

# Personnel Committee

11 July 2024



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
*Working better with you*

<b>Title</b>	Review of the Council's Employment Policies
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To make a decision
<b>Report status</b>	Public report
<b>Report author</b>	Kathryn Cook – Assistant Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development
<b>Lead Councillor</b>	Cllr Emberson – Lead Councillor for Corporate Services and Resources
<b>Corporate priority</b>	Not applicable, but still requires a decision
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p>1. That Personnel Committee approve the following revised HR policies (detailed in Appendices A to E of this report):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Employment Stability Agreement</li><li>• Flexible Workstyles Framework</li><li>• Trade Union Facilities Agreement</li></ul>

## 1. Executive Summary

1.1. A rolling review of the Council's employment policy framework ensures that all employment policies are clear, easy to understand, up to date and reviewed regularly. This report presents 3 policies which have been reviewed and jointly agreed with the Joint Trade Unions. The Employment Stability Agreement, the Flexible Workstyles Framework and the Trade Union Facilities Agreement all have minor updates to improve content.

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

- Employment Stability Agreement
- Flexible Workstyles Framework
- Trade Union Facilities Agreement

### 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 revised policies the issues which have been addressed together with any 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.

<b>Issues addressed</b>
<b>Employment Stability Agreement (A)</b> This Agreement was reached between the Council and its recognised trades unions and was effective from 18 November 2022. The Council and its recognised trades unions are committed to the principle of employment stability. Both sides recognise that there have been changes in the delivery patterns of local government services. Whilst it is acknowledged that there is a need for adaptability, any changes must be achieved within a context of employment stability. A paragraph has been added to reflect that in exceptional circumstances a consultation period of 10 days will be possible by agreement with the recognised trade unions.
<b>Flexible Workstyles Framework (B)</b> 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. A paragraph has been added to

stipulate that working from home is not a substitute for childcare. It also encourages employees to talk to their line manager if there is an emergency regarding childcare to agree suitable arrangements.

**Trade Union Facilities Agreement (C)**

The Council recognises the value of maintaining and developing good industrial relations practices. In line with this, the Council supports the practice of collective bargaining when dealing with issues that affect its employees. It recognises that in order to do this, the employee representatives require certain facilities together with time in which to carry out their Trade Union duties. A paragraph has been added to give guidance on how local agreements should be agreed and approved.

**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:

7 May 2024	Policies were uploaded to a SharePoint folder for union representatives to review, requesting comments to be added by 24 May 2024.
7 June 2024	Reminder sent to Trade Union colleagues reminding them to review policies and add comments.
13 June 2024	Comments added and policies resent to Trade Union colleagues for approval.
21 June 2024	Trade Union colleagues confirmed approval of policies via email.

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.

**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 F) and has found no differential impact on any groups with protected characteristics.

## **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: Employment Stability Agreement
- Appendix B: Flexible Workstyles Framework
- Appendix C: Trade Union Facilities Agreement
- Appendix D: EIA