

Employment Committee



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Wednesday, 25 March 2026 at 10.00 am
Council Chamber - South Kesteven House, St. Peter's Hill, Grantham.
NG31 6PZ

Committee Members: Councillor Anna Kelly, Vice-Chairman of the Council (Chairman)
Councillor Gloria Johnson (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Rhys Baker, Councillor Ashley Baxter, Councillor David Bellamy,
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing, Councillor Susan Sandall, Councillor Ian Stokes
and Councillor Paul Stokes

Agenda

This meeting can be watched as a live stream, or at a later date, [via the SKDC Public-I Channel](#)

- 1. Apologies for absence**
- 2. Disclosure of interests**
Members are asked to disclose any interests in matters for consideration at the meeting.
- 3. Minutes of the previous meetings** (Pages 3 - 10)
To consider the minutes of the meeting held 10.00, 12 November 2025.
To consider the minutes of the meeting held 11.30, 21 January 2026.
- 4. Volunteering with South Kesteven District Council Update** (Pages 11 - 17)
To provide Members with an update in relation to the implementation of the Volunteer Policy including current roles and numbers of volunteers engaged
- 5. Employment Rights Act** (Pages 19 - 36)
To update the Employment Committee on the implications of the Employment Rights Act 2025 and to seek endorsement of policy changes to ensure the Council remains legally compliant.
- 6. Chief Executive Appraisal** (To Follow)
- 7. Any other business, which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, decides is urgent**

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☎ 01476 406080

Karen Bradford, Chief Executive

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Meeting of the Employment Committee

Wednesday, 12 November 2025,
10.00 am



SOUTH
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COUNCIL

Committee Members present

Councillor Anna Kelly (Chairman)
Councillor Gloria Johnson (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Rhys Baker
Councillor Ashley Baxter
Councillor Gareth Knight
Councillor Susan Sandall
Councillor Ian Stokes
Councillor Paul Stokes
Councillor Max Sawyer

Other Members present

Councillor Tim Harrison

Officers

Joshua Mann, Democratic Services Officer
Karen Bradford, Chief Executive
Sam Fitt, Senior HR Officer
Leila Foster, Human Resources Officer
Jane Jenkinson, Senior HR Officer

21. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing, substituted by Councillor Max Sawyer.

22. Disclosure of interests

There were none.

23. Minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2025 were proposed, seconded, and AGREED as an accurate record.

24. Pay Policy Statement 2026/27

The Pay Policy Statement 2026/27 was introduced by the Leader of the Council.

The Pay Policy Statement detailed:

- The Council's decision to adopt the Real Living Wage in March 2021.
- The pay increase arrangements for the lowest grade and a number of other lower grades which were impacted by the Real Living Wage increase.
- These pay increases were an alternative (and not in addition to) to the annual cost of living pay award.

The Pay Policy Statement also highlighted the salary bandings for posts graded Service Manager or above within table one. As well as encapsulating the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) where the current employer contribution rate was 24.8%.

During discussions, Members commented on the following:

- The significant financial implication of the LGPS employer contribution was noted.
- It was noted that the April 2026 National minimum wage and living wage rates were yet to be confirmed by central government.

Following discussions, it was proposed, seconded, and AGREED to recommend the Pay Policy Statement 2026/27 to Full Council for approval.

25. Gender Pay Gap

The Gender Pay Gap report was introduced by the Leader of the Council.

The gender pay gap referred to the difference between men's and women's median hourly earnings as a proportion of men's earnings, reflecting disparities across all types of jobs, not just those with the same job title

The Council's mean gender pay gap remained a 'negative' measure. At the end of March 2025, it was -4.93% (in March 2024 it was -4.83%). This meant that for every £1 a woman earned, a man earned 95p.

The mean hourly rate for women was £17.66, and the mean hourly rate for men was £16.83.

The median hourly rate for women was £16.81, and the median hourly rate for men was £16.15.

The gender pay gap for median gross hourly earnings for the whole economy

decreased to 13.1% in April 2024 (down from 14.2% in April 2023). At -4.08%, the Council's median gender pay gap was significantly lower.

During discussions, Members commented on the following:

- Attention was drawn to the progress demonstrated on page six of the appendix, stating it to be the result of collective effort and organisational commitment.

The Gender Pay Gap report was NOTED by the Committee.

26. Employee Engagement Survey Results 2025

The Employee Engagement Survey Results 2025 was introduced by the Leader of the Council.

In July 2025, South Kesteven District Council undertook the annual employee engagement survey and invited all employees to participate. The survey was open from 7th July 2025 until 31st July 2025.

Colleagues were asked to rate 41 statements on a scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. There were a further 10 questions with opportunities to add comments to provide suggestions, feedback and explanations to how they have rated the statements.

539 out of a possible 620 employees completed the survey (including casual workers). This resulted in an 87% response rate, which was an increase from last year's survey, which received an 85% response rate.

