

STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL

Greenacre Centre, Valerian Way, Stotfold, SG5 4HG
01462 730064 enquiries@stotfoldtowncouncil.gov.uk



27 March 2025

Members of Stotfold Town Council:

Cllr S Buck (Chair), J Smith (Vice-Chair), M Cooper, S Dhaliwal, S Hayes, J Headington, D Matthews, B Saunders, and J Talbot

You are hereby summoned to attend the **Governance & Resources Committee Meeting** to be held in the **Stotfold Council Chamber** on **Wednesday 2 April 2025 at 7.00pm** for the purpose of transacting business detailed in the agenda.



E Payne
Town Clerk

Members of the public:

In addition to attendance in person, you are now able to observe our meetings by joining via MS Teams. Join on your computer or mobile app [Click here to join the meeting](#) Please note, our meetings are recorded for minute taking purposes, and will be deleted after Minutes are approved.

Members of the public are invited to observe the meeting and may speak in the 'public section' agenda item. As per Standing Orders, if you wish to speak, you must notify the Town Clerk of your intention prior to the start of the meeting (contact in advance enquiries@stotfoldtowncouncil.gov.uk or 01462 730064 or you will be asked at the appropriate point in the agenda if unable to give prior indication).



IN COLLABORATION WITH SLCC, NALC, OWW, COUNTY ASSOCIATIONS

The seven principles of public life
Selflessness | Integrity | Objectivity | Accountability | Openness | Honesty | Leadership

AGENDA

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To receive and accept apologies for absence from Members of the Committee.

2. DISCLOSURES OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

Members are reminded of their obligations to declare interests in accordance with the Code of Conduct. The Town Clerk will report any dispensation requests received. Where a matter arises at a meeting which relates to a Councillor's interest, the Councillor has the responsibility to declare that interest in accordance with the adopted Code of Conduct.

- a. To receive Member's declarations of interest in items on the agenda.
- b. To consider any requests for dispensations.

3. PUBLIC SECTION

Members of the public to speak are entitled to be at this meeting in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, Section 1, extended by the Local Government Act 1972, Section 100 unless precluded by the Council by resolution during the whole or part of the proceedings. on matters of concern, ask questions or make statements (maximum of 3 minutes per speaker), after giving notice of their wish to do so to the Town Clerk prior to the meeting. Order of speakers will be in order of notification. [Public Participation Policy](#) applies.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

To approve the Minutes of the Governance & Resources Committee meeting held **12th February 2025** as a true record of the meeting.

5. CLERK'S REPORT, CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED & MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS COUNCIL MINUTES, FOR INFORMATION

6. REPORTS TO COMMITTEE

To **receive** the following reports for decision:

6.1. Policy Review

To consider these amended Policies and recommend their adoption by Full Council:

- a. Grants Policy
- b. Credit Control and Bad Debt Policy
- c. Equality and Diversity Policy

| For Decision

6.2. Policies for Adoption

To consider the following new Policies and recommend their adoption by Full Council:

- a. Vexatious Policy
- b. Internal Control Statement

| For Decision

6.3. Financial Regulations

To review the updated Financial Regulations and recommend their adoption to Full Council.

6.4. Staff Handbook

To note the new staff handbook from Worknest.

| For Information

6.5. Performance Management

To receive an update on staff Performance Management including the Town Clerk's objectives.

For Information

6.6. Staff Performance - Sickness Absence and Holiday Leave

To receive a report on sickness absence and holiday leave.

For Information

6.7. Bank Reconciliations

To note the bank reconciliations.

For Decision

7. MEMBERS' ITEMS FOR INFORMATION PURPOSES ONLY

For Information

8. WORK PROGRAMME

To note the Work Programme for this Committee.

For Information

9. DELEGATED DECISIONS

To note the Town Clerk's delegated decisions.

For Information

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To be confirmed once the calendar of meetings is ratified

11. CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

That in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, and as extended by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public, including the press, be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the following business to be transacted.

For Decision

11.1. Staff Recruitment

To receive a confidential report on staff recruitment

For Decision



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF EXTRA GOVERNANCE & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, GREENACRE CENTRE, VALERIAN WAY, STOTFOLD SG5 4HG ON WEDNESDAY 12TH FEBRUARY 2025 AT 19:00

Present:

Cllr S Buck (Chairperson), Cllr J Smith (Vice Chairperson), Cllr M Cooper, Cllr S Hayes, Cllr J Headington and Cllr B Saunders.

Also Present:

E Payne - Town Clerk

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs Dhaliwal, Matthews and Talbot.

DECISION: It was **RESOLVED** to accept apologies

2. DISCLOSURES OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

Cllrs Headington and Smith declared an interest in item 6.3 as they are members of Stotfold Bowls Club. They have been granted a dispensation and did not take part in the vote.

3. PUBLIC SECTION

There were no members of the public present.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Members received the Minutes of the Governance & Resources Committee meeting held **22nd January 2025**.

DECISION: It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on **22nd January 2025** are accepted as a true record of the meeting.

5. CLERK'S REPORT, CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED & MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS COUNCIL MINUTES, FOR INFORMATION

There were no matters to report.

6. REPORTS TO COMMITTEE

6.1. Review of Standing Orders

Members reviewed Standing Orders in light of a recommendation from the Internal Auditor. They were asked to confirm whether they wanted to continue with the items highlighted in yellow and remove the items crossed through.

DECISION: It was **RESOLVED** to recommend to Full Council that Standing Orders are adopted.



ACTION: Town Clerk to add this item to the Full Council agenda.

6.2. Cheque Processing Fee

Members received a report proposing a cheque processing fee. Members were asked to consider levying this fee on business operations only and not community organisations.

DECISION: It was **RESOLVED** to adopt a cheque processing fee of £1.50 with effect from 1 April 2025.

ACTION: Town Clerk to write to all businesses advising them of the charge.

6.3. Community Grant Applications

Members received a report outlining community grant applications. Members were advised that some of the grant applications were for running costs and this was contrary to the Town Council's Grant Policy. There was a discussion about whether purchasing new pads for defibrillators was a running cost and Members felt that the benefits of providing these assets in the community should be acknowledged with funding.

DECISION: It was **RESOLVED** to award the following grants:

- a) M J Ryalls Building Supplies Ltd - £1,500 for the purchase and installation of a defibrillator
- b) Pix Gymnastics Club - £750 to purchase gym equipment
- c) St Mary's C of E Academy - £1,500 to purchase new IT equipment
- d) Stotfold Bowls Club - £600 towards the cost of CCTV
- e) Stotfold Runners Club - £200 towards costs to gain affiliation with England Athletics
- f) The Barn - £162 towards the purchase of new defibrillator pads

DECISION: It was **RESOLVED** to decline the grant application from Respite at Home Volunteers as the grant was for running costs which is contrary to the Town Council's grant policy.

DECISION: It was **RESOLVED** to set aside £150 per publicly accessible defibrillator in the town which organisations could apply to for funding to replace pads.

ACTION:

- a) Town Clerk to advise organisations of the grant decisions
- b) Town Clerk to set aside sufficient funding for publicly accessible defibrillators and advise all relevant organisations that the funding is available.

Cllrs Headington and Smith declared an interest in the grant application from Stotfold Bowls Club and took no part in the vote.

6.4. Calendar of Meetings 2025-26

Members received a proposed calendar of meetings for 2025-26.

DECISION: It was **RESOLVED** to recommend to Full Council that the calendar of meetings is adopted.



ACTION: Town Clerk to add the calendar of meetings to the Full Council agenda in May 2025.

6.5. Q3 Income and Expenditure Report

Members received a report outlining expenditure for Q3 for this committee with reasons for variances.

DECISION: It was **RESOLVED** to note the report.

6.6 Insurance Renewal

Members were asked to note that the Town Council's insurance policy is due for renewal. There are several areas where the Town Clerk needs to take advice regarding additional valuations other than the buildings, which are currently being re-valued. These include the flood lights and irrigation system for the Football Club.

DECISION: It was **RESOLVED** to note the report.

6.7. Pension Discretions Policy

Members received a reviewed Pensions Discretions Policy, as the previous policy had not been reviewed since 2014. Members were advised that this needed to be considered by the Bedfordshire Pension Fund, and this would be undertaken before it is adopted by Full Council.

DECISION: It was **RESOLVED** to recommend to Full Council that the Pension Discretion Policy is adopted after its approval by Bedfordshire Pensions.

ACTION: Town Clerk to send Pension Discretion Policy to Bedfordshire Pensions.

6.8. Birthday Leave

Members received a proposal to award an additional day's leave for all permanent members of staff to acknowledge their birthdays. Members queried whether this was included in the Good Councillor Guide and if other parish/town councils had this policy. They were advised that this was a bespoke policy for the Town Council which the HR provider had advised on.

DECISION: It was **RESOLVED** to adopt the Birthday Leave Policy.

6.9. Procurement Policy

Members received a proposed Procurement Policy which includes the procedures for adopting a preferred suppliers list.

DECISION: It was **RESOLVED** to recommend to Full Council that Procurement Policy is adopted.

ACTION: Town Clerk to add the Procurement Policy to the Full Council agenda.



6.10. Lone Working Policy

Members received a proposed Lone Working Policy to support the operation of the Lone Working Devices which the Public Realm Committee had resolved to implement.

DECISION: It was **RESOLVED** to recommend to Full Council that the Lone Working Policy is adopted.

ACTION: Town Clerk to add the Lone Working Policy to the Full Council agenda.

6.11. Bank Reconciliations

Members were advised that Cllr Cooper had approved the bank reconciliations for December 2024.

6.12. WORK PROGRAMME

Members received this Committee's Work Programme.

DECISION: It was **RESOLVED** to note the Work Programme.

7. MEMBER’S ITEMS FOR INFORMATION PURPOSES ONLY

There were no items.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 2nd April 2025.

The meeting closed at 19:38

SIGNED BY CHAIR:

MINUTES APPROVED (date):

STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL

COMMITTEE: GOVERNANCE & RESOURCES

DATE: 2 APRIL 2025

OFFICER RESPONSIBLE: EMMA PAYNE, TOWN CLERK

SUBJECT: POLICIES FOR REVIEW

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 Policies should be reviewed on a regular basis, the cadence of which depends on the nature of the policy. Normal policies should be reviewed every 2 years and benchmarked against standards set by National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC). This may include new legislation.
- 1.2 Policies can also be updated with Officer input on how they have been easy to implement.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 Members are asked to review the following policies and recommend their adoption to Full Council
 - a) Grants Policy
 - b) Credit Control and Bad Debt Policy
 - c) Equality and Diversity Policy

3. GRANTS POLICY 2024

- 3.1 The original Grants Policy was adopted in May 2024 for review in May 2026. Following a proposal at this Committee that a sum was set aside for the upkeep of publicly accessible defibrillators in the town, the Grant Policy 2025 has been updated to reflect this change.

4. CREDIT CONTROL AND BAD DEBT POLICY 2019

- 4.1 This policy was originally adopted in 2019 and has been extensively updated. The key changes are:
 - A 14-day payment deadline is introduced after the 60 days' notice before suspending services and referring the debt to a collection or small claims court
 - The 2025 version is clearer in defining the steps before a debt is written off
 - It explicitly requires an aged debt report to be reviewed annually to track outstanding debts.
- 4.2 Members are asked to note that the town council very rarely has bad debts and this would be highlighted by the internal auditor during their end of year audit.

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY 2014

- 5.1 The original policy was adopted in 2014. The new policy still covers the principals of the Equality Act with more details. It provides more explanation on the different types of discrimination.

6. FINANCIAL

- 6.1 There are no financial implications. Often a funding stream will seek clarification that an organisation holds a current Equality and Diversity Policy.

7. IMPLICATIONS

Strategic Plan	N/A
Risk Management	Regular review of policies is an internal control demonstrating good governance.
Legals	Equalities Act 2010
Resources/Stakeholders	Officers, Councillors, residents
Contracts/Financials	N/A
Crime & Disorder	N/A
Equalities	N/A
Biodiversity	N/A



STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL GRANT APPLICATIONS POLICY

1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- a) Stotfold Town Council is committed to helping and supporting eligible local community groups, faith groups, not-for-profit organisations and organisations working in Stotfold and supporting its local residents. These grants aim to provide support for residents connected to improved wellbeing and opportunities to ensure inclusivity and equality of opportunity for all.
- b) Stotfold Town Council is funded by its residents via the Council's precept and therefore has only limited, pre-agreed budget available for the purpose of grant funding. The level of funding available may vary each year depending on the Council's agreed budget.
- c) Stotfold Town Council is committed to following best practice in grant giving in order to provide sustainable funding and support to voluntary and community groups, whilst providing value for money for local taxpayers and ensuring that public money is spent in a responsible manner.
- d) Stotfold Town Council has two grant award periods – April and October annually.
- e) In order for Stotfold Town Council to be able to assess applications objectively, it must assess all applications received against a range of criteria and will be presented to and decided on by the Governance & Resources Committee.
- f) The following eligibility principles will apply:
 - Assistance will be given on the basis of need, merit and contribution to local community.
 - Applicants must clearly show how any assistance given will benefit the people living in Stotfold or will benefit the environment of Stotfold.
 - Any grant awards will be subject to monitoring and evidence of agreed expenditure and resulting benefit. Photographic evidence may be requested.
 - Organisations should not make a presumption that funding will continue on a year-to-year basis.
 - Any funds awarded must only be spent on the activity/purpose for which it was awarded.

2. THE AIMS OF THE COUNCIL'S GRANT MAKING POLICY

- a) Stotfold Town Council provides grant funding to support the following aims:
 - To enable local people to participate in voluntary groups and activities.
 - To help the town's voluntary groups to improve effectiveness and equality of opportunity.
 - To ensure provision of services, needed by the town's residents, via the voluntary and charity sectors.
 - To support organisations which meet the needs of people experiencing social and economic difficulties.
 - To improve and enhance the local environment, public safety, arts and culture (The Town Council defines a voluntary group as a non-profit making organisation, set up and run by a voluntary, unpaid management committee).

- An annual amount of £150 is available to organisations who have installed defibrillators within the Stotfold boundaries for replacement of defibrillator pads to ensure the continued availability of life-saving equipment for public use.

3. GRANT APPLICATION ELIGIBILITY

a) Applicants must meet the following criteria:

- The organisation is based in or has significant local activity in Stotfold.
- The work of the organisation directly benefits a number of residents of Stotfold.
- The organisation has a written Constitution with clearly defined aims and objectives.
- The local organisation has a clear financial need. (Account will be taken of how much money the organisation has, including any special reserves set aside for particular projects and local fundraising efforts. Additionally, if the balance is high in relation to spending, then an explanation is required, justifying the reasons why the organisation is still applying for a grant.)
- The organisation has its own bank account with at least two authorised signatories.
- The organisation is non-party political and non-profit making.
- Individuals will not be funded.

4. THE GRANTS PROCESS

- a) All funding requests must use an updated application form which can be downloaded from the Town Council's website and applicants should provide all information requested.
- b) The amount of money available for grants may vary each financial year, depending on the overall budget. The level of funds available for grant applications in any given year can be obtained from the Town Clerk and applicants are advised to speak with the Town Clerk for guidance ahead of submitting applications.
- c) The Town Council's Governance & Resources Committee will evaluate completed applications at the appropriate point of the grant award schedule.
- d) Applicants may be asked to send a representative to attend the Committee meeting in support of their application. A calendar of all Council meetings can be found on the Town Council's website.
- e) The Governance & Resources Committee may defer deciding on an application if it feels more information is required from the applicant.

