

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF HR AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

TO:	PERSONNEL COMMITTEE		
DATE:	15 July 2021	AGENDA ITEM:	3
TITLE:	REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S EMPLOYMENT POLICIES		
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND 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 five policies, all of which have been reviewed jointly and agreed with the Joint Trade Unions.

1.2 The report includes the following appendices:

- Appendix A: Additional Payments Policy
- Appendix B: Grievance Policy
- Appendix C: Market Supplements Policy
- Appendix D: Grey Fleet Policy
- Appendix E: Volunteer Engagement Policy
- Appendix F: Equality Impact Assessment

2. DECISION

2.1 That the following revised/new HR policies (detailed in Appendices A to E of this report) be approved:

- Additional Payments Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Market Supplements Policy
- Grey Fleet Policy
- Volunteer Engagement Policy

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 Of the five policies covered in this report, the majority have extended beyond their normal review date and have been updated to reflect changes in employment law and the latest Codes of Practice and guidance issued by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS).
- 3.3 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).

4. POLICIES COVERED UNDER THIS REVIEW

- 4.1 All employment policies will be reviewed by the HR and Organisational Development team before end of November 2021 and presented for approval to Personnel Committee, following consultation and negotiation with the Joint Trade Unions. The policies listed below have been prioritised because they do not reflect current best practice or are out of date and hence put the Council at risk. A Grey Fleet Policy and a Volunteering Engagement Policy were missing from the current policy framework. This has been addressed and new policies covering these areas have now been included. The policies included in this report are:

- Additional Payments Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Market Supplements Policy
- Grey Fleet Policy
- Volunteer Engagement Policy

- 4.2 The remaining new and residual policies which require review will be brought forward for approval by end of November 2021.

4.3 Principles used for conducting this review

- 4.3.1 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
- 4.4 In future, all employment policies will be reviewed every two years or sooner if legislation requires it.

5. KEY ISSUES AND CHANGES PROPOSED

- 5.1 The table below sets out in summary terms for each of the revised policies the issues which have been addressed. Once the policy review is complete, hyperlinks will be added to the policies where they are cross-referenced with other policies.

Revised Policies

Issues to be addressed
Additional Payments Policy - Appendix A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplified and concise wording, making the application process easier for users to follow • Formatted to standard Council HR policies
Grievance Policy - Appendix B <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and update of language and content to simplify and make clearer for users
Market Supplements Policy - Appendix C <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and update of language and content to simplify and make clearer for users

New Policies

5.2 Grey Fleet Policy (Appendix D)

This policy sets out the Council's approach to management of the Grey Fleet and how it should be used.

5.3 Volunteer Engagement Policy (Appendix E)

This policy sets out the Council's approach to the recruitment and management of volunteers.

6. PROCESS FOR AGREEING THE NEW AND REVISED POLICIES

- 6.1 The process for agreeing the policies with the Joint Trade Unions has been as follows:

21 June 2021	The 5 draft policies (A-E) were uploaded to a SharePoint site that trade union representatives have access to, requesting initial feedback on the policies in advance of a meeting scheduled for 1 July 2021.
1 July 2021	First meeting with trade unions, HR Services Manager and Senior HR Advisers to review feedback from the trade unions and incorporate changes.
5 July 2021	Second meeting with trade unions, HR Services Manager and Senior HR Advisers to agree final amendments.
6 July 2021	Issued revised policies to the trade unions. The trade unions have confirmed their agreement by email to the final versions of the five policies and a record of their agreement will be formally noted at the Joint Trade Union Committee meeting on 14 July.

6.2 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)
- Being highlighted in the Chief Executive's weekly email to all staff
- Strategic HR and OD Business Partners/HR Advisers will 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 team meetings, tool-box talks, 1-1s etc.

7. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

7.1 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.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no environmental or climate change implications.

9. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

9.1 The Joint Trade Unions have been consulted on the revised policies. All the changes they proposed which have been incorporated into the final versions.

10. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

10.1 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.

10.2 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been carried out (see Appendix F) and has found no differential impact on any groups with protected characteristics.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 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.

11.2 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.

12. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

13.1 None