Some key findings from the survey are summarised below:

- 82% of respondents would recommend working for SKDC, were happy with their current job, and find the work they do interesting.
- 66% of respondents believed that morale was good at SKDC. This was a 19% increase since 2023.
- The highest response rates were from CMT, Human Resources, and Building Control. The lowest were Markets, Waste, and Economic Development.
- 80% of respondents believed that the hybrid working approach worked well for them personally, 20% were neutral, and no respondents disagreed with the statement.
- 85% of respondents stated that they had not been bullied or harassed at work in the previous 12 months. The HR team highlighted this to be a positively high figure but noted a 2% decrease from 87% in 2024.
- 80% of respondents also stated that they planned to be at SKDC in 12 months time, a 2% increase from 78% in 2024. Given the uncertainty across the industry with the upcoming Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) this was highlighted as a positive figure.

During discussions, Members commented on the following:

- Praise was given to both the HR Team and CMT for the leadership shown in setting the positive culture.
- It was confirmed that office staff were required to spend a minimum of two days in the office and attend further days if business demands warranted. Heads of Service and above worked from the office a minimum of 3-4 days. This was monitored.
- Given the 2% change in respondents who stated that they had not been bullied or harassed at work, the HR team stated they were currently breaking down the results to identify specific department areas, potential hotspots, and would consult with relevant Heads of Service. The Head of Paid Service noted the responsibility Members had, given that any Member to Officer contact could influence the results.
- It was confirmed that members of staff on long-term sick had been invited to undertake the survey.
- The disproportionality between the response rates and the engagement index of the Arts department was noted.
- The suggestion was made that the high response rate to the survey demonstrated that staff felt that their opinion was listened to. Furthermore, the suggestion was made to include staff turnover figures in the 2026 report.

The Employee Engagement Survey Results 2025 was NOTED by the Committee.

27. Human Resources Policy and Handbook Review

The Human Resources Policy and Handbook Review was introduced by the Leader of the Council.

Key changes resulting from the review included:

A fresh draft of the Employee Handbook – Developed in consultation with the Trade Union, management and staff feedback. Outdated content was replaced and new sections that had been added relating to wellbeing, employee voice and inclusion.

Adoption and Surrogacy Policy - The policy set out employee's entitlements to up to 52 weeks' adoption leave, alongside time off for adoption and surrogacy-related appointments. The Council provided Enhanced Adoption Pay in line with its approach to maternity pay, offering more than the statutory minimum for eligible employees.

Shared Parental Leave Policy - The policy set out employees' entitlements to up to 50 weeks of shared parental leave and up to 37 weeks of statutory

shared parental pay, allowing flexibility for parents to share care responsibilities.

The Leader also noted that the Deputy Leader of the Council had not been included within the Cabinet outlined in the Employee Handbook. This was an error and following approval of the handbook then the Member would be subsequently included in the document.

During discussions, Members commented on the following:

- Accessibility of the documents was praised as they included embedded links to the HR hub.
- A Member suggested that long service awards should be higher.
- It was confirmed that the adoption and surrogacy policies were regardless of the age of the adopted child.
- An amendment was suggested to include the dates from which policies were effective within the Employee Handbook.

Incorporating this amendment, it was proposed, seconded, and AGREED to:

1. Approve the revised Employee Handbook.
2. Approve the following HR policies:
 - Adoption and Surrogacy Policy
 - Shared Parental Leave Policy
3. Approve the delegation of authority for minor amendments to HR policies and the Employee Handbook to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for HR.

28. HR Dashboard

Prior to the commencement of the HR Dashboard item, the meeting adjourned at 11.20 and resumed at 11.30.

The HR Dashboard was introduced by the Leader of the Council.

The dashboard encapsulated South Kesteven District Council's people metrics for the half-year period from April to September 2025.

At 30 September 2025, the number of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) employees was 595 (324 male and 271 female), with 48 new starters and 27 leavers so far through the year.

Almost 50% of the workforce were aged 50 and over and the Council were signed up to the Age-friendly Employer Pledge. This required a commitment to at least one action a year towards better recruitment, retention and development of older workers.

In August staff received an agreed 3.2% pay award increase, backdated to April 2025.

The Council currently had 43 apprenticeships: Two apprenticeships had been completed during the year and 10 new apprenticeships started.

The average number of days of sickness absence per FTE for the period April to September 2025 was 4.78 days. This was a slight increase on the same period last year of 4.07 days. The CIPD Health and Wellbeing At Work report for 2025 revealed a record high for absence levels: 9.4 days in 2025, up from 7.8 in 2023.

During discussions, Members commented on the following:

- A Member disputed that the 17% increase in sickness absence was a 'slight' increase and requested for the word to be removed from section 2.8 of the report.
- It was confirmed that there had not been a CIPD Health and Wellbeing At Work report in 2024 containing sickness absence figures.
- The HR team recognised an increase in short-term absence across September.
- The Head of Paid Service noted the extensive work of the Wellbeing Team in combating mental health-related absence. A member urged for regular reporting to continue on this area.

The HR Dashboard was NOTED by the Committee.

29. Work Programme 2025 - 2026

It was proposed, seconded, and AGREED to make the following changes to the Work Programme:

- Addition of a Chief Executive Pay Banding item to the March meeting.
- Removal of the Employee Health Insurance item from the unscheduled items.

30. Any other business, which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, decides is urgent

It was noted that the January meeting had been cancelled as all the relevant items had been dealt with.

