

**Medway Council**  
**Meeting of Employment Matters Committee**  
**Thursday, 30 April 2026**  
**7.00pm to 7.51pm**

**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, Hamilton and Peake
- Substitutes:** Councillors: Barrett and Williams
- In Attendance:** Samantha Beck-Farley, Chief Organisational Culture Officer  
Vanessa Etheridge, Democratic Services Officer  
Hary Steer, HR Consultant and Policy Lead  
Nicola Trainor, Head of Employee Relations

**892 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Fearn and Councillor Sands.

**893 Record of meeting**

The record of the meeting held on 28 January 2026 was agreed and signed by the Chairperson as correct.

The record of the Joint Consultative Committee held on 28 January 2026 was noted by the Committee.

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

There were none.

**895 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Significant Interests**

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

## Employment Matters Committee, 30 April 2026

### Other interests

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

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

## **896 Domestic Abuse Workplace Policy**

### **Discussion**

The Head of Employee Relations introduced the report which sought approval for a revised Domestic Abuse Workplace Policy for Medway Council. The Policy modernised definitions and scope in line with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, strengthened support for employees (including the introduction of trained Domestic Abuse Champions), clarified manager responsibilities and safeguarding routes, and formalised the Council's approach to alleged perpetrators who were Council employees.

Members were informed that the policy had been developed collaboratively with HR and the Council's Public Health team who were the subject experts in this area, drawing on national research, best practice and alignment with other authorities. The appendices included up-to-date national and local support pathways.

It was queried how uptake of the policy could be monitored, including whether anonymised data by directorate, grade, contract type and protected characteristics could be captured safely and lawfully; and how it would link to the wider policy framework, in particular where risks might arise from colleagues, service users, contractors or members of the public. In response, the Head of Employee Relations agreed that it was important to understand usage patterns, but this needed to be balanced against ensuring any monitoring did not deter staff from coming forward. It was confirmed that further work would be undertaken, including discussions with the Equality Board and staff forums, to explore safe and appropriate approaches. The challenge of how this would link into wider framework where the risk might be from the public, contractors, service users or colleagues, was welcomed and this would also be looked into.

A concern was raised around clarity of definitions, particularly the omission of cohabitation and the breadth of the term "intimate personal relationship." The HR Consultant and Policy Lead advised that he would query this with the Public Health team who were the subject experts in this area. In any case the view was that the policy should not be too restrictive and matters would be

## Employment Matters Committee, 30 April 2026

considered on an evidenced based, case- by-case basis. It was agreed that the specific reference to cohabitation would be reviewed.

It was queried how the policy applied to elected members, as some employment-related processes were not directly applicable. Officers agreed to review and clarify this element.

In response to a question about the engagement with national domestic abuse charities and trade unions in developing the policy, it was confirmed that the Public Health team's advice was based on national standards and that local trade unions had been consulted, not national.

Members noted the Joint Consultative Committee comments from the earlier meeting where the policy had been welcomed and recognised as one of the first to benefit from the new informal consultation process. Wider signposting to disability associations had been requested, along with greater diversity amongst champions and a request that that the policy be shared in an accessible, easy-to-understand format online.

### Decision

The Employment Matters Committee:

- a) approved the revised Domestic Abuse Workplace Policy at Appendix A (and its appendices, Appendix B-E) for immediate implementation;
- b) noted the key improvements in scope, legal alignment, support arrangements and perpetrator-management protocols, as set out in the Summary of Changes at Appendix F to the report; and
- c) agreed to the provision of targeted communications and training for managers and Champions to support consistent uptake, led by the Council's Public Health team.

## 897 Implementing Family Leave Reforms

### Discussion

The Head of Employee Relations introduced the report which informed the Committee of the April 2026 statutory reforms and the effect on the Council's family policies, which included: (i) Paternity Leave and Unpaid Parental Leave becoming day-one rights, (ii) the lifting of the restriction on taking Paternity Leave after Shared Parental Leave, and (iii) the introduction of a new statutory Bereaved Partner's Paternity Leave. The report also clarified the continued distinction between entitlement to leave and entitlement to statutory pay. The recommended updates within the report, ensured the Council would be compliant with the Employment Rights Act reforms and associated regulations coming into force in April 2026, whilst supporting the ambition to be a family-friendly employer.