5. PAYMENTS AND DECISIONS

- a) All applicants will usually be notified of Council's decision following the relevant meeting of the Governance & Resources Committee.
- b) Successful applicants for grants will normally receive their award four to six weeks after the decision of the Governance & Resources Committee.
- c) Successful applicants will be invited to attend a meeting of Stotfold Town Council to receive their awarded grant.
- d) In some circumstances the payment date(s) may differ, and this will be set out in the grant award confirmation letter.
- e) Grants will be paid by BACs to the nominated account.

6. MONITORING AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

- a) Groups are expected to provide Stotfold Town Council with written evidence of what the money has been spent on and the benefit it has brought to the people of Stotfold.
- b) Such evidence of how the money has been spent may include copies of invoices and receipts, plus attendance numbers, photos, press clippings, etc. where applicable.
- c) This information should be submitted within 1 month of the event/project end or by the end of the project, provided written confirmation has been received by the Town Council as to expected finish date of the relevant project or expenditure point.
- d) The grant can only be used for the purpose stated in the application and the Council reserves the right to reclaim any grant not being used for the specified purpose of the application. However, if a group wishes to change the purpose of the grant they must seek approval by writing to the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee who will consider whether or not to approve the change.
- e) Organisations are responsible for ensuring that they follow all applicable legal and statutory requirements (including those relating to health and safety and equalities).
- f) Should the organisation, for any reason, disband or the project is not completed, the Council may ask for all or part of the monies to be paid back.
- g) Acknowledgement of the financial support received from the Council is required where possible on documentation and any promotional material, including websites.
- h) In order to receive payment, organisations/groups must have a bank account into which grants can be paid; payments will not be made to private individuals.
- i) All successful applicants must complete an evaluation form within the stated time periods.
- j) Additional grant conditions may also be attached to any funding from Stotfold Town Council, and these will be set out in the award confirmation letter.
- k) Failure to comply with any conditions attached to a grant may result in the grant being recalled or affect future grant assistance.



STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL

CREDIT CONTROL & BAD DEBT POLICY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy sets out Stotfold Town Council's procedures for managing late payments and bad debts, in line with Financial Regulations (item 13.3).

2. Policy Objectives

- 2.1 The aim of this policy is to establish clear procedures for identifying, minimising, and recovering potential bad debts, as well as writing off debts that cannot be recovered.

3. Credit Control

- 3.1 All income due will be collected following Financial Regulations. Any irrecoverable sums or bad debts shall be reported to Full Council.

3.2 Unpaid Income and Bad Debt Procedure

- **After 30 days:** The Finance Officer will contact the customer via telephone or email to remind them of the unpaid invoice.
- **After 45 days:** A formal reminder letter will be sent by the Finance Officer.
- **After 60 days:** The Town Clerk will issue a final reminder letter. If payment is not received within 14 days:
 - The customer's activity (e.g., hall hire) will be suspended.
 - The outstanding debt may be referred to a debt collection agency or small claims court.

At the Town Clerk's discretion, a repayment plan may be agreed upon, allowing the customer to continue their activities, provided that future payments are made in advance. No credit facility will be granted until the Town Clerk is satisfied that future invoices will be paid on time.

4. Write off bad debts

4.1 Recovery and Due Diligence

Stotfold Town Council will take all reasonable actions to recover outstanding debts before considering a write-off. The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) must assess the following factors before recommending a debt write-off:

- The cost of recovery compared to the amount owed.
- The likelihood of successful recovery.
- Whether the correct credit control procedures were followed.
- Potential improvements to procedures and practices.

Stotfold Town Council will seek to minimise the cost of write offs by taking all necessary action to recover what is due. Debts will be subject to the full recovery, collection and all reasonable legal procedures.

4.2 Reporting and Approval

Any debts proposed for write-off must be reported to Full Council in a write-off schedule containing:

- Customer reference
- Invoice number
- Date of invoice
- Amount of debt
- Reason for write-off
- Recovery history
- Date of write-off
- Authorisation details

5. Year-end write offs

The Responsible Financial Officer must ensure that all bad debts and doubtful debts are properly accounted for at the end of each financial year. An aged debt report should be reviewed annually to identify outstanding debts and assess their recoverability.

Document History

Date Adopted	February 20219	
Date Reviewed	March 2025	Policy reviewed against best practice and redrafted in a more concise manner
Date for Review	March 2027	



STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

Stotfold Town Council is committed to providing equal opportunities in employment, eliminating discrimination, and celebrating diversity amongst our community. This Equality and Diversity Policy is intended to assist the Town Council to put this commitment into practice. Compliance with this policy should also ensure that employees do not commit unlawful acts of discrimination.

This policy applies to all employees (part-time, full-time, and temporary), contractors, councillors, residents, and users of our facilities. It covers recruitment, training, career development, and promotion for staff, as well as ensuring all residents and facility users receive fair and equal treatment.

The Town Clerk is responsible for implementing and monitoring this policy, but all employees and Councillors must uphold its principles. Discrimination or failure to comply may result in disciplinary action or a complaint to the Monitoring Officer under a breach of the Code of Conduct.

2. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY LAW

2.1 Legal Framework

The Equality Act 2010 aims to simplify, strengthen and harmonise legislation to support progress on equality in employment, provision of goods and services, and public functions.

2.2 Protected Characteristics

It is unlawful to discriminate directly or indirectly because of:

- Age
- Disability
- Sex
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race (which includes colour, nationality, caste, and ethnic or national origins)
- Sexual orientation
- Religion or belief
- Marriage and civil partnership

3. PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

3.1 Legal Requirement

The Public Sector Equality Duty is a legal requirement arising from the Equality Act 2010 for public authorities to consider the impact of their policies and decisions on people with protected characteristics.

3.2 Council Responsibilities

As a public authority, Stotfold Town Council has a general duty of equality related to provision of its services and event organisations to consider how its functions will affect people with different characteristics. This duty also applies to the Town Council's policies, programmes, and services.

4. TYPES OF UNLAWFUL DISCRIMINATION

4.1 Direct Discrimination

Direct discrimination is where a person is treated less favourably than another because of a protected characteristic.

In limited circumstances, employers can directly discriminate against an individual for a reason related to any of the protected characteristics where there is an occupational requirement. The occupational requirement must be crucial to the post and a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

4.2 Indirect Discrimination

Indirect discrimination is where a provision, criterion or practice is applied that is discriminatory in relation to individuals who have a relevant protected characteristic such that it would be to the detriment of people who share that protected characteristic compared with people who do not, and it cannot be shown to be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

4.3 Harassment

Harassment is where there is unwanted conduct, related to one of the protected characteristics that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity; or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

4.4 Associative Discrimination

Associative discrimination is where an individual is directly discriminated against or harassed for association with another individual who has a protected characteristic.

4.5 Perceptive Discrimination

Perceptive discrimination is where an individual is directly discriminated against or harassed based on a perception that they have a particular protected characteristic when they do not.

4.6 Third-party Harassment

Third-party harassment occurs where an employee is harassed and the harassment is related to a protected characteristic, by third parties.

4.7 Victimisation

Victimisation occurs where an employee is subjected to a detriment because they made or supported a complaint or raised a grievance under the Equality Act 2010.

5. THE COUNCIL AS AN EMPLOYER

5.1 Fair Treatment

All employees, whether part-time, full-time, or temporary workers, will be treated fairly and with respect.

5.2 Employment Practices

The Town Council will avoid unlawful discrimination in all aspects of employment including recruitment, promotion, opportunities for training, pay and benefits, discipline, and selection for redundancy.

5.3 Reasonable Adjustments

The Council will make reasonable adjustments to overcome barriers caused by disability.

5.4 Recruitment

Person and job specifications will be limited to necessary requirements for effective job performance. Candidates will be assessed objectively against job requirements. Disability and personal commitments will not form the basis of employment decisions except where necessary

5.5 Working Practices

The Town Council will consider any possible discriminatory effect of its standard working practices when considering requests for variations and will refuse such requests only if it has good reasons unrelated to any protected characteristic.

5.6 Equal Opportunities Commitment

The Town Council will:

- Create an environment where individual differences and contributions are recognized and valued
- Promote dignity and respect for all, with zero tolerance for intimidation, bullying or harassment
- Monitor workforce composition and take appropriate action to address any issues identified
- Review practices and procedures to ensure fairness
- Treat breaches of this Policy as misconduct that could lead to disciplinary proceedings

5.7 Training

Training and development opportunities will be available to all staff

5.8 Employee Responsibilities

Every employee must assist the Town Council in providing equal opportunities and avoiding unlawful discrimination. Employees can be held personally liable for acts of unlawful discrimination. Discrimination, harassment, bullying, or victimisation are disciplinary offences and may constitute gross misconduct

5.9 Grievances

The Town Council's grievance procedure should be used to make complaints of unlawful discrimination. Complaints will be taken seriously and resolved promptly. Complainants will not be penalised for raising grievances unless complaints are both untrue and made in bad faith.

6. THE COUNCIL AS A COMMUNITY LEADER AND ADVOCATE

Stotfold Town Council is committed to creating a socially inclusive and cohesive community by:

- Promoting equal opportunity and equal access to employment, services, and information
- Identifying and addressing barriers to participation in community life
- Working towards ensuring fair and equitable resources
- Respecting and celebrating diversity as a vital part of community strength
- Working with others to ensure our community is a safe place
- Listening and responding to community views through accessible consultation
- Ensuring communications and events positively reflect and promote diversity

7. THE COUNCIL AS A SERVICE PROVIDER

7.1 Service Provision

The Town Council will not discriminate against or harass members of the public when providing services or goods.

7.2 Accessibility

The Council will make reasonable adjustments to overcome barriers to using services caused by disability, including removal, adaptation, or alteration of physical features.

7.3 Service Commitments

The Town Council is committed to:

- Delivering services in ways sensitive to everyone's needs
- Ensuring all employees, contractors and partners provide equality of opportunity
- Making community halls accessible to all
- Providing accessible information about services
- Consulting with all community sections in policy development

8. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY COMMITMENTS FOR SPECIFIC PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS

8.1 Age

Treat all individuals with dignity and respect
Ensure equal access to employment, training, and development opportunities
Challenge age-related stereotypes and discrimination

8.2 Disability

Provide reasonable adjustments to ensure accessibility
Challenge assumptions about disabled individuals
Improve access to information, services, and physical spaces

8.3 Race

Oppose racism and respond swiftly to incidents
Actively promote race equality in the workplace and community facilities

8.4 Gender

Promote gender equality in employment, pay and service provision
Prevent discrimination against individuals undergoing gender reassignment

8.5 Sexual Orientation

Ensure an inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ individuals
Promote positive representation and challenge stereotypes

8.6 Religion or Belief

Respect and accommodate religious beliefs and observances where possible
Ensure expression of beliefs does not infringe on others' rights

8.7 Pregnancy and Maternity

Support employees during pregnancy and maternity leave
Prevent discrimination and ensure equal opportunities

8.8 Marriage and Civil Partnership

Ensure fair treatment and prevent bias based on marital status

8.9 Ex-Offenders

Prevent discrimination against individuals with an offending background unless there is a safeguarding risk

8.10 Equal Pay

Guarantee equal pay and benefits for work of equal value

Document History

Date Adopted	[April 2025]	
Date for Review	[April 2027]	

DRAFT

STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL

COMMITTEE: GOVERNANCE & RESOURCES

DATE: 2 APRIL 2025

OFFICER RESPONSIBLE: EMMA PAYNE, TOWN CLERK

SUBJECT: POLICIES FOR ADOPTION

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Town Council should consider the adoption of policies and procedures to ensure transparency, consistency and efficiency in its operations. Some policies comply with legislation whilst others set out the rules on governance, finance and conduct. They prevent ad hoc or inconsistent decisions, reducing the risk of bias or discrimination.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 Members are asked to consider the following new policies and recommend their adoption to Full Council
- a) Vexatious Policy
 - b) Internal Control Statement

3. VEXATIOUS POLICY

- 3.1 Having a Vexatious Complaints Policy is important for councils and public bodies to manage persistent, unreasonable and malicious complaints while ensuring that legitimate concerns are still addressed fairly. It protects council resources as handling repeated complaints can drain time and staff resources. Persistent complaints can dominate attention, delaying responses to legitimate concerns and a definitive policy ensures that complaints are dealt with consistently.

4. INTERNAL CONTROL STATEMENT

- 4.1 It was a recommendation of the interim internal audit that the Town Council adopts an Internal Control Statement that sets out accurate continuity in financial procedures.

5. FINANCIAL

- 5.1 There are no financial implications.

6. IMPLICATIONS

Strategic Plan	N/A
Risk Management	Regular review of policies is an internal control demonstrating good governance.
Legals	Various
Resources/Stakeholders	Officers, Councillors, residents
Contracts/Financials	N/A
Crime & Disorder	N/A
Equalities	N/A
Biodiversity	N/A



STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL

VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A vexatious complaint is one that appears to be intended primarily to cause harassment, annoyance, frustration, worry, or financial cost to the Town Council or its staff. It is not to be confused with a complaint that is found to be without merit but was made in good faith. It refers to bringing up the same issues repeatedly, even after they have already been decided.
- 1.2 This policy ensures complaints are handled fairly while preventing excessive demands on council resources. It applies to all complaints, including those under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Data Protection Act 2018.
- 1.2 Under the Protection from Harassment Act 1977 S1(1) A person must not pursue a course of conduct— (a)which amounts to harassment of another, and (b)which he knows or ought to know amounts to harassment of the other. Such action can be:
- Physical Conduct;
 - Verbal Conduct;
 - Non-Verbal Conduct
- 1.4 The Town Council encourages mediation or alternative dispute resolution where appropriate before imposing restrictions.

2. DEFINITION OF UNREASONABLE COMPLAINT BEHAVIOUR

- 2.1 Raising a complaint does not in itself constitute unreasonably persistent behaviour and neither do complainants who escalate through all stages of the relevant complaints procedure or those who express criticism about the complaints process itself.
- 2.2 A complaint itself may be either reasonable or unreasonable, as can the persistence of a complainant. In some cases, persistence is necessary to achieve a fair outcome, while in others, it can become excessive and unreasonable. This policy recognises the need to balance these factors when determining how to manage complaints.
- 2.3 Sometimes the situation between the Town Council and a complainant can escalate and the behaviour moves from being unreasonable and unreasonably persistent to behaviour, which is unacceptable, for example, abusive, offensive, or threatening. Such complainants are in a small minority, but their behaviour may result in the Town Council having to restrict access to Town Council premises.
- 2.5 **Examples of unreasonably persistent behaviour:**
- This list is not exhaustive, nor does one single characteristic on its own imply that the person will be considered as being in this category:
- Refusing to specify the grounds of a complaint, despite offers of help.
 - Refusing to cooperate with the complaint's investigation process.

- Refusing to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the Council’s authority or within the scope of a complaint’s procedure.
- Insisting on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeking to have them replaced.
- Changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Denying or changing statements he or she made at an earlier stage.
- Introducing trivial or irrelevant new information at a later stage.
- Raising many detailed but unimportant questions, and insisting they are all answered.
- Submitting falsified documents from themselves or others.
- Adopting a 'scatter gun' approach: pursuing parallel complaints on the same issue with various members of staff and/or organisations.
- Making excessive demands on the time and resources of staff with lengthy phone calls, emails to numerous council staff, or detailed letters every few days, and expecting immediate responses.
- Submitting repeat complaints with minor additions/variations, which the complainant insists make these 'new' complaints.
- Refusing to accept the decision; repeatedly arguing points with no new evidence.