It was also recognised that the Senior HR Officer was retiring in January. Members of the Committee offered their appreciation for the Officer and dedication to their work.

The meeting concluded at 12.03.

Meeting of the Employment Committee

Wednesday, 21 January 2026,
11.30 am



SOUTH
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DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Committee Members present

Councillor Anna Kelly (Chairman)
Councillor Gloria Johnson (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Rhys Baker
Councillor Ashley Baxter
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing
Councillor Susan Sandall
Councillor Paul Stokes
Councillor Gareth Knight
Councillor Virginia Moran

Officers

Karen Bradford, Chief Executive
Richard Wyles, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer
Fran Beckitt, Head of Service – Human Resources and Organisational Development
Sam Fitt, Senior HR Officer
Joshua Mann, Democratic Services Officer

34. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ian Stokes, substituted by Councillor Gareth Knight, and Councillor Paul Wood, substituted by Councillor Virginia Moran.

35. Disclosure of interests

There were none.

36. Minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2025

The minutes of the meeting held at 2.45 PM, 12 November 2025 were proposed, seconded and AGREED as an accurate record.

The Democratic Service Officer apologised that, due to a clerical oversight, the minutes from the meeting held at 10am on 12 November 2025 had not been included within the agenda pack. The officer noted that the draft minutes were available online and would be presented to the next meeting of the Employment Committee.

37. Pay Policy Statement 2026/27

The Pay Policy Statement 2026/27 was introduced by the Leader of the Council.

The Pay Policy Statement was presented to the Employment Committee on 12 November 2025 which voted to recommend the Statement to Full Council.

Since the Employment Committee voted to recommend the Pay Policy Statement, there was one minor amendment to the Statement (section 8.6) to reflect the Council's position on the 'sale of annual leave'. This addition was in response to a recommendation from the Council's External Auditors. Consultation was undertaken with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Employment Committee and the Cabinet Member for HR.

During discussions, Members commented on the following:

- It was noted that the text in section 9.2 of the policy, referencing that the Pay Policy would be updated to reflect the minimum wage figures, could be removed now that the figures had been released and included within the report.
- It was clarified that the sale of annual leave was scope for employees to exchange remaining annual leave for money in some circumstances. The Leader confirmed this to be positive, demonstrating SKDC to be flexible and responsive to the needs of employees.
- A Member noted concern at the level of reimbursement for travel expenses. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that 45p per mile was the rate set by HMRC and was not determined locally.

Following discussions, it was proposed, seconded, and AGREED to recommend the Pay Policy Statement 2026/27 to Council for approval.

38. Work Programme 2025 - 2026

The Head of Paid Service noted that they would engage with the Chairman and relevant officers to further populate the Work Programme following the meeting.

The Work Programme 2025-26 was noted by the committee.

39. Any other business, which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, decides is urgent

There was none.

The meeting concluded at 11.49 am.



**SOUTH
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COUNCIL**

Employment Committee

Wednesday, 25 March 2026

Report of Councillor Paul Stokes,
Deputy Leader of the Council and
Cabinet Member for Leisure and
Culture

Implementation of the Volunteering with South Kesteven District Council Policy

Report Author

Karen Whitfield, Assistant Director (Leisure, Culture and Place)

✉ karen.whitfield@southkesteven.gov.uk

Purpose of Report

To provide Members with an update in relation to the implementation of the Volunteering with South Kesteven District Council Policy.

Recommendations

The Employment Committee is asked to note the progress made on the implementation of the Volunteering with South Kesteven District Council Policy, requesting any clarifications or further information required.

Decision Information

Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?	No
What are the relevant corporate priorities?	Connecting Communities Enabling Economic Opportunities
Which wards are impacted?	All Wards

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance and Procurement

- 1.1 No costs have been incurred to date as a result of the implementation of the Volunteering with South Kesteven District Council Policy. Should volunteers need to be reimbursed the Policy provides a robust authorisation process to be followed and the expense would be met from the relevant service budget.

Completed by: David Scott – Assistant Director of Finance and Deputy s151 Officer.

Legal and Governance

- 1.2 The adoption and implementation of the Volunteering with South Kesteven District Council Policy has created a clear framework for the Council to engage volunteers and meet its legal obligations around protecting the health and safety of volunteers.

Completed by: James Welbourn, Democratic Services Manager

Health and Safety

- 1.3 The Council has a legal and moral responsibility to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, the health and safety and welfare of volunteers whilst they are engaged in Council activities. The Council must provide the same level of protection to volunteers as it does to employees carrying out similar duties.
- 1.4 The implementation of the Policy has created a clear framework for volunteer activity which includes adherence to risks and mitigating actions identified, the provision of training and personal protective equipment, as well as procedures for reporting and addressing safety concerns.

Completed by: Philip Swinton Head of Health, Safety, Emergency Planning and Compliance

Human Resources

- 1.5 The implementation of the Policy has ensured that both the Council and its volunteers are clear on their respective roles and responsibilities. It has also

promoted consistency across services in how volunteers are engaged and managed, ensuring a high quality and valuable experience for volunteers.

