

Medway Council
Meeting of Employment Matters Committee
Tuesday, 2 September 2025
7.00pm to 8.12pm

Record of the meeting

Subject to approval as an accurate record at the next meeting of this committee

Present: Councillors: Mark Prenter (Chairperson), Cook (Vice-Chairperson), Fearn, Hackwell BEM, Hamilton and Peake

In Attendance: Samantha Beck-Farley, Chief Organisational Culture Officer
Steve Dickens, Democratic Services Officer
Nicola Trainor, Head of Employee Relations

264 Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Sands.

265 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 3 July 2025 was agreed and signed by the Chairperson as correct.

The record of the Joint Consultative Committee held on 3 July 2025 was noted by the Committee.

266 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

267 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Significant Interests

Disclosable pecuniary interests (DPI)

There were none.

Other significant Interests (OSI)

There were none.

Other Interests

Councillor Cook disclosed that she was a member of the NAHT trade union.

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Councillor Hamilton disclosed that she was a member of the NEU trade union.

Councillor Mark Prenter disclosed that he was a member of the ASLEF trade union.

Councillor Peake disclosed that he was a Member of Unison.

268 Staff Survey 2025 Results

Discussion:

The Chief Organisational Officer introduced the report outlining the results of the recent staff survey. The survey was completed by 55.5% of staff which was slightly lower than last year and showed significant improvements in a number of areas such as improved communication between management and staff and pay and reward. However, there was also a number of areas where further action was required.

The following issues were discussed:

Staff retention – The Committee discussed staff retention and the Chief Organisational Culture Officer was asked for her thoughts as to why 10% of staff wanted to leave the Council in the short term. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer stated that the results had improved compared to previous surveys, with an additional 7% of staff reporting a desire to work for the Council for the long term. With regard to the 10% that intended to leave the Council in the next year, part of this figure could be explained by those planning retirement which reflected the aging workforce within the Council. The figures also showed some staff wanted to leave to seek carer progression. Officers would investigate how the Council could provide additional opportunities to staff in response to the survey results.

It was asked how the Council compared to other comparable authorities and local public sector organisations. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer undertook to discuss with external partners if they would be willing to share their results and provide additional information outside of the meeting.

Bullying – concern was raised by Members in relation to the results of the survey relating to bullying, discrimination and harassment. A Member asked if officers were concerned given a significant proportion of staff that completed the survey were managers and this may have affected results and the views of staff who had not completed the survey had not been heard.

Improving response rates – a Member noted that a significant proportion of those completing the survey were managers, she asked whether this would affect results and how the Council could improve response rate across divisions. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer stated that there had been some anecdotal feedback which suggested that some staff wanted to engage in different ways such as group discussions or shorter surveys. It was the

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intention of the Council to undertake the principal staff survey every two years in future and compliment this with shorter focused surveys on particular issues. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer acknowledged that the bullying, discrimination and harassment results remained similar to previous survey which was disappointing. She did not believe that the results were misleading due to the cohort that had completed the survey, however, further investigation into the data was required.

She added that she was concerned that the results showed a reluctance to report issues by some staff, 20% of staff reported not knowing how to report issues despite additional work undertaken by officers to promote the survey and 55% of staff that reported issues were dissatisfied with the outcome. Results were being investigated and free text responses anonymised. This would provide additional insight as to the causes of the results. In response the Council was considering options such as a chatbot to assist staff in finding helpful information on the internet.

The Committee discussed the importance of culture in ensuring that staff felt supported to raise issues. The Chief Organisational Officer explained the importance the Chief Executive and administration placed on engagement and the positive work that has been undertaken in the area had been reflected in other areas of the survey. She added that the Equalities Board was undertaking some work to understand how the directorates worked in different ways and to create a safe space for staff to report concerns. In addition, some specialist training would be commissioned regarding microaggressions.

Loneliness – a Member raised concern about the numbers of staff reporting feelings of loneliness. It was asked whether the questions relating to loneliness referred to staff experience of workplace loneliness or more widely. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer stated that she believed it referred to workplace loneliness but would confirm this and report back to the Committee. She added that workplace loneliness and wellbeing would be a priority for the Council following the survey. The Council had put in place a number of groups and activities to support wellbeing in the workplace following the end of Covid restrictions, however, the partial closure of the building due to RAAC had affected some of those schemes. HR intended to work with Public Health to consider some of these issues and provide additional support for staff to support wellbeing.

Recruitment and Retention - in response to a question about progress in improving recruitment and retention the Chief Organisational Culture Officer stated that there had been significant progress made. This was reflected in survey results which showed 7% more staff satisfied with pay and rewards and significant rise in staff who would recommend Medway as a place to work which had risen 20% over the last six years.

Trade Union representatives at the Joint Consultative Committee had expressed concern at the results related to bullying, discrimination and harassment and had agreed to work with the Council in finding proactive solutions.