4. **MANAGING UNREASONABLE COMPLAINANT BEHAVIOUR**

- 4.1 Before invoking this policy, the Town Clerk will consider whether further actions—such as a mediation meeting—could resolve the issue.
- 4.2 If a member of staff dealing with a complaint considers that a complainant is behaving unreasonably, they should seek the advice of Clerk. They should submit evidence to support their view which may include copies of e-mails, case notes or independent witness statements. On being notified of a complainant behaving unreasonably the following stages will be followed:
- 4.3 If a complainant’s behaviour is deemed unreasonable, the Town Clerk will adhere to the following stages:

STAGE ONE	A verbal warning will be issued to the complainant by the Town Clerk, advising them that they are acting unreasonably and if they continue then further steps will be taken	Stage One will be reported to the Governance & Resources Committee and/or Council depending on which meets first, under Confidential items.
STAGE TWO	If the complainant persists, then they will be invited to attend a meeting with the Town Clerk and a Councillor. The complainant will be invited to attend with a friend or colleague.	Stage Two will be reported to either the Governance & Resources Committee and/or Council depending on which meets first, under Confidential items.
STAGE THREE	A final written warning will be issued to the complainant, sent confidentially outlining the members of contacting the Town Council set out below.	Stage Three will be reported to either the Governance & Resources Committee and/or Council depending on which meets first, under Confidential items.

4.2 Where the behaviour is extreme or threatens staff safety, the Town Council may escalate the matter to the police or take legal action without prior warning.

5. IMPOSING AND REVIEWING RESTRICTIONS

5.1 Types of restrictions that may be imposed include:

- Limiting the complainant to one method of contact (e.g., email only);
- Requiring all contact to be through a named officer;
- Restricting communication to specific times/dates;
- Declining to acknowledge correspondence unless it introduces significant new information;
- Refusing all contact if behaviour remains abusive or threatening.

5.2 Any restrictions will be proportionate and will be reviewed every three months. If the complainant demonstrates a more reasonable approach, restrictions may be lifted early.

6. HANDLING NEW COMPLAINTS FROM RESTRICTED INDIVIDUALS

6.1 Any new complaints from a restricted complainant will be assessed on their individual merits.

6.2 Restrictions will not prevent the Council from considering genuine concerns, but previous behaviour will be considered when deciding how to proceed.

7. RECORD KEEPING AND CONFIDENTIALITY

7.1 The Town Clerk will maintain **secure records** of all decisions made under this policy including:

- The name and details of the complainant;
- The nature of the restrictions imposed;
- The period of enforcement and review dates;
- The rationale behind the decision.

7.2 Records will be retained in accordance with GDPR requirements and will only be accessed by authorised personnel.

8. PROCESS FOR FILING COMPLAINTS

8.1 The process for filing complaints is set out in detail in the Complaints Policy which is published to the Town Council's website.

9. ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER POLICIES OF THE TOWN COUNCIL

This Policy is not exhaustive and does not cover all forms of behaviour that may be considered unreasonable. In certain circumstances, it may be more appropriate to refer to the following Town Council Policies:

- Complaints Policy
- Complaints Procedure
- Public Participation Policy
- Risk Management Strategy
- Subject Access Request

Revision History

Adopted	[April 2025]
Reviewed and updated	
Reviewed and updated	

DRAFT



STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL

INTERNAL CONTROL STATEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

Stotfold Town Council (the Council) is a local authority funded by public money. It is responsible for ensuring that its financial operations comply with legal and proper standards, safeguarding public funds, maintaining accurate financial records, and ensuring efficiency. The Council must review its system of financial control at least annually, informed by the work of the internal auditor, the Governance & Resources Committee, and any comments from external auditors in their interim and annual reports.

2. THE PURPOSE OF INTERNAL CONTROL

The Council's system of internal control is to manage risk rather than eliminate it. It identifies, prioritises and mitigates risk while ensuring compliance with [Governance and Accountability in Local Councils: A Practitioners' Guide \(2024 edition\)](#).

The internal control system aims to:

- Ensure financial management is effective and in accordance with regulations.
- Identify and mitigate risks in financial and operational activities.
- Ensure compliance with policies, legislation and best practices.
- Provide assurance that resources are used efficiently and effectively.

3. THE INTERNAL CONTROL ENVIRONMENT

The Council has adopted Financial Regulations which set parameters for the Council's financial operations. The Town Clerk implements financial systems and controls.

Financial Management

- The Council uses RBS Omega, a financial management system designed for town and parish councils, to process transactions, manage the cashbook, and maintain the purchase ledger.
- Budget performance is reviewed quarterly by Full Council and respective committees to ensure financial targets are met.

Payroll & Banking

- Payroll is managed in-house using Sage 50.
- Banking services are provided by Unity Trust, and investments are held with CCLA and Barclays. The Council, due to its turnover, is not covered by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS).

Audit & Risk Management

- Internal audit services are provided by Parish and Town Auditing Solutions.
- The Governance & Resources Committee, in conjunction with the Town Clerk/RFO, monitors financial compliance and effectiveness. Any recommendations from audits are addressed promptly and within agreed timeframes.

- The Council seeks professional advice on property, legal, insurance, and health & safety matters to mitigate risk.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COUNCIL

The Council is responsible for:

- Setting and monitoring strategic objectives.
- Policy and decision-making processes.
- Ensuring compliance with laws and regulations.
- Risk identification and management.
- Ensuring value for money in all purchases.
- Overseeing financial management, with the Town Clerk/RFO providing regular reports.
- Monitoring financial and operational performance.

The **Public Realm Officer** is the designated **competent person** for health and safety management.

5. REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS

The **Town Clerk/RFO** leads an annual review of the internal control system, with findings reported to **Full Council**. This review is supported by:

- Reports from Officers within the Council.
- The Town Clerk/RFO's oversight of financial management and regulatory compliance.
- The Governance & Resources Committee's assessment of financial priorities and procedures.

The **Town Clerk/RFO** ensures that:

- Financial records are maintained to support accurate reporting.
- Transactions are recorded promptly and accurately.
- Assets and liabilities are documented.
- Risks are managed effectively through appropriate controls.

Financial duties are segregated where possible to minimise fraud risk. All payments comply with the Council's Financial Regulations and Governance & Accountability guidance (2024 edition).

6. AUDIT & ASSURANCE

Internal Audit

- The Council appoints an Internal Auditor who conducts two audits per year.
- Audit reports are reviewed by the Governance & Resources Committee and then presented to Full Council, with any necessary actions implemented.

External Audit

- The Council operates under the limited assurance scheme.
- The current External Auditor for Bedfordshire is Mazars, appointed by Smaller Authorities Audit Appointments Ltd (SAAA) on behalf of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

7. BUSINESS CONTINUITY & ASSET MANAGEMENT

- The Council maintains a Business Continuity Plan for its primary office site, which is reviewed and updated regularly.
- Employee contact details are stored securely in a cloud-based system accessible remotely by Heads of Service.
- The Council's data is securely stored in the Cloud.
- The Governance & Resources Committee reviews the Asset Register annually.
- The Asset Management Policy includes a maintenance programme for play areas and buildings.

8. INSURANCE

- The Council reviews insurance policies every three years to ensure best value and protection.
- Policies cover physical assets, public liability, employer's liability, and fidelity guarantees (protection against fraudulent activities by employees).

9. EMPLOYEES & COUNCILLORS

Employee Policies

- The Council maintains an Employee Handbook covering policies on bullying, harassment, disciplinary procedures, and whistleblowing.
- An HR provider is retained to manage employment-related disputes and legal compliance.
- Ongoing training and professional development are encouraged to enhance skills and job satisfaction.
- Health & Safety and Data Protection training are mandatory for all staff.
- Operational procedures are documented to safeguard institutional knowledge in case of staff turnover.

Councillor Responsibilities

- Councillors receive ongoing training to improve awareness, effectiveness, and legislative compliance.
- Policies guiding Councillors include:
 - Code of Conduct
 - Declaration of Interests
 - Dispensations Procedure
 - Councillor/Officer Protocol
- Declaration of interests is a standing agenda item at all Council and Committee meetings and is recorded in the minutes as a matter of public record.

STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL

COMMITTEE: GOVERNANCE & RESOURCES
DATE: 2 APRIL 2024
OFFICER RESPONSIBLE: EMMA PAYNE, TOWN CLERK
SUBJECT: FINANCIAL REGULATIONS UPDATE

1. SUMMARY

1. With the introduction of the Procurement Act and subsequent legislation, the Model Financial Regulations have been updated to reflect the new legislation.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 Members are asked to

- a) Note the amendments
- b) Note the advice regarding advertising contracts over £30,000 including VAT outlined in 3.4 below
- c) Recommend that the updated Financial Regulations are adopted by Full Council.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 NALC have advised that the model Financial Regulations have been updated to reflect the Procurement Act 2023 and the Procurement Regulations 2024 which came into effect from 24 February 2025.

3.2 It affects the following sections which have been amended. The deletions are ~~struck through~~ and insertions are in *italics*

3.3 The sections the updates relate to are items 5.4, 5.7 and 5.11.

3.4 In addition, Members are asked to note that all open invitations for local authority contracts estimated to be over £30,000 including VAT must be published on Find-Tender rather than Contracts Finder. Posting an invitation on Contracts Finder is no longer compliant with the laws and councils should use Find-Tender instead. This is not required where a council has invited specific firms rather than publishing an open invitation. This advice has been received from Steve Parkinson, National Specialist in VAT and advisor to SLCC and NALC.

4. FINANCIAL

4.1 There are no financial implications. There will be operational implications when contracting for larger projects.

5. IMPLICATIONS

Strategic Plan	N/A
Risk Management	Adherence to financial regulations reduces risk of comments by Internal Auditor during audit process.
Legals	Procurement Act 2023 and Procurement Regulations 2024.
Resources/Stakeholders	Officers, Contractors
Contracts/Financials	As above
Crime & Disorder	N/A
Equalities	N/A
Biodiversity	N/A



STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL

FINANCIAL REGULATIONS 2024

Contents

1. General	2
2. Risk management and internal control.....	3
3. Accounts and audit	4
4. Budget and precept.....	5
5. Procurement.....	6
6. Banking and payments	8
7. Electronic payments.....	9
8. Cheque payments.....	11
9. Payment cards	11
10. Petty Cash.....	11
11. Payment of salaries and allowances	11
12. Loans and investments.....	12
13. Income.....	12
14. Payments under contracts for building or other construction works.....	13
15. Stores and equipment.....	13
16. Assets, properties and estates	13
17. Insurance	14
18. Suspension and revision of Financial Regulations	14
Appendix 1 - Tender process	16

These Financial Regulations were adopted by the council at its meeting held on 4 September 2024.

1. General

- 1.1. These Financial Regulations govern the financial management of the council and may only be amended or varied by resolution of the council. They are one of the council's governing documents and shall be observed in conjunction with the council's Standing Orders.
- 1.2. Councillors are expected to follow these regulations and not to entice employees to breach them. Failure to follow these regulations brings the office of councillor into disrepute.
- 1.3. Wilful breach of these regulations by an employee may result in disciplinary proceedings.
- 1.4. In these Financial Regulations:
 - 'Accounts and Audit Regulations' means the regulations issued under Sections 32, 43(2) and 46 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, or any superseding legislation, and then in force, unless otherwise specified.
 - "Approve" refers to an online action, allowing an electronic transaction to take place.
 - "Authorise" refers to a decision by the council, or a committee or an officer, to allow something to happen.
 - 'Proper practices' means those set out in *The Practitioners' Guide*
 - *Practitioners' Guide* refers to the guide issued by the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance (JPAG) and published by NALC in England or Governance and Accountability for Local Councils in Wales – A Practitioners Guide jointly published by One Voice Wales and the Society of Local Council Clerks in Wales.
 - 'Must' and **bold text** refer to a statutory obligation the council cannot change.
 - 'Shall' refers to a non-statutory instruction by the council to its members and staff.
- 1.5. The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) holds a statutory office, appointed by the council. The Town Clerk has been appointed as RFO and these regulations apply accordingly. The RFO;
 - acts under the policy direction of the council;
 - administers the council's financial affairs in accordance with all Acts, Regulations and proper practices;
 - determines on behalf of the council its accounting records and control systems;
 - ensures the accounting control systems are observed;
 - ensures the accounting records are kept up to date;
 - seeks economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of council resources; and
 - produces financial management information as required by the council.

1.6. The council must not delegate any decision regarding:

- **setting the final budget or the precept (council tax requirement);**
- **the outcome of a review of the effectiveness of its internal controls**
- **approving accounting statements;**
- **approving an annual governance statement;**
- **borrowing;**
- **declaring eligibility for the General Power of Competence; and**
- **addressing recommendations from the internal or external auditors**

2. Risk management and internal control

2.1. The council must ensure that it has a sound system of internal control, which delivers effective financial, operational and risk management.

2.2. The Clerk shall prepare, for approval by the council, a risk management policy covering all activities of the council. This policy and consequential risk management arrangements shall be reviewed by the council at least annually.

2.3. When considering any new activity, the Clerk with the RFO shall prepare a draft risk assessment including risk management proposals for consideration by the council.

2.4. At least once a year, the council must review the effectiveness of its system of internal control, before approving the Annual Governance Statement.

2.5. The accounting control systems determined by the RFO must include measures to:

- **ensure that risk is appropriately managed;**
- **ensure the prompt, accurate recording of financial transactions;**
- **prevent and detect inaccuracy or fraud; and**
- **allow the reconstitution of any lost records;**
- **identify the duties of officers dealing with transactions and**
- **ensure division of responsibilities.**

2.6. At least once in each quarter, and at each financial year end, a member other than the Chair or a bank signatory shall be appointed to verify bank reconciliations (for all accounts) produced by the RFO. The member shall sign and date the reconciliations and the original bank statements (or similar document) as evidence of this. This activity, including any exceptions, shall be reported to and noted by the Governance & Resources Committee.

2.7. Regular back-up copies shall be made of the records on any council computer and stored either online or in a separate location from the computer. The council shall

put measures in place to ensure that the ability to access any council computer is not lost if an employee leaves or is incapacitated for any reason.

3. Accounts and audit

- 3.1. All accounting procedures and financial records of the council shall be determined by the RFO in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
- 3.2. **The accounting records determined by the RFO must be sufficient to explain the council's transactions and to disclose its financial position with reasonable accuracy at any time. In particular, they must contain:**
 - **day-to-day entries of all sums of money received and expended by the council and the matters to which they relate;**
 - **a record of the assets and liabilities of the council;**
- 3.3. The accounting records shall be designed to facilitate the efficient preparation of the accounting statements in the Annual Governance and Accountability Return.
- 3.4. The RFO shall complete and certify the annual Accounting Statements of the council contained in the Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with proper practices, as soon as practicable after the end of the financial year. Having certified the Accounting Statements, the RFO shall submit them (with any related documents) to the council, within the timescales required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
- 3.5. **The council must ensure that there is an adequate and effective system of internal audit of its accounting records and internal control system in accordance with proper practices.**
- 3.6. **Any officer or member of the council must make available such documents and records as the internal or external auditor consider necessary for the purpose of the audit** and shall, as directed by the council, supply the RFO, internal auditor, or external auditor with such information and explanation as the council considers necessary.
- 3.7. The internal auditor shall be appointed by the council and shall carry out their work to evaluate the effectiveness of the council's risk management, control and governance processes in accordance with proper practices specified in the Practitioners' Guide.
- 3.8. The council shall ensure that the internal auditor:
 - is competent and independent of the financial operations of the council;
 - reports to council in writing, or in person, on a regular basis with a minimum of one written report during each financial year;
 - can demonstrate competence, objectivity and independence, free from any actual or perceived conflicts of interest, including those arising from family relationships; and

- has no involvement in the management or control of the council

3.9. Internal or external auditors may not under any circumstances:

- perform any operational duties for the council;
- initiate or approve accounting transactions;
- provide financial, legal or other advice including in relation to any future transactions; or
- direct the activities of any council employee, except to the extent that such employees have been appropriately assigned to assist the internal auditor.