Completed by: Fran Beckitt (Head of HR)

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1. The Volunteering with South Kesteven District Council Policy (the Policy) was introduced in September 2023 following consideration by the Employment Committee (See Background Papers).
- 2.2. Since that time the Policy has consistently been adopted across the Council services where volunteers are engaged. In addition to providing a framework for existing volunteers it has also enabled the recruitment of new volunteers, as well as expanding the number and types of roles available.
- 2.3. The introduction of the Policy has also allowed Council officers to improve relationships with existing volunteer groups and organisations engaged in activity on Council owned land and assets.

Grantham Parks

- 2.4. There are currently a total number of 15 individual volunteers engaged in activities at Wyndham Park and the Wyndham Park Visitor Centre. The roles covered include:
 - Light gardening work including planting and weeding
 - Surveying wildlife
 - Leading walks through the park
 - Hosting regular events including book club and coffee mornings for the deaf
 - Hosting arts and crafts activities for park users
 - Instructing 'Our Parks' fitness classes
- 2.5. The volunteers at Wyndham Park have received a comprehensive range of training to allow them to fulfil their roles to a high standard. This has included training on equality, diversion and inclusion, customer service, health and safety, dementia awareness and mental health first aid.
- 2.6. Regular check ins are undertaken with each volunteer on a four to six week basis. As a result, volunteer retention and satisfaction levels have remained high.

Wyndham Park Forum and Friends of Queen Elizabeth Park

- 2.7. The two volunteer organisations were previously separate but have since merged due to the membership and governance arrangements being the same. The membership of the merged organisation varies between 15 and 20 people.
- 2.8. A Terms of Reference document has been developed and was jointly signed by the Council and the Wyndham Park Forum/Friends of Queen Elizabeth Park in July 2024. The aim of this document has been to facilitate a positive working relationship and to align the work of the volunteer organisation with the Policy.
- 2.9. The Terms of Reference document clearly sets out the respective roles and expectations of the Council and the volunteer group. This includes the need for all activities to be risk assessed and works to take place in agreed areas.
- 2.10. During 2025, volunteers from the merged organisation undertook a total of 360 hours of work in Wyndham Park and 363 hours of work in Queen Elizabeth Park. The following list includes the agreed areas which the volunteer group is responsible for maintaining:

Wyndham Park:

- The Sensory Garden
- The Commemorative Orchard
- The Shield Bed adjacent to the white bridge
- The Machine Gun bed

Queen Elizabeth Park:

- The Diamond Grove
- Wildflower areas.

Grantham Rivercare

- 2.11. Grantham Rivercare are a volunteer organisation who also support the upkeep and maintenance of the parks. Their current focus is on the following:
 - Litter picking between Bridge End Road and Harrowby Weir
 - Working to eliminate Himalayan Balsam from the riverbanks between Grantham and Belton House
 - Maintenance of the three wetland ponds in Queen Elizabeth Park which were developed as part of the Witham/Slea Blue Green Corridor project
- 2.12. The maintenance of the wetland ponds in Queen Elizabeth Park is covered by a Service Level Agreement between the Council and Grantham Rivercare. Again, this document aligns with the Policy and sets out the respective roles of the Council

and the volunteer organisation, including health and safety arrangements and the tasks to be undertaken.

Dysart Park Action Group

2.13. The Dysart Park Action Group are a volunteer organisation who organise a range of successful and well-planned events within Dysart Park. The group are extremely supportive and play a key role in promoting the park and its attractions. Events are well attended, and the funding required is raised solely from sponsorship and community donations.

2.14. For 2026 the following events are planned:

May Gingerbread Festival

July Family Fun Day

September Family Jazz Festival

Park Forum

2.15. A quarterly Park Stakeholder Forum meeting has been established which all volunteer organisations and stakeholders involved in the operation of the parks are invited to attend. This has proved to be a valuable opportunity for the Council and respective organisations to share their plans, aspirations and achievements.

Arts Service

2.16. The Guildhall Arts Centre in Grantham already had a strong cohort of volunteers who had been in place for some time. Following the introduction of the Policy, existing volunteers were requested to sign up to the principles within it, alongside new volunteers that have since been recruited. Subsequently, following the introduction of the Policy, volunteer roles have also now been introduced to support the operation of Stamford Arts Centre.

2.17. Currently a total number of 37 volunteers are signed up to support the Guildhall Arts Centre and a total of 15 at Stamford Arts Centre. The roles they perform include:

- Theatre Usher
- Scanning tickets and showing customers to their seats
- Checking for lost property
- Litter picking

2.18. In addition to the above there are a total of 14 volunteer technicians who operate across the two venues. Their roles are to assist the technical production of live shows including operating an element of the lighting requirements. These volunteer

roles are invaluable during peak seasons, for example supporting the pantomime run.

- 2.19. All the volunteers engaged across the arts service receive training to enable them to undertake their roles. This includes health and safety training, fire evacuation, and safeguarding training.
- 2.20. Currently, to ensure alignment with Council Officers, volunteers within the arts service are being requested to undertake a Disclosure and Barring Service check.

