

PROCEEDINGS OF THE LOCAL JOINT FORUM – 9 MARCH 2026

Present:

Councillors Emberson (Chair), Ennis, Goss, McGrother and Terry.	
K Magee	Unite
K Gumbrell	National Education Union (NEU)
A McNamara	National Education Union (NEU)
M Palfrey	Unison
Kathryn Cook	Assistant Director of HR and Organisational Development
Simon Hill	Committee Services

Apologies:

Councillors

1. PROCEEDINGS OF THE LOCAL JOINT FORUM MEETING HELD ON 8 OCTOBER 2024

The proceedings of the Local Joint Forum meeting held on 8 October 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

2. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the following meeting were received:

- Joint Trades Union Committee - 11 February 2026

3. UPDATE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS ACT 2025

The Forum received a report, which was due to be considered at Personnel Committee on 12 March 2026, that provided an update on the implementation of the Employment Rights Act 2025.

The report explained that the Employment Rights Act had become law on 18 December 2025 and would progressively introduce additions and amendments to existing legislation including the Employment Rights Act 1996. The employment law changes included in the Act would happen in 2026 and 2027. The provisions in the Act would impact on a number of current HR Policies and these would be revised as set out in the Act. However, not all the provisions in the Act would apply to the Council.

A headline summary of the anticipated provision of the Act and the amendments required to be made to the Council's Policies including delivery timescales was attached to the report at Appendix 1 and a single 'master-tracker' had been developed to ensure the timely amendment of policies. This would be reviewed actively to ensure compliance and management of risk.

It was noted that further details were awaited on the introduction and operation of the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) for school support staff and that there would be engagement with the Unions when these were available.

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AGREED: That the report be noted and endorsed for onward submission to Personnel Committee on 12 March 2026.

4. CONFLICT OF INTEREST - POLICY

The Forum received a report, which was due to be considered at Personnel Committee on 12 March 2026, that introduced a standalone Conflict of Interest Policy that had been developed in response to the recently introduced Failure to Prevent Fraud offence under which the Council might be held criminally liable if it failed to prevent fraud that had been committed by employees or associated persons. The Draft Conflict of Interest Policy was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that under the Failure to Prevent Fraud offence, that had been introduced in September 2025, the Council might be held criminally liable if it failed to prevent fraud that had been committed by employees or associated persons, unless it could demonstrate that reasonable and proportionate fraud prevention procedures were in place. This included having clear governance frameworks, effective monitoring and documented controls to mitigate the risk of prosecution and reputational damage. A key area of concern had been the management of employee conflicts of interest. Currently, staff Declarations of Interest were not renewed annually. This created a risk that new business interests, secondary employment, or personal relationships might go undisclosed, leaving the Council exposed to allegations of bias or impropriety. Without regular updates it becomes difficult to evidence compliance with statutory requirements and to defend decisions if challenged. To address this a standalone Conflict of Interest Policy, that built on current expectations in the Code of Conduct, had been created to reflect the Council's obligations under the Failure to Prevent Fraud offence. Declaration of Interest submission would be mandatory on an annual for all staff, regardless of whether circumstances had changed or not. Staff would also be required to update their declaration immediately if a new interest arose. This would enable the Council to demonstrate proactive compliance with the new legislation, strengthen transparency and reduce the Council's exposure to fraud, corruption and procurement risks. It would also create a clear audit trail evidencing that the Council had taken reasonable steps to prevent conflicts and misconduct, thereby protection both staff and the organisation.

Finally, the report stated that process changes would be made upon approval of the Policy by Personnel Committee and a communications campaign was under development to ensure its implementation.

AGREED: That the report be noted and endorsed for onward submission to Personnel Committee on 12 March 2026.

5. OTHER BUSINESS

(a) Staff Club

K Magee noted that there had been representations from staff about the decision to end funding for the Staff Club administrator post. Councillors Emberson and Terry outlined the context and reasons for the decision and the process which had been followed. It was noted that similar clubs were supported on a voluntary basis in other authorities as were the other Staff networks. A meeting of the Club to discuss its future was due to be held on 10 March 2026.

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AGREED: That the position be noted.

(b) Inclusion and Change

K Gumbrell asked about wider staff input into change processes to ensure that accessibility issues were not overlooked, for example in the procurement of IT systems or the design of new facilities. It was noted that this could be picked up in work on the Inclusion Strategy.

AGREED: That K Cook follow up the suggestion about wider staff input into change processes.

(The meeting opened at 5.00 pm and closed at 5.31 pm).