3.10. For the avoidance of doubt, in relation to internal audit the terms 'independent' and 'independence' shall have the same meaning as described in The Practitioners Guide.

3.11. The RFO shall make arrangements for the exercise of electors' rights in relation to the accounts, including the opportunity to inspect the accounts, books, and vouchers and display or publish any notices and documents required by the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, or any superseding legislation, and the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

3.12. The RFO shall, without undue delay, bring to the attention of all councillors any correspondence or report from internal or external auditors.

4. Budget and precept

4.1. Before setting a precept, the council must calculate its council tax (England) requirement for each financial year by preparing and approving a budget, in accordance with The Local Government Finance Act 1992 or succeeding legislation.

4.2. Budgets for salaries and wages, including employer contributions shall be reviewed by the Governance & Resources Committee at least annually in October for the following financial year and the final version shall be evidenced by a hard copy schedule signed by the Clerk and the Chair of Governance & Resources Committee. The RFO will inform committees of any salary implications before they consider their draft their budgets.

4.3. No later than November each year, the RFO shall prepare a draft budget with detailed estimates of all receipts and payments/income and expenditure for the following financial year along with a forecast for the following three financial years, taking account of the lifespan of assets and cost implications of repair or replacement.

4.4. Unspent budgets for completed projects shall not be carried forward to a subsequent year. Unspent funds for partially completed projects may only be carried forward (by placing them in an earmarked reserve) with the formal approval of the full council.

- 4.5. Each committee shall review its draft budget and submit any proposed amendments to the Governance & Resources Committee not later than the end of November each year.
- 4.6. The draft budget with any committee proposals and three-year forecast, including any recommendations for the use or accumulation of reserves, shall be considered by the Governance & Resources Committee and a recommendation made to the council.
- 4.7. Having considered the proposed budget and three-year forecast, the council shall determine its council tax requirement by setting a budget. The council shall set a precept for this amount no later than the end of January for the ensuing financial year.
- 4.8. **Any member with council tax unpaid for more than two months is prohibited from voting on the budget or precept by Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and must and must disclose at the start of the meeting that Section 106 applies to them.**
- 4.9. The RFO shall **issue the precept to the billing authority no later than the end of February** and supply each member with a copy of the agreed annual budget.
- 4.10. The agreed budget provides a basis for monitoring progress during the year by comparing actual spending and income against what was planned.
- 4.11. Any addition to, or withdrawal from, any earmarked reserve shall be agreed by the council or relevant committee.

5. Procurement

- 5.1. **Members and officers are responsible for obtaining value for money at all times.** Any officer procuring goods, services or works should ensure, as far as practicable, that the best available terms are obtained, usually by obtaining prices from several suppliers.
- 5.2. The RFO should verify the lawful nature of any proposed purchase before it is made and in the case of new or infrequent purchases, should ensure that the legal power being used is reported to the meeting at which the order is authorised and also recorded in the minutes.
- 5.3. Every contract shall comply with these the council's Standing Orders and these Financial Regulations, and no exceptions shall be made, except in an emergency.
- 5.4. **For a contract for the supply of goods, services or works where the estimated value will exceed the thresholds set by Parliament, the full requirements of ~~The Public Contracts Regulations 2015~~ The Procurement Act 2023 and the Procurement Regulations 2024 or any superseding legislation ("the Legislation"), must be followed in respect of the tendering, award and notification of that contract.**
- 5.5. Where the estimated value is below the Government threshold, the council shall (with the exception of items listed in paragraph 6.12) obtain prices as follows:

- 5.6. For contracts estimated to exceed £60,000 including VAT, the Clerk shall seek formal tenders from at least three suppliers agreed by the council OR advertise an open invitation for tenders in compliance with any relevant provisions of the Legislation. Tenders shall be invited in accordance with Appendix 1.
- 5.7. **For contracts estimated to be over £30,000 including VAT, the council must comply with any requirements of the Legislation¹ regarding the advertising of contract opportunities and the publication of *invitations and notices about the award of contracts.***
- 5.8. For contracts greater than £3,000 excluding VAT the Clerk shall seek at least 3 fixed price quotes;
- 5.9. where the value is between £500 and £3,000 excluding VAT, the Clerk shall try to obtain 3 estimates which might include evidence of online prices, or recent prices from regular suppliers.
- 5.10. For smaller purchases, the clerk shall seek to achieve value for money.
- 5.11. **Contracts must not be split into smaller lots to avoid compliance with these rules.**
- 5.12. The requirement to obtain competitive prices in these regulations need not apply to contracts that relate to items (i) to (iv) below:
- i. specialist services, such as legal professionals acting in disputes;
 - ii. repairs to, or parts for, existing machinery or equipment;
 - iii. works, goods or services that constitute an extension of an existing contract;
 - iv. goods or services that are only available from one supplier or are sold at a fixed price.
- 5.13. When applications are made to waive this financial regulation to enable a price to be negotiated without competition, the reason should be set out in a recommendation to the council or relevant committee. Avoidance of competition is not a valid reason.
- 5.14. The council shall not be obliged to accept the lowest or any tender, quote or estimate.
- 5.15. Individual purchases within an agreed budget for that type of expenditure may be authorised by:
- the Clerk, under delegated authority, for any items below £1,000 excluding VAT.
 - the Clerk, in consultation with the Chair of the Council or Chair of the appropriate committee, for any items below £2,000 excluding VAT.

¹ The Regulations require councils to use the Contracts Finder website if they advertise contract opportunities and also to publicise the award of contracts over £30,000 including VAT, regardless of whether they were advertised.

- a duly delegated committee of the council for all items of expenditure within their delegated budgets for items under £10,000 excluding VAT
- in respect of grants, a duly authorised committee within any limits set by council and in accordance with any policy statement agreed by the council.
- the council for all items over £5,000;

Such authorisation must be supported by a minute (in the case of council or committee decisions) or other auditable evidence trail.

5.16. No individual member, or informal group of members may issue an official order or make any contract on behalf of the council.

5.17. No expenditure may be authorised that will exceed the budget for that type of expenditure other than by resolution of the council {or a duly delegated committee acting within its Terms of Reference} except in an emergency.

5.18. In cases of serious risk to the delivery of council services or to public safety on council premises, the clerk may authorise expenditure of up to £5,000 excluding VAT on repair, replacement or other work that in their judgement is necessary, whether or not there is any budget for such expenditure. The Clerk shall report such action to the Chair as soon as possible and to the council as soon as practicable thereafter.

5.19. No expenditure shall be authorised, no contract entered into, or tender accepted in relation to any major project, unless the council is satisfied that the necessary funds are available and that where a loan is required, Government borrowing approval has been obtained first.

5.20. An official order or letter shall be issued for all work, goods and services unless a formal contract is to be prepared or an official order would be inappropriate. Copies of orders shall be retained, along with evidence of receipt of goods.

5.21. Any ordering system can be misused and access to them shall be controlled by the RFO.

6. Banking and payments

6.1. The council's banking arrangements, including the bank mandate, shall be made by the RFO and authorised by the council; banking arrangements shall not be delegated to a committee. The council has resolved to bank with Unity Trust and Barclays Bank with investments held with CCLA. The arrangements shall be reviewed annually for security and efficiency.

6.2. The council must have safe and efficient arrangements for making payments, to safeguard against the possibility of fraud or error. Wherever possible, more than one person should be involved in any payment, for example by dual online authorisation or dual cheque signing. Even where a purchase has been authorised, the payment must also be authorised, and only authorised payments shall be approved or signed to allow the funds to leave the council's bank.

- 6.3. All invoices for payment should be examined for arithmetical accuracy, analysed to the appropriate expenditure heading and verified to confirm that the work, goods, or services were received, checked and represent expenditure previously authorised by the council before being certified by the RFO.
- 6.4. Personal payments (including salaries, wages, expenses and any payment made in relation to the termination of employment) may be summarised to avoid disclosing any personal information.
- 6.5. All payments shall be made by online banking, in accordance with a resolution of the council, unless the council resolves to use a different payment method.
- 6.6. For each financial year the RFO may draw up a schedule of regular payments due in relation to a continuing contract or obligation (such as Salaries, PAYE, National Insurance, pension contributions, rent, rates, regular maintenance contracts and similar items), which the council or a duly delegated committee may authorise in advance for the year.
- 6.7. A list of such payments shall be reported to the next appropriate meeting of the council for information only.
- 6.8. The Clerk and RFO shall have delegated authority to authorise payments in the following circumstances:
 - i. any payments of up to £3,000 excluding VAT, within an agreed budget.
 - ii. payments of up to £5,000 excluding VAT in cases of serious risk to the delivery of council services or to public safety on council premises.
 - iii. any payment necessary to avoid a charge under the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998 or to comply with contractual terms, where the due date for payment is before the next scheduled meeting of the council, where the Clerk and RFO certify that there is no dispute or other reason to delay payment, provided that a list of such payments shall be submitted to the next appropriate meeting of council.
 - iv. Fund transfers within the councils banking arrangements up to the sum of £50,000, provided that a list of such payments shall be submitted to the next appropriate meeting of council.
- 6.9. The RFO shall present a schedule of payments requiring authorisation, forming part of the agenda for the meeting, together with the relevant invoices, to the council. The council shall review the schedule for compliance and, having satisfied itself, shall authorise payment by resolution. The authorised schedule shall be initialled immediately below the last item by the person chairing the meeting. A detailed list of all payments shall be disclosed within or as an attachment to the minutes of that meeting.

7. Electronic payments

- 7.1. Where internet banking arrangements are made with any bank, the RFO shall be appointed as the Service Administrator. The bank mandate agreed by the council

shall identify a number of councillors who will be authorised to approve transactions on those accounts and a minimum of two people will be involved in any online approval process.

- 7.2. All authorised signatories shall have access to view the council's bank accounts online.
- 7.3. No employee or councillor shall disclose any PIN or password, relevant to the council or its banking, to anyone not authorised in writing by the council or a duly delegated committee.
- 7.4. The Finance Officer shall set up all items due for payment online. A list of payments for approval, together with copies of the relevant invoices, shall be sent to two authorised signatories.
- 7.5. In the prolonged absence of the Finance Officer, the RFO shall set up any payments due before the return of the Finance Officer.
- 7.6. Two councillors who are authorised signatories shall check the payment details against the invoices before approving each payment using the online banking system.
- 7.7. Evidence shall be retained showing which members approved the payment online and a printout of the transaction confirming that the payment has been made shall be appended to the invoice for audit purposes.
- 7.8. A full list of all payments made in a month shall be provided to the next council meeting.
- 7.9. With the approval of the council in each case, regular payments (such as gas, electricity, telephone, broadband, water, National Non-Domestic Rates, refuse collection, pension contributions and HMRC payments) may be made by variable direct debit, provided that the instructions are signed/approved online by two authorised members. The approval of the use of each variable direct debit shall be reviewed by the council every year.
- 7.10. Payment may be made by BACS or CHAPS by resolution of the council provided that each payment is approved online by two authorised bank signatories, evidence is retained, and any payments are reported to the council at the next meeting. The approval of the use of BACS or CHAPS shall be renewed by resolution of the council at least every two years.
- 7.11. If thought appropriate by the council, regular payments of fixed sums may be made by banker's standing order, provided that the instructions are or approved online by two members, evidence of this is retained and any payments are reported to council when made. The approval of the use of a banker's standing order shall be reviewed by the council at least every two years.
- 7.12. Account details for suppliers may only be changed upon written notification by the supplier verified by the Clerk and the Finance Officer. This is a potential area for

fraud and the individuals involved should ensure that any change is genuine. Data held should be checked with suppliers every two years.

7.13. Members and officers shall ensure that any computer used for the council's financial business has adequate security, with anti-virus, anti-spyware and firewall software installed and regularly updated.

7.14. Remembered password facilities {other than secure password stores requiring separate identity verification} should not be used on any computer used for council banking.

8. Cheque payments

8.1. Cheques or orders for payment in accordance in accordance with a resolution or delegated decision shall be signed by two members.

8.2. A signatory having a family or business relationship with the beneficiary of a payment shall not, under normal circumstances, be a signatory to that payment.

8.3. To indicate agreement of the details on the cheque with the counterfoil and the invoice or similar documentation, the signatories shall also initial the cheque counterfoil and invoice.

8.4. Cheques or orders for payment shall not normally be presented for signature other than at, or immediately before or after a council or committee meeting}. Any signatures obtained away from council meetings shall be reported to the council or Governance & Resources Committee at the next convenient meeting.

9. Payment cards

9.1. Any corporate credit card or trade card account opened by the council will be specifically restricted to use by the Clerk and RFO, Public Realm Manager and Democratic Services Manager and any balance shall be paid in full each month.

9.2. Personal credit or debit cards of members or staff shall not be used.

10. Petty Cash

10.1. The council will not maintain any form of cash float. All cash received must be banked intact. Any payments made in cash by the Clerk (for example for postage or minor stationery items) shall be refunded on a regular basis, at least quarterly

11. Payment of salaries and allowances

11.1. As an employer, the council must make arrangements to comply with the statutory requirements of PAYE legislation.

11.2. Councillors' allowances (where paid) are also liable to deduction of tax under PAYE rules and must be taxed correctly before payment.

11.3. Salary rates shall be agreed by the council, or a duly delegated committee. No changes shall be made to any employee's gross pay, emoluments, or terms and conditions of employment without the prior consent of the council or relevant committee.

- 11.4. Payment of salaries shall be made, after deduction of tax, national insurance, pension contributions and any similar statutory or discretionary deductions, on the dates stipulated in employment contracts.
- 11.5. Deductions from salary shall be paid to the relevant bodies within the required timescales, provided that each payment is reported, as set out in these regulations above.
- 11.6. Each payment to employees of net salary and to the appropriate creditor of the statutory and discretionary deductions shall be recorded in a payroll control account or other separate confidential record, with the total of such payments each calendar month reported in the cashbook. Payroll reports will be reviewed by the Governance & Resources Committee to ensure that the correct payments have been made.
- 11.7. Any termination payments shall be supported by a report to the council, setting out a clear business case. Termination payments shall only be authorised by the full council.
- 11.8. Before employing interim staff, the council must consider a full business case.

12. Loans and investments

- 12.1. Any application for Government approval to borrow money and subsequent arrangements for a loan must be authorised by the full council and recorded in the minutes. All borrowing shall be in the name of the council, after obtaining any necessary approval.
- 12.2. Any financial arrangement which does not require formal borrowing approval from the Secretary of State (such as Hire Purchase, Leasing of tangible assets or loans to be repaid within the financial year) must be authorised by the full council, following a written report on the value for money of the proposed transaction.
- 12.3. The council shall consider the requirement for an Investment Strategy and Policy in accordance with Statutory Guidance on Local Government Investments, which must be written in accordance with relevant regulations, proper practices, and guidance. Any Strategy and Policy shall be reviewed by the council at least annually.
- 12.4. All investment of money under the control of the council shall be in the name of the council.
- 12.5. All investment certificates and other documents relating thereto shall be retained in the custody of the RFO.
- 12.6. Payments in respect of short term or long-term investments, including transfers between bank accounts held in the same bank, shall be made in accordance with these regulations.

13. Income

- 13.1. The collection of all sums due to the council shall be the responsibility of and under the supervision of the RFO.

- 13.2. The council will review all fees and charges for work done, services provided, or goods sold at least annually as part of the budget-setting process, following a report of the Clerk. The RFO shall be responsible for the collection of all amounts due to the council.
- 13.3. Any sums found to be irrecoverable, and any bad debts shall be reported to the council and shall be written off in the year. The council's approval shall be shown in the accounting records.
- 13.4. All sums received on behalf of the council shall be deposited intact with the council's bankers, with such frequency as the RFO considers necessary. The origin of each receipt shall clearly be recorded on the paying-in slip or other record.
- 13.5. Personal cheques shall not be cashed out of money held on behalf of the council.
- 13.6. The RFO shall ensure that VAT is correctly recorded in the council's accounting software and that any VAT Return required is submitted from the software by the due date.
- 13.7. Where significant sums of cash are regularly received by the council, the RFO shall ensure that more than one person is present when the cash is counted in the first instance, that there is a reconciliation to some form of control record such as ticket issues, and that appropriate care is taken for the security and safety of individuals banking such cash.