National Volunteer Week

- 2.21. National Volunteer Week is an annual celebration, which, this year, is due to take place between 1 and 7 June 2026. To mark this the Council is combining the celebration with the SK Community Awards ceremony which is due to take place on Saturday 6 June 2026. Nominations are currently open across seven categories to celebrate community champions, including an award for Volunteer of the Year.
- 2.22. The award celebration is being held in Dysart Park in Grantham. As part of the celebrations, all volunteers engaged with the Council will be invited and will receive a certificate of thanks to celebrate their achievements and demonstrate the Council's gratitude.

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1. The implementation of the Policy has allowed the Council to strengthen its commitment to providing a safe and welcoming environment for volunteers. It has also helped to facilitate a growth in volunteering across Council services, both in terms of the numbers of volunteers and the roles undertaken.
- 3.2. The Policy has provided a framework for the Council to set out its expectations so that it is clear what is expected of volunteers and in return what support they can expect from the Council.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. The Policy has been implemented, and the Employment Committee has requested an update be required. Therefore, no other options have been considered.

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 5.1. The report is for noting and to provide an opportunity for the Employment Committee to raise any questions in relation to the implementation of the Policy.

6. Background Papers

6.1. [Meeting of Employment Committee held on 6 September 2023](#)

6.2. [Volunteering with South Kesteven District Council Policy](#)

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**SOUTH
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COUNCIL**

Employment Committee

Wednesday, 25 March 2026

Report of Councillor Ashley Baxter -
Leader of the Council and Cabinet
Member for Finance, HR and Economic
Development

Employment Rights Act

Report Author

Fran Beckitt, Head of Service – Human Resources and Organisational Development

 fran.beckitt@southkesteven.gov.uk

Purpose of Report

To update on the implications of the Employment Rights Act 2025 and to seek endorsement of policy changes to ensure the Council remains legally compliant.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- 1. Approve the proposed amendments to the Council's Probation Policy and Paternity Policy to ensure alignment with forthcoming legislative changes and best practice.**
- 2. Note the update provided on the Employment Rights Act and the ongoing work to review and update relevant policies, plans and procedures.**

Decision Information

Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?	No
What are the relevant corporate priorities?	Effective council
Which wards are impacted?	All Wards

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance and Procurement

- 1.1 There are no significant financial implications arising from the proposed changes to the Paternity and Probation policies. The changes primarily ensure that the Council's policies remain compliant with current and upcoming legislation. There may be some minor financial impact if colleagues access enhanced entitlements of 'Bereaved partners' paternity leave', however in the unfortunate events that this is required, the costs would be met within existing budgets. Similarly, Paternity is now a Day One right and this may increase the number of employee taking paternity leave slightly, but this would also be met within existing budgets.

Completed by: Richard Wyles (Deputy Chief Executive and S151 Officer)

Legal and Governance

- 1.2 The proposed policy updates ensure the Council remains compliant with forthcoming employment legislation. Regular review of HR Policies forms part of the good governance and supports the Council in maintaining fair, transparent and legally compliant employment practices. The updates will help ensure that managers and employees are supported by clear and consistent policies that reflect statutory rights and best practice.

Completed by: Graham Kitchen (Monitoring Officer)

Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion

- 1.3 The implications of the Employment Rights Act 2025 have been considered in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion. The HR Policy Equality Impact Assessment has been updated to assess the proposed changes on employees and identified only positive impacts, supporting the Council's commitment to fairness, inclusivity and equitable treatment. The changes introduced through the Act are expected to strengthen protections for employees and promote fairer employment practices.

Completed by: Fran Beckitt (Head of HR)

2. Background

- 2.1 The Employment Rights Act 2025 presents a significant programme of reform to UK employment law and introduces a number of changes that will be implemented on a phased basis between April 2026 and 2027.
- 2.2 The Bill was given Royal Assent on 18 December 2025 and amends a number of existing employment rights.
- 2.3 In February 2026, the government published additional guidance to ‘Implementing the Employment Rights Bill: our roadmap for delivering change and timeline update’.
- 2.4 This report provides an overview of the key provisions of the Act that are relevant to SKDC. It highlights changes that will require amendments to the Council’s policies and procedures to ensure continued legal compliance.

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1 The table below summarises the new Employment Laws and the implications for the Council.

Legal Change Date	Topic	Explanation	Impact to SKDC	SKDC Actions
No earlier than Oct 26	Employment Tribunal (ET) changes	Extended time limits for bringing tribunal claims from three to six months.	Potentially more claims but also more time to resolve disputes prior to ET claims.	Review file retention; with ET backlogs and longer time limits, there is a need to ensure emails/files are still available if required for an ET.
January 2027	Unfair dismissal	Qualifying period for unfair dismissal protection has reduced from 2 years to 6 months service.	Council dismissal processes are robust but this may increase claims. Therefore changes are proposed to the Probation Policy to reduce probation period.	Amendment to Probation Policy timescales. Appendix 1 details the amendments. 3 months’ probation period (with 6-week review and extension if required). Focus on ensuring recruitment, induction and performance management is correct to minimise risk.
Expected Jan 27	Unfair dismissal	Removal of cap on compensatory awards for unfair dismissal.	Current cap is the lower of:	Most likely to benefit very high earners. Limited potential impact on SKDC.

