

**Medway Council**  
**Meeting of Joint Consultative Committee**  
**Wednesday, 3 December 2025**  
**6.03pm to 6.58pm**

**Record of the meeting**

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

- Present:** Councillors: Mark Prenter (Chairperson), Cook, Fearn, Hackwell BEM, Peake and Sands
- Employee Side Representatives: Tania Earnshaw UNISON (Vice Chairperson), Mark Hammond UNISON, Lauraine McManus NEU, Louise Stevenson AEP.
- Substitutes:** Councillor Louwella Prenter
- In Attendance:** Samantha Beck-Farley, Chief Organisational Culture Officer  
Vanessa Etheridge, Democratic Services Officer  
Nicola Trainor, Head of Employee Relations

**1 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Fearn and Hamilton, and Trade Union representatives Philip Bunn ASCL, and Mick Simpkin GMB.

**2 Record of meeting**

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

**3 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances**

There were none.

**4 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.

**5 Workforce Update 2025/26**

**Discussion**

The Chief Organisational Culture Officer introduced the report which provided the latest information on the workforce for 2025/26.

In response to a query from the NEU representative, the Chief Organisational Culture Officer agreed to take the request away and circulate data on Medway Schools.

The UNISON representative queried the lower than UK average sickness figures and highlighted a concern that staff were working from home whilst potentially should be signed off; that this was potentially storing up further issues in the future; and that the figure might need capturing differently due to new ways of working. She also queried the stress and anxiety figures which were double the UK average; queried how this was being addressed; and asked what was being done to tackle high first year turnover.

The Chief Organisational Culture Officer advised that the rolling figure to date for sickness was actually 10.18% and lower within the report as it was a 6 month report. This was one of the reasons for a request to move to annual reporting. She also advised that sickness absence was easier to report now which may have contributed to the higher figures. Work had been underway with the Public Health team on healthy workplace intervention and an action plan was in place but not yet signed off. She proposed reporting on its progress to a future meeting.

**Decision:**

The Committee to provide comments to the Employment Matters Committee as outlined above.

**6 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 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.

**Decision:**

The Committee to provide comments to the Employment Matters Committee as outlined above.

**7 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 Employment Matters Committee for a decision to approve.

**Grievance Policy** - UNISON made a number of observations, queries and minor typographical errors which it was agreed would be forwarded to the Head of Employee Relations for better consideration. These included, amongst other comments:

- under Line Manager's Responsibilities (paragraph 5.2), consequences for line managers had been removed which was a loss to the policy as it was important that consequences were fully understood.
- there was concern that the informal route was not always possible (paragraph 6.3) and, in some cases, could cause further distress if forced. The Head of Employee Relations agreed, however the policy was trying to emphasise that it was important to exhaust informal routes

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as much as possible first. However all cases were assessed on an individual basis.

- under 'informal resolution' (paragraph 8.2) it would be preferable as 'aim to meet' rather than 'resolve' issues within 2 working days. The Head of Employee Relations agreed with the suggested amendment.
- the policy still referred to raising a grievance within three months (paragraph 9.3) when it was widely understood that there was a change to the Employment Rights Bill from 3 to 6 months. It was noted that as there were ongoing reported changes to the Bill and it had been decided to only implement what was definite. Also, due to Local Government Reform (LGR) proposals, generally when reviewing policies, it had been agreed with neighbouring authorities to not make substantially different decisions in the lead up to LGR. Therefore processes were being reviewed to comply with the current law only.

**Harassment and Bullying Policy** - the UNISON representative was delighted with paragraph 1.4 removing the onus on the victim.

### **Decision:**

The Committee to provide comments to the Employment Matters Committee as outlined above.

## **8 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.

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.

It was noted that the numbering anomalies within the document would be corrected before publication.

### **Decision:**

The Committee to provide comments to the Employment Matters Committee as outlined above.

## **9 Pay Negotiations 2026/27**

### **Discussion**

The Chief Organisational Culture Officer introduced the report on the progress of the pay negotiations for the financial year 2026/2027. It was noted that the report referred to (paragraph 7) full Council in April but should read 26 February 2026.

UNISON advised that the 'joint pay claim' was just UNISON in this instance and advised the Committee of the context to the pay claim and the necessity of the cost of living award (COLA). There was also concern that salary honouring as a result of the MedPay review was a delayed detriment and potentially an age discrimination matter.

The Chief Organisational Culture Officer advised that the commitment was not to be in a position below inflation and an aspiration not to be where were before, and the MedPay review had helped with this. There were limitations within bands, particularly range 2, where increases would give less headroom and lead to another evaluation exercise.

The Chief Organisational Culture Officer explained that COLA could not be applied to salary honouring as that would mean those employees would continue to be paid more and the need for the MedPay review was to remove inequality and provide protection for the Council against equal pay.

There was still a lot of work to do before the final report recommendations in January. UNISON requested that full costings be featured in the next report.

### **Decision:**

The Committee to provide comments to the Employment Matters Committee as outlined above.

### **Chairperson**

**Date:**

**Vanessa Etheridge, Democratic Services Officer**

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