

Agenda item 6

For decision – approval of updates to policies within the Staff Handbook

Author: Laura Flaherty, HR Lead and Executive Assistant to the Town Clerk

We are currently in the midst of one of the biggest reforms to employment law with the government plan to ‘make work pay’ The changes began in December 2025 and will be rolled out in phases throughout 2026 and 2027.

A full list of current reforms can be read on the ACAS website here:

www.acas.org.uk/employment-rights-act-2025

Myself and Sian, Business and HR Administrator, have been keeping a watchful eye on all these and the changes still to come. In light of this policies within the Staff Handbook need to be updated to reflect the changes. We have used the templates offered by South West Councils which gives us confidence that the policies are reflective of employment law. The updated policies are:

[Appendix 6.1 Leave Policy](#)

[Appendix 6.2 Paternity Policy](#)

[Appendix 6.3 Bereaved Partners Paternity Leave](#)

[Appendix 6.4 Maternity Policy](#)

[Appendix 6.5 Shared Parental Leave Policy](#)

[Appendix 6.6 Adoption Policy](#)

[Appendix 6.7 Neonatal Care Leave Policy](#)

[Appendix 6.8 Whistleblowing Policy](#)

[Appendix 6.9 Volunteer Policy](#)

Staff have been consulted on these updated policies and have had a chance to comment. The policies at Appendix 6.1 through to Appendix 6.9 are the final versions and are for councillors’ approval.

A significant change to be aware of is that the Leave Policy now includes an accommodation for military reservists. It is proposed that the leave offer is similar to that offered for staff with civic duties. This is up to 5 days leave per year (not to be taken from holiday allowance). We have also updated our Adoption Policy so it is in line with the NJC Green Book in the same way that our maternity leave policy is. We recommend that this is a fair amendment to make.

The Leave Policy also makes provision for extra statutory days to be used by staff during the closure between the Christmas bank holiday and New Year starting in December 2027. Pro-rata arrangements will be in place for part-time staff. All part-time staff have complex calculations in their annual entitlement which ensures that they benefit from Bank Holidays (whether working days or not) specific to their pro-rata hours. So, no-one under or over benefits from Bank Holidays and no manual changes are required unless there is a permanent change to the staff member’s working days or hours.

The Staff Handbook is now a substantial document, currently standing at 147 pages (without factoring in the above policies), therefore Sian and I will be splitting the document up into the

individual policies to make it a much more accessible document. For staff, the policies will be added to our internal HR system, HR Planner. This will also make future updates much more manageable to make.

We continue to ensure that all policies and procedures are up to date. We will also be considering how we can weave in White Ribbon reference to fulfil our accreditation. Before she left FTC, Lucy McMahon shared some suggestions in terms of how we can do this and we will consider how this could be achieved. We are also working closely with Emily Osler, Community Engagement Officer, to understand how we can improve our equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) considerations within our staff policies, training opportunities and recruitment. Recommendations will be brought back to a future meeting.

Other options considered	N/A
Key considerations for the Council	To be confident that these policies are reflective of current employment law
Consultation and feedback	Staff have been consulted with the deadline for responses being Tuesday 18 August. No feedback has been received at the time of writing.
Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan	This links to Aim 5 of the Council Plan
Financial and Risk Implications	Risk arises from not being up to date and compliant with employment law. These policies help to mitigate that.
Legal / HR Implications	• These policies have significant legal and HR implications. • We have a duty to ensure all staff are aware of these policies and procedures • We will also ensure the details and information are circulated to all staff.
Equalities Implications	None specifically. Although these policies will be applied with equalities as a key consideration.
Community Safety Implications	N/A
Climate Change and Sustainability Implications	N/A
Health and Safety Implications	• Health and Wellbeing implication • Provides a framework of support for staff and provides a safe working environment.
Constitutional Requirements	The Staff Handbook and its associated policies are part of the constitution.
Background Papers	None
Report Sign-Off	Peter Wheelhouse, Town Clerk, 19/08/26

Recommendations

1. Approve the updated policies as part of Chapter 4 – Staff Handbook
2. Approve adopting the Adoption Policy on Green Book terms
3. As part of the Leave Policy approve the additional 5 days leave for military reservists
4. Approve the requirement for staff to use extra statutory days during the closure between the Christmas bank holiday and New Year starting in December 2027
5. Delegate to the HR Lead and Executive Assistant to the Town Clerk to ensure the policies are accessible to staff and are updated on our website.