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To: Councillor Terry (Chair)
Councillors Brock, Ennis, Mitchell and
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5 July 2023

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NOTICE OF MEETING - PERSONNEL COMMITTEE 13 JULY 2023

A meeting of the Personnel Committee will be held on Thursday, 13 July 2023 at 6.30 pm in Committee Room 1, Cvic Offices, Reading. The Agenda for the meeting is set out below.

CIVIC OFFICES EMERGENCY EVACUATION: If an alarm sounds, leave by the nearest fire exit quickly and calmly and assemble on the corner of Bridge Street and Fobney Street. You will be advised when it is safe to re-enter the building.

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Present: Councillor Terry (Chair);
Councillors Brock and Ennis (in place of Councillor Page).

Also Present: Brian Grady, Teresa Kaine and Charlie Stewart.

Apologies: Councillors Lovelock, Mitchell and Page.

13. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

14. PROPOSALS TO ENHANCE EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

The Interim Assistant Director of HR and Organisational Development submitted a report which proposed a range of additional employee benefits that would enhance the comprehensive benefits package that the Council already offered to staff. The proposals include both employee and employer funded benefits. The following documents were appended to the report:

Appendix A: Health Cash Plan summary;
Appendix B: Plan4Life Cancer Care Plan summary;
Appendix C: Wage Stream App information.

The report explained that the following optional benefits would be funded by employees and contributions would be deducted from their monthly salary. In most cases there was an option to increase the payment made in return for a higher level of cover and/or to cover family members.

Health Cash Plan – This was a way to manage the cost of essential healthcare. Employees would pay a small monthly premium and could claim cash back on a wide range of healthcare costs and other benefits including discounted gym membership, a 24/7 counselling and information helpline, private prescriptions. A table summarising the levels of cover available and costs to the employee was set out at Appendix A to the report.

CARE4LIFE Insurance Top Up Plan - The Care4 Life Insurance Top Up Plan, was designed to help dependents by paying a lump sum in the event that an insured person died during the period of cover. An employee could insure themselves under personal cover or cover their spouse/partner as well under couple cover.

PLAN4LIFE Cancer Care Plan - This was an insurance policy that would provide a lump sum for the insured person if they were diagnosed with cancer. There were different levels of cover available and summary of the scheme benefits was provided at Appendix B to the report.

The report also set out details of the Wage Stream App which would be funded by the Council and available to all employees. This would give employees the opportunity to take control of their finances. The App gave access to budget tracking, streaming (early access to a small proportion of their earned wage at any time of the month to help absorb any financial shocks during the month), financial coaching and a saving through salary scheme. There was a one-off set up cost to create the interface with the

Council's HR system, iTrent and the cost to the Council for 1700 employees would be £1,250 per month (including 1-2-1 personal financial coaching).

The report also proposed that the maximum leave entitlement for Chief Officers with 10 years' service be increased to 33 days, to ensure continued parity with staff on grades 1-10 whose maximum leave entitlement would also increase to 33 days. No changes were proposed for Chief Officers with less service. Chief Officers were not entitled to time off in lieu or flex-leave in the same way that staff at grades 1-10 were, so this represented the maximum amount of leave they could take.

Resolved:

    (1) **That the three new employee-funded benefits (Health Cash Plan, Plan4Life Cancer Care Plan and Care4Life Insurance Top Up Plan) be implemented to enhance the comprehensive offering already provided;**

    (2) **That the Wage Stream App, be implemented to give employees the opportunity to take control of their finances with visibility and flexible pay; and build skills for long-term financial wellbeing;**

    (3) **That the maximum annual leave entitlement for Chief Officers be increased to 33 days each year (pro rata for part-time staff) from 1 April 2023, to ensure continued parity with staff covered by NJC for Local Government Services terms and conditions, following an increase in their leave entitlement resulting from the 2022 national pay agreement.**

15. UPDATE ON APPRENTICESHIPS, WORK EXPERIENCE AND MENTORING PROGRAMMES

The Interim Assistant Director of HR and Organisational Development submitted a report which provided an update on activity being undertaken as part of the Team Reading Programme to support young people in the Borough to prepare for work and see the Council as a potential future employer, whilst also providing opportunities to upskill Council employees. The report covered four areas Apprenticeships, a corporate work experience programme, mentoring and a proposal that the Council signed the Social Mobility Pledge. The following documents were attached to the report:

Appendix A - Apprenticeship details as at August 2022;
Appendix B - Apprenticeship three-year Strategy;
Appendix C - 2021/22 Apprenticeship Strategy Performance Update;
Appendix D - Proposed FTE target for each service area and current apprentice numbers.

The report explained that apprenticeships could support the Council's People Strategy by attracting, recruiting and retaining the best staff and by developing skills, knowledge, competencies and talent so that staff could reach their full potential and make a maximum contribution. Appendix A provided a breakdown showing the number of apprentices by directorate/team. The report also gave an update on the Council's three-year Apprenticeship Strategy, attached at Appendix B. Appendix C to the report showed the agreed success measures for the Apprenticeship Strategy and progress against these in Year 1 and Year 2.

The report explained that there were challenges with recruitment and retention of apprentices which would be addressed as follows:

- Increasing the pay for apprentices to the Living Wage Foundation hourly rate which was currently £9.90 per hour, rising to £10.90 per hour on 1 April 2023;
- Each Assistant/Deputy/Director would be set a target to ensure that 2.3% of posts in their service area were employed as apprentices, excluding any existing staff already undertaking an apprenticeship. This equated to 35 apprentice posts (the Council currently had 20). A breakdown showing the FTE target for each service area and current apprentice numbers was included in Appendix D.
- Funding for the 15 new apprentice posts would be created by top-slicing a percentage of existing salary budgets in order to create funding for each service area to appoint the minimum number of apprentices shown in Appendix D.
- Raising managers' awareness of the benefits of employing apprentices, and the commitment required of both them and their apprentice, through manager's briefings, seminars, guidance notes etc.
- Encouraging cross working between departments if teams do not feel they had capacity to train an apprentice over the full duration of the course.
- The Council would be allowed to advertise some apprenticeship posts in particular areas to encourage applications, but not discriminate against others that applied from outside those areas.

The report also stated that the HR and Organisational Development team was working with managers across the Council to create a new corporate work experience programme, initially for students in Years 10 and 11 which aimed to show the wide range of career opportunities available, manage work experience placements more efficiently, support more students and provide a more impactful experience aligned to schools' needs. The work experience programme would be delivered to students over three separate weeks in the calendar year, allowing teams plenty of notice to plan for placement support. The new programme had been piloted in February 2023.

The report explained that the Team Reading Programme for 2022/23 included an objective to explore opportunities for RBC managers to mentor young people in the Borough, prioritising secondary schools for young people from the lower income or least affluent areas of the Borough. Ten organisations had been approached for details about their mentoring programmes, two of which (Starting Point and Chapter 2 Reading) would be supported initially. Staff would be given the opportunity to volunteer to support these schemes and the Council's existing Volunteering Policy would be reviewed to ensure that it could accommodate the volunteering commitment required by these mentoring programmes.

Finally, the report explained that the Social Mobility Pledge was a coalition of businesses and universities that encouraged organisations to be a force for good by putting social mobility at the heart of their purpose and committing to outreach, access and recruitment.   Organisations signing the pledge were required to make three commitments:

Outreach   We will work to reach out to schools or colleges to provide coaching through quality careers advice, enrichment experience and mentoring to people from disadvantaged backgrounds or circumstances;

Access   We will work to provide structured work experience and apprenticeship opportunities to people from disadvantaged backgrounds or circumstances;

Recruitment We will work to adopt open employee recruitment practices which promote a level playing field for people from disadvantaged backgrounds or circumstances.

The Outreach and Access commitments were covered by the proposals in this report whilst the Recruitment commitment was covered through work with Job Centre Plus and attendance at local job fairs at least once every quarter. The report recommended that the Council signed the pledge to demonstrate its commitment to social mobility.

Grace Andrews and Maximilian Kalyuzhnov, members of the Youth Parliament, attended the meeting and asked questions of the Committee.

Resolved

(1)   **That an increase in the hourly pay rate for apprentices, for example to at least the Living Wage Foundation rate (currently £9.90 per hour, increasing to £10.90 per hour from 1 April 2023), in line with the Council's commitment to be a Living Wage Foundation employer be approved;**

(2)   **That each service area be required to ensure that at least 2.3% of their full-time equivalent posts were employed as apprentices. This excluded current staff who were upskilling through an apprenticeship. This would create at least 15 new apprentice posts at the Council by March 2024;**

(3)   **That the Council be able to advertise some apprenticeship posts to certain groups in line with social inclusion objectives, such as care-leavers, those living in the lower income or least affluent areas of the Borough and those with protected characteristics;**

(4)   **That the Council's new approach to work experience which would commence with a number of pilot programmes during 2023 be noted;**

(5)   **That Council staff be offered the opportunity to volunteer as part of a number of mentoring programmes for young people in the Borough;**

(6)   **That the Council to commit to the Social Mobility Pledge.**

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 7.02pm).

PROCEEDINGS OF THE LOCAL JOINT FORUM – 15 JUNE 2023

Present:

Councillors Brock and Ennis

K Magee	Unite
A McNamara	National Education Union (NEU)
M Palfrey (In the Chair for items 3 onwards)	Unison
Ian Newnham	Unite
Rob Stirling	GMB
Kathryn Cook	Assistant Director of HR and Organisational Development
Julie Quarmby	Committee Services
Apologies:	Councillors Mitchell and Terry

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Councillor Terry had been appointed to serve as Chair at the Annual General Meeting of the Council on 24 May 2023 (Minute 11 refers).

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Miriam Palfrey was appointed to serve as Vice-Chair of the Forum for the Municipal Year 2023/2024.

3. PROCEEDINGS OF THE LOCAL JOINT FORUM MEETING HELD ON 24 FEBRUARY 2022

The proceedings of the Local Joint Forum meeting held on 11 October 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION STRATEGY AND THE WHOLE COUNCIL ENGAGEMENT EXERCISE

Kathryn Cook Assistant Director HR & OD, submitted a report that set out details of the whole Council engagement exercise that would be used to inform the Council's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Strategy and Plan, which was due to be submitted to Personnel Committee on 16 November 2023.

