

Personnel Committee

16 July 2026



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

Title	Review of Council's Employment Policies
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Report author	Kathryn Cook – Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development
Lead Councillor	Cllr Ruth McEwan – Lead Councillor for Corporate Services and Resources
Corporate priority	Our Foundations
Recommendations	That: • Personnel Committee approves the new/amended HR policies as attached in Appendices A-H of this report. • Personnel Committee agrees to delegated authority being given to the Head of Paid Service in conjunction with the Leader and Lead Councillor if changes are required to HR policies as a result of the EHRC guidance on single sex spaces if required ahead of the next Personnel Committee (in November).

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The Council's employment policies are regularly reviewed to ensure that they are clear, easy to understand and up to date. Where new HR policies are required, these are presented to Personnel Committee for approval along with any changes required to existing policies. This report presents Personnel Committee with one new policy and seven amended policies– these have been reviewed and agreed with the Joint Trade Unions. The report also requests delegated authority for changes to HR policies following the implementation of EHRC guidance on single sex spaces if this is required prior to November's Personnel Committee meeting.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1 Good employment policies should support a culture based on trust, fairness, and inclusion. They can also speed up 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 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 and through regular review remain current.
- 2.2 ACAS Codes of Practice give authoritative advice in key areas of employment practice. A failure to follow the Code does not 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. Principles for the review of existing policies/creation of new policies:

3.1 When existing policies are reviewed or new policies are created, the following principles apply:

- They must reflect current employment law and the ACAS Codes of Practice and/or guidance where relevant.
- They must be easy to understand and written in plain English
- They should be concise. Any information which is not germane to the policy itself should be removed. For example, management guidance notes should not included in the policies, but available separately.
- They should be consistent across related policies (where relevant)
- They should use gender neutral language

3.2 Prior to the creation of new policies or amendments being proposed to existing policies (other than where these changes are required as a result of changes to legislation), they are discussed with relevant subject matter experts and with the joint trade unions at a series of workshops. The specific policies covered by this paper have been discussed with the trade unions at a series of workshops over the past two months. The proposal for a new Suicide Prevention Policy has been contributed to by Public Health.

4. KEY ISSUES AND CHANGES PROPOSED

4.1 The table below sets out in summary terms the proposed changes made to seven existing policies. It also sets out in broad terms the content of the new proposed policy on suicide prevention. The policies themselves are attached as appendices. Once Personnel Committee has agreed them, referenced links will be added to each policy (where appropriate) and they will be lodged on the intranet and referenced in all staff communications. Where required, references will be made in relevant learning and development programmes.

Issues addressed:
DBS policy
As part of the TUPE transfer of Brighter Futures for Children back into Reading Borough Council in late 2025, a review was undertaken to assess differences between HR policies across the two organisations and the impact on transferring BFFC (now DOCS) staff. This review identified a small number of areas where amendments to existing RBC policies were required. For example, updates to the Fostering Friendly Policy were considered at the most recent Personnel Committee meeting. There are strict restrictions around the use of DBS checks and criteria that govern which roles they can be applied to. Blanket requirements for DBS checks cannot be mandated, instead we are required to evaluate the need for DBS checks on a role specific basis – this applies even where the role title appears to be similar eg social worker. Similar requirements apply to the need for DBS rechecks. The proposed amendment to the RBC DBS Policy reflects an operational requirement within DOCS for certain roles to undergo DBS re-checks on a three-year cycle.
Time off for Public Duties Policy

RBC is seeking to achieve Silver accreditation under the Armed Forces Covenant (currently held at Bronze level). The proposed changes to the Time Off for Public Duties Policy reflect the enhanced provisions required to meet Silver standards.

These include:

- up to five days' additional leave (either unpaid or from annual leave) for reservists; and
- up to five days' additional paid leave per leave year for Adult Cadet Force Volunteers to support attendance at essential annual training.

Recruitment Policy

RBC is seeking to achieve Silver accreditation under the Armed Forces Covenant (currently held at Bronze level). The proposed changes to the Recruitment Policy support this application, including provisions such as guaranteed interviews for veterans who meet the essential criteria.

In addition, a small number of minor amendments have been made to the policy following feedback from the Trade Unions.

Sickness Absence Policy

The Managing Sickness Absence policy has been updated in line with the requirements of the 2025 Employment Rights Act and to ensure that sickness is managed effectively. The key policy changes include SSP being paid from the first day of employment in line with the Employment Rights Act; requirements to co-operate with the sickness absence management process, procedural clarifications including absence review triggers in light of sickness related to disability and how disability sickness is recorded and addressed, changes to how concerns about the abuse of long term sickness absence will be managed; the use of first and final warnings as part of Attendance Review meetings and clarity about the opportunity to complete overtime following prior sickness absence.

Managing Poor Performance

A minor amendment has been made to this policy to reference that where an employee requests that a formal meeting under this policy is rearranged that this is within five working days of the original date.