14. Payments under contracts for building or other construction works

- 14.1. Where contracts provide for payment by instalments the RFO shall maintain a record of all such payments, which shall be made within the time specified in the contract based on signed certificates from the architect or other consultant engaged to supervise the works.
- 14.2. Any variation of addition to or omission from a contract must be authorised by the Clerk to the contractor in writing, with the council being informed where the final cost is likely to exceed the contract sum by 5% or more, or likely to exceed the budget available.

15. Stores and equipment

- 15.1. The officer in charge of each section shall be responsible for the care and custody of stores and equipment in that section.
- 15.2. Delivery notes shall be obtained in respect of all goods received into store or otherwise delivered and goods must be checked as to order and quality at the time delivery is made.
- 15.3. Stocks shall be kept at the minimum levels consistent with operational requirements.
- 15.4. The RFO shall be responsible for periodic checks of stocks and stores, at least annually.

16. Assets, properties and estates

- 16.1. The Clerk shall make arrangements for the safe custody of all title deeds and Land Registry Certificates of properties held by the council.
- 16.2. The RFO shall ensure that an appropriate and accurate Register of Assets and Investments is kept up to date, with a record of all properties held by the council, their location, extent, plan, reference, purchase details, nature of the interest, tenancies granted, rents payable and purpose for which held, in accordance with Accounts and Audit Regulations.
- 16.3. The continued existence of tangible assets shown in the Register shall be verified at least annually, possibly in conjunction with a health and safety inspection of assets.
- 16.4. No interest in land shall be purchased or otherwise acquired, sold, leased or otherwise disposed of without the authority of the council, together with any other consents required by law. In each case a written report shall be provided to council in respect of valuation and surveyed condition of the property (including matters such as planning permissions and covenants) together with a proper business case (including an adequate level of consultation with the electorate where required by law).

No tangible moveable property shall be purchased or otherwise acquired, sold, leased or otherwise disposed of, without the authority of the council, together with any other consents required by law, except where the estimated value of any one item does not exceed £500. In each case a written report shall be provided to council with a full business case.

17. Insurance

- 17.1. The RFO shall keep a record of all insurances effected by the council and the property and risks covered, reviewing these annually before the renewal date in conjunction with the council's review of risk management.
- 17.2. The Clerk shall give prompt notification of all new risks, properties or vehicles which require to be insured and of any alterations affecting existing insurances.
- 17.3. The RFO shall be notified of any loss, liability, damage, or event likely to lead to a claim, and shall report these to the council at the next available meeting. The RFO shall negotiate all claims on the council's insurers.
- 17.4. All appropriate members and employees of the council shall be included in a suitable form of security or fidelity guarantee insurance which shall cover the maximum risk exposure as determined annually by the council, or duly delegated committee.

18. Suspension and revision of Financial Regulations

- 18.1. The council shall review these Financial Regulations annually and following any change of clerk or RFO. The Clerk shall monitor changes in legislation or proper practices and advise the council of any need to amend these Financial Regulations.
- 18.2. The council may, by resolution duly notified prior to the relevant meeting of council, suspend any part of these Financial Regulations, provided that reasons for the

suspension are recorded and that an assessment of the risks arising has been presented to all members. Suspension does not disapply any legislation or permit the council to act unlawfully.

18.3. The council may temporarily amend these Financial Regulations by a duly notified resolution, to cope with periods of absence, local government reorganisation, national restrictions or other exceptional circumstances.

Appendix 1 - Tender process

- 1) Any invitation to tender shall state the general nature of the intended contract and the Clerk shall obtain the necessary technical assistance to prepare a specification in appropriate cases.
- 2) The invitation shall in addition state that tenders must be addressed to the Clerk in the ordinary course of post unless an electronic tendering process has been agreed by the council.
- 3) Where a postal process is used, each tendering firm shall be supplied with a specifically marked envelope in which the tender is to be sealed and remain sealed until the prescribed date for opening tenders for that contract. All sealed tenders shall be opened at the same time on the prescribed date by the Clerk in the presence of at least one member of council.
- 4) Where an electronic tendering process is used, the council shall use a specific email address that will be monitored to ensure that nobody accesses any tender before the expiry of the deadline for submission.
- 5) Any invitation to tender issued under this regulation shall be subject to Standing Order 21 and shall refer to the terms of the Bribery Act 2010.
- 6) Where the council, or duly delegated committee, does not accept any tender, quote or estimate, the work is not allocated and the council requires further pricing, no person shall be permitted to submit a later tender, estimate or quote who was present when the original decision-making process was being undertaken.

STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL

COMMITTEE: GOVERNANCE & RESOURCES

DATE: 2 APRIL 2025

OFFICER RESPONSIBLE: EMMA PAYNE, TOWN CLERK

SUBJECT: EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK 2025

1. SUMMARY

Worknest, the Town Council's HR advisor, regularly reviews the Employee Handbook to ensure that it keeps up to date with current legislation. The latest one can be found on the following link:

[Stotfold Town Council Employee Handbook April 2025.pdf](#)

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 Members are asked to note the latest Employee Handbook.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The following policies have been updated following new legislation:

- Carer's Leave which came into effect from April 2024.
- Flexible Working requests to reflect changes in legislation from April 2024.
- Flexi Leave Policy adopted by this Committee
- Updated paternity leave policy
- Inclusion of Menopause Policy
- Sexual Harassment and Bullying Policy adopted by this Committee 12 February 2025.

3.2 Members are asked to note that these policies are based on statutory legislation and any amendments may impact the indemnity from the HR provider.

4. FINANCIAL

4.1 The review of this handbook is part of the subscription to WorkNest which costs £5,939 per annum and is part of the contract which expires in July 2027

5. IMPLICATIONS

Strategic Plan	N/A
Risk Management	HR provider reduces the risk of employment issues
Legals	Various HR legislation
Resources/Stakeholders	Staff
Contracts/Financials	Budget in place. Contract until 2027
Crime & Disorder	N/A
Equalities	N/A
Biodiversity	N/A



Stotfold Town Council

Employee Handbook

January 2025

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Stotfold Town Council (referred to throughout this handbook as “We” or “the Council”). Our strength as a Council is due to the skills and abilities of colleagues like you. We look forward to a long and successful working relationship with you and hope that your time with us is enjoyable and rewarding.

This handbook

This handbook is designed to explain the way in which we work and to set out the key procedures, rules and policies designed to ensure an efficient workplace and a safe and supportive environment for all employees. The contents of this handbook do not form part of the terms of your contract of employment unless otherwise stated. The Council may need to alter or amend any policy or procedure contained in this handbook to ensure that it remains relevant and consistent with the needs of the business. Any such change will be notified to all employees, and an up-to-date copy of this handbook can be obtained from the shared drive or in paper format from your line manager.

The Council recognises the ‘Green Book’ which includes enhancements above the statutory minimum to certain employee benefits. These additional benefits are detailed within your contract of employment, however if detailed within this handbook, they will be clearly identifiable.

We do expect you to comply with the requirements set out in this handbook and failure to do so may lead to disciplinary action; in appropriate cases, up to and including dismissal.

CONTENTS

1	KEY PRINCIPLES	5
1.1	Council Code of Conduct	5
1.2	Health and Safety	5
1.3	Ethical Conduct	6
1.4	Whistleblowing	7
1.5	Good Faith and Loyalty	7
1.6	Data Protection	7
1.7	Environmental Statement	8
2	HOW WE DO THINGS	9
2.1	Proof of Identity	9
2.2	Dress Code	9
2.3	Timekeeping	10
2.4	Adverse Weather and Traffic Disruption	10
2.5	Rest Breaks	11
2.6	Smoking	11
2.7	Computer Use - Including the use of email/Internet	12
2.8	Social Media	13
2.9	Telephones	13
2.10	Alcohol and Drugs	13
2.11	Driving	15
2.12	Expenses	16
2.13	Council Property	16
2.14	General	17
3	ABSENCE	18
3.1	Unauthorised Absence	18
3.2	Medical Appointments	18
3.3	Ante-natal Care/Adoption Appointments	18
3.4	Sickness Absence	19
3.5	Jury Service/Other Time Off	22
3.6	Compassionate/Bereavement Leave	22

3.7	Parental Bereavement Leave	22
3.8	Emergency Time Off for Dependents.....	23
3.9	Annual Leave.....	24
3.10	Reserve Forces	25
3.11	Carer’s Leave.....	25
4	FLEXIBLE WORKING AND FAMILY RELATED LEAVE.....	27
4.1	Flexible Working	27
4.2	Flexi-time	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.3	Maternity Leave	30
4.4	Adoption Leave	33
4.5	Paternity Leave	35
4.6	Parental Leave.....	35
4.7	Shared Parental Leave	36
4.8	Keeping in Touch Days/Shared Parental Leave Days.....	37
4.9	During Maternity/Adoption or Shared Parental Leave.....	37
4.10	Homeworking and Hybrid Working Policy.....	37
5	HOW WE RESOLVE ISSUES	43
5.1	Performance Improvement Procedure.....	43
5.2	Sickness Absence Procedure.....	46
5.3	Disciplinary Procedure	48
5.4	Grievance Procedure.....	51
5.5	Redundancy Policy	53
6	EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION.....	55
6.1	Equal Opportunities Statement	55
6.2	Menopause Policy.....	58
6.3	Harassment and Bullying	60
6.4	Monitoring equal opportunities and dignity at work	66

1

KEY PRINCIPLES

This section sets out some of the key commitments made by the Council to its employees – and the key commitments expected from employees in return.

1.1 Council Code of Conduct

The behaviour of employees is central to the continued success of the Council. This handbook sets out a number of requirements aimed at ensuring the smooth running of the Council and the fair treatment of all employees. A number of these are so important that any breach of them will amount to gross misconduct and these are clearly identified throughout the handbook. Your attention is drawn in particular to the following:

- The rules on gifts and hospitality;
- The policy on smoking;
- The policy on alcohol and drugs;
- The policies on driving and the use of Council vehicles;
- The policy regarding social media; and
- The rules concerning the use of computers, the internet and email.

Dishonesty

It is important to stress that any form of dishonesty, however minor, will be regarded as gross misconduct. This includes theft of property, whether belonging to the Council, colleagues or any third party. However, it also includes an employee seeking to gain any advantage through deception - such as making a false claim for expenses or overtime, falsely claiming to be sick or falsely claiming to have completed a particular task.

It does not matter if any amount of money at issue is small. The Council regards any dishonesty by employees as gross misconduct which will usually result in dismissal.

Refusal to carry out instructions

The Council expects employees to work in a spirit of cooperation with their colleagues and managers for the good of the business as a whole. Employees are required to carry out their managers' instructions and a deliberate and wilful refusal to do so will be gross misconduct.

If you believe that you have been instructed to do something that does not fall within your duties, or which is in some other way unreasonable then the appropriate way of dealing with this is to raise a grievance under the grievance procedure (see Section 5). However, doing so will not prevent a refusal to carry out an instruction from amounting to gross misconduct if it is found to have been a reasonable one in all the circumstances.

1.2 Health and Safety

The primary duty owed to you by the Council is to ensure that you are safe while you are at work. Similarly, all employees are obliged to carry out their duties in a safe and

responsible manner that does not risk harm to either themselves, their colleagues, or any other person.

A detailed health and safety policy/handbook identifying the roles and responsibilities of key staff members for ensuring that the Council meets its commitment to health and safety is on the shared drive or a paper copy can be made available. In addition, there is information on health and safety displayed throughout our premises.

Detailed risk assessments have been carried out on all aspects of the Council's activities and steps have been taken to ensure that all work can be done safely. Any employee who is concerned that any aspect of the Council's activities poses a risk to health and safety should report this to the nearest available manager immediately. Genuine concerns about health and safety will always be treated with the utmost seriousness and be thoroughly investigated.

Employees are required to comply with all instructions rules and procedures concerning matters of health and safety. Failure to do so may amount to gross misconduct. In particular, where employees are required to wear personal protective equipment then failure to do so will be treated as gross misconduct which will usually result in dismissal.

1.3 Ethical Conduct

The Council aims for the highest possible standards of ethical conduct in all of its activities and expects the conduct of individual employees to reflect this. Dishonesty of any kind will be treated as a serious matter, which may amount to gross misconduct and therefore to dismissal without notice.

Gifts and Hospitality

The acceptance of gifts and hospitality from clients/customers, suppliers and potential suppliers must not give the appearance that employees or the Council may be unduly influenced in the decisions that they make in respect of clients/customers, suppliers or in any other aspect of their work.

All gifts and hospitality given or received, of whatever value, must be entered in the Register kept by the management team.

No personal gifts of a value in excess of £10 should be accepted from a client/customer, supplier, or potential supplier without express permission from the Town Clerk.

Acceptance of hospitality, such as lunch or drinks receptions, should be kept within common sense limits and should always be authorised by your manager. Offers of hospitality must always be authorised by your manager.

You may also be instructed to return any gifts which your manager considers to be inappropriate, or to refuse to accept hospitality from a particular supplier or potential supplier. Failing to obey such an instruction will be treated as misconduct.

Allowing gifts or hospitality to influence any purchasing/business decisions that you may make on behalf of the Council or to otherwise influence the way in which you perform your duties is an act of gross misconduct which will usually result in dismissal.

It is also an act of gross misconduct to seek to influence any other person to behave in an improper way or to confer a business advantage on you or the Council through the giving of any gift or hospitality.

1.4 Whistleblowing

The Council encourages employees to raise any concerns that they may have about any wrongdoing at any level within the business. Wrongdoing in this context means any breach of a legal obligation, risk to health and safety, a criminal offence being committed, a miscarriage of justice occurring or likely to occur, damage to the environment, or an attempt to conceal any of the above.

Any initial concern should be raised with the Town Clerk. However, if this is not appropriate then you should contact another member of the management team who will ensure that your concern is properly addressed.

Employees who raise a concern which is in the public interest under this policy are entitled not to be subjected to any detriment as a result, however the employee must believe that the disclosure they are making is true.

Even if your concern proves to be unfounded you will be protected against any reprisals from your manager, colleagues, or any other employee of the business. Making a deliberately false allegation, however, against the Council, a fellow employee or any other person will be treated as an act of gross misconduct which will usually result in dismissal.

If you are the subject of an allegation of wrongdoing then you will be informed of the allegation and given every opportunity to explain the situation and put your side of the story. Disciplinary action will only be taken following a full investigation in accordance with the disciplinary procedure.

1.5 Good Faith and Loyalty

The employment relationship is one built on trust, and we all have a mutual interest in making the relationship a success. The Council has a duty to provide reasonable support to employees and employees have a duty of good faith towards the Council.

In practice this means not doing anything that undermines the Council's standing with members of the public, customers, clients, and fellow employees.

1.6 Data Protection

We will process personal data and sensitive personal data (also known as 'special categories of personal data') relating to you in accordance with our Data Protection

Policy and our Data Protection Privacy Notice (provided to you separately), as well as in accordance with the relevant data protection legislation.

We may monitor staff in accordance with our policies relating to email, internet and communications systems and monitoring at work, as detailed in this Employee Handbook and in accordance with the relevant data protection legislation.

You will comply with your obligations under our Data Protection Policy and other relevant policies as directed.

1.7 Environmental Statement

In the undertaking of their daily duties, we accept that all staff associated with the Council will have an influence on the environment. We will commit to adopting working practices that will help to have a positive effect, assist towards continued environmental improvement, prevent pollution, and reduce unavoidable negative influences caused by our working practices.