The report explained that, further to a motion agreed at Council on 20 October 2020, (Minute 7 refers) attached to the report at Appendix 1, the Council had been working to develop a formal EDI Strategy setting out the Council's aims and ambitions for becoming a more diverse and inclusive organisation, the priorities for achieving this and how progress and success would be measured. Whilst the initial focus of the EDI was on race, the scope would encompass all inequalities with a focus on protected characteristics.

The report noted that achievements to date included a steady increase in the ethnic diversity of staff, a more representative senior leadership team (RSM Group) and work

to embed the actions. The report also set out a timetable for the development of the Strategy. In order to fully develop the Council's ambition in a meaningful way to improve EDI, it would be necessary to involve as many people as possible across the organisation in the development of the EDI, including teams, staff groups, ambassadors, trades unions etc in a Whole Council engagement exercise. This would be a structured engagement exercise, including the Big Conversation, through multiple channels with multiple stakeholders focussing on the following core questions:

- What do you think our equality, diversity and inclusion priorities should be?
- How do you want the Council to *feel* in the future?
- What would help your voice to be better heard?

Whilst this exercise would initially be limited to RBC staff, Kathryn Cook explained that officers were talking to Brighter Futures for Children about engaging their staff, including those working in schools.

The responses would then be analysed to identify areas of focus and external consultancy support would be used to enable development of the EDI Strategy. The EDI Strategy would have implications for a range of HR policies and processes requiring both a thorough review of these areas and a conscious decision about how the EDI Strategy would be supported going forward.

The Forum discussed the report and noted that some teams were notoriously difficult to engage with, especially those that worked out of doors. Kathryn Cook explained the measures that would be put in place to try to maximise engagement and explained that the Trades Unions would be key to achieving this.

AGREED –

    (1)   **That the process for the development of the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy and Plan including a whole Council engagement exercise be noted;**

    (2)   **That the submission of the EDI Strategy and Plan to the Personnel Committee meeting to be held on 16 November 2023 be noted.**

5.   HR POLICY CHANGES UPDATE

Kathryn Cook Assistant Director HR & OD, reported that the Domestic Violence and Smoking Policies would be submitted to Personnel Committee on 13 July 2023. Further work was needed on the Employment Break Policy and Flexible Workstyles Framework before they were submitted to the appropriate Personnel Committee meeting.

AGREED: That the position be noted.

6.   ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Alison McNamara, NEU, suggested that the Local Joint Forum receive the proceedings of the Corporate Health & Safety Group and the Trades Unions Group, as information items.

AGREED: **That the proceedings of the Corporate Health & Safety Group and the Trades Unions Group be added to the agenda as standing information items.**

(The meeting opened at 5.00 pm and closed at 5.30 pm).

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Personnel Committee

13 July 2023

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Title	Review of the Council's Employment Policies
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Report author	Kathryn Cook – Assistant Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development
Lead Councillor	Liz Terry – Lead Councillor for Corporate Services and Resources
Corporate priority	Not applicable, but still requires a decision
Recommendations	That Personnel Committee approve the following revised HR policies (detailed in Appendices A to D of this report): Domestic Violence Policy Employment Break Policy Smoking at Work Policy Flexible Workstyles Framework

1. Executive Summary

1.1. A review of the Council's employment policy framework is underway which aims to ensure that all employment policies are clear, easy to understand, up to date and reviewed regularly. This report presents 4 policies which have been reviewed and jointly agreed with the Joint Trade Unions. The Domestic Violence Policy, Employment Break Policy and Smoking at Work Policy are all new. The Flexible Workstyles Framework has been updated to reflect the agile working principles.

2. Policy Context

2.1 Good employment policies should support a culture based on trust, fairness and inclusion. They can also speed the decision-making process by ensuring that clear guidance is readily available to cover a range of employment issues. Further, they can assist in avoiding involvement with employment tribunal claims by providing guidance for managers that reflects accurately current employment law and good practice. It is therefore important that employment policies are clear, easy to understand, up to date and reviewed regularly.

2.2 ACAS Codes of Practice give authoritative advice in key areas of employment practice. A failure to follow the Code does not, in itself, make a person or organisation liable to proceedings. However, employment tribunals will take the Code into account when considering relevant cases. Tribunals will also be able to adjust any awards made in relevant cases by up to 25% for unreasonable failure to comply with any provision of the Code (by an employer or an employee).

3. Policies Covered Under This Review

3.1 All employment policies have now been reviewed by the HR and Organisational Development team and presented for approval to Personnel Committee, following consultation and negotiation with the Joint Trade Unions. The policies included in this report are:

- Domestic Violence Policy
- Employment Break Policy
- Smoking at Work Policy
- Flexible Workstyles Framework

3.2 Principles used for conducting this review

3.2.1 The policies have been written with the following principles in mind:

1. They must reflect current employment law and the ACAS Codes of Practice and/or guidance where relevant.
2. They must be easy to understand and written in plain English
3. They should be concise. Any information which is not germane to the operation of the policy has been removed. For example, management guidance notes are not included in the policies, but available separately.
4. There should be a consistency of approach across related policies (e.g. same period of notice given to employees to attend formal meetings where relevant)
5. They should use gender neutral language

3.2.2 All the Council's employment policies are reviewed every two years or sooner if legislation requires it.

3.3 KEY ISSUES AND CHANGES PROPOSED

3.3.1 The table below sets out in summary terms for each of the new and revised policies the issues which have been addressed together with additional key changes agreed with the Joint Trade Unions. Once the policy review is complete, hyperlinks will be added to the policies where they are cross-referenced with other policies.

Issues to be addressed
Domestic Violence Policy (A)
This is a new policy that has been developed as part of our commitment to support our workforce's health and wellbeing at work. It covers the internal and external support available to individuals experiencing domestic abuse, including appointing a member of staff as a nominated point of contact, special leave provisions and signposting to external sources of advice and help.
Employment Break Policy (B)
This is a new policy that has been developed to provide the basis for a clear understanding of the Employment Break Scheme for the benefit of both the organisation and the employee who wishes to have a planned and agreed break from the workplace.
Smoking at Work Policy (C)

> We recognise that the health, safety and welfare of employees, Councillors, sub-contractors and anyone else directly affected by our organisation's operations are of prime importance. We have therefore developed this new dedicated smoking policy which conforms to the requirements of the smoke-free legislation.

Flexible Workstyle Framework (D)

This policy was originally drafted in 2021, but the agile working principles have now been updated to reflect the aim of the Council's approach to Flexible Working.

3.4. PROCESS FOR AGREEING THE NEW AND REVISED POLICIES

3.4.1 The process for agreeing the policies with the joint trade unions has been as follows:

12 May 2023	Policies were uploaded to a SharePoint folder for union representatives to review, requesting comments to be added by 25 May 2023.
26 May 2023	First meeting with Trade Unions to discuss policies.
1 June 2023	Revised policies were issued to Trade Unions incorporating feedback.
9 June 2023	Second meeting with Trade Unions to agree policies.

3.4.2 A communications plan is in place to communicate the revised policies to managers and employees. This will include:

- News items on the intranet and iTrent Employee Self Service (the HR system used by all staff to book leave, submit mileage claims etc) to highlight the revised policies and who to speak to about any queries (i.e. their line manager or HR)

- Highlighted in the weekly email to all staff

- Strategic HR and OD Business Partners/HR Advisers highlight the revised policies and their implications (for staff and managers) when they attend department management team meetings and 1-1 meetings with managers.

- An email from HR to all line managers to highlight the new policies and explain the changes, and to ask that they discuss them with their staff in

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

4.1 The new and revised HR policies help to ensure that the Council can meet its Corporate Plan priority, specifically ensuring that the Council is fit for the future.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

5.1 There are no environmental or climate change implications

6. Community Engagement

6.1 The Joint Trade Unions have been consulted on the revised policies.

7. Equality Implications

7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

7.2 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been carried out (see Appendix E) and has found no differential impact on any groups with protected characteristics. Some positive impacts have been identified.

8. Legal Implications

8.1 Certain employment policies and procedures are specifically needed to comply with legal requirements, for example, a written health and safety policy. Even where a policy or procedure is not specifically required by law, employers often find it helpful to have a policy in place to provide clear guidance that reflects the legal framework for handling the issue in question and it also helps employees to be clear about the organisation's stance on a particular subject. The proposed policies presented in this review reflect current employment law and ACAS Codes of Practice and/or guidance where relevant.

8.2 The Council's Constitution confirms that Personnel Committee is responsible for determining the terms and conditions on which staff hold office. The proposed policies will therefore be presented to Personnel Committee for approval, following consultation and negotiation with the trade unions.

9. Financial Implications

9.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

10. Background Papers

10.1. There are none.

Appendices

The report includes the following appendices:

Appendix A: Domestic Violence Policy
Appendix B: Employment Break Policy
Appendix C: Smoking at Work Policy
Appendix D: Flexible Workstyles Framework
Appendix E: EIA

Domestic Violence Policy

June 2023

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Document History	
Version	1.1 (see below)
Status	Draft
Date	June 2023
Target audience	All employees of Reading Borough Council with the exception of Schools-based staff for whom alternative procedures apply
Ratification	None
Author	HR Employment Services Team

Version control	Reviewers
Version 1.0	Initial draft –
Version 1.1	Final version agreed with Joint Trade Unions on DATE and approved by Personnel Committee on DATE.

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1 Introduction

We have developed this policy as part of our commitment to support our workforce's health and wellbeing at work.

It covers the internal and external support available to individuals experiencing domestic abuse, including appointing a member of staff as a nominated point of contact, special leave provisions and signposting to external sources of advice and help.

This policy applies to anyone working for us. This includes employees, workers, contractors, volunteers, interns and apprentices.

2 The aim of this policy

The purpose of this policy is to:

- support individuals experiencing domestic abuse;

- enable individuals experiencing domestic abuse to remain productive and at work;

- aid managers seeking to help team members experiencing domestic abuse;

- assist colleagues of those experiencing domestic abuse; and

- reinforce our objectives as a socially responsible organisation by demonstrating that we value, and are prepared to support, staff during difficult periods.

3 What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is abusive behaviour by one person to another, where they are both aged 16 or over and they are personally connected. The abusive behaviour can be a single incident or a course of conduct.

Behaviour is abusive if it consists of any of the following:

- physical or sexual abuse;

- violent or threatening behaviour;

- controlling or coercive behaviour;

- economic abuse; or

- psychological, emotional or other abuse.