			employee's 52 weeks' gross pay or £118,223	
6 April 2026	Family Friendly	The reform removes the restriction on taking paternity leave after shared parental leave.	Not currently restricted in SKDC policy but timing not referenced.	Amendment to current policy adding that Paternity Leave can be taken before or after Shared Parental Leave. See Appendix 2 for amended Paternity Policy amendments.
		Introduction of bereaved partners' paternity leave (52 weeks) if mother or primary adopter dies within a year. Not currently linked to pay.	Not currently in SKDC policy.	'Bereaved partners' paternity leave' of up to 52 weeks. It is proposed the pay mirrors maternity/adoption/shared parental leave.
		Paternity is a Day One right.	Currently a 26 week qualifying period for Paternity.	Amendment to Paternity Policy to give new starters a Day One right to Paternity Leave. Appendix 2 details the Paternity Policy amendments.
Voluntary April 2026 and compulsory in 2027	Menopause Actions Plans	Regulations for employers with 250+ employees to publish 'Menopause Action Plans' as part of an Equality Action Plan. There will be penalties for not doing so.	SKDC currently has a published Equality Action Plan which contains information on menopause support. This will need to be published as a specific Action Plan.	From 2026, Menopause Action Plan to be published.
2027	Change to collective consultation trigger	Duty to consult will be extended to apply where an employer proposes 20 or more redundancies across locations (currently one establishment). 6 April 2026 – Current penalty for failing to consult is a max of 90 days gross pay and this will double to 180 days (per person).	Continue lawful consultations relating to redundancies and be aware of new multi-site regulations.	Managers to be made aware of new requirements for consultation.

April 2026	Fair Worker Agency	<p>The 'Fair Worker Agency' is expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforce minimum wage laws • Tackle modern slavery and labour exploitation • Ensure compliance with holiday pay and statutory pay rules • Regulate certain employment agencies and umbrella companies • Take action against employers who breach labour laws 	Not expected to cause significant operational change but reinforces the need to ensure HR policies, payroll processes and arrangements remain fully compliant with legislation.	The Council needs to remain up-to-date with any guidance, enforcement priorities and regulatory requirements.
2027	Flexible Working	<p>The 8 reasons for rejecting the request remain unchanged.</p> <p>New procedure for demonstrating rejections are reasonable will be published.</p>	<p>Awaiting new procedure.</p> <p>SKDC to continue to manage requests well.</p>	
April 2026	Sexual Harassment	Requires employers to take 'all reasonable steps' to prevent sexual harassment (includes third party harassment).	SKDC has a Sexual Harassment action plan and training has taken place.	Review of Sexual Harassment Action plan in line with new legislation.
		<p>Whistleblowing Protection for Sexual Harassment - Extends protection for whistleblowers to include disclosures relating to sexual harassment.</p> <p>NDA's will not prevent employees discussing allegations of</p>	If someone raises sexual harassment concerns and they are later dismissed or subjected to detriment, they may bring an automatic unfair dismissal/detriment claim with uncapped compensation.	Amendment to the Whistleblowing policy to list sexual harassment as a protected disclosure. This is scheduled for presentation to Governance and Audit Committee in June 2026.

		discrimination or harassment.		
Delayed until 2027	Zero-hour contract	Right to be offered guaranteed hours, based on the number of hours worked in a previous period. Right to reasonable notice of shifts.	SKDC currently have 60 employees on zero-hour contracts. Limited information has been provided so far from the Government - consultation is required, but no current live consultation is open.	A full review of casual contracts at SKDC is taking place. When further regulations are published, SKDC must ensure contracts and working arrangements remain compliant and reflect the anticipated requirements regarding predictable work patterns.
April/October 2026	Trade Unions (TU) rights	Simplified requirements on TUs, including industrial action (Feb 2026)	Advance notice of industrial action reduces from 14 days to 10 days. Industrial action mandates will last 12 months instead of 6. Unions will only need more votes in support of IA than against.	To be aware of changes.
		Duty to inform workers of their right to join a TU	This is already included in induction information and on HR Hub.	Potential addition to statement of particulars.
		New rights and protections for TU reps.	Further protections against dismissals for doing work related to TU activities.	To be aware of Trade Union rights.
		Extending protection against detriments for taking industrial actions. Dismissal for taking part in industrial action will become automatically unfair. (Feb 26)	SKDC is unlikely to be impacted by the changes to strike legislation.	SKDC to be aware of protections for those taking part in Industrial Action.
Voluntary April 2026, compulsory in 2027	Pay Gap Reporting	Required gender pay gap action plans i.e. how the gap will be closed.	Limited impact at present as SKDC does not have a Gender Pay Gap.	Stay up to date with changing legislation including potential pay gap reporting for Ethnicity and Disability. Gap.
6 th April 2026	Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) Reform	Statutory sick pay from first day of absence (currently fourth day)	Enhanced sick pay terms are already paid from first day of absence.	No actions as enhanced sick pay already in place.

