers and service users with confidentiality and in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Employees must take all reasonable steps to protect and safeguard confidential documents and must comply with the Data Protection Policy and any other policies relating to confidentiality and security of information.

Employees must not use any information obtained in the course of their employment for personal gain or benefit, and they must not pass such information on to others unless they are legally entitled to receive it.

Corruption and use of financial resources
You must be aware that it is a serious criminal offence for you corruptly to receive or give any gift, loan, fee, reward or advantage for doing, or not doing, anything or showing favour, or disfavour, to any person in your official capacity.

You should also ensure that you use public funds entrusted to you in a responsible, lawful manner and in accordance with our financial regulations. You should strive to ensure value for money to the local community and to avoid legal challenge to the county council.

Hospitality
Offers of personal gifts should be refused with the exception of small gifts of a promotional nature. Offers of hospitality should be treated with caution and you should be guided by the county council conventions on gifts and hospitality which are contained under the Code of Conduct.

What you wear
Whatever your role, we expect you to dress in a manner that is appropriate for your job function and the environment in which you work. Managers in each area are responsible for setting and maintaining these standards.
9. Resolving issues at work

Grievances
We encourage open communication between you and your manager to ensure any issues are resolved quickly and to the satisfaction of all concerned. In this way, your line manager will support you through informal discussions to resolve the problem. If the problem persists, you can use our **Grievance Policy**.

Disciplinary procedure
We are committed to being a fair and reasonable employer. You are required to demonstrate appropriate standards and at all times conform to our policies, practices and procedures.

Wherever possible, we will seek to resolve issues about conduct on an informal basis. In most cases, managers will identify any shortcomings in conduct or behaviour via day to day supervisory performance management processes, providing appropriate feedback and support. However, there may be occasions where the issue needs to be addressed formally via the **Discipline Policy**.

Respect and dignity at work
We respect and value the diversity of individuals and embrace equality and diversity in everything we do in line with the council’s organisational values. Harassment and bullying is unlawful, and failure to comply with the required standards of behaviour will not be tolerated or condoned in the workplace. As with all issues, you are encouraged and supported to find an informal resolution wherever possible. Please refer to the **Managing Harassment and Bullying (Dignity at Work) Policy** for more details.
10. Leaving HCC

Retirement
We believe that employees of all ages have valuable contributions to make to the organisation and for this reason we do not enforce a specific retirement age to allow people to continue working for as long as they are willing and able. If you wish to retire at 65 years of age you are entitled to do so, however there are also options if you want to retire early or ease into retirement gradually.

Redundancy
Change is a fact of life for us and from time to time it will be necessary to change jobs and services which may result in the need for redundancy. In these circumstances we will aim to do this fairly, providing advice and support for you if you are at risk. For further information please refer to our Organisational Change (Redundancy and PAP) Policy.

The exit interview
When you leave us you will be either invited to an exit interview or provided with a leavers’ questionnaire. This gives you the chance to have your say about why you are leaving.

Exceptional leadership and management skills are vitally important to us. Part of our talent management strategy will be to conduct formal exit interviews and to keep in touch with those talented people who leave.

Herts Pathways
Pathways is an online resource which can be accessed via iLearn. It is dedicated to providing you with impartial advice and information on issues ranging from job hunting and creating a CV or applying for jobs through to obtaining financial advice.
11. Ask Us

AskUS
01992 555000 (Comnet 25000)
A single contact number for all support services including Human Resources, payroll, pension and lease car related enquiries, to help you reach the right person as quickly as possible.