4 Internal support

To support individuals who experience domestic abuse, we will:

- nominate an appointed Senior HR Advisor to act as a confidential first point of contact;

- offer access to counselling, and publicise the availability of this support regularly through ongoing health and wellbeing initiatives;

- offer access to counselling and other support to individuals perpetrating domestic abuse who seek help from us; and

- undertake to raise workplace awareness of domestic abuse issues through a programme of regular information initiatives.

5 External support

We will signpost external sources of help and support, including information on:

- Respect, which provides practical information and advice on domestic abuse for perpetrators, the abused, health and social care professionals, and family and friends;

- the National Domestic Abuse Helpline, which provides advice for those experiencing domestic abuse;

- Business in the Community's domestic abuse toolkit which helps ensures all employees feel supported and empowered by their workplace to deal with domestic abuse; and

- government advice and guidance for those who are experiencing, or feel at risk of, domestic abuse.

6 Your line managers' role

Line managers have a crucial role to play in enabling individuals experiencing domestic abuse to seek help. We provide training for all managers in handling sensitive issues (including domestic abuse), raising awareness of domestic abuse in teams, and operating the procedures for handling instances of domestic abuse.

Your role as a manager is not to deal with the abuse itself but to address the workplace effects of domestic abuse by making it clear to employees that they will be supported, making them aware of the workplace policy, outlining what help is available, and signposting them to professional sources of support.

The role of your line manager is to:

- identify individuals experiencing difficulties as a result of domestic abuse (for example, using regular performance appraisal, or by fostering an open management culture that enables team members to disclose sensitive issues);

- provide support in the first instance, including specific advice on the options available, but also recognise the limitations of their role (referring to professional counsellors or experts where necessary); further information of support organisations can be found at the end of this policy.

- protect confidentiality in all instances and should not be discussed with anyone unless consent has been given (excepting the requirements of child protection);

- refer individuals to the appropriate internal or external source of help and support, for example the organisation's confidential point of contact or external agency;

- ensure that the safety of all individuals in the team is protected; and

- enable the affected individual to remain productive and at work during a difficult period in their domestic life, for example by using the organisation's special leave policies and procedures.

7 Attendance

We recognise that those experiencing domestic abuse may need to be absent from work at times and will assist them by using our special leave policies.

Individual absences can be discussed and agreed between the individual and the line manager, with HR support where appropriate.

Absences will not be counted towards sickness reviews.

8 Security and safety

We will protect the safety and security of all staff at work, including those affected by domestic abuse and their colleagues.

individuals need to tell us that they are at risk from domestic abuse to receive this protection and we will seek to enable them to make this disclosure by fostering a supportive and open management culture.

9 Should the victim/survivor and the perpetrator both work at Reading Borough Council

In cases where both the victim/survivor and the perpetrator of domestic abuse work in the organisation, Reading Borough Council will take appropriate action.

Action may also need to be taken to minimise the potential for the perpetrator to use their position or work resources to find out details about the whereabouts of the victim/survivor. This may include a change of duties for one or both employees or withdrawing the perpetrator's access to certain computer programmes or offices.

However, it is also recognised that in certain circumstances, those experiencing and perpetrating domestic abuse in a relationship may choose to seek solutions jointly, and in such situations appropriate support should be given.

10 Data protection

When an individual experiences domestic abuse and we are providing support, we will process any personal data collected in accordance with our Data Protection Policy. Data collected from the point at which we become aware of the issue is held securely and accessed by, and disclosed to, individuals only for the purposes of providing the necessary support.

11 Resources

If you are concerned for your own or someone else's immediate safety, ring the police on 999.

RESPECT	Working to end Domestic Abuse. We lead on the development of safe, effective work with perpetrators, male victims and young people using violence in their close relationships	www.Respect.Net.UK
REFUGE	Are you experiencing Domestic Abuse? You are NOT alone. The Freephone 24-hour Domestic Abuse Helpline – **0800 2000 247**	www.Nationaladhelpline.org.uk
GOV.UK	Information to find help and advice if you or someone you know is a victim of Domestic Abuse	https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-abuse-how-to-get-help
WOMEN'S AID	I need help – information and support on Domestic Abuse. • Chat • Email • Survivors Handbook • Forum	I need help - information and support on domestic abuse (womensaid.org.uk)
GALOP	Our team has decades of experience in supporting	Galop - the LGBT+ anti-abuse charity

	LGBT+ people who are victims of domestic abuse, sexual violence, hate crime, so-called conversion therapies, honour-based abuse, forced marriage, and other forms of abuse.	
RESPECT – MEN'S HELPLINE	The helpline for male victims of Domestic Abuse Talk it over Freephone 24-hour 0808 8010327	Domestic Abuse Helpline for Men | Men's Advice Line UK (mensadviceline.org.uk)
The Prince's Responsible Business Network	Domestic Abuse tool kit for employer	Domestic Abuse: a toolkit for employers - Guide For Employers (bitc.org.uk)

You can also contact:

0808 802 1414 – Northern Ireland Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline
0800 027 1234 – Scottish Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline
0808 801 0800 – Live Fear Free (Wales)

Employment Break Policy

June 2023

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Document History	
Version	1.0
Status	Reviewed and agreed by Trade Unions
Date	June 2023
Target audience	All employees of Reading Borough Council with the exception of schools-based staff for whom alternative procedures apply
Ratification	None
Author	HR Advisory Team

Version control	Reviewers
Version 1.0	Initial draft – June 2023
Version 1.1	Final version agreed with Joint Trade Unions on xxxx 2023 and approved by Personnel Committee on xxx 2023

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# 1.	Introduction

1.1.	Reading Borough Council is committed to equal opportunities and attaches great importance to securing, retaining and encouraging the return to work of skilled and motivated employees.

1.2.	The Council will consider requests from employees for an Employment Break for domestic, education or other exceptional reason, for a period of between 12 and 23 months.

1.3.	There is no entitlement to pay, annual leave or sick pay during the break. The Employment Break agreement as at Appendix 2 gives more details.

1.4.	The employment break will be treated as a pause in the employment contract, but the employee's continuous service will be maintained during the break.

1.5.	The Council's policies and joint agreements continue to apply during the break, unless they are specified as a variation in the attached agreement.

1.6.	The scheme allows employees to keep up to date whilst on the break, maintain regular contact with their work colleagues/environment and develop skills and knowledge through work experience and/or training during the period.

1.7.	The employee will be paid if they attend work or training.

# 2.	Purpose

2.1.	The purpose of the document is to provide the basis for a clear understanding of the Employment Break Scheme for the benefit of both the organisation and the employee who wishes to have a planned and agreed break from the workplace.

# 3.	Scope and Eligibility

3.1.	The Employment Break scheme will apply to all employees who have completed a minimum of 5 years' continuous service with the Council.

3.2.	The scheme applies to full-time and part-time employees

3.3.	When eligibility requirements are met, the line manager will need to weigh up a number of considerations before granting admission to the scheme:

- That there are realistic expectations of managing the absence and return of the individual
- How the Employment Break will benefit the authority

3.4.   The reason for requesting the break may fall into one of the following
         categories:

- Domestic Care – time out to care for children or other dependants
- Educational – to complete or undertake a course of study to satisfy
  personal ambition and enhance knowledge
- Other exceptional reasons – for example, this could include
  opportunities for voluntary work

4.   Application Process

4.1.   Employees who wish to apply for the scheme should speak to their line
         manager initially. A formal application should then be made using the
         appropriate application form (see appendix 1)

4.2.   The manager should consider the request with how the post will be
         covered during the Employment Break. Options, which may be available,
         are temporary appointment, secondments, rearranging workloads and
         responsibilities of existing employees or reprioritising where practical. If
         these are not practical, then the manager may have to consider a
         replacement on a permanent basis

4.3.   It is important that the Council's agreed procedures, for example,
         recruitment and selection and job evaluation are applied during this
         process

4.4.   It is important to balance the needs of the employee with the needs of the
         service. The decisions as to whether or decline an individual application
         for an Employment Break rests with the appropriate Assistant Director

4.5.   On commencement of the break, the employee will be asked to sign an
         agreement, which will apply for the duration of the break (see appendix 2)

4.6.   Managers should make positive efforts to allow employees who wish to
         take a break to do so. Refusal must be based on sound, objective
         reasons. If an employee feels that their request has been unfairly
         refused, they can appeal the decision to their Assistant Director whose
         decision will be final

5.   Keeping in touch

5.1.   Although an employee cannot be forced to do any work for the Council
         during the break, there may be times when the employee will be asked if
         they are prepared to work. The purpose of this will be to ensure that the
         employee acquires, maintains or updates skills and knowledge that will
         facilitate their return to work. The period of work will be agreed between
         the employee and their manager. The employee's usual hourly rate will
         apply in this case.

5.2.   Whilst on a break an employee will not gain any increments, but their pay (the hourly rate if they have to do any work) will have increased as per pay nationally agreed pay rise.

5.3.   The manager and employee should arrange to keep in contact while the employee is on an Employment Break.

5.4.   Employees taking part in the scheme will receive relevant documents from their manager, as they would if they were working.

6.   Responsibilities of the Employee

6.1.   Employees who take a break must advise their line manager and HR of any change of circumstance, for example, change of address

6.2.   The employee may be required to meet with their line manager on an annual basis. The purpose of this meeting will be to review the break and confirm the employee's intention to return at the agreed date. This will also provide an opportunity to consider any changes in circumstance as either side.

6.3.   The employee must advise their line manager of any changes that may have implications for their returning to the workplace at the agreed date.

6.4.   The employee must provide three months' notice of their intention to return to work on the agreed date. This will help to ensure that arrangements are in place for the employee's return.

6.5.   The employee must not undertake any paid employment during the period of the break unless this has been expressly agreed with the Assistant Director.

6.6.   Employees should ensure that they are familiar with the terms of the Code of Conduct in relation to additional/alternative employment, and the Employment Stability Agreement in relation to organisational change and redeployment.

7.   Responsibilities of the Council

7.1.   The line manager will ensure that they send relevant documents to the employee, from time to time. If required, the line manager will arrange to meet the employee annually during the break.

7.2.   Where, during the Employment break, the employee's substantive post is subject to change, the employee will be consulted. The line manager will apply the principles contained within the Employment Stability Agreement.

8. Return to Work

8.1. Employees returning to work after an Employment break should give a minimum of three months' notice of their intention to return to work to the line manager and HR.