		Lower earnings limit will be removed.		
2027	'Fire and rehire' automatic unfair dismissal	'Fire and rehire' gives automatic unfair dismissal. No statutory cap on compensation	Limited use in the Council but will no longer be a lawful 'last resort'. Must consult to manage contractual change or we would face significant legal and financial exposure.	To be aware of.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 **No change to current policies or practices.** This option was discounted as the Council must ensure its employment policies remain aligned with the requirements of the Employment Rights Act 2025 and associated employment law.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Consultation with the Trade Union representatives has taken place. They are in support of the proposed changes.

6. Appendices

- 6.1 Appendix 1 – Amended Probation Policy
6.2 Appendix 2 – Amended Paternity Policy

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Probation Policy

This policy details the probationary period at South Kesteven District Council which ensures a fair and supportive process with consistent application.

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Relevant forms and letters:

- [Probation Assessment Form](#)
- [New Starter Guidance](#)
- [Probation Letter Templates](#)

Related policies:

- [Recruitment Policy](#)

If you have any questions about this policy or require any further support, please contact the HR team by emailing hr@southkesteven.gov.uk

For independent support, our Employee Assistant Support service offer a completely confidential helpline for employees. Call 0800 716 017 to receive support for mental health, legal signposting, practical help, manager coaching and much more.

1.0 Policy Statement

The Council recognises that a supportive and developmental probation process is important.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that new employees are supported and assessed during their probationary period and that any issues or concerns are addressed in a timely and constructive manner. The policy also aims to reinforce our culture of continuous learning and development within the council.

2.0 Scope

Newly appointed employees to the Council will have a probationary period which will usually **last 3 months**. This policy applies to all new employees including full and part time colleagues, those on permanent and fixed term contracts and regardless of seniority within the Council.

This policy does not apply to employees who are new to the Council as a result of a TUPE transfer or those on casual contracts.

3.0 Guiding Principles

- The probationary period is a two-way process that involves regular communication, feedback and support between the manager and the employee.
- The Council is committed to ensuring newly hired employees undergo a thorough, informative and meaningful induction which is tailored to their specific role. This probation policy operates in conjunction with the induction process.
- Line managers will conduct regular 'check-ins' or 'one-to-one' meetings with new starters as an important support mechanism.
- The probation period ensures newly appointed colleagues work with their manager so all reasonable development needs are identified and addressed. It also ensures the new employee is capable of carrying out the role to which they have been appointed.
- Line managers are encouraged to address any concerns with a new employee promptly, without waiting for a scheduled one-to-one or probation review meeting.
- The Council emphasise fairness and transparency throughout the probation period.

4.0 Probation Review Meetings

Line Managers will hold regular meetings with new employees – depending on the role, these could be 'check-ins' or more formal one-to-one meetings. These are an opportunity for line managers to provide feedback and check new employees are receiving sufficient support and guidance.

Line Managers will also hold a formal review around the 6 week service mark and three months' service.

In cases where employees have a disability or when a disability becomes apparent, the line manager will consider reasonable adjustments with the employee and implement where appropriate. It may also be useful to refer to Occupational Health for guidance and/or complete a wellbeing plan.

4.1 Six Week Review Meeting

During the probationary period, employees at the Council will undergo a review to assess their performance, adaptability and alignment with the Council's values and objectives. This review serves as an important checkpoint for both the employee and the Council to evaluate mutual expectations and contributions.

Managers will conduct an assessment, considering factors such as job proficiency, work behaviours and adherence to the Council's policies. Feedback from both parties will be sought to ensure a transparent and constructive dialogue, facilitating adjustments if necessary. This process aims to support employees in their professional growth while allowing the council to make informed decisions regarding the continuation of employment beyond the probationary period.

4.2 Three Month Review Meeting

Before the end of a new starters probationary period, the line manager will meet with the employee to conduct a review of performance, progress and suitability for the role. This meeting is a two-way discussion between the employee and their manager and is an opportunity to ensure clarity regarding the role, provide constructive feedback and discuss developmental plans.

The outcome of this meeting will be a decision to:

- Confirm the employee's permanent appointment or;
- Extend the probationary period (please see section 4.3), or;
- Invite the employee to a probationary hearing if the line manager considers that further support or training is unlikely to lead to a satisfactory standard of performance.

5.0 Extending the Probation Period

Under certain circumstances, the probation period may be extended beyond the three months. An extension would usually be for an additional four weeks. This could be (but is not limited to) the following reasons:

- Inability to assess performance due to the employee's absence from the workplace for an extended period.
- Concerns about performance along with evidence to suggest performance is likely to improve with an extension to the probation period.

Shortly before the end of any agreed period of extension, the line manager will meet with the employee to conduct a final review of performance. The outcome of this meeting will be a decision to:

- Confirm the employee's permanent appointment, or;
- Invite the employee to a probation hearing

By exceptional circumstances, the probation period may be further extended where there is strong justification to do so.

6.0 Probation Hearing

A probation hearing is most likely to occur following a three-month review or a review after an extension to the probation period. However, they can be held at any time within the probation period where there is justification to do so.

Employees invited to a probation hearing will be given at least 48 hours written notice and may be accompanied to the probation meeting if they wish (usually by a Trade Union representative or work colleague). An HR representative will also be present at this meeting.

The hearing serves as a platform for open communication and consideration of alternatives to dismissal.

