

Medway Council
Meeting of Employment Matters Committee
Wednesday, 3 December 2025
7.06pm to 8.10pm

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), Hackwell BEM, Peake and Sands

Substitutes: Councillor Louwella Prenter

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

504 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Fearn and Hamilton.

505 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 2 September 2025 was agreed and signed by the Chairperson as correct.

The record of the Joint Consultative Committee held on 2 September 2025 was noted by the Committee.

506 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

507 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Significant Interests

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

Other interests

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

Councillor Peake disclosed that he was a member UNISON.

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

Councillor Louwella Prenter disclosed that she was a member of the UNITE trade union.

508 Workforce Update 2025/2026

Discussion

The Chief Organisational Culture Officer introduced the report which provided the latest information on the workforce for 2025/26 and requested that it move to an annual report to allow full year comparison.

Workforce growth and turnover – the almost 10% growth in workforce with little additional output was queried. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer reminded Members that there had previously been a number of reports to full Council looking at increasing some of the back office provision in Children and Adults, Legal, HR and Finance. This had been due to the sheer demand and increase in activity, as well as reduced government funding. It was also important to note that there had also been vacancy freezes for many years. Any appointments were within the budget agreed by full Council.

The Chief Organisational Culture Officer further advised that part of the turnover issue was burn out from operating with vacancies and people managing very high caseloads, and it was necessary to ensure appropriate numbers of staff to ensure manageable caseloads. Some additional resource had also been brought in for the Local Government Reform work (LGR), the MedPay review, recruitment and legal. She did not have a full breakdown of exact numbers but it could be provided on request. With specific reference to one year turnover, it was high and work was ongoing to resolve this such as better inductions and looking at recruitment and how positions were advertised in the market. Some of the figures would also be resources where there had previously been grant funding and fixed term appointments.

Annual comparators with other organisations were carried out in June which was why it was being requested that this report be changed to an annual report.

Stress and anxiety – the Chief Organisational Culture Officer advised that as Members were aware a new Sickness Policy had been introduced and the bite sized training continued to be delivered. Reasonable adjustments were being introduced so that returnees could ease themselves back with part-time adjustments. The occupational health provision was the care first provision to

Employment Matters Committee, 3 December 2025

support people and this would be going up for retender next year, which provided an opportunity to consider more professional support for colleagues.

The staff survey had highlighted that many managers did not feel well equipped to support staff who were experiencing mental ill health issues and stress. To this end work was being done with a healthy mind and well-being group around how managers could be supported better. There was also ongoing work with the Public Health team around healthy workplaces. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer offered to report back to a future meeting on the action plan being put in place.

Salary transparency – in response to a query as to how many members of staff had salaries exceeding £50k, the Chief Organisational Culture Officer advised that this information could be obtained on the Council's website transparency pages.

Equality and diversity – it was noted that declaration rates remained low despite continued work on building trust and improving reporting, particularly around disability and neurodiversity.

The Equality Board was active and conversant with the various networks. The Board's annual report would be submitted to this Committee in due course. There had been a confidential open forum recently, discussing harassment and bullying, and discrimination. The trusted conversations had given insight into some micro aggressions and some suggested key areas for deep dives. It had also opened up a conversation on whether neuro-diversity was seen as a disability. Building trust was key to better reporting, as well as use of language.

Members noted the Joint Consultative Committee comments from the earlier meeting.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the 6 month workforce update 2025/26 and further supported data as set out in the Appendices 1 - 4 to the report.
- b) The Committee agreed the report should move to yearly reporting, to align with the workforce strategy review, acknowledging there was quarterly senior oversight and review in place already.
- c) The Committee requested that the action plan on absence management under healthy workplaces be presented at a future meeting.

509 Speak Up, Anti-Bribery and Anti-Money Laundering and RIPA Policies: Report on Instances September 2024 - August 2025

Discussion

The Chief Organisational Culture officer introduced the report which advised the number and nature of concerns raised between September 2024 and

Employment Matters Committee, 3 December 2025

August 2025, under the Council's speak up (whistleblowing), anti-bribery, anti-money laundering and use of regulation of investigatory powers policies.

It was noted that the report had also been considered by the Audit Committee on 11 September 2025.

Members noted the Joint Consultative Committee comments from the earlier meeting.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the comments of the Audit Committee set out at section 8 of the report.
- b) The Committee noted the contents of the report.

510 Revised Grievance and Harassment Policies

Discussion

The Head of Employee Relations introduced the report which outlined the review and amendments to the Council's current grievance and harassment policy, which had been split into two separate policies with their own procedure documents.

The revised policies provided greater accessibility and readability due to being split; greater procedural detail; more transparent explanation of processes; faster timelines for processing grievances and complaints of bullying and/or harassment; and better managerial guidance for dealing with such issues. There was also a greater focus on informal resolution as the initial response. The revisions did not represent a substantive change to the meaning, purposes or function of the policies and were therefore not being put to the Committee for approval.

In response to a concern as to how consistency and quality of application of the policy would be managed/audited with managers, it was noted that improvements had been made with recording and this was analysed to spot any trends. Deep dives would then be carried out if required along with targeted intervention and bitesize learning. As an example, issues would be evident through high turnover for instance.

Members noted the Joint Consultative Committee comments from the earlier meeting.

Decision:

The Committee noted the updated grievance and harassment policies and procedures as set out at Appendices A to E to the report.

511 Introduction of a Sexual Harassment Policy

Discussion

The Head of Employee Relations presented this report which sought approval to introduce a sexual harassment policy to drive greater prevention and protection for employees against sexual harassment in the workplace. It also sought to clarify how instances of reported sexual harassment would be dealt with in conjunction with the revised harassment policy and procedure.

It was noted that introducing a sexual harassment policy would support compliance with legal requirements under the Worker Protections Act 2023, as well as the proposed changes to those requirements under the Employment Rights Bill. It would also help to promote an inclusive and supportive working environment where employees could feel safe in the workplace.

In response to a query as to how this policy would apply to third party interaction e.g. external contractors, the Head of Employee Relations undertook to find this information out.

Members noted the Joint Consultative Committee comments from the earlier meeting.

Decision:

- a) The Committee approved the introduction of a sexual harassment policy and the implementation of the policy across all areas of the organisation.
- b) The Committee noted the requirement for adequate training provision and awareness communications to allow managers and employees to have an informed insight on existing and new preventative and responsive measures to protect workers against sexual harassment.

512 Pay Negotiations 2026/2027

Discussion

The Chief Organisational Culture Officer introduced the report on the progress of the pay negotiations for the financial year 2026/2027 and clarified the situation around sleep-in payments.

Members noted the Joint Consultative Committee comments from the earlier meeting.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report, including progress made to date under the Pay Negotiations Protocol.

Employment Matters Committee, 3 December 2025

Chairperson

Date:

Vanessa Etheridge, Democratic Services Officer

Telephone: 01634 332115

Email: democratic.services@medway.gov.uk