8.2. As far as is reasonably practicable, the Council will ensure that the employee returns to their former post when returning to work after the break. Where this is not reasonably practicable, the employee will be redeployed under the terms of the Employment Stability Agreement.

8.3. Should a returning employee have undertaken studies during their Employment break, gaining additional qualifications, the manager will need to review this within their job description to take into consideration if a gateway has been passed and acted upon in accordance with the job description pay progression criteria.

8.4. If an employee wishes to return to employment **before** the end of their employment break, they must give at least three months' notice in writing. In these circumstances, if their post or a suitable alternative is not available, the employment break will continue.

8.5. Should a returning employee have gained additional qualifications whilst on an Employment break which would progress their career within Reading Borough Council. The manager will support the employee in future applications where possible.

8.6. Should an employee choose not to return after the Employment break, they are required to talk with their line manager in the first instance and then formally resign via ESS. Full details can be found in the following link ESS how to resign

9. Monitoring and Review

9.1. The Employment Break scheme will be monitored to provide the following information:

- the numbers of those applying and those currently on Employment Breaks
- the reason for the Employment Break
- feedback from users and managers on the effectiveness of the break

APPENDIX 1

Application for an Employment Break

Employee / Post Details – Part 1

Full Name --

Length of Service with the Council --------------------------------------

Post title -------------------------------- Grade of Post --------------------

Career record with the Council to date:

<u>Directorate</u>	<u>Post title</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Dates Employed</u>

Current Salary --------------------------

Please state reason and details of the request:

    a) Domestic

    b) Educational

    c) Other reason

If your application is on grounds of Paternity:

Your expected date of confinement --------------------------

Your likely date of commencement of Paternity leave----------------

---

Period of Employment Break

Start Date --------------------anticipated return date----------------------

Please forward this form to your line manager

Line Manager's Recommendation – Part 2

This application has been discussed with the employee

Application approved   Yes   No

☐   ☐

State reasons

Please forward to the relevant Assistant Director

Authorisation – Part 3

I have considered the application and it is approved / is not approved

*delete as appropriate

Comments:

Reading BOROUGH COUNCIL

Appendix 2

EMPLOYMENT BREAK AGREEMENT

VARIATION TO MAIN TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

EMPLOYEE NAME ('THE EMPLOYEE'):	
JOB TITLE:	
DIRECTORATE:	
EMPLOYMENT BREAK COMMENCEMENT DATE:	
PERIOD OF BREAK:	
RETURN TO WORK DATE:	
TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT BREAK:	<u>By the employee</u>: 3 months' notice to terminate the Employment Break at any time (and return to work) is required. Notice of termination of employment (resignation or retirement at any time **within** the period of the employment break) remains in accordance with the contract of employment. The employee will be required to return to work out the contractual period of notice, unless this requirement is waived, in full or in part, by the Assistant Director (in which case employment will end and there will be no entitlement to pay in lieu of notice). <u>By the employer</u>: The Council can only terminate the break before the agreed end of the term through redundancy, dismissal or negotiation of an early return to work. All of these will be subject to the Council's current policies, procedures and joint agreements. Contractual notice will be required (except in the case of summary dismissal as part of a disciplinary process), and the employee will be entitled to normal pay for the period of notice (either worked or paid in lieu as determined by the Assistant Director).

REMUNERATION:	There is no entitlement to any salary during the break except on occasions when this is to fulfil work requirements (see below).
WORK REQUIREMENTS:	The employee will not be compelled to do any work for the Council, other than as part of a legal process where their presence is required as a witness, or within a final period of notice to terminate employment by resignation or retirement. The employee's usual hourly rate will apply if work is performed.
CONTINUOUS SERVICE:	The Employment Break will be treated as a temporary pause to the employment contract. Continuity of service is maintained for employment and statutory conditions of service and other provisions, for example, redundancy and unfair dismissal. Where, during the employment break, the employee's substantive post is subject to change, the employee will be consulted in the same way as if they were at work. The principles contained within the Employment Stability Agreement must be applied for consultation, redeployment and redundancy purposes.
POLICIES AND JOINT AGREEMENTS:	Policies and Joint Agreements continue to apply for the duration of the employment break, whilst the employee retains a contract of employment with Reading Borough Council. Policies and Joint Agreements that are suspended for the duration of the employment break are specified in this variation.
SICK PAY / ANNUAL LEAVE:	These entitlements do not accrue during the period of the break. However, on returning to work, previous continuous service will be counted towards annual leave and sick pay entitlements. Individuals who fall sick during an employment break will not be entitled to occupational sick pay. Further advice regarding benefits whilst sick should be sought from the Department for Work and Pensions.
PENSION:	The actual period of the employment break will not count towards the employee's overall pensionable service. When the employee returns to work after a break, pensionable service either side of the employment break will be considered for aggregation. Employees wishing to "buy back" pension service should contact the Pensions Service direct.

CAR LOAN:	Employees who have a salary sacrifice car (from Tusker) will be asked to terminate the contract, at their own cost.
MATERNITY / ADOPTION / PARENTAL LEAVE:	There will be no entitlement to occupational maternity pay during the period of the break. Statutory Maternity Pay may be applicable. A break may be granted in addition to a period of Adoption or Parental leave. Employees should contact HR in these circumstances.
ALTERNATIVE OR OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT:	Any request or intention to take up paid alternative employment during the period of an employment break must be discussed and expressly agreed with the employee's Assistant Director. Employees should observe the guidance contained within the Code of Conduct and the same approach to alternative / outside employment will be followed.
MAINTAINING CONTACT:	It is in all parties' interests to maintain contact for the duration of the employment break. The nature and frequency of this contact must be a matter for prior agreement between the employee and the line manager.
RETURN TO WORK:	The employee will need to give not less than 3 months' notice of their confirmed intention to return to work at the end of the agreed term of the employment break. Wherever possible the employee will return to work in their substantive post, but where this is not possible the principles contained within the Employment Stability Agreement must be applied **at the time that any changes are contemplated.**
EXTENSIONS AND VARIATIONS:	Arrangements for extensions and variations to employment breaks (if requested by the employee) must be reviewed by the line manager and approved by the relevant Assistant Director. Any agreed extension of an employment break will require the employee entering into a new agreement.
POLITICALLY RESTRICTED POSTS:	If the employee's post is 'Politically Restricted', the provisions of the relevant legislation will continue to apply for the duration of the employment break.
COUNCIL PROPERTY / EQUIPMENT:	Property of the Council, for example, ID pass, keys, computer hardware/software or documents, should be returned during the period of the break.

I accept this notice as a variation to my terms and conditions of employment with Reading Borough Council.

I agree to abide by the requirements set out above and as additionally agreed with my line manager.

Signed: .... Date: ....

Assistant Director:

Signed: .... Date: ....

Name: ....

EMPLOYMENT BREAK SCHEME POLICY

Agreed between the Council and the recognised trades unions.

Signed:

Kathryn Cook	Assistant Director for HR and Organisational Development
Miriam Palfrey	Staff Side and Branch Secretary for Unison
Kieran Magee	Joint Shop Stewards Committee and Branch Secretary/Convenor for Unite
Alison McNamara	Education & Community Unions Panel and Branch Secretary for the National Education Union (NEU)
Robert Stirling	Convenor for GMB

SMOKING AT WORK POLICY

June 2023

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Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

Document History	
Version	1. (See below)
Status	Draft for discussion
Date	May 2023
Target audience	All Council employees with the exception of staff employed by schools
Ratification	None
Author	Human Resources
Version control	**Reviewers**
Version 1.1	Initial draft – June 2023
Version 1.1	Agreed by Trade Unions –

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Introduction

We recognise that the health, safety and welfare of employees, Councillors, sub-contractors and anyone else directly affected by our organisation's operations are of prime importance. We have therefore developed this dedicated smoking policy which conforms to the requirements of the smoke-free legislation.

The Policy

This policy is mandatory and applicable to all employees, Councillors as well as sub-contractors who undertake activities on behalf of the organisation and any visitors to/customers on our premises.

Prohibition on smoking

Smoking is strictly prohibited on Council owned or managed premises, including at entrances. This includes the use of electronic cigarettes ("e-cigarettes") and vaporisers/E-cigarettes.

Council employees are prohibited from smoking/vaping in service users' private homes at all times.

Smokers are restricted to taking one short smoking break in the morning and one in the afternoon, with a maximum of 10 minutes per break. You should inform your manager if you wish to take a smoking break and ensure that there is sufficient cover before taking a break.

Online meetings

Visibly Smoking/Vaping is strictly prohibited during any online meeting/ training.

Vehicles

Smoking is not permitted in company vehicles.

Homeworkers

Homeworkers are not required to refrain from smoking during the course of work that is carried out for the organisation in their home, unless they invite others into an area of their home for work purposes.

Electronic cigarettes

We acknowledge that some employees may wish to make use of electronic cigarettes ("e-cigarettes") in the workplace, particularly as an aid to giving up smoking. E-cigarettes are battery-powered products that release a visible vapour that contains liquid nicotine that is inhaled by the user.

Although they fall outside the scope of smoke-free legislation, we prohibit the use of e-cigarettes in the workplace. Our rationale for a ban on e-cigarettes is that:

- although they do not produce smoke, e-cigarettes produce a vapour that could provide an annoyance or health risk to other employees;

Assistance for employees to give up smoking

The Council is committed to providing opportunities and support for staff who wish to give up smoking. Help to stop smoking is available to any staff member. This service will be regularly publicised on the Council's intranet system and in other Council buildings. Staff interested in stopping smoking can get help by:

- Ringing or emailing the Reading Stop Smoking Service on 0118 952 5400
- Obtaining information from General Practitioners and the Stop Smoking Advisors in the practices
- Contacting the NHS Smoking Helpline 0800 169 0169

Managers will allow staff to work flexibly or take time off to attend smoking cessation classes as far as is reasonably practicable.

Support is available, free of charge, to all employees and family members, and elected members through the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) – contact 0800 028 0199 and/or go to the EAP page on the intranet

Reading also now has its own smoking cessation service based at the Primary Care Trust premises at Broad Street Mall, Reading (telephone 0118 952 5400).

Non-compliance

Any infringement of these rules by an employee may result in appropriate disciplinary action, which will be dealt with in accordance with our disciplinary procedure. Employees are also reminded that it is a criminal offence to smoke in smoke-free areas, with a fixed penalty of £50 or prosecution and a fine of up to £200.