The Council therefore maintains a policy of 'minimum waste' which is essential to the cost effective and efficient running of all our operations. Every employee has a responsibility to promote this policy by taking extra care when carrying out normal duties to avoid unnecessary or extravagant use of services, materials, lights, heating, water etc.

2

HOW WE DO THINGS

This section deals with some important administrative requirements to do with your employment and sets out the standards the Council expects of employees in various situations.

2.1 Proof of Identity

The Council is legally obliged to ensure that all employees are permitted to work in the UK. It is a condition of your employment that you comply with all reasonable requests to provide details of your identity, right to work in the UK and place of residence. This will include allowing the Council to take copies of your passport or other appropriate documents and to check their authenticity. Copies of any such documents will be kept in your personnel file for such a period as is deemed necessary in compliance with current data protection laws.

The Council may dismiss any employee who cannot demonstrate that they are legally entitled to work in the United Kingdom.

2.2 Dress Code

All employees should dress in a manner appropriate to the work that they do. Key factors include whether or not the employee meets clients or customers and whether the requirements of health and safety require particular clothing. How you dress is a matter of common sense. If your manager feels that you are dressing in an inappropriate way they may ask you to dress differently the next time you come into work. A persistent refusal to comply with a reasonable standard set by a manager will amount to misconduct.

Where an employee dresses in a completely inappropriate way, for example by wearing clothing with offensive images or slogans, then they may be sent home to change. Any time taken to go home and change will be unpaid.

Employees required to wear Uniform

If you are provided with specific uniform for your role, you will be expected to wear this at all times whilst at work, especially if you may come into contact with the public in the performance of your duties.

You must ensure you look presentable for work and your uniform is maintained in a good condition. If you lose your uniform, or do not look after it, then the Council will be entitled to make a deduction from your remuneration to cover the cost of replacing this. General wear and tear will be considered, and the Council may exercise its discretion to replace uniform.

Personal Protective Equipment

If you are provided with any Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) you must ensure you wear this at all times, especially in any designated area which may pose additional risk. Failure to do so is likely to result in disciplinary action.

2.3 Timekeeping

Good timekeeping is essential in any team; however, we recognise the commitment that staff dedicate to their duties and therefore are happy to show some flexibility in terms of time keeping. This having been said, any employee who is seen to abuse this goodwill, will be spoken to. Persistent abuse of this goodwill will result in disciplinary action.

Where it is clear that you are going to be late for work you must contact the Town Clerk as soon as possible to explain the situation and give an estimate of your arrival time. You must make every effort to talk to your manager directly rather than leave a message with colleagues or send an email or text message.

If personal or domestic circumstances make it difficult for you to attend work on time then you should discuss this with the Town Clerk. In some cases, the Council may be able to accommodate a reasonable need for flexibility, but this will be subject to the needs of the business and the need to avoid placing an unfair burden on your colleagues (see Section 4).

2.4 Adverse Weather and Traffic Disruption

Adverse Weather

Adverse weather conditions can cause road closures and public transport disruption.

The Council's primary duty is to provide a safe place of work. If adverse weather means that this cannot be achieved, and the workplace needs to close then all employees will be sent home or told not to come in. In these circumstances, where possible, employees may be required to work from home and will be paid as normal. If home working is not a suitable alternative arrangement, employees will be paid in full for any working time that they have lost.

If the need to close the workplace persists, the Council may invoke any lay-off clause in employees' contracts.

Traffic Disruption

We understand that events such as industrial action, road traffic accidents and road works can cause difficulties for employees attempting to travel into the workplace. In these circumstances we are prepared to take a flexible approach to working arrangements while still keeping the business running as effectively as possible.

You must make a genuine effort to report for work at your normal start time. You may need to leave home earlier to give yourself extra time for the journey or taking an alternative route. Travel on foot or by bicycle should be considered where appropriate and safe.

If you are unable to get into work, you should check the situation throughout the day in case it improves. Information may be available from local radio stations, the police, transport providers or the internet. If conditions improve sufficiently to allow you to travel in to work, you should report this to your manager and attend work unless told otherwise.

Delayed Return from holidays

You should make every effort to return to work as planned at the end of any period of authorised annual leave and should ensure that travel arrangements are made that would best ensure this is possible. However, we recognise that employees may be delayed when returning from holidays due to flight cancellations/ delays.

If you are unable to travel into work

If the workplace is open, it is the responsibility of employees to attend work if they can.

Employees who are absent from work due to adverse weather or other travel disruptions are not entitled to be paid for the time lost.

Where it is clear that you are not going to be able to get to work you must contact the Town Clerk or your line manager as soon as possible to explain the situation. You must make every effort to talk to your manager directly rather than leave a message with colleagues or send an email or text message.

If you are unable to attend work due to severe weather or other travel difficulties, then you will be required to take time from your annual leave allowance to cover any absence or to take unpaid time off by agreement with your manager.

There may be circumstances in which employees are able to work at home or from an alternative place of work, if available, but this will be entirely at the discretion of the Council. If you do this, you will receive your normal pay.

If travel disruption or adverse weather causes you to arrive at work late or requires you to leave work early you will usually be expected to make up any lost time.

2.5 Rest Breaks

The Council encourages all employees to take full advantage of scheduled rest breaks. These are provided not only for comfort, but also to protect the health of employees and prevent excessive fatigue from causing accidents.

A rest break should be taken away from your workstation wherever possible. If you leave the premises you should bear in mind the time that it will take you to return from the break so that you can ensure that you begin work again on time.

Different areas of the business may have different arrangements for ad hoc breaks such as to make a cup of tea or coffee. These arrangements are in place to ensure the smooth running of the business and to prevent putting unfair pressure on colleagues. You are required to comply with any requirements relating to such breaks as may be in place from time to time.

2.6 Smoking

The Council operates a smoke-free workplace. Smoking (which includes the use of e-cigarettes and personal vaporisers) is therefore strictly prohibited throughout all Council premises, including any Council vehicle.

Smoking is only permitted during designated break times and in the designated outside areas.

2.7 Computer Use - Including the use of email/Internet

It is especially important that the Council is able to keep its data secure. To assist with this, all employees are required to comply with instructions that may be issued from time to time regarding the use of Council-owned computers or systems.

You should ensure that when leaving your workstation for any lengthy period, that you lock your terminal, or log off if appropriate.

You must not attach any device to Council IT equipment without authorisation from the Town Clerk and you must not open attachments or click on links unless you know you can trust the source. Council portable IT devices must be kept secure and password protected at all times.

Your computer password is an important piece of confidential information, and you should treat it that way. Do not share it with others, and make sure that it is not written down anywhere where an unauthorised person can find it.

Unauthorised access to any of the Council's systems will amount to gross misconduct.

Internet Use

Employees with access to the internet on Council-owned devices should use that access responsibly.

Personal use during working hours will be treated as misconduct. From time to time the Council may block access to sites which it considers inappropriate but whether or not a specific site has been blocked, employees must not use the internet to view or download offensive or sexually explicit material. Any attempt to do so may, depending on the circumstances, amount to gross misconduct leading to dismissal.

Employees must not download any software, plugins, or extensions on to Council-owned devices unless an appropriate manager first clears this. Employees should also refrain from downloading music, video, or any other entertainment content on any Council-owned device.

Firewalls and anti-virus software may be used to protect the Council's systems. These must not be disabled or switched off without express permission from management.

Email

All email correspondence should be dealt with in the same professional and diligent manner as any other form of correspondence.

If you have a Council email account you should be mindful of the fact that any email that you send will be identifiable as coming from the Council. You should therefore take care not to send anything via email that may reflect badly on the Council. In particular, you must not send content of a sexual, racist, or discriminatory nature, junk mail, chain letters, cartoons or jokes from any email address associated with work.

Using a Council/work email address to send inappropriate material, including content of a sexual, racist, or discriminatory nature, is prohibited and may amount to gross misconduct. Should you receive any offensive or inappropriate content via email you should inform a member of management of this as soon as possible so that they can ensure that it is removed from the system.

You should also take care that emails will be seen only by the person intended. Particular care should be taken when sending confidential information that the email has been correctly addressed, marked 'private' /'confidential' and not copied into those not authorised to see the information. Sending confidential information via email without proper authorisation or without taking sufficient care to ensure that it is properly protected will be treated as misconduct.

Privacy

Monitoring of email usage may take place without notice. You should have no expectation of privacy in respect of personal and business use of email and the internet whilst at work.

Your email remains the property of the Council and therefore you should not use your Council email to send or receive any information that you regard as private. The Council may, in the course of its business, read emails that you have sent or received - although in the absence of evidence of wrongdoing the Council will try to avoid reading personal emails if possible.

2.8 Social Media

An employee's behaviour on any social networking or other internet site must be consistent with the behaviour required of employees. Where it is possible for users of a social media site to ascertain who you work for, then you should take particular care not to behave in a way which reflects badly on the Council.

Inappropriate or disparaging comments about the Council, colleagues or clients will be treated as misconduct. Because social media interactions can be copied and widely disseminated in a way that you may not be able to control, the Council will take a particularly serious view of any misconduct that occurs through the use of social media.

You must not operate a social media account or profile that purports to be operated on or on behalf of the Council without express permission to do so from your manager.

You should not attempt to access social networking sites, such as Facebook/X (formally known as Twitter) or similar on Council computers. This includes during break times.

2.9 Telephones

Council telephones must be used for legitimate business purposes only.

Calls and texts on personal mobile phones should wherever possible be restricted to formal rest breaks.

2.10 Alcohol and Drugs

The Council's approach to the consumption of alcohol, drugs, and other substances (including new psychoactive substances) that have intoxicating and/or behaviour-altering effects or impair judgement (referred to in this policy as "other substances") is based on the need to ensure a safe and productive working environment. Because of the serious nature of the risks posed by the abuse of alcohol, drugs and other

substances in the workplace, any breach of the rules in this area will be treated as gross misconduct which will usually result in dismissal.

An employee will be regarded as 'under the influence' of alcohol, drugs, or other substances if their behaviour, speech, ability to concentrate or otherwise perform their duties is in any way affected. An employee will also be regarded as under the influence if they fail a drug, other substance, or alcohol test.

Dependency

Employees who have a dependency on alcohol, drugs or other substances may be offered support and encouraged to seek appropriate counselling or medical help. Absence arising from treatment or counselling related to drug, alcohol or other substance abuse will be treated as sickness absence under the Council's Sickness absence procedure. However, while the Council will always try to be supportive toward employees with a drug, alcohol, or other substance problem, this will not prevent disciplinary action being taken when employees act in breach of the rules laid out in this policy.

Wherever an employee informs the Council that they have a drug, alcohol, or other substance problem this will, as far as possible, be treated in the utmost confidence. However, the Council may need to disclose particular circumstances to managers, regulatory authorities or others should this be necessary to ensure safety or compliance with legal requirements.

Drugs

The consumption, storage, distribution or sale of illegal drugs or any other behaviour-altering and/or intoxicating substance, including new psychoactive substances, on Council premises or during working time is prohibited. The Council will report any illegal activities to the police or other relevant authorities.

You must not present yourself for work under the influence of illegal drugs or any other substance taken for non-medical purposes.

Medicines and Prescription Drugs

If you are taking prescription drugs or any other medicine that may affect your performance at work or your ability to carry out any of your duties, then you must inform the Town Clerk of this so that steps can be taken to ensure that the work can be done safely. It is your responsibility, when beginning any course of medication, to check whether it may adversely affect your ability to work.

Alcohol

Consumption of even a small amount of alcohol may be sufficient to adversely affect the work of an employee and could pose a risk to health and safety. Remember that alcohol remains in the bloodstream for up to 24 hours following consumption and that the consumption of a significant amount of alcohol in the evening may leave you unfit to work in the morning.

You must not present yourself for work under the influence of alcohol.

You must not consume any alcohol during working time, lunchtime or during any break unless this has been specifically authorised by your manager.

Where alcohol is available at Council organised events or occasions when you are representing the Council – even outside working hours - it is important to behave responsibly and not drink to excess. Behaviour that reflects badly on the Council will be a disciplinary matter and in serious cases may amount to gross misconduct.

2.11 Driving

Where driving is required as part of your job, it is your responsibility to ensure that you are legally qualified to drive.

Licences will go through the Council inspection procedure which requires us to check individual licences once a year with the DVLA, or as otherwise requested. The Council will require you to share your driving licence information by supplying it with your driving licence number and a check code provided by the DVLA. If you receive any points on your licence you must inform the Council of this immediately.

If you use your own vehicle to drive on Council/work-related business, it is your responsibility to arrange to be insured for that business use. The Council may require you at any time/annually to allow a copy of your insurance and any MOT test certificate to be made and kept in our records.

You are responsible for any driving offences committed while driving as part of your duties, including any parking fines. Dangerous, careless, inconsiderate, or aggressive driving as well as causing a risk to others can be damaging to the Council's reputation and can amount to gross misconduct. If you are banned from driving for any reason, the Council is not obliged to find alternative work for you and may choose to dismiss you if the ban renders you incapable of performing your duties as required.

It is illegal to use your mobile phone whilst driving. This includes texting etc.

Employees should **never** use their mobile phone whilst driving on Council business unless they do so on an installed hands-free system and traffic conditions mean that it is safe to do so. In most cases, it would be preferable to make any calls when the vehicle is stationary.

Any journey carried out on Council business must be scheduled in such a way as to allow adequate rest breaks – usually one break of 15 minutes for two hours of driving. Where possible, driving on Council business should be avoided either late at night or early in the morning.

Safety is the Council's prime responsibility, and you should not be required to compromise safety in any way when driving on Council business. If you are concerned about any driving requirements you may have, then you should discuss these with the Town Clerk and appropriate arrangements will be made to ensure that any work-related journey can be completed safely.

Council Vehicles

If a Council vehicle is provided to you as part of your contract of employment or you are required to drive a Council vehicle as part of your job, it is your responsibility to take care of the vehicle, keeping it in a clean and roadworthy condition, including checking the oil/water levels are at the required levels. You should report any damage or fault immediately. The Council will arrange for appropriate maintenance or servicing to be carried out. If you incur any reasonable expenses in connection with the vehicle then these will be reimbursed, but you must check with the Town Clerk first and comply fully

with our expenses policy. The Council will not be obliged to reimburse any expenses incurred without authorisation.

Any personal use of a Council vehicle, other than a vehicle provided for your exclusive use as part of your contract is at the sole discretion of the Council and must in any event be kept within reasonable limits. Your manager may at any time instruct you not to use – or to cease using - a Council vehicle for private purposes.

If you have possession of a Council vehicle overnight or at the weekend then you must ensure that it is securely parked in an appropriate location. In general, equipment or stock should not be left in a vehicle overnight. Where this is unavoidable then you must ensure that the vehicle is parked in a locked garage. If this is not possible then you should discuss appropriate parking and security arrangements with the Town Clerk.

2.12 Expenses

You will be reimbursed for authorised and legitimate expenditure incurred in the course of the proper performance of your duties, i.e. travel, accommodation, agreed out-of-pocket expenditure.

In order to claim expenses, you must complete an expense claim form and support the claim by submitting valid receipts.

2.13 Council Property

You are not permitted to use Council property for any purpose other than its intended use. Council property must not be removed from the premises unless with prior approval.

Damage to Council Property

Any damage to or loss of Council property must be immediately reported to your manager.

If, following an investigation, it is found that as a result of your carelessness, negligence or failure to comply with Council procedures, or by wilful act, the Council suffers loss or damage of cash, stock, fixtures and fittings or property (including vehicles), this will be construed as serious breach of the rules, which could result in your summary dismissal on grounds of gross misconduct.