If the employee does not attend the probation hearing, the hearing may either proceed in their absence or be adjourned taking into consideration the reasons for their non-attendance.

Where a manager decides to terminate employment, the employee would usually be dismissed with notice, unless an allegation of gross misconduct is upheld where dismissal without notice may occur. The employee will be informed of the outcome either at the probation hearing, or within 5 working days after the meeting.

Confirmation of the termination will be provided in writing to the employee, with the reasons explained, along with details of their right to appeal.

7.0 Dismissal Appeal

Employees who are dismissed during their probationary period have the right to appeal against the decision. To do this, employees can lodge an appeal within 5 working days of being notified of a decision by emailing HR (hr@southkesteven.gov.uk).

An appropriate Appeals Manager will be appointed, usually either the relevant Head of Service, Assistant Director or the Second Line Manager. The Appeals Manager will arrange an appeal meeting to consider the matter which would normally be held within 14 days from receipt of the appeal. Employees may, if they wish, be accompanied to the appeal meeting and this would usually be a work colleague or Trade Union representative.

The employee will be informed of the outcome of the appeal no later than 10 working days after the appeal meeting.

This is the final part of the process and there are no further rights to appeal.

For further information about this policy, please contact the HR Team at hr@southkesteven.gov.uk.

- This policy applies to all employees within South Kesteven District Council unless stated otherwise within the policy.
- This policy does not form part of contracts of employment.
- The Council reserves the right to amend this policy from time to time.

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Paternity Leave Policy

Supporting colleagues in balancing work and family commitments through our paternity leave policy.

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Relevant forms and letters:

[Notification of request to take paternity leave form](#)

Related policies:

- [Maternity Policy](#)
- [Shared Parental Leave Policy](#)

If you have any questions about this policy or require any further support, please contact the HR team by emailing hr@southkesteven.gov.uk

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1.0 Policy Statement

This Paternity Leave Policy sets out the entitlements and procedures for colleagues who wish to take paternity leave to care for their new-born or newly adopted child. It is designed to support the well-being of our employees by recognising and facilitating their roles as parents and support them in balancing work and family commitments.

2.0 Eligibility

Paternity is available to employees who:

- Have or expect to have responsibility for the child's upbringing
- Are the biological father of the child or the mother's spouse or partner, or be the child's adoptive parent where the other adoptive parent has elected to take adoption leave, or be the intended parent of a child in a surrogacy arrangement where a parental order applies.
- **Employees are eligible from Day One of employment with no minimum service requirement.**
- Give the correct notice outlined in this policy document.
- Where a stillbirth occurs after the 24th week of pregnancy, or a child is born alive at any time but only lives for a short time, employees will qualify for paternity leave if they would otherwise have been eligible to take it.
- **Where employees are taking Shared Parental Leave and are eligible for Paternity Leave, they may take the Paternity Leave before or after the SPL.**

3.0 Guiding principles

The council's paternity leave policy is based on the following guiding principles:

- SKDC aim to support the holistic well-being of our employees and acknowledge the significance of family life.
- Employees who apply for paternity leave will be supported and not subjected to a disadvantage or unfair treatment.
- We recognise and value the diversity of our workforce and the different family structures and needs of our employees.
- We aim to facilitate a smooth transition for our employees who return to work after paternity leave, and to provide them with the necessary support and resources.

4.0 Entitlement

Eligible employees are entitled to:

- Two weeks of paternity leave at full pay, which can be taken as a single block or two separate blocks of one week each.
- Choose to start their leave on any day of the week.

- Take their paternity at any point in the 52 weeks after the birth or adoption.

5.0 Notice of intention to take paternity leave

An eligible employee intending to take paternity leave should inform their line manager and HR of their intentions by the end of the 15th week before the mother’s expected week of childbirth, or as soon as is reasonably practicable. To initiate a Paternity Leave request, the employee completes the ‘*Notification of Request to take Paternity Leave*’ form which includes providing the following information:

- the mother's expected week of childbirth (or, if birth has already occurred, the date of the child's birth);
- the amount and pattern of leave they wish to take;
- when they want the period of leave to start.

To change the dates or duration of paternity leave, we would usually request at least 28 days notice in writing to the line manager and HR, unless this is not possible.

6.0 Antenatal Appointments

An employee can accompany a pregnant woman to two antenatal appointments (regardless of length of service). This will usually be unpaid leave or, if applicable to role, flexi-time can be used.

7.0 Additional Entitlements

An employee may be entitled to take Shared Parental Leave in addition to the two weeks Paternity Leave outlined in this policy. **In these cases, the Paternity Leave may be taken before or after the Shared Parental Leave.** Please see the Council’s policy on ‘Shared Parental Leave’ for more information.

7.1 Bereaved partners’ paternity leave

In the tragic event that the mother or primary adopter dies in the first year of a child’s life or adoption, an employee who is the bereaved partner is entitled to up to 52 weeks leave. This will be paid in line with the Council’s Maternity policy as follows:

Weeks 1 - 6	Weeks 7 - 18	Weeks 19 - 39	Weeks 40 - 52
90% of your average weekly earnings	Half pay, in addition to SMP	SMP or 90% of your average weekly earnings (whichever is lower)	These weeks will be unpaid

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