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Flexible Workstyles Framework

June 2023

www.reading.gov.uk

Reading Borough Council
Working better with you

Document History	
Version	1.0 (see below)
Status	FINAL
Date	November 2021
Target audience	All employees of Reading Borough Council with the exception of Schools-based staff for whom alternative procedures apply
Ratification	None
Author	HR and Organisational Development team

Version control	Reviewers
Version 1.0	Approved by Personnel Committee on 18 November 2021. Next review is due in November 2023 or sooner if required by legislation.
Version 1.1	Review June 2023 no changes required
Version	

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1.   Objectives and scope

1.1   The aim of the Council's Flexible Workstyles Framework is to create a more agile, responsive, efficient and effective organisation, which advances business performance, increases customer satisfaction and improves the health, wellbeing and diversity of our staff.

1.2   This framework applies to all staff who work for some or all of the time in a desk-based role.

1.3   This framework focuses on flexible workstyles but there are many other ways of working flexibly. All employees have a right to request a flexible working pattern (e.g. to reduce their hours, change the pattern of hours to compressed or annualised hours etc) and to have their request considered seriously by the Council; regardless of their length of service. This is covered in a separate policy called the Flexible Working Policy.

1.4   The Flexible Workstyles Framework is focused on giving our staff the flexibility to choose, where feasible, where they do their work, whether that's in the office or working remotely. There will be occasions when people need to be in the office e.g.to resolve IT issues, collect equipment, attend training, do new starter inductions, or attend team and staff meetings. For many people, the purpose of coming into the office will be to collaborate with colleagues or to touch down in between meetings/visits etc. Unless there are specific service needs, we do not require staff to come in and sit at a desk to do focused work when they could be more productive working remotely. We also recognise that some staff will continue to work primarily in the office, either because they have difficulty working from home and due to their personal situation prefer to be in the office for some or all of the time, or their job requires them to work in the office.

1.5   The benefits of flexible workstyles are:

For the Council:

- Greater flexibility to meet service needs and improve customer service
- Being innovative and forward-thinking by focusing on outcomes and productivity rather than being present in a fixed office
- Increased diversity of the workforce by enabling access to a more diverse pool of talent
- Potential for a reduction in absence through better work/life balance
- Improved employee retention, motivation and engagement
- Creates an environment of trust between managers and staff
- Positively contribute to climate change through a reduction in commuting so reducing carbon footprint
- Reduces the costs of our office accommodation

For our staff:

- Improvements in overall health and well-being
- Greater flexibility for parents and carers especially over the arrangement of working hours and location of work
- Reduction in commuting and travel expenses
- Modernised working environment and better IT equipment /software
- Increased staff productivity – fewer distractions, improved focus, concentration, creativity and better use of skills

2. Principles

2.1 The Flexible Workstyles Framework is not prescriptive as there is no one size fits all. These principles provide a framework within which staff and managers can embrace flexible working. The main aim of these principles is to empower and support staff to work where, when and how they choose, to maximise productivity and customer satisfaction. The Council's flexi-time scheme is covered in Section 5 of this framework.

The Council will:	You will:
Embrace agile working – office, home and other locations. There are no standard number of days people need to be in the office – some people will need to be in regularly, others not.	There is no standard number of days people need to come into the office, but commit to come into the office sometimes. when you come in come in with purpose; collaborate, create, connect and celebrate
Create opportunities to enable staff to take control over where, when and how you do your work	Use the space most appropriate to your needs
Trust our staff to deliver, perform and contribute to the highest standards.	Be a good citizen, be mindful of noise, confidentiality and food smells when colleagues are working nearby
Trust staff to use their judgement and personal organisation skills	Think about not just using the Civic, but also other Council and partner buildings especially for larger meetings.
Support you to find solutions if things are not working	Be accountable for meeting your work commitments and the Council's Customer Service Standards.
Build the infrastructure for all staff to work efficiently and provide the equipment to enable you to do your job	Build the trust of others by ensuring your work gets done to the highest standards
	Be pragmatic and recognise that it is not always possible to work the way

	you want. Plan ahead with your manager and share your working patterns so colleagues can contact you.
	Keep in contact with your manager and colleagues, attend regular 1:1's, fully participate in team meetings, other networking events as well as performance meetings.
	Be responsible for the security and confidentiality of your work and ensure that updates are applied to your laptop etc. when requested.

3.   Working from home or remotely

Working in our homes in an environment with which we are very familiar can sometimes make us less alert to risks and hazards to our health and safety. To help address any potential risks or hazards, there are four main areas staff need to consider with their manager:

- Working environment
- Equipment
- Lone working
- Wellbeing

Home or remote working environment

It is important to consider the space you intend to work in and make best use of that space.

- Identify the area you want to use
- Is there enough space for work to be carried out comfortably?
- Is there enough light and ventilation?
- Is the space too hot/too cold?
- Can you enter/exit the space without difficulty?
- Is the equipment safe and fit for purpose?

When setting up the area where you will work check the screen is at the correct height and the chair and desk are comfortable. Before you start your work day, check your workstation and make sure you are comfortable.

There is an online course, Are you Sitting Comfortably, which includes lots of helpful hints and tips on how to set up your work station correctly.

You should also read the **DSE guidance on the intranet** and you must complete a **DSE self-assessment form**. You must send the completed form to your line manager who will discuss the outcomes of the assessment with you.

Home Work Space

You may not have the perfect environment or equipment and your workstation set up at home may not be as good as a purpose-designed workstation in the office. However, you should try and set up your work area so that it doesn't put you at risk of discomfort or developing musculoskeletal disorders. Working from your sofa or bed may seem comfortable initially but could create issues in the longer term. Make sure you have a solid chair with good lumbar support, or consider one of these options:

- Standard desk - Setting up a workstation with a standard desk should reflect the usual set up at work. Make sure you are sitting in a comfortable chair with enough support, and all your equipment is set up correctly and you are not straining any part of your body.
- Standing desk - In the office you may use a standing desk. It is unlikely you will have this at home. But you may choose to replicate this, try using a kitchen top or a table with a riser to support your laptop. Make sure you are not straining any part of your body.

Regular Breaks

As there may be fewer distractions at home, it can be tempting to work for extended periods without a break.

- Set yourself a reminder in your Outlook calendar to prompt you to take at least a five-minute break every hour
- Avoid static, awkward postures by regularly changing position
- Get up, move around or do some simple stretching exercises
- Make a drink and stay hydrated
- Avoid eye fatigue by taking a screen break and changing focus.

Remember not everyone will experience the same issues and you need to plan for those you experience.

Equipment

You will be provided with IT equipment such as a laptop which can be used wherever you are working from.

You can arrange to borrow additional equipment and book collection (usually from the Civic Offices) by using this form.

Equipment provided and paid for by the Council	Expenses not paid by the Council

Laptop or another IT solution	Insurance costs (Council equipment is covered by the Council)
Office chair, display screen, keyboard, mouse (if requested)	Reimbursement for heating and lighting and other utilities
Stationery	Reimbursement of any office furniture or IT equipment that you choose to purchase yourself.
Lone worker safety device (where identified as necessary through a risk assessment)	

In all cases equipment remains the property of the Council and will need to be returned if you leave the Council or move to a new role where home working is not possible. An inventory of equipment borrowed will be maintained by FM and IT.

You should visually check, at least on an annual basis, that any Council equipment you use at home is safe to use including electric plugs, cables and power. A form is available here to assist with this, which must be sent to your manager when complete.   You will need to make sure fuses and sockets are safe to use and any electric equipment is safely secured. Periodic PAT testing, carried out by a competent person, will be required for portable IT equipment which is moved regularly (e.g. laptops, charging cables etc). This will be organised by the Facilities Management team and you will need to bring your equipment in to the offices for testing.

If you experience any IT problems which affect your ability to work remotely (e.g. a broadband outage) then you should contact your line manager to discuss the issue and together you should come up with a reasonable solution that works for you and the service. This could include coming into the office to work, allowing a reasonable timeframe for your journey, or taking leave, flex etc to cover the period. If problems are likely to last for several days then you will need to come into the office to work during that period.

Well-being

It can be difficult to separate work from home life if you are working from home frequently, and it can be easy to slip into feeling you should always be available. It is important to manage your work/life balance and you should regularly talk to your manager to agree expectations around your hours of work and availability.

Working flexibly is a two-way process. There is an expectation that services will be provided between normal working hours (i.e. 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday, or the normal hours operated in your service).   Those who want to work flexible hours outside of this should be able to do so, subject to the needs of the service being met. If you send emails or messages (e.g. using WhatsApp or Teams) outside of normal working hours you should not expect an immediate response, nor ring colleagues unless there is mutual agreement to do so. If a response is required urgently, this should be requested during normal working hours. Only work supplied mobile

phones and Council supplied software such as Office365 should be used for work issues.

If you are working outside of normal working hours, you may find it helpful to add a message to your emails along these lines:

I work flexible hours and may send emails outside of the normal working day, However, there is no expectation that they are responded to at those times.

We would encourage you to talk to the colleagues you frequently communicate with to understand their flexible working arrangements and be respectful. There is no expectation from the Council for you to open, read or respond to e-mails outside of the normal hours operated by your service.

Communication

It is more important when working remotely to keep in touch and maintain regular contact with team members and colleagues. You should do this by phone, email or video calls, checking in with others regularly and keeping your contact details up to date. Regular use of Microsoft Teams keeps staff connected. Good communication channels, both formal and informal, are ways of keeping in touch and can also help minimise the sense of working on your own and any feelings of isolation. Here are some suggestions for maintaining contact with colleagues and with what's happening at the Council more generally:

- Using Microsoft Teams for 1-1 meetings, team meetings, informal catch-ups etc
- Joining the Council's Facebook group
- Reading Borough Council intranet
- Service Now portal for any IT issues
- Weekly information email sent to all staff on a Friday
- Monthly Wellbeing Newsletter
- Periodic face-to-face meetings in the office with colleagues

More information and resources on working remotely are available on the intranet here and on the **RBC Learning Pool Working Remotely and at Home page**.

Accidents/Incidents and Near misses

Any accident that occurs while you are working from home, which is directly related to your work, needs to be reported to your line manager and then logged on the accident/incident/near miss form (available on the intranet in DASH within the Useful Links section).