You may also be liable to pay the full, or part, cost of making good the Council's loss in respect of cash, stock, fixtures and fittings, or property (including vehicles).

In the event that the Council makes a claim to its insurers, for repair or replacement, or other losses incurred, it reserves the right to require you to pay any insurance excess that may accrue.

It is an express term of your contract of employment that if Council property is damaged, lost or stolen through your negligence or fault, then the Council may deduct the cost of repair or replacement from your salary.

Before any decision is made to deduct, the matter will be fully investigated, and you will be given an opportunity to state your case and appeal any decision.

Return of Council Property

Upon termination of employment for whatever reason, you must return to the Council all property belonging to the Council including Council vehicle, computer, equipment, keys, records and documents within your possession or control belonging or relating to the affairs and business of the Council and its customers.

The Council may deduct the cost of replacement of any items not returned, or repair of items that are returned damaged, on termination of your employment from your salary or any monies owed to you.

Employees' Property

The Council does not accept liability for any loss of, or damage to, property that you bring onto the premises. You are requested not to bring personal items of value onto the premises, and in particular, not to leave any items overnight.

Any loss or theft of items must be reported to your manager.

Lost Property

If you find any items of lost property they should be handed to your immediate Manager, who will retain the items for three weeks. The property will either be handed over to the police or disposed of accordingly.

2.14 General

Statements to the Media

Any statements to reporters from newspapers, radio, television etc. in relation to our business will be given only by the Town Clerk

Parking

If the Council provides parking, all cars parked in such parking areas are parked at the owner's risk and must be parked so as not to obstruct access. It is your responsibility to ensure that your vehicle is parked in a safe area.

CCTV/Security Cameras

The Council reserves the right to use closed circuit television (CCTV) systems throughout its premises as deemed necessary and employees should expect all areas (other than those where use would contravene common decency) to be visible on a television monitoring system. Information obtained from systems will only be used in appropriate circumstances and with strict adherence to Data Protection Laws. This may include using recorded images as evidence in disciplinary proceedings.

3 ABSENCE

This section sets out the approach the Council takes when you are unable to attend work, are taking annual leave or need time off.

3.1 Unauthorised Absence

Employees who deliberately fail to attend work without proper excuse or in breach of management instructions will be committing gross misconduct which could result in dismissal without notice or payment in lieu.

3.2 Medical Appointments

In general, appointments to see a GP, dentist or optician should be made for outside working hours. Paid leave will not normally be granted for non-emergency visits.

The Council appreciates that it is not always possible to avoid appointments during the working day and will judge each case individually in deciding whether any paid time off should be granted. In most cases, employees will be required either to use part of their annual holiday entitlement or flexi time or to make up any lost time.

Employees who have a medical condition which will require regular appointments during the working day should discuss their situation with their manager so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

You may be required to provide evidence of any appointment for which time off is needed.

Necessary paid time off will be granted for cancer screening.

3.3 Ante-natal Care/Adoption Appointments

Pregnancy Related Appointments

Employees who are pregnant are entitled to paid-time off to attend ante-natal appointments provided that attendance is based on medical advice. For second and subsequent appointments you may be required to produce an appointment card or similar evidence of the date and time of the appointment.

While there is no limit on the number of appointments that an employee can attend, the Council does have the right to refuse time off where it is reasonable to do so. Employees are therefore expected to take reasonable steps to arrange antenatal appointments at a time that will require the minimum amount of time off. Part-time workers should attempt to arrange appointments for days when they are not required to work, and all employees should try to avoid appointments in the middle of the working day in order to minimise disruption.

If your partner is pregnant, you are entitled to unpaid time off for up to two antenatal appointments. If you wish to exercise this right you should notify your manager of the

date and time of the appointment. You may be asked to provide written evidence that an appropriate appointment has in fact been made.

Adoption Appointments

Employees who are adopting on their own or have elected to be the primary adopter may take paid time off to attend up to five adoption appointments in certain circumstances.

If you are the partner of the primary adopter, you may take unpaid time off on up to two occasions to attend an adoption appointment.

3.4 Sickness Absence

Regular and reliable attendance at work is an important commitment that the Council asks all employees to make. Unjustified or excessive absence can put unfair pressure on colleagues and seriously damage the Council's business, to everybody's detriment.

Nevertheless, the Council will always try to be supportive when an employee is genuinely too ill to attend work. This policy sets out the Council's approach and the steps that you need to take if you are off sick.

Infectious Disease

An employee who is prevented from attending work because of contact with infectious disease shall be entitled to receive normal pay whilst absent from work in consequence of this. The period of absence on this account shall not be reckoned against the employee's entitlements under this scheme.

If an employee contracts an industrial disease or is involved in an accident or assault arising out of, or in the normal course of their employment, this will be considered entirely separately from normal sickness absence and therefore will not be off set against an employee's sick pay entitlement under the sick pay scheme.

Reporting Sickness Absence

If you are too ill to come into work you should personally inform the Town Clerk or your line manager of this fact as soon as possible and in any event by no later than 9am. When you phone in sick you must make every effort to speak to your manager directly. Do not simply leave a message with a colleague or send an email or text. If you need to leave a message for your manager then they may contact you during the day to discuss your absence with you.

It is important that you keep in touch with your manager about the likely length of your absence so that appropriate arrangements can be made for cover and you should phone in sick on every day of your absence unless either you have previously informed your manager that you will be off sick for a particular period of time or your absence is certified by a 'Fit Note' (Form Med 3).

Hangovers are not regarded as legitimate reasons to take sickness absence. Absence by reason of hangovers will be regarded as a disciplinary offence which may result in dismissal without notice or payment in lieu. You should also be aware of the rules governing the consumption of alcohol set out in the Alcohol and Drugs Policy.

The Council requires any absence of 4 or more calendar days to be certified by a 'self-certification form' (Form SC2). Any absence of more than 7 calendar days must be certified by a 'Fit Note' (Forms Med 3 or Med 10). Uncertified absence may be treated as misconduct and will not be paid.

Where any period of sickness absence occurs immediately before or immediately after a period of annual leave then the Council may require such absence to be certified by a Fit Note at your own expense.

Where you are absent for an extended period of time (three weeks or more) or where you have high levels of short-term absences the Council may refer you to an occupational health professional or seek a medical report from your GP. The purpose of this will be to ascertain when you are likely to be able to return to work and to identify any measures that can be taken to help you return as soon as possible.

Employees who are off sick should not undertake any activities likely to be detrimental to their recovery and should cooperate with the appropriate medical professionals in taking steps to ensure that their recovery is as swift as possible.

The Council will maintain regular contact with employees who are off sick for an extended period.

Employees will be required to attend a return-to-work meeting after any period of sickness absence. The purpose of the meeting is to check on the employee's general health and wellbeing, to catch up with regards to anything that the employee may have missed, and to discuss whether there are any concerns in respect of absence levels.

Annual Leave and Sickness Absence

Employees may request annual leave during any period of sickness absence in the normal way. If you intend to spend any time away from home during your sickness absence you should inform your manager of this fact in advance and provide contact details. The Council does not expect employees to take holidays while off sick. In exceptional cases only, where this may assist in an employee's recovery, the Council may agree to holidays being taken during sick leave. It is essential however that any such holidays are agreed in advance with the Council following the normal holiday request procedure.

Phased Return to Work

As an employee recovers from illness or injury it may be possible for them to undertake a limited range of duties as a preparation for returning to normal work. The Council will try whenever appropriate in light of medical advice to allow for a phased return to work from any long-term illness. This may involve reducing the employee's hours, or the scope of their duties or both. The purpose of a phased return, however, is to provide a bridge between sickness absence and normal working and so any such arrangements will be time-limited and will not normally extend over more than three months.

Alternative Work

The Council may consider agreeing changes to an employee's duties or other working arrangements when it becomes clear that due to sickness or injury they will not be able to return to normal working. Any such changes will be subject to the needs of the

business and there is no guarantee that permanent arrangements of this sort will be possible.

Where duties or working hours are varied in this way then the job being done by the employee will need to be reassessed to determine the appropriate level of remuneration. This will then need to be agreed with the employee. If an agreement is not reached then the Council may proceed to dismiss the employee in accordance with the procedure for long-term sickness absence.

Disability and Reasonable Adjustments

The Council is committed to making reasonable adjustments to an employee's duties or working arrangements where they would otherwise suffer a disadvantage arising from any disability.

In order to make appropriate adjustments the Council needs to know about any disability the employee may have. Employees who feel that they may require an adjustment should discuss their situation with the Town Clerk. Any such discussions will be in the strictest confidence although when an adjustment is made it may be necessary to inform other employees of the reason for this. The extent to which details of any disability will be discussed with other employees will be agreed as part of the process of making the adjustment itself.

The purpose of any adjustment will be to ensure that the employee can work effectively in an appropriate role and on appropriate terms and conditions. The Council is not obliged to maintain an employee's level of pay if hours are reduced or the employee is moved to a less senior role as a result of any adjustment. Nor will the Council agree to an adjustment which will not result in a commercially practicable working arrangement.

Contractual Sick Pay

In addition to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) the Council also offers an enhanced Sick pay scheme in line with the Green book provisions. An employee's entitlement under this scheme is linked to their length of service, and will be as follows:

- During 1st year of service: 1 month's full pay, which after having completed 4 months continuous service, also increases by 2 months' half pay;
- During 2nd year of continuous service: 2 months' full pay and 2 months' half pay;
- During 3rd year of continuous service, 4 months' full pay and 4 months' half pay;
- During 4th and 5th years of continuous service, 5 months' full pay and 5 months' half pay; and
- After 5 years' continuous service, an employee would be entitled to 6 months' full pay and 6 months' half pay.

NB: 'Full Pay' period = Sick Pay shall include SSP and any Incapacity Benefit

'Half Pay' period = Half pay plus SSP and Incapacity Benefit, so long as this total does not exceed an employee's normal pay.

Statutory Sick Pay

If you are sick the Council will pay you Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) if you are eligible. Further details of this are contained within your contract of employment.

3.5 Jury Service/Other Time Off

There are a number of circumstances in which employees have a right to time off from work either with or without pay. These include jury service and certain public duties such as serving as a local councillor, magistrate, or school governor. Where a need for such time off arises you should discuss the matter with the Town Clerk who will consider what arrangements should be put in place.

While the Council will do its best to accommodate time off in these circumstances, the requirements of an employee's role may mean that the amount of time off granted may be limited.

Where serving on a jury would lead to a level of absence that would be detrimental to the business, the Council may require you to seek a deferment.

Employees undertaking jury service or serving on public bodies, or undertaking public duties, will be entitled to paid time off. Where an allowance is available for loss of earnings, the employee should claim and pay the allowance to the employing authority.

3.6 Compassionate/Bereavement Leave

In the event an employee suffers a bereavement in their family, the Council will exercise its discretion to allow reasonable time off to attend a funeral. This will be up to 3 days paid leave with an extension of unpaid leave at the discretion of the Town Clerk. Compassionate leave only applies to immediate family members (spouse/partner, parents, siblings, children, grandparents). What is reasonable will be determined on a case-by-case basis and the type of leave, whether paid or unpaid, will depend on the circumstances and the relationship the employee had with the individual.

An employee will not be eligible to receive paid bereavement or compassionate time-off benefits while off, or absent from work because of holiday, sickness (paid or unpaid) or for any other reason.

3.7 Parental Bereavement Leave

Employees are entitled to statutory parental bereavement leave (SPBL) if a child for whom they have or were due to have parental responsibility has died or been stillborn after 24 weeks of pregnancy.

Leave can be taken as one week, two consecutive weeks, or two separate weeks, at any time within the first 56 weeks after the child's death.

Notification

During the first eight weeks after a child has died, you, or someone on your behalf as necessary, need only give notice to the Council to take SPBL before you are due to start work on the first day of leave. If you have already started work, then officially your SPBL period will start on the following day. If you want to cancel it at any time during the first seven weeks you can do so as long as it has not started.

After eight weeks, you need to give at least a week's notice to the Council to take SPBL. You can cancel it with a week's notice, or re-book it by giving a week's notice.

When giving notice to take SPBL, you must tell the Council: the date of the child's death; when you want your leave to begin; and whether you want to take 1 or 2 weeks leave). You can give notice by telephone or by email or by letter.

Parental Bereavement Pay

To qualify for statutory parental bereavement, pay (SPBP) during such leave you must have at least six months' continuous employment and normal weekly earnings of at least the lower earnings limit. It is paid at the same rate as other statutory family leave pay, which is subject to change every year. You can check the most up-to-date figure with the Town Clerk.

To claim SPBP, you must confirm the following information in writing within 28 days of starting any period of SPBL: your name; your entitlement to SPBP; the dates of SPBL you want to claim the pay for; the date of the child's death; and your relationship to the child. You can provide this information at the same time as giving notice to take SPBL, as set out above, so long as it is in writing.

Other leave entitlements

In addition to parental bereavement leave if you qualified for:

- maternity or paternity leave and pay and your child has died or been stillborn, you are still entitled to such leave and pay.
- adoption leave and pay, then the adoption leaves entitlement runs for another eight weeks from the end of the week in which the child died (unless it would already have ended sooner).

If your planned period of SPBL coincides with another statutory family leave right, your SPBL will end at the start of that other leave. If you wish to take SPBL at the end of the other statutory family leave period, then a fresh notice to take the leave will be required, as per the above notice requirements.

Compassionate or Dependants leave may be available under our Compassionate or Dependants Leave Policy at our discretion. Please speak to your manager if you require time off in addition to parental bereavement leave.

3.8 Emergency Time Off for Dependants

The Council recognises that situations arise where you need to take time off work to deal with an emergency involving someone who depends on you. Your husband, wife or partner, child or parent, or someone living with you as part of your family can all be considered as depending on you. Others who rely solely on you for help in an emergency may also qualify. For further detail as to who counts as depending on you and guidance on individual circumstances, please speak to your Manager.

Provided the reasons for such a request are genuine and you inform the Council as soon as possible that you need this time off, you will be allowed reasonable unpaid time off work to deal with such emergencies.

The right to time off only covers emergencies. If you know in advance that you are going to need time off, you will not qualify for this type of leave and you therefore should

arrange this with the Council by taking another form of leave, such as annual leave, parental leave etc.

If an emergency occurs and it is not possible for you to inform your manager in advance of any absence you should contact your manager as soon as possible to inform them of the situation. Appropriate arrangements may then be put in place.

If you suffer some other personal emergency you should talk to the Town Clerk who will discuss what arrangements can be made to grant you compassionate leave. These arrangements will always be at the discretion of the Council and will depend on the circumstances of the case and the impact that any absence on your part may have on the business. However, the Council will be sympathetic to your need for time off (which may be paid or unpaid at our discretion) to deal with the situation and make any arrangements that may be necessary.

3.9 Annual Leave

Your individual holiday entitlement, including the calculation of any holiday pay, is set out in your contract of employment. This section of the handbook outlines the general approach taken by the Council to requests for annual leave.

All annual leave must be agreed in advance with the Town Clerk. You should not make firm travel plans or commitments until a request for leave has been granted and the Council will not take such plans into account when dealing with conflicting holiday requests.

Further, no more than two consecutive weeks' holiday can be taken at one time. In certain circumstances, and at the discretion of the business, a longer period may be permitted. If this is required, you should discuss this with the Town Clerk, to establish whether this can be accommodated.

What notice do I need to give?

All requests for leave should be made at least 2 weeks in advance. The means of requesting leave may change from time to time and you should comply with whatever procedure is in place at the time of the request.

Your manager may refuse any request for leave if it would result in the workplace being understaffed or otherwise prejudice the business. Leave is likely to be refused if it is requested for a particularly busy period or a time when other employees have already had leave approved.

