

Medway Council
Meeting of Joint Consultative Committee
Thursday, 30 April 2026
6.02pm to 6.33pm

Record of the meeting

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

- Present:** Councillors: Cook, Hackwell BEM, Hamilton, Peake and Mark Prenter (Chairperson)
- Employee Side Representatives: Tania Earnshaw UNISON (Vice Chairperson) and Louise Stevenson AEP.
- 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

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Fearn and Sands, and Trade Union representatives Mark Hammond UNISON, and Lauraine Mcmanus NEU.

2 Record of meeting

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

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Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

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.

5 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.

The UNISON representative welcomed the Policy and the incorporation of the comments from the new informal consultation process. In a point of clarification she pointed out that whilst not described as a "champions" scheme at that time, the approach was not new and a similar model had been in place since 2014. At that point, efforts had been made to ensure contacts existed across service areas and with a broad range of protected characteristics represented. LGBTQ+ issues had previously been absent from the policy framework and were incorporated in 2014 following recognition of that gap and she expressed her satisfaction that this aspect was now explicitly acknowledged. In response to a question, the HR Consultant and Policy Lead advised that the staff intranet page listed all champions and there were plans to communicate and increase visibility, providing clearer links between the policy and the champions information. It was also noted that as part of the roll out, all the networks would be made aware for signposting purposes.

It was observed that the Policy was lengthy and word-heavy and that staff who were seeking support may not be in the appropriate emotional or cognitive headspace to engage with a long and comprehensive document. It was agreed that an initial one page or summary could be introduced. It was also suggested that the Policy could benefit from being redrafted in plainer English.

The UNISON representative stressed the importance of ensuring diversity within the champions group, particularly the representation of disabled staff.

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She advised that disabled individuals were statistically less likely to come forward for support or might take significantly longer to seek help. The UNISON representative commented that the policy currently signposted only one external support organisation for the disabled and advised that she had identified at least three additional organisations. She agreed to share this information with the Head of Employee Relations.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that training was provided by colleagues in Public Health who were subject-matter specialists. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer advised that the organisation was working with Oasis Domestic Abuse Service and that course content could be shared with Members. It was also confirmed that it was the responsibility of line managers to provide appropriate initial support and signposting, and that staff should not be expected to rely solely on champions for guidance or intervention. It was noted that there was no requirement to inform a line manager and that speaking to a champion was completely confidential.

In response to question it was advised that one of the current policy updates explicitly clarified that anyone could be a victim, whilst still retaining a clear and necessary focus on groups known to be at greater risk.

Decision:

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

6 Implementing Family Leave Reforms

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.

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. It was noted that there had already been updates made with caveats that it was subject to confirmation at this Employment Matters Committee.

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In response to a query from the UNISON representative, the HR Consultant and Policy Lead agreed to look at clarifying the legacy wording in the second bullet point under Parental Leave at Appendix A, concerning adoptive parents.

Decision:

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

7 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 UNISON representative commended the Equality Board for its work, particularly its reassuring communications during periods of uncertainty and for providing a safe, conversational space in which key learning experiences could be shared and accepted behaviours challenged.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

Chairperson

Date:

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