Lone working

When you are working from one of our buildings, surrounded by your team and colleagues, lone working only generally applies when you are working out in the community or visiting service users. If you are combining working from home with working out in the community or visiting service users, it is important that you continue to adhere to the lone working policy and procedure which can be found here. Lone worker safety devices are provided to staff where this is identified as a requirement through a risk assessment.

Other Considerations

Insurance Arrangements

You should inform your household insurer if you are working at home to ensure your buildings and contents insurance is not invalidated. When working at home on Council business, personal and public liability cover will be provided by the Council.

If you are a tenant rather than a home-owner, you may also need to refer to your tenancy agreement or landlord for advice, to ensure you have their agreement for the partial use of premises for work purposes.

Tax Implications

There should be no change to your income tax position due to homeworking. Homeworking by choice does not qualify for tax relief.

Travelling/Mileage Claims

All claims for travelling/mileage must be made in accordance with the Council's current policy, and must be authorised appropriately. Under HMRC rules, mileage which is 'ordinary commuting' between your home and your permanent office base cannot be claimed (your permanent office base is shown in your contract of employment).   If you travel from home to a temporary workplace (e.g. to visit a client at their home or visit a customer's premises), then claims must be based on what the normal journey would have been from your permanent workplace, or the actual journey travelled, whichever is the lesser.

Example 1
- You travel 12 miles from home to a temporary workplace
- The journey from your permanent office base to a temporary workplace would have been 4 miles
- You can claim 4 miles

Example 2
- You travel 4 miles from home to a temporary workplace
- The journey from your permanent office base to a temporary workplace would have been 12 miles

- You can claim 4 miles

Security and Confidentiality

The same standards of security and confidentiality that apply when you are office based must be maintained when you are homeworking. Attention must be paid to ensuring the security of IT equipment and documents supplied by the Council. All confidential paperwork/files etc must be secured and disposed of securely and you must adhere to service guidelines on data protection (e.g. bring confidential paperwork into the offices to be disposed of confidentially when you next visit the office and use online filing/storage wherever possible). Specialist software (e.g. Adobe Writer for PDFs) can be requested from IT to help with redacting confidential information in documents if needed. You must also ensure that you complete any mandatory e-Learning modules on data protection, information governance or cyber security as directed by your manager. The e-Learning portal can be accessed here.

4.   Working in the office

Whilst the Flexible Workstyles Framework is focused on giving our staff the flexibility to choose where they do their work, there will be occasions when you need to be in the office e.g.to resolve IT issues which cannot be fixed remotely, to collect equipment, to attend in-person training and for new starter inductions. You may also be required to attend meetings in the office that your line manager has reasonably determined are best conducted in person.

Most of our offices operate a desk-sharing system, whereby we provide a bank of workstations which are usually allocated on a directorate or service area basis. Please speak to your line manager about the arrangements for your service. In a small number of cases, staff will be allocated a specific desk where they require special equipment or adaptations to help them do their job which is personal to them and which is not easily portable.

At the end of each day on which you are attending the office, please ensure that you leave the desk clear, clean and tidy. Your laptop and any personal items should not be left on desks overnight.

If you are going to be away from your desk for two or more hours, please clear the desk so that someone else can use it.

You will have access to a lockable cupboard and/or a digital locker. At the end of each day on which you are attending the office, please ensure that your laptop and other equipment are either taken with you or secured away in a locked cupboard. In most cases lockers must also be cleared when you have finished work for the day.

Further information about working in the offices and the facilities available is provided in the Council Buildings Handbook.

5. Flexi-time

Most staff covered by this policy can use the Council's "flexitime" scheme, where you can work your total number of contractual hours but are permitted flexibility as to when you begin and end a day or shift. Flexible working patterns can reduce unauthorised absences from work and employee stress, and in turn promote a good work-life balance and improve performance and productivity.

Flexitime should not interfere with service delivery requirements or your job duties and line managers can override or adjust flexitime arrangements to meet the needs of the business.

How flexi-time works

Flexi-time allows you to vary your hours around the core working periods (see below). Flexi-time is different from Time Off in Lieu (TOIL) where you are asked by your manager and agree to work overtime which is reimbursed as TOIL.   Separate provisions apply for TOIL which are covered in the Overtime Policy.

You can work extra hours and use these later to take time off work as flexi-leave as long as you have the work to enable you to do this. You can, if you wish and if appropriate, accrue a surplus of hours to take later, up to a maximum of 10 hours within the flexitime period (which is usually four weeks). Any surplus hours can be rolled over to the next four-week period, provided that the 10 hour maximum is not exceeded.

You are not usually allowed to take time off that has not been accrued unless agreed with your manager (e.g. for emergency caring requirements). In other words, you would not be allowed to use flexitime to work less than hours in a day or take flexi-leave when you have not worked the time in advance to accrue this time off.

You will need your manager's consent in advance to take off a whole or half day of flexi-leave. A maximum of one day flexileave to be taken in any four week period Flexi-leave does not need to be recorded on iTrent.

Hours of work

The core working periods during which you must normally be at work are 10am to 12pm and 2pm to 4pm, Monday to Friday. You can work flexibly outside of these hours if service delivery requirements and your job duties are met.

You must take a minimum of 30 minutes for an unpaid lunch or to have a rest break if you are contracted to work six or more hours on that day.

The Council must ensure that we comply with working time limits so that employees who do flexitime do not exceed reasonable working hours. Further information is available in the Working time regulations guidance

APPENDIX 1

Tips for making flexible workstyles succeed

1. **Be Organised** – as you might not be returning to the same location every time you need to be very organised with your files.

You may need to carry the documents and resources you need with you so if possible, file as much electronically. Dump the junk and get rid of all unnecessary clutter. The last thing you want to do is be carting around heavy bags!

Get familiar with Microsoft 365 tools and make the most of them e.g. OneDrive. You need to get into good habits that help you be more agile. If you are working in different locations on different days you need to be able to set yourself up quickly, access the files you need when you need them and be able to work with the minimum of fuss and disruption.

There are also security aspects to consider, making sure documents are saved in the right locations so they are secure and backed up.

2. **Be Engaged** – one of the problems with not being sat next to the same person every day is that you can feel isolated and lose connectivity with the rest of your colleagues. At times, especially if you are working away from the office, you need to work hard at staying in touch. It's very tempting to put off making that call to your manager (or popping to their desk to see them) but if you don't you will soon feel isolated and out of touch and you will find your job much harder.

Keep in regular contact with your team, sit with them when you can, go to team social events but most important of all if you can't interact face to face, use the phone or Teams chat or meetings, not just email, wherever possible to engage with your teammates.

3. **Be Equipped** - to maximize your ability to work flexibly you will need to have the right equipment and make proper use of it. Understand what is available (both hardware and software) and learn how to use it. Try to attend any training offered as it will be invaluable in helping you get the most out of any resources.

Learn how to access your files remotely from wherever you are and keep up to date with announcements on new software which is being made available and issued for staff to use.

4. **Be Visible** – Don't be tempted to hide yourself away too much.

It is useful to find a quiet space to get an urgent task done that you need to focus on – this is exactly what agile working is about; make the most of being able to work in the most productive place for the task at hand.

If you are working remotely then make sure you are visible to your team and line manager via phone/Teams calls and email.

Make sure your team knows what your plans are, where you are planning to work and what your current work and deadlines are. Communicate regularly with your team and your manager, agreeing your outputs and delivering on them.

We encourage all Line Managers to trust and empower their team members to manage their time effectively and achieve the tasks and objectives set for them. Managers must carry out 1-1s with their staff at least every 4-6 weeks and should check-in regularly with staff on an informal basis as a way of keeping in touch.

5. **Be Productive** – Consider what activities you prioritise and focus your time on. Are you busy with the right things? Are you focussing on things that make a difference to you, your team, Reading and our customers?

One useful technique is to jot down at the start of each day everything you have in your head that you feel you need to get done. Review that list, prioritise it and select the top 5 to 10 tasks that you really need to get done, moving all other task to a second list. Only tackle the other items when these are finished.

Try not to be distracted by emails and calls when working on important tasks – it is not productive or time efficient to be constantly distracted from the task at hand. Consistently stopping and starting a task will mean it takes much longer to complete overall.

6. **Be Focused** – Focus on the output that is required of you.

Make sure you understand from your line manager what is expected in terms of competencies/behaviours and objectives. This must be your priority and will be the main way your performance will be measured. Don't be distracted by emails and non-critical items, especially emails which you were cc'd in to.

Plan times in your day for dealing with emails and let your colleagues know when you will be available for calls or when you will be in the office. Regularly update your Teams status to flag when you are available.

Make sure to take short, regular breaks as this will help you to clear your head and encourage you to be more focused, with a clearer head upon returning to the task at hand.

7. **Be Aware** of when you are at your most productive. Everybody is different and works in a different way. Some people genuinely are morning people and others afternoon people. Flexible workstyles allow you to plan your day to do the more focussed tasks when you are at your peak.

Save the more mundane and easier to do tasks (such as calls or emails) for when your creativity is lower.

Be aware of when you are flagging and plan to take breaks, drink plenty of water and eat regularly to maintain your energy levels. You will be amazed about how much more you get done by listening to your body and understanding its energy cycles.

Similarly, if you identify yourself as an extrovert then make sure you're engaging in enough social interaction to stay happy and productive, or if you're more introverted then don't be afraid to take yourself away to a quiet corner for part of the day.

8. **Be Flexible** – agile working is all about flexibility, but it only works if all your colleagues are equally flexible and considerate to each other. Try to avoid "beach towelling" a desk or work area if you are away for a period of time (e.g. in meetings all morning).

Tidy your work area and put your files away after you have finished using a workspace so others can use it. Don't book rooms if your meeting could be done round a table in a breakout area.

Make sure that if a meeting is no longer going ahead that you remove your reservation of the workspace so others can use it.

9. **Be Comfortable** – You may be working in different locations from day to day. It is important you get yourself comfortable and can set up your working environment quickly, so you don't lose time and don't strain yourself.

Learn how to adjust the chair to the settings that suit you best, sit square to the desk or working area and try not to hunch especially when using a laptop.

Avoid spending prolonged periods of time in the same seating position; go for short walks around your work area to avoid stiffness, aches and pains.

10. **Be Active** – flexible workstyles give you the ability to be much more mobile and work in the location most appropriate for the task at hand. This will allow you to be more active during the day, which in turn will help you stay alert and productive.