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Decision:

- a) The Employment Matters Committee noted the report.
- b) The Committee requested a briefing note to include benchmarking information regarding staff retention and percentage of staff seeking to leave the organisation with other authorities in the area and NHS partners.
- c) The Committee requested further information regarding staff who experienced feelings of loneliness, particularly whether it referred to in work, or as a whole.
- d) The Committee requested additional information regarding the Members of management and non-management staff that completed the report and whether this had affected results.

269 Gender Pay Gap 2025/26

Discussion:

The Head of Employee Relations introduced the report which highlighted the gender pay gap which the Council was required to publish by 31 March and also reported the ethnicity and disability pay gap. The gender pay gap fell from the previous year and stood at 8.1% at March 2025, this was below the national average of 13.1%. Medway ranked 7th of the 14 local authorities.

The ethnicity pay gap showed that ethnic minorities had a higher average pay in comparison to white employees which reflected the higher proportion of ethnic minorities in senior posts and the disability pay gap was -0.1, meaning that staff members with a disability earned slightly more than those without.

The following issues were discussed

Reasons for progress – Members welcomed the progress made by officers in reducing the gender pay gap, the Head of Employee Relations was asked her opinion on how the progress had been made. The Head of Employee Relations stated that the introduction of Medpay PPP had provided more structure to pay and contributed to the reduction in the pay gap.

The Head of Employee Relations added that the figures also reflected the predominantly female workforce. Further work would be undertaken to review pay quartiles and cross reference with ethnicity and disability pay gaps.

Local Government Reform – in response to a question what impact Local Government Reform would have on the results, the Head of Employee Relations stated that it was too early in the process to know what the impact of Local Government Reform would have on the current pay gaps.

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Bonus Pay - The Committee discussed bonus pay gap figures, the Head of Employee Relations explained that the bonus gap related to a small group of staff predominately in Social Worker positions. As such a small change in staffing had a significant impact on the figures.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the contents of the report in relation to the Gender Pay Gap, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, prior to external publication and to also note the ethnicity and disability pay gap results, as set out in Appendices 3 and 4.
- b) The Democratic Services Officer to share with the Committee the briefing note that had been prepared in relation to bonus pay.

270 Probationary Policy

Discussion:

The Head of Employee Relations introduced the report which was intended to provide clarity for managers and employees in particular with regard to if an extension of the probationary period is required, the appeals process and when temporary staff take up permanent roles.

The Head of Employee Relations explained two amendments to the wording were proposed to clarify that temporary staff who had satisfactorily completed six months in role would not be subjected to probationary period upon converting to a permanent role and to clarify that the probationary period for staff was either 6 months or 12 months dependent on the role.

She added that consultation with Trade Unions had taken place, and communications and training strategies were in place to support the implementation of the policy.

The following issues were discussed:

Members welcomed the proposals and a Member commented that it was important to ensure the probationary period gave the right support to staff as part of recruitment and retention. The Head of Employee Relations agreed. She added that it was important that the probationary period was an ongoing process, so both employee and managers should have clear understanding of progress made prior to probationary meetings.

Trade union representatives at the Joint Consultative Committee welcomed the proposals and the slight amendment to the text of the policy.

Decision:

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- a) The Committee approved the updated Probationary Policy set out as Appendix A to the report and approve the implementation of the policy across all areas of the organisation.
- b) The Committee supported the provision of adequate communication and training to support the effective uptake of the revised policy.
- c) The change in wording at paragraph 2.2 to clarify the position of staff converting from temporary to permanent contracts was approved.

271 Flexible Retirement Policy

Discussion:

The Head of Employee Relations introduced the report, she highlighted that the proposed policy provided significantly more information for staff who may consider flexible retirement. The proposals give transparency and clarity regarding eligibility for flexible retirement to enable staff to make informed decisions and clear procedures.

The Head of Employee Relations added that the new policy would help retain the knowledge of experienced staff and would improve recruitment and retention. Trade Unions had been consulted and briefing sessions for managers would be arranged to support implementation of the policy.

The following issues were discussed:

Flexibility for staff – Members welcomed the policy, it was asked whether a provision could be made for staff to return to full time work in exceptional circumstances once they had taken flexible retirement. The Head of Employee Relations undertook to take advice from the pension provider and legal services whether this was possible.

Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Statement – in response to a question whether experience of being in care should be referred to specifically in the statement the Head of Employee Relations undertook to check and amend this if care leavers had not been included ahead of publishing the policy.

Decision:

- a) The Committee approved the updated Flexible Retirement Policy as set out as Appendix A to the report and approved the implementation of the policy across all areas of the organisation subject to confirmation of decisions C and D below.
- b) The Committee supported the provision of adequate communication to support the effective uptake of the revised policy, as well as any training requirements.

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- c) The Head of Employee Relations to investigate whether an employee who had taken flexible retirement could return to full time work in exceptional circumstances and provide an update to the Committee.
- d) The Head of Employee relations to consider whether the Equality, diversity and inclusion statement should be amended to specifically refer to those people who have had experience of being in care as a characteristic.

Chairperson

Date:

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