

Meeting of the Employment Committee

**Wednesday, 12 November 2025,
10.00 am**



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
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 earnt, a man earnt 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 agree 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.