Take regular breaks and socialise with your colleagues over coffee and lunch – do not be tempted to eat at your desk, it makes you less, not more, productive.

11. **Be security conscious** – Flexible workstyles allows you to choose when and where you are going to work from within reason, this could be at a café, park or visiting family. You need to think about who may be listening into your conversation if you are on a virtual meeting; can people see your screen or papers you may have with you.

You must think about confidentiality and data protection when you plan your day i.e. don't arrange a meeting if you plan to work from a public space.

APPENDIX 2

Managing flexible workstyle: tips for managers

When people are working in a flexible way, managers will be exercising their management skills in a different way. Most of the core skills are the same e.g. organising workloads, supervision, motivating and engaging, team building, ensuring quality and <u>performance management</u>, troubleshooting, listening and initiating improvements. The difference lies in the way managers interact with their team members and how they measure work performance. The following sections provide a broad framework of things to consider helping you get the most out of your teams in a flexible world.

Moving away from presenteeism to managing on outputs

The key to making flexible workstyles succeed is to accept that visible presence is often a poor guide to a person's productivity and outputs. Outputs can be measured wherever a person is located and at whatever time they might be working. If your management style is not already focused on results, you will need to adapt:

- **Targets**. Managers who manage on outputs not presenteeism do so by having clear key performance indicators (KPIs) and targets for staff. Be specific on what you expect and when, and let the individual decide how to deliver that.
- **Trust** people to do their work even if you can't see them doing it. Trial periods can help e.g. daily updates for people working in a flexible way to embed different behaviour. Trust doesn't happen overnight. You must work with your teams to build this over time. A discussion with your team is a good place to start.
- **Technology**. Recognise that staff need the right tools to embrace flexible workstyles and to know how to use them. Internal briefings and training sessions are key. Making good use of calendars can really help.
- **Tasks**. Which tasks require interaction and which don't? How can work be clustered to optimise performance and space?
- **Empathy**. Listen to your staff and their wants and needs, don't dismiss things out of hand, just because it's not how you would do things.
- **Flexibility**. Enable staff to work in an agile way to achieve the goals of the business, be clear and consistent with your reasoning if sometimes you can't accommodate flexible workstyles choices.

Remember - there is no 'one size fits all' solution. Every job is likely to have its own set of considerations, dependent on the nature of the work and the needs of the customer, service or function.

Tips for implementation

- Use performance discussions and 1-1s to review flexible workstyles arrangements in the same way you review performance on tasks. You should be having 1-1 meetings with every member of your team at least every 4-6 weeks. See the Performance Management Policy for more details of our performance management framework.
- Start by breaking the job down into a list of duties and tasks, and then list the main outputs of the job.
- It may help to consider the employee's workload in terms of defined pieces of work e.g. writing a report, developing a project.
- Meet with your team members and agree specific objectives in a defined performance period. It could be a week, month, or six-months depending on the nature of the job. In most jobs it would be up to the employee as to how they plan individual days, as long as they meet any requirements on being contactable.
- Monitor progress and measure performance just the same as if they were office based. Be clear with staff on your expectations on contact while working remotely.
- Manage by exception – this means only performance manage staff on time where it is believed that there is a problem rather than monitoring all team members' hours as a matter of course.
- Give regular feedback on performance and positive reinforcement of achievements.
- If the business needs change, flexible workstyle arrangements need to be reviewed. The key to success is flexibility on both sides.
- Look at what work requires physical interactions, what can be done online, what needs quiet time?
- Use shared calendars. Managers need to know when their team members are working and when they are not available.
- Be smarter about meetings. What are they for? Who is required? Can people join remotely?
- Discuss with the team and be clear who needs to be available and when e.g. for the weekly team meeting.
- Discuss with the team whether there needs to be any baseline office presence.
- Maintain team spirit through virtual away days or lunches, to re-connect remote workers.
- Provide clear briefings on technology available.

FLEXIBLE WORKSTYLES FRAMEWORK POLICY

Agreed between the Council and the recognised trades unions.

Signed:

Shella Smith	Assistant Director for HR and Organisational Development
(signed) 04/01/2022	

Miriam Palfrey	Staff Side and Branch Secretary for Unison
(signed) 16/04/22	

Kieran Magee	Joint Shop Stewards Committee and Branch Secretary/Convenor for Unite
(signed) 4.5.22	

Alison McNamara	Education & Community Unions Panel and Branch Secretary for the National Education Union (NEU)
(signed) 11th January, 2022	

05/01/2022

Robert Stirling   Convenor for GMB

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APPENDIX E

Reading
BOROUGH COUNCIL
Equality Impact Assessment

Provide basic details

Policies
Directorate: **Resources**
Service: **HR and Organisational Development**
Name and job title of person doing the assessment
Name: **Teresa Kaine**
Job Title: **HR Services Manager**
Date of assessment: July 2023

Scope your proposal

What is the aim of your policy or new service/what changes are you proposing?
Review/introduce new employment policies covering:
- Domestic Violence Policy
- Employment Break Policy
- Smoking at Work Policy
- Flexible Workstyles Framework

Who will benefit from this proposal and how?
All employees of the Council and the Council itself because employment policies will be clearly set out. They will also be based on current employment legislation and ACAS codes of practice and/or guidance where available.

What outcomes does the change aim to achieve and for whom?
Setting out clear employment policies can help in supporting a culture based on trust, fairness and inclusion. They can also speed the decision-making process by ensuring that clear guidance is readily available to cover a range of issues. Furthermore, they can assist in avoiding involvement with employment tribunal claims by providing guidance for managers and staff that reflects accurately

1

current employment law and good practice. It is therefore important that HR policies are clear, easy to understand, up to date and reviewed regularly.

Who are the main stakeholders and what do they want?

All employees covered by the policy and the Council.

Assess whether an EqIA is Relevant

How does your proposal relate to eliminating discrimination; promoting equality of opportunity; promoting good community relations?

Do you have evidence or reason to believe that some (racial, disability, gender, sexuality, age and religious belief) groups may be affected differently than others? (Think about your monitoring information, research, national data/reports etc.)

No. The Council has a legal duty to ensure that the terms and conditions of employment for its employees are clearly set out. The polices that are the subject of this review help to achieve this.

Is there already public concern about potentially discriminatory practices/impact or could there be? Think about your complaints, consultation, and feedback.

No

If the answer is **Yes** to any of the above, you need to do an Equality Impact Assessment.

If No you **MUST** complete this statement

An Equality Impact Assessment is not relevant because:

There is no evidence or reason to believe that some (racial, disability, gender, sexuality, age and religious belief) groups may be affected differently than others by the proposed policies. Nor is there already public concern about potentially discriminatory practices/impact for the issues covered in these policies.

Signed (completing officer) Teresa Kaine	Date 03/07/2023
Signed (Lead Officer) Kathryn Cook	Date 03/07/2023

2

Assess the Impact of the Proposal

Your assessment must include:

- **Consultation**

- **Collection and Assessment of Data**

- **Judgement about whether the impact is negative or positive**

Think about who does and doesn't use the service? Is the take up representative of the community? What do different minority groups think? (You might think your policy, project or service is accessible and addressing the needs of these groups, but asking them might give you a totally different view). Does it really meet their varied needs? Are some groups less likely to get a good service?

How do your proposals relate to other services - will your proposals have knock on effects on other services elsewhere? Are there proposals being made for other services that relate to yours and could lead to a cumulative impact?

> **Example**: A local authority takes separate decisions to limit the eligibility criteria for community care services; increase charges for respite services; scale back its accessible housing programme; and cut concessionary travel.
>
> Each separate decision may have a significant effect on the lives of disabled residents, and the cumulative impact of these decisions may be considerable.
>
> This combined impact would not be apparent if decisions are considered in isolation.

Consultation

How have you consulted with or do you plan to consult with relevant groups and experts. If you haven't already completed a Consultation form do it now. The checklist helps you make sure you follow good consultation practice. **My Home > Info Pods > Community Involvement Pod - Inside Reading Borough Council**		
Relevant groups/experts	**How were/will the views of these groups be obtained**	**Date when contacted**
Trade unions	Through a series of email communications and meetings with trade union colleagues	5 May 2023 26 May 2023 9 June 2023

4

Collect and Assess your Data

Using information from Census, residents survey data, service monitoring data, satisfaction or complaints, feedback, consultation, research, your knowledge and the knowledge of people in your team, staff groups etc. describe how the proposal could impact on each group. Include both positive and negative impacts.

(Please delete relevant ticks)

Describe how this proposal could impact on Racial groups			
Is there a negative impact?	~~Yes~~	**No**	~~Not sure~~

Describe how this proposal could impact on Gender/transgender (cover pregnancy and maternity, marriage)			
Is there a negative impact?	~~Yes~~	**No**	~~Not sure~~

Describe how this proposal could impact on Disability			
Is there a negative impact?	~~Yes~~	**No**	~~Not sure~~

Describe how this proposal could impact on Sexual orientation (cover civil partnership)			
Is there a negative impact?	~~Yes~~	**No**	~~Not sure~~

Describe how this proposal could impact on Age			
Is there a negative impact?	~~Yes~~	**No**	~~Not sure~~

Describe how this proposal could impact on Religious belief?			
Is there a negative impact?	~~Yes~~	**No**	~~Not sure~~

5

Make a Decision

If the impact is negative then you must consider whether you can legally justify it. If not you must set out how you will reduce or eliminate the impact. If you are not sure what the impact will be you MUST assume that there could be a negative impact. You may have to do further consultation or test out your proposal and monitor the impact before full implementation.

