

Human Resources - Phase 3 Policy Review

General Purposes Committee	28 January 2025
By	Sonia Godfrey, Head of Human Resources
Cabinet Portfolio	Cllr Rob Yates
Key Decision	For Decision
Decision classification	Unrestricted
Ward:	Thanet Wide

Purpose of the Report

To consider and adopt proposed changes to four of the council's existing HR policies and a new Probation Policy to replace the New Postholder Policy.

Recommendation(s):

To adopt the HR policies with effect from 1 February 2025.

1. Summary of Reasons

- 1.1 Human Resources (HR) policies are essential for providing clarity and structure and also to provide clear communication between the council and its employees regarding their conditions of employment.

The review of HR policies is a continuation of the HR policy review work and further supports recommendations made by the external auditor and Independent Monitoring Officer (IMO) with the aim of making HR processes more straightforward and reducing the potential for any risk to the council.

2. Background

- 2.1 The transfer of HR services back in house and the outcome of the IMO recommendations has provided an opportunity for HR to review HR policies and procedures, existing and new.

- 2.2 Extensive research has been carried out to look at best practice generally, organisational needs as well as considering the policies and procedures in place at other comparable local authorities. This has informed the content and structure of the new draft policies, all of which now follow a standard format and incorporate their own procedures within them.
- 2.5 The revised policies have been developed with due consideration for the ACAS guidelines and any relevant legislation. Consideration also from a HR perspective around the practical issues that have emerged whilst operating within existing policies and procedures.

3. Relevant Issues

- 3.1 A policy review highlighted that approximately 30 policies would benefit from being reviewed and/or developed and due to the volume and lead in times for making changes HR categorised policy development across a number of phases.
- 3.2 As part of the review, discussions were held with the Corporate Management Team (CMT) to support the agreed phases of policy review. Feedback was based upon the external auditors report and the outcomes of case reviews where it had been identified that policy constraints had caused operational difficulties and made processes overly complicated, placing the council at risk of challenge.
- 3.3 The main changes to the proposed policies are as follows:

Flexible Working Arrangements, Flexible Working Requests and Flexitime

These three policies will sit under the heading "The way we work" on TOM, the council's intranet page.

There is very little change to the Flexitime and Flexible Working Requests Policies.

The key changes to the Flexible Working Policy are the title and new key principles that have been added. These key principles were discussed at an employee focus group and have been based on feedback from both managers and other employees.

Probation Policy

This policy will replace the current New Post Holder Policy and the key proposed changes are:

- It will no longer be linked to the Disciplinary procedure
- An initial discussion should be held within the first four weeks
- No set review periods but a recommendation of a minimum of two documented meetings during this period

- Probation review hearing to determine ongoing employment

Travel and Expenses Policy

This policy will replace the existing Mileage Policy and the proposed key changes are:

- Addition of defined allowances that can be claimed for subsistence and overnight stays
- Claiming mileage for electric vehicles
- Uploading receipts to EKP when making a claim

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 HR policies provide written guidance on how a wide range of employment issues should be handled. They play a key role in supporting trust, fairness, inclusion and consistency by outlining the responsibilities of both employer and employee.
- 4.2 New and revised HR policies are introduced to reflect and comply with existing or new legislation and case law, including latest developments in effective people management and support with internal change.
- 4.3 Alternative options is not a consideration due to the risk associated with out of date and/or inadequate HR policies which could potentially expose the council due to changing laws, industry standards and organisational needs.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 The draft policies were agreed by CMT before commencing a 30 day consultation period with staff and the trade unions; Unison and GMB.
- 5.2 During the consultation period, limited feedback was received from staff and nothing raised by either unions. Feedback did not result in any significant changes to the draft policies and only some minor changes in wording were applied to the proposed policies.
- 5.3 In addition to the policy consultation, the council also consulted for a 30 day period to remove the working from home payment with effect from 1 February 2025. This payment is non-contractual and was introduced during Covid as a temporary payment to support employees in addition to the payment that could be claimed through HMRC. As the tax rules have now changed, this has become a payment that is subject to both tax and national insurance. No feedback was received from staff or unions around the removal of this payment.
- 5.4 The final versions of the policies are attached to this report for consideration and, if agreed and adopted by the General Purposes Committee these policies will go live on the 1 February 2025.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Finance and Resources

6.1.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

6.2 Legal and Constitutional

6.2.1 The Council's HR functions are not the responsibility of the executive and are a matter upon which the General Purposes Committee may decide. The Council's constitution provides that General Purposes Committee shall '*exercise any function of the Council, which by statute or regulation is a function not to be the responsibility of an authority's executive, and which is not delegated to another committee or reserved to the Council by statute, regulations or the Council's Constitution.*'

6.2.2 The changes proposed to the policies referred to in this report are consistent with employment legislation. Staff and unions have been given the opportunity to comment on the changes proposed through the period of consultation. The results of consultation are referred to in section 5 above.

6.3 Council Policies and Priorities

6.3.1 It is important that the council's HR policies are updated and reviewed as they provide clarity and consistency in managing employees, thus ensuring legal compliance and best practice, establishing fair practices and promoting a positive work culture within an organisation.

These revised policies aim to make some of the council's key employee relations processes easier to follow and understand, making Thanet District Council a good place to work and helping with the organisation's corporate aim of increasing openness and transparency.

New and revised HR policies support the recommendations made by the external auditor and the IMO, with the aim of making HR processes more straightforward and reducing the potential for any risk to the council.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities: -

- To create a thriving place
- To work efficiently for you

6.4 Risk

6.4.1 HR policies serve to define behavioural expectations, promote fairness, compliance and efficiency within an organisation.

The risks associated with failing to implement new or revised HR policies may potentially expose the council through out of date policies with changing laws, industry standards and organisational needs.

There are some policies in place at present that are overly complicated and open to interpretation thus leaving the council open to challenge when trying to implement processes to deal with employee relation issues. In addition, some of these policies have been identified by the IMO as requiring review and form part of the recommended actions.

6.5 Climate Change and Biodiversity

6.5.1 There are no climate change and biodiversity implications arising directly from this report.

7. Equality, Equity and Diversity Implications

7.1 An equality impact assessment has been completed as part of this policy review process and this report relates to the following aim of the equality duty: -

To eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.

8. Crime and Disorder Implications and Community impact

8.1 None

Annexes

Annex 1: Flexible Working Arrangements Policy

Annex 2: Flexible Working Requests Policy

Annex 3: Flexitime Policy

Annex 4: Probation Policy

Annex 5: Travel and Expenses Policy

Background Papers

None

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Report Sign Off / Signed off by / Date sent / Date signed off / Initials

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