## Employment Matters Committee, 30 April 2026

The report also requested a delegated authority to make minor, non-material amendments to any policies affected by statutory changes under the Employment Rights Act 2025 until such time as the Act has been fully implemented. This was to ensure no delays in compliance due to the quarterly nature of the Committee and rapidly changing landscape of legislative implementation.

**Bereaved Partners' Leave** - concerns were raised by Members regarding bereaved partners' leave, particularly the perceived inconsistency whereby a bereaved parent was entitled to up to 52 weeks' unpaid leave if the death of the mother or primary adopter occurred early within the first year, but significantly less leave if the death occurred later in that same year. Several Members expressed the view that this distinction was difficult to justify and that the impact on the surviving parent would be equally profound regardless of timing. Officers advised that the Council was currently reflecting the statutory framework and confirmed that a wider suite of policies - including bereavement leave, compassionate leave, carers' leave and dependent leave, could be accessed to support staff experiencing such circumstances. It was suggested that Medway could and should do better than the minimum statutory requirement and that the 12 months unpaid leave should not be limited to a 52 week timeframe, stressing the aspiration to be a genuinely family-friendly employer.

**Training** - in response to a query it was confirmed that clear guidance and training would be provided to managers to prevent unintended consequences of informal disadvantage or penalties for staff taking family leave. Supplementary guidance for managers would accompany the policies and it was noted that the Council's approach to training increasingly used practical examples and bite-size learning to support consistent and fair application. Members requested clearer signposting between family leave policies and other relevant staff policies, to ensure managers had a holistic understanding of the full range of support available and to avoid overly complex or inconsistent approaches.

Members noted the Joint Consultative Committee comments from the earlier meeting which had included the HR Consultant and Policy Lead agreeing to look at clarifying the legacy wording in the second bullet point under Parental Leave at Appendix A, concerning adoptive parents.

### Decision

The Employment Matters Committee:

- a) reviewed and approved the statutory updates to the Council's Maternity and Paternity Leave, Parental Leave and Shared Parental Leave as set out in the report as set out in Appendix A to the report;
- b) approved the new Bereaved Partner's Paternity Leave Policy as set out at Appendix B to the report, with its appendices (Appendix C and D to this report); subject to the 'new day-one right for the child's father/partner (or equivalent in adoption/surrogacy scenarios) to take up to 52 weeks of

## Employment Matters Committee, 30 April 2026

unpaid leave where the mother/primary adopter dies within the first year; taken within 52 weeks of birth/placement provision of up to 12 months unpaid carers leave', being amended so that the entitlement to 12 months was not limited to end within the first 52 weeks timeframe. The Committee agreed to delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer in consultation with the Chairperson to agree the final wording within the Policy.

- c) endorsed the delivery of manager briefings, payroll and HR system updates, and staff communications to be rolled out alongside these updates; and
- d) agreed to delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer, to make minor, non-material amendments to any policies affected by statutory changes under the Employment Rights Act 2025 until such time as the Act has been fully implemented. The delegation was limited to amendments required to maintain legal compliance and did not extend to substantive policy changes, which would remain subject to Committee approval. Any use of the delegation would be reported to the next meeting of the Committee.

### 898 Equality Board Annual Review

#### Discussion

The Chief Organisational Culture Officer introduced the annual report which summarised the key achievements of the Equality Board in the last year and the priorities for the coming year.

The report was welcomed and it was requested that a dashboard of workforce data by protected characteristic (pay gaps, recruitment, progression, grievances, sickness and exits) could be added to future reports. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer confirmed that it was possible to share that data.

Members noted that the Joint Consultative Committee had praised the work of the Equality Board.

#### Decision

The Employment Matters Committee noted the achievements of the Equalities Board in 2025/26 and the priorities for the Equalities Board in 2026/27.

### Chairperson

Date:

**Vanessa Etheridge, Democratic Services Officer**

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