Tick which applies (Please delete relevant ticks)

1. No negative impact identified
2. ~~Negative impact identified but there is a justifiable reason~~   You must give due regard or weight but this does not necessarily mean that the equality duty overrides other clearly conflicting statutory duties that you must comply with.   **Reason**
3. ~~Negative impact identified or uncertain~~   **What action will you take to eliminate or reduce the impact? Set out your actions and timescale?**

How will you monitor for adverse impact in the future?   An annual equality audit is carried out and reported to Personnel Committee which monitors whether there is any adverse impact on employees with protected characteristics, for example, the proportion of female, BAME and disabled employees involved in Council policies that are the subject of this review, compared to male, white and non-disabled employees. The most recent report looks at data for the last 2 financial years and does not indicate that procedures were applied and / or accessed disproportionately by any particular protected characteristic group

Signed (completing officer) Teresa Kaine	Date 03/07/2023
Signed (Lead Officer) Kathryn Cook	Date 03/07/2023

6

Personnel Committee **13 July 2023**	Reading Borough Council Working better with you

Title	EDI Strategy and the whole Council Engagement Exercise
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Update for Personnel Committee
Report author (name & job title)	Kathryn Cook Assistant Director HR&OD
Lead Councillor (name & title)	Councillor Terry, Deputy Leader
Corporate priority	Our Foundations
Recommendations	1. Note the process for the development of RBCs EDI strategy and plan including a shole council engagement exercise 2. Note that the EDI strategy and plan will be drafted by September 2023 and will go through formal governance processes, culminating in Personnel Committee in November 2023

1. Executive Summary

This report sets out how we will develop RBC's EDI strategy and plan. We will be using a whole council engagement exercise to inform both the strategy and the plan. The strategy and plan will be drafted by September 2023 and will go through the required governance processes after this including going formally go to Personnel Committee for agreement on 16th November 2023.

2. Policy Context

2.1. On 20 October 2020, Council agreed a motion on Tackling Employment Inequality – appendix 1. In response the Council commissioned Business in the Community (BITC) to review the Council's approach to EDI. The findings from this review resulted in a formal action plan. The recommendations outlined in the Council Motion and those proposed by BITC have largely either been implemented or are in progress.

2.2. The work to develop a formal EDI strategy builds on these foundations. The EDI Strategy will set out the Council's aims and ambitions for becoming a more diverse and inclusive organisation, our priorities for achieving this and how progress and success will be measured

3. Background

3.1 The aim of the EDI programme is to create a diverse and inclusive workforce where everyone, regardless of their background, level or vocation, can thrive and reach their full potential. Although the initial focus was on race, the scope of this aim encompasses all inequalities with a focus on all protected characteristics.

3.2 Work on the EDI agenda has been underway since late 2020 and tangible progress has been made - particularly in terms of the equality and diversity agenda - including a steady increase in the ethnic diversity of staff and a more representative senior leadership team

(RSM group). Work to fully embed the actions already taken is continuing.   Given progress has been made on some fronts, it is appropriate to now take stock and consider our longer-term aspirations for equality, diversity and inclusion - moving from focussing on the basics to developing a compelling longer-term ambition for equality, diversity and inclusion within the Council.

3.3   Early discussions with senior officers on what their ambition was for EDI going forward show:

o   There is a strong feeling that we need to move on from 'the basics' of EDI (important as they will continue to be) towards an ambition grounded in how the organisation should feel- quotes from the recent SLG EDI workshop included "we need RBC to be an organisation that feels inclusive, where we belong and is diverse" and "where everyone can thrive and reach their full potential"

o   That to fully develop our ambition in a meaningful way, rather than develop our EDI strategy top down, we should involve as many people as possible across the organisation in its development including engaging with teams, staff groups, ambassadors, trades unions etc

Process for the development of the EDI strategy for the Council:

Progress to date	Review and (re) Discovery	Strategy development	Deployment and monitoring
BITC review of the Council's approach to EDI incl. the Council's policies, processes and initiatives, and employee experiences Implementation of key recommendations	• Further detailed analysis of progress to date, its impact and the need for any remedial or enhancing actions • Whole Council engagement activities to inform our ambition for EDI	• Creation of a compelling ambition (vision) for EDI • Creation of a strategy and action plan, KPIs and recommendation re governance, roles and responsibilities and monitoring • Understanding of how to mainstream EDI into BAU	• Quarterly monitoring of action plan and proposed impacts • Alignment of associated strategies including Team Reading (Values and behaviours and associated tools e.g. appraisal policy and processes, recruitment etc)
Oct 2020 to date	June-mid July	July-August	September onwards

3.4 Whole council engagement exercise

o We know from research that engaged employees produce better outcomes and are less likely to leave – our people (the majority of whom live in the Borough – or close by) want purpose and meaning from their work and one aspect of the 'psychological contract' we have with them centres on making sure their voices can be heard, that they feel that they can contribute and that their opinions count. Communications and surveys can go some way to providing channels to do this but true engagement (and certainly engagement that actively fosters the use of discretionary effort) requires more – it requires that we find ways to engage with them at a deeper level eg through active staff groups; through champions/ambassador groups, through being asked to help shape things that matter to them. It is undoubtedly the case that equality, diversity and inclusion matters to staff and therefore engaging with them as we develop our EDI strategy is essential.

o A structured engagement exercise will take place through multiple channels (face to face, workshops, intranet discussions etc) with multiple stakeholders including leadership and management groups (CLT, SLG and Team Reading), individual teams, staff groups, unions etc. It will focus on a small number of core questions:

> o What do you think our equality, diversity and inclusion priorities should be?
> o How do you want the Council to *feel* in the future?
> o What would help your voice to be better heard?

o A thematic analysis of responses to the questions asked will be carried out to help us to identify areas of focus for the strategy and its enabling action plan - the act of involving people in developing this important agenda *through involving them in its development* is equally important

3.5 Strategy development

The whole council engagement exercise will provide valuable insight into priorities and actions in relation to the EDI agenda and additional external consultancy support will be used to enable the development of the EDI strategy – based on the findings of both the review of data/impact and the whole council engagement exercise. The consultancy support is expected to cost in the region of £35k.

The strategic ambition for EDI is expected to have implications for a range of key HR policies and processes including Team Reading values, our approach to recruitment, our strategy for apprenticeships and appraisal. The EDI strategy will require a thorough review of all of these areas and a conscious decision about how EDI will be supported and mainstreamed going forward.

3.6 Deployment and Monitoring

The delivery plan for our EDI strategy will need to be monitored quarterly with relevant metrics included in our performance reporting process.

3.7 Conclusion

We have the opportunity to re-energise our approaches to EDI – learning from what's been achieved so far, addressing gaps and most importantly setting a clear strategic vision for taking this important agenda forward. This paper outlines a process for doing so which is both inclusive and which will seek and secure appropriate specialist input to what is a complex, multi-faceted area of work.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

4.1. The work to develop an EDI strategy and plan for RBC will enable the Council better to reflect the Borough and its residents, providing opportunities and support for diverse recruitment, development and progression.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

5.1. There are no environmental or climate implications arising from the work to develop the Council's EDI strategy and plan as this focuses on existing and future staff of the Council.

6. Community Engagement

6.1. N/A

7. Equality Implications

7.1. This work is founded in a commitment to improving our equality, diversity and inclusion as an employer. It will reflect all relevant legislation including the Equality Act 2010, including Section 149, which requires a public authority … in the exercise of its functions, [to] have due regard to the need to—

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

8. Other Relevant Considerations

8.1. N/A

9. Legal Implications

9.1. N/A this paper is a briefing paper for Strategic Briefing

10. Financial Implications

Costs are anticipated to be c £35k for specialist consultancy support to assist with the creation of the strategy.

11. Timetable for Implementation

The draft strategy and plan will be produced in September 2023 and will go through the required governance processes after this including going formally go to Personnel Committee for agreement on 16th November 2023.

12. Background Papers

12.1. There are none.

Appendices

1. Council motion on Tackling Employment Inequality (20/10/20)

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications arising from the proposals set out in this report are set out below:-

1.   Revenue Implications

Use this Table in the report or as an Appendix to set out the revenue implications:

	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000
Employee costs (see note1) Other running costs Capital financings costs	35,000		
Expenditure	35,000		
Income from: Fees and charges (see note2) Grant funding (specify) Other income			
Total Income			
Net Cost(+)/saving (-)	35,000		

2.   Capital Implications

Capital Programme reference from budget book: page line	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000
Proposed Capital Expenditure	N/A		
Funded by Grant (specify) Section 106 (specify) Other services Capital Receipts/Borrowing			
Total Funding	N/A		

Note: where more than one option /proposal is being made it may be easier to set out the above information in an Appendix.

3.   Value for Money (VFM)

The cost of specialist consultancy support to develop the EDI strategy are subject to a competitive tender. This specialist support will be limited to those areas where internal capability is not available.

4.   Risk Assessment.

Risks exist around not developing an EDI strategy – through its development (and the creation of a plan to deliver it) we will better reflect the residents of the borough and provide opportunities to all to progress and develop.

Appendix 1:

<u>Tackling Employment Inequality – Motion to Council (20 October 2020)</u>

> Proposer: Cllr Challenger
> Seconder: Cllr James

This Council notes that:

- Just 52 out of the 1099 most powerful roles in the country are held by People of Colour, or 4.7% of the total number compared to the 13% proportion of the UK population (Colour of Power report 2020).
- There are 56 Unitary Authorities in the UK, currently only two Chief Executives identify as BAME.
- 3.3% of local government staff are Black in the South East compared to over 10% of the population.
- Progression remains important to BAME employees across the UK, with 70% saying that career progression is important to them, compared to only 42% of White British employees. However, over half of BAME employees (52%), believe that they will have to leave their current organisation to progress in their career, in contrast with 38% of White British employees who believe this.
- The evidence clearly shows that the workforces and institutions of the UK and our region are not reflective of their stakeholders.
- Many of the recommendations in the Lammy Review (2017), the Dame Angiolini Report (2017), the Windrush Lessons Learned Review (2018), the McGregor-Smith Review (2017), and the Macpherson report (1999) have not been implemented by Government.
- Reading Borough Council commits to being an anti-racist organisation – one that does not just tackle inequality, but actively fights racism in the Borough.
- Work is already being undertaken at the Council to identify the gaps and long-term solutions to fix the inequalities in our community and workforce, focusing on the understanding of the causes and consequences of inequality

This Council resolves to:

- Ask officers to bring forward plans to improve the diversity of the Council's senior leadership by instigating inclusive leadership training and seek to achieve the 'excellent' rating in future Local Government Equality Framework peer challenges.
- Develop an apprenticeship scheme that commits to increasing the number of black employees across the Council in a range of roles.
- Work with partners to improve diversity across the public sector.
- Request that the Corporate Management Team to identify a Lead Officer at Executive Director level to champion equalities work across the borough.
- Publish Ethnicity Pay Gap reporting on an annual basis and lobby Government to make such reporting mandatory for all organisations.
- Improve transparency in our recruitment, retention and progression data of Black/BME colleagues and develop an Action Plan.
- Become a signatory to Business In The Community's Race at Work Charter.
- Engage with any future Government commissions on racism in the UK and lobby the Government to implement outstanding recommendations in existing reviews.