



Employment Committee

Wednesday, 12 November 2025

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

Human Resources Policy and Handbook Review

Report Author

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Purpose of Report

To seek approval for the implementation of two updated Human Resources (HR) policies and an Employee Handbook. These policies have been reviewed to ensure clarity, legal compliance and improved accessibility for employees and managers.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended 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.

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Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?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 Effective implementation of HR policies reduces risk of expensive legal challenges.
- 1.2 From a financial perspective, there is no additional budgetary impact by the adoption of these 2 new policies and Employee Handbook.

Completed by: David Scott (Assistant Director of Finance and Deputy S151 Officer)

Legal and Governance

- 1.3 All refreshed policies have been reviewed for compliance with current employment legislation including equality, health and safety and family leave regulations. Employment Committee's approval ensures appropriate governance and consistency across the organisation.

Completed by: Alison Hall-Wright (Deputy Monitoring Officer)

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1 As part of an ongoing review, the HR team has refreshed some key people management policies. The aim is to make them more accessible to managers and employees; aligned with best practice and employment legislation.
- 2.2 A key change in approach is the replacement of a single HR handbook with standalone, topic-specific policies.
- 2.3 All policies and supporting documents are hosted on the newly launched HR Hub – a central resource for staff guidance, templates and policy access.
- 2.4 The policy review principles are as follows:

(1) Succinct policies, in a user-friendly layout.

(2) Focus on informal resolutions.
(3) Where relevant, go beyond statutory requirements to push the boundaries and enhance the culture of SKDC.
(4) Provide clear guidance and support for managers and employees on the application of policies.
(5) Ensure policies are clear, transparent and accessible
(6) Ensure consistency and fairness across all HR policies and procedures.
(7) Align policies with TeamSK values.
(8) Involve stakeholders in the policy development and review process through Union Representatives, the People Panel, CMT and Employment Committee.
(9) Update policies in line with the changing legal, regulatory and best practice frameworks (ACAS).
(10) Regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of policies.

3. Summary of Key Policy Changes

3.1. Employee Handbook (Appendix 1)

- A refreshed draft of the Employee Handbook has been developed in consultation with the Trade Union, management and staff feedback.
- Signposting policies with links to the HR Hub, rather than embedding full policy text, is designed to be more user-friendly allowing colleagues to find the information they need quickly.
- Outdated content has been replaced and new sections have been added relating to wellbeing, employee voice and inclusion, reflecting our commitment to colleague experience and engagement.

3.2 Adoption and Surrogacy Policy (Appendix 2)

- The Council recognises that adopting a child or having a baby through surrogacy is a significant life event and is committed to providing clear, supportive arrangements for colleagues.
- The refreshed Adoption and Surrogacy Policy brings these provisions together in one place, ensuring consistency with our maternity, paternity and shared parental leave policies.
- The policy sets out employee's entitlements to up to 52 weeks' adoption leave, alongside time off for adoption and surrogacy-related appointments.
- The Council provides Enhanced Adoption Pay in line with its approach to maternity pay, offering more than the statutory minimum for eligible employees. Other provisions within the policy are in line with legal requirements, including 'Keeping in Touch' (KIT) days and the timeframes of leave.
- This new policy is the same in principle to the previous version in the old Employee Handbook with no changes to entitlements, timeframes etc.

3.3 Shared Parental Leave Policy (Appendix 3)

- The policy sets 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.
- Leave may be taken by either parent, at the same time or separately, and can be requested in either continuous or discontinuous blocks, giving families flexibility to manage their arrangements.
- This is fully aligned to statutory provisions, including eligibility requirements.
- The approach reflects the Council's commitment to supporting employees with family responsibilities and aligns with related policies on maternity, paternity and adoption/surrogacy leave.
- This new policy is the same in principle to the previous version in the old Employee Handbook with no changes to entitlements, timeframes etc.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 Retaining the existing HR policies in the Employee Handbook without updates. This would risk non-compliance with current legislation and best practice.

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 5.1. Developing refreshed policies ensures alignment with the Council's values and supports a fair, modern and supportive workplace culture.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 The Trade Union are consulted throughout the development of HR policies and handbook, with feedback incorporated at various stages. Their input helps ensure the approach is fair, consistent and supports both employee and organisational needs.
- 6.2 The policy refresh has been discussed with the People Panel for their feedback and ideas.

7. Appendices

- 7.1. Appendix 1 – Employee Handbook
Appendix 2 – Adoption and Surrogacy Policy
Appendix 3 – Shared Parental Leave