Disciplinary

Changes to this policy include standardising the required timescales for action/response (including the provision of documents that the employee wishes to be considered as part of the process) and amendments to the requirements for referrals to external professional bodies

Grievance

Changes to this policy include standardising the required timescales for action/response and additional references to reasonable adjustments as well as responsibilities in respect of all parties involved in the case (not just the person taking out the grievance).

Supporting the Prevention of Suicide Policy – NEW POLICY

This policy sets out the Council's approach to supporting the prevention of suicide, identifying and supporting individuals at risk, and responding effectively to suicide-related incidents affecting staff. This policy aims to create a safe and supportive workplace where staff feel able to seek help and support others. It sets out clear roles and responsibilities including those for leaders/managers and employees.

It was created following input from Public Health and the trades unions. The policy will be scheduled for early review – six months after adoption. Guidance will be produced to sit alongside the policy, along with an 'easy read' version

and a flowchart setting out responsibilities etc. A bespoke version will be co-produced with head teachers for Schools.

- 4.2 Personnel Committee will be aware of recent EHRC advice about single sex spaces – this is expected to need to be implemented quickly although the date for this has yet to be confirmed. It is currently expected that this may have an impact on a number of current HR policies and given that the required implementation date may be prior to the next meeting of Personnel Committee (in November), delegated authority is requested from the Committee if changes are required to be made to HR Policies. As with previously delegated authorities from the Committee, this request is for the Head of Paid Service in conjunction with the Leader and Lead Councillor to agree policy changes if they are required.
- 4.3 A communications plan is in place to communicate the policy changes to managers and employees. This will include:
- News items on the intranet and iTrent Employee Self Service/Manager 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.

5. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 5.1 The new/revised HR policies help to ensure that the Council can meet its Corporate Plan priorities, specifically ensuring that the Council is fit for the future.

6. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 6.1 There are no environmental or climate change implications

7. Community Engagement

- 7.1 The Joint Trade Unions have been consulted on the policies covered by this report.

8. Equality Implications

- 8.1 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 I) and has found no differential impact on any groups with protected characteristics. Some positive impacts have been identified.

9. 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.

10. Financial Implications

- 9.1 There are no known financial implications arising from this report.

11. Background Papers

- a. There are none.

Appendices

The report includes the following appendices:

- Appendix A: DBS Policy
- Appendix B: Time off for Public Duties Policy
- Appendix C: Recruitment Policy
- Appendix D: Sickness Absence Policy
- Appendix E: Managing Poor Performance Policy
- Appendix F: Disciplinary Policy
- Appendix G: Grievance Policy
- Appendix H: Supporting the Prevention of Suicide Policy (new)
- Appendix I: EIA

Equality Impact Assessment

A. Information about the policy

Policy title	• DBS Policy • Time off for Public Duties Policy • Recruitment Policy • Sickness absence Policy • Managing Poor Performance Policy • Disciplinary Policy • Grievance Policy • Supporting the Prevention of Suicide Policy
Lead officer	Kathryn Cook, Director HR&OD
Date of assessment	16/6/26
Summary of the policy	Changes to each policy as set out in paragraph 4.1 of the covering paper. Provisions of the proposed new policy on suicide prevention are as also set out in paragraph 4.1

B. Initial assessment

	Assessment
PSED Aim 1 (unlawful behaviour): • Could your policy lead to direct or indirect discrimination, harassment, victimisation, or any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010?	no
PSED Aim 2 (equal opportunities): • Could your policy affect how service users or employees access services or participate in activities relevant to your policy area? • Could it impact people with particular protected characteristics who have a disproportionately low level of access to services, participation in public life, or other activities?	no

• Could it create or worsen disadvantages and inequalities in your community? • Could it remove or minimise disadvantages and inequalities in your community?	
PSED Aim 3 (good relations): • Could your policy affect how people perceive or interact with others? • Could it help tackle prejudice and promote understanding between people with different protected characteristics? • Could it lead to prejudice, community tensions, conflicts, isolation, or segregation?	no

C. Full assessment

i. Impact on protected characteristics

Protected characteristic	Expected impact	Evidence
Age	None	
Disability	None	
Gender reassignment	None	
Pregnancy and maternity	None	
Race	None	
Religion or belief	None	
Sex	None	
Sexual orientation	None	
Marriage and civil partnership	None	
Membership of the armed forces community*	Improved provisions for veterans and reservists and cadet forces volunteers	Policy proposal meets the requirements of the 'Silver' standard for the Armed Forces Covenant
Socio-economic disadvantage*	None	
Experience of care*	None	

*Additional characteristics identified by the Council to be considered in Equality Impact Assessments.

ii. Mitigating Actions

Negative impact	Mitigating action
-----------------	-------------------

None identified	

iii. Monitoring and Review

There are formal review periods for each HR Policy and once agreed by Personnel Committee, each of the amended policies will be added to the regular review schedule. The Suicide Prevention Policy will be reviewed after six months in operation at the request of the trades unions.

A regular workforce report is provided to Personnel Committee which monitors whether there is any adverse impact on employees with protected characteristics.

D. Approval

Approving officer (name and role)	Date
Kathryn Cook, Director HR&OD	16/6/2026