Certain times of year are particularly popular times for requesting holiday. Subject to the needs of the business, leave will be granted on a first come first served basis, but exceptions may be made in the interests of ensuring that holiday is spread through the year on a fair and equitable basis.

Our Holiday Year

All employees are encouraged to take their full holiday entitlement during the holiday year which runs from 1 April to 31 March. However, it is your responsibility to schedule your holiday so that it can be taken at an appropriate time.

You cannot carry forward more than 5 days of untaken holiday from one holiday year to the following holiday year unless you have been prevented from taking it in the relevant

holiday year by one of the following: a period of sickness absence or statutory maternity, paternity, adoption, shared parental, parental, parental bereavement, carer' leave. In cases of sickness absence, carry-over is limited to four weeks' holiday per year less any leave taken during the holiday year that has just ended. Any such carried over holiday which is not taken within eighteen months of the end of the relevant holiday year will be lost.

If you do not take your annual leave within the leave year in which it accrued, you will lose the right to take it, unless one of the carry forward provisions referred to above applies.

Employees who leave their employment during the course of a holiday year will be entitled to a pro-rata payment reflecting leave accrued but not taken. Where an employee has, at the time their employment ends, taken a larger proportion of their leave entitlement than the proportion of the holiday year that has expired, then a deduction will be made from the final payment of salary to reflect the holiday which has been taken but not accrued.

The Council may insist on annual leave being taken at particular times depending on the needs of the business and these are set out in your contract of employment. Alternatively, we will give reasonable notice of any such requirement (the length of the notice given will be at least twice the duration of the leave the Council requires the employee to take).

The Council may require annual leave to be taken during the notice period of any employee who has resigned or been dismissed.

3.10 Reserve Forces

The Council supports employees who are also member of the reserve forces. Such employees have specific entitlements relating to time off including arrangements for them returning to work after a period of deployment. Employees who are members of the reserve forces or who are considering joining should discuss the implications with the Town Clerk.

3.11 Carer's Leave

All employees are entitled to one week's unpaid leave in any 12-month period to provide or arrange care for a dependant with a long-term care need. A "week" for these purposes will be equal in duration to the period you are normally expected to work in a week at the time of making the request. How that is calculated will depend on whether you have non-variable or variable hours of work.

A dependant is:

- your spouse, civil partner, child, or parent;
- someone who lives in the same household as you, otherwise than by reason of being your boarder, employee, lodger, or tenant, or;
- anybody else who relies on you to provide or arrange their care.

A dependant has a long-term care need if:

- they have an illness or injury (whether physical or mental) that requires, or is likely to require, care for more than three months,

- they have a disability for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010, or
- they require care for a reason connected with their old age.

The minimum period of carer's leave that can be taken at one time is half a working day, with the maximum period being one continuous week. Leave need not be taken on continuous days.

You must give notice of your request to take a period of carer's leave. This can relate to all or part of the leave to which you are entitled. The notice must:

- Specify that you are entitled to take carer's leave;
- Specify the days on which you would like to take carer's leave and if you will take a full or a half day; and
- Be given with the following minimum notice periods depending on how many days of leave you want to take: Half a day to 1 day - 3 days' notice; 1.5 to 2 days - 4 days' notice; 2.5 to 3 days - 6 days' notice; 3.5 to 4 days - 8 days' notice; 4.5 to 5 days - 10 days' notice; or 6 days (if you work 6 days a week) - 12 days' notice.

The notice does not need to be in writing, but it would be helpful if it were in order to maintain an accurate record of what is being requested.

The Council may, in our absolute discretion, waive the notice length requirement above, and as long as the other requirements are met, the request will be treated as one for carer's leave.

If the Council reasonably considers that the operation of the business would be unduly disrupted if your request was granted, we may postpone the start of the carer's leave after consulting with you to agree an alternative date(s) which is/are no later than one month after the earliest day or half day of the request. In these circumstances, the Council will give written notice to you of the postponement, setting out the reason for the postponement and the agreed dates you can take the leave. This notice will be given no later than the earlier of: (a) seven days after your notice was given to the Council, or (b) before the earliest day or half day requested in your notice.

4

FLEXIBLE WORKING AND FAMILY RELATED LEAVE

The Council understands the particular issues faced by employees trying to balance their work and family life. This section sets out the Council's policies in this area and the specific rights given to new parents.

4.1 Flexible Working

The Council will try, subject to the needs of the business, to accommodate requests from employees who wish to make changes to their working hours or place of work.

Requests for a change in working arrangements can be made by any employee. Two requests per employee may be made in any 12-month period (which includes requests that have been withdrawn). However, you may have only one live request for flexible working with the Council at any one time. The request must:

- be made in writing and state this is a flexible working request;
- be dated;
- set out the change requested, including when you would like the change to come into effect; and
- set out if and when you have made a previous request for flexible working to the Council.

When a request is received, you will be invited to a meeting to discuss the potential change.

The Town Clerk will normally conduct the meeting.

You are entitled to be accompanied by a fellow employee to assist in making any representations that may be appropriate.

The application may be refused on one or more of several grounds, these being that the proposed changes will result in:

- a burden of additional cost;
- a detrimental effect on ability to meet customer demand;
- an inability to re-organise work among existing staff;
- an inability to recruit additional staff;
- a detrimental effect on quality;
- a detrimental effect on performance;
- an insufficiency of work during the periods you propose to work;
- a planned structural change; and
- any other ground allowed by regulations.

Before refusing a request, the Council will consult with you to discuss the application further, which may include exploring any alternatives that may be available. If no agreement is reached and the request is rejected, this will be confirmed in writing and your terms and conditions will remain unchanged, subject to your right to appeal the decision. The process (including any appeal) will be concluded within 2 months of the request being made unless a longer period is agreed.

Any meetings should take place in a spirit of cooperation with both sides seeking to reach agreement on an appropriate way forward.

Any change in working arrangements which results from this process will be confirmed to you in writing.

This policy will not prevent managers agreeing to ad hoc arrangements from time to time. However, any such arrangement will not amount to a variation in your terms and conditions of employment unless specifically agreed to the contrary and confirmed in writing. The Council may terminate any such ad hoc agreement at any time and require you to revert to your agreed working arrangements.

As there will inevitably be a limit to the amount of flexibility the Council can tolerate without detriment to its interests, employees must accept that the fact that a particular working arrangement has been granted to one employee does not oblige the Council to grant it to another.

4.2 Flexitime

Flexitime is available to:

- Town Clerk
- Office staff
- Town Rangers

Employees will, where possible, organise their workload and time so that 'out of hours' duties or attendances are carried out as part of the normal contractual weekly hours, i.e. the total of 'out of hours' and 'office hours' will be 37 hours per week.

Employees should ordinarily perform the work duties during normal working hours 8am to 6pm except when in the period in question (normally the week) the employee is required to attend visits, meetings, committee meetings, conferences, or other duties outside normal office hours.

All employees should organise any flexi time requests so that sufficient cover will be in place amongst their team.

Flexi time is not to be accumulated or approved in such a way that a change in normal working arrangements results (e.g. every Friday is a 'flexi day'). Flexi is exceptional rather than a regular or routine occurrence.

As far as it consistent with the aims of the service and is practicable, the employee should try to arrange visits and other appointments in office hours.

Employees may not take more than one working day per month (7.4 hours) as flexi (pro rata for part time employees), or be in deficit of one working day per month (pro rata for part time employees)

Any employee found to be abusing this system will be liable to disciplinary procedures.

Line managers

Line Managers are responsible for the day-to-day running of the flexible working hours scheme, and to ensure that there is adequate coverage to enable their service to run effectively.

Line Managers can request that employees provide them with sight of a 'virtual clock card' to support requests for flexi time at any point.

Line Managers will ensure that all employees are not working in a way that contravenes their wellbeing and work life balance or are not consistently working the hours for which they are paid.

Core time and lunch breaks

Employees will normally form a 'regular' working pattern and we encourage any planned deviation to be discussed and agreed with the line manager.

Core time is 10.00 am to 4.00 pm on Mondays to Fridays and dependent upon agreed attendance patterns, employees ought to be in attendance during those hours on each of their working days.

Employees must take and record a lunch break of at least half-an-hour and may take up to two hours. Lunch breaks will normally be taken between 12.00 pm and 2.00 pm.

Recording period for calculation hours

A 'virtual clock card' record should be maintained and be available to be viewed by line managers upon request.

A working day for a full-time employee is 7.4 hours for a full-time working over 5 days.

Absences for annual leave, special leave or sickness must be recorded using the standard daily hours figure (i.e. 3.7 hours for a half day or pro-rata equivalents for part time employees). Working time recorded should include official travelling time but this should not include time that is spent travelling between your home and usual place of work.

Each recording period is four weeks. Within that period employees are required to work their contracted hours.

Employees may accrue credit or debit hours up to a maximum of 10 hours (pro rata for part timers) and this credit or debit may be carried forward to the next accounting period.

Provided that the requisite number of hours are completed in any four-week accounting period employees may, subject to prior arrangement with their line manager, take one flexi day off per month (pro rata for part time employees).

Any overtime worked and 'claimed' as such cannot also be recorded so that it is taken as flexi time.

Authorisation of Flexitime

Requests to redeem flexi-time hours will be considered by the employee's line manager, with an emphasis on business and department needs such as workloads, customer and client service requirements and available staffing.

Flexitime to be taken at the employee's basic salary rate.

Termination of employment

Employees whose employment is terminated with notice will be required to redeem their full flexi-time bank prior to their departure.

Untaken flexitime will be lost upon termination and no payment in lieu will be made. If notice is not given or worked for any reason, the accrued but untaken flexitime will be lost.

Paid Overtime

Overtime will only be paid in the event of requests from The Council to work additional hours for specific events, such as Civic Events or project work.

In this instance, overtime will be paid at the following rates:

- Weekdays – standard hourly rate
- Saturdays – 1.5 x standard hourly rate
- Sundays/Bank holidays – 2 x standard hourly rate

4.3 Maternity Leave

All employees who give birth are entitled to take maternity leave which lasts for a maximum of 52 weeks. Employees with at least 26 week's continuous service immediately before the 15th week prior to the expected week of childbirth will also be entitled to be paid Statutory Maternity pay (SMP) for up to 39 weeks of their absence. Because this is a statutory payment there are a number of procedural requirements that must be met in order to make sure that an employee qualifies. The most important requirements are set out below, but if you have any doubts about the rules that apply you should speak to a member of the management team who will make sure that you have all the appropriate information.

Notification

To qualify for maternity leave you must provide the Council, no later than the end of the 15th week before your EWC (when you are approximately 6 months' pregnant) with the following information:

- that you are pregnant;
- the date of the week your baby is due (your expected week of childbirth or EWC);
- when you intend your maternity leave to start (this date can be changed later – see below); and
- you must also provide the Council with the original Maternity Certificate (MAT B1) issued by your doctor.

In some circumstances the Council may be able to accept other medical evidence of when your baby is due, so if there is any difficulty in providing the MATB1 certificate you should discuss this with your manager.

If you intend to take advantage of the right to shared parental leave, you should inform the Council of this fact at the same time as you notify the intended start date of your leave.

Start of Maternity Leave

It is up to you to decide when to start your maternity leave. However, your leave cannot begin any earlier than the beginning of the 11th week before your EWC.

Where it is safe to do so, you may choose to continue working right up to your child's birth. However, your maternity leave will begin automatically if you are off sick for a pregnancy-related reason at any stage in the four weeks immediately before your EWC.

If your baby is born before the date that you have notified as the start date for your maternity leave then your maternity leave will begin on the day following the birth.

You may change the date on which you intend to start your maternity leave, but you must notify the Council of your new start date at least 28 days before the original date given (or the new date if that is sooner). If there is a reason you cannot give this notice then you should explain the situation to an appropriate manager and the Council will attempt to accommodate your changed circumstances. However, the Council may need to insist on delaying the start of your leave until at least 28 days have passed since your notification of a changed date.

When your baby is born you should inform the Council of this fact as soon as is reasonably practicable.

Duration of Maternity Leave

The standard length of maternity leave is 52 weeks. Once you indicate the intended start date of your leave, the Council will send you a written notification of your expected date of return.

Unless you give due notice to the Council of an earlier date of return, it will be assumed that you intend to take your full 52-week entitlement, and you will not be expected back at work before your leave ends. You do not then have to give any notice of your return although it would be sensible to contact your manager some time in advance to discuss any arrangements that may need to be made.

At the end of your maternity leave you are entitled to return to the same job as you had before your leave began. If you are away for more than 26 weeks, however, there may be circumstances in which that is not reasonably practicable. In that case, the Council will provide you with a suitable and appropriate role at the same level of seniority and on no-less favourable terms and conditions.

Dismissal or Resignation

While on maternity leave you remain employed by the Council and bound by your contract of employment. If you decide that you want to leave your employment you will need to submit your resignation in the normal way.

The Council will not dismiss you for any reason related to your pregnancy or your exercise of any right which arises from it. However, if separate circumstances require your dismissal (for instance, because of redundancy) then that will bring your maternity leave to an end.

If your position becomes redundant during your maternity leave then you will be offered any suitable alternative work that is available.

Enhanced Maternity Pay

The Council offers enhanced maternity pay in line with the provisions of the Green book. An employee who meets the other qualifying criteria listed in this policy, and who have more than one year's continuous service at the point of the 11th week before the expected week of childbirth will be entitled to enhanced Maternity pay as follows:

- 6 weeks' leave payable at 90% of normal pay;
- 12 weeks' leave payable at 50% of normal pay, plus Statutory Maternity Pay at the relevant rate; (capped at 100% of normal pay) and
- 21 weeks' leave payable at the relevant rate of SMP

NB: Normal pay includes all earnings that would be paid during a period of normal working, but excluding any payments not made on a regular basis.

Statutory Maternity Pay

Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) is paid to employees who have at least 26 weeks' service immediately before the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth and whose pay is above the Lower Earnings Limit for paying National Insurance Contributions (this changes each year). Employees who earn below that amount may be entitled to a state benefit called Maternity Allowance. The Council will provide you with an appropriate form to help you claim this, where appropriate.

To pay SMP, the Council needs to be given at least 28 days' notice that you intend to claim it. This will normally be given when you inform the Council of your intended start date for maternity leave. If it is not possible to give 28 days' notice, you should give as much notice as is reasonably practicable.

SMP is paid for a maximum total of 39 weeks. The first 6 weeks are paid at 90 per cent of your normal weekly earnings (this is based on an average of your total earnings in the eight weeks immediately preceding the 14th week before your expected week of childbirth) and the remaining 33 weeks are paid at a flat rate specified in legislation (this changes each year).

Your entitlement to SMP will be affected if you undertake any paid work (other than 'Keeping in Touch' days, described below) or are taken into legal custody at any time during your period of SMP entitlement. You should inform the Council immediately of any such change in your circumstances.

Returning to Work Early

Not every employee will want to take the full 52 weeks of maternity leave. Some may simply want to return to work early, and others may wish (with their partner) to take advantage of the right to shared parental leave (see below).

In order to plan to accommodate an early return the Council is entitled to ask for 8 weeks' notice of the new date, and if that is not given may delay your return until 8 weeks have passed since your notification.

In any event the law requires that you must not be permitted to return to work during the two weeks immediately following the birth.

Returning to Work Late

Following your maternity leave, you are required to return to work on the date notified to you as your expected date of return. If you are unwell on that date then you should follow the sickness absence reporting procedure set out in Section 3.4 of this handbook.

If you are entitled to begin some other period of leave (such as annual leave or parental leave) then you should ensure that you have followed the appropriate procedure for taking such leave as set out in this handbook.

Maternity Suspension (Health and Safety Reasons)

Depending on the nature of your job, there may be circumstances in which it is unsafe for you to continue working while you are pregnant. In some circumstances the law requires a pregnant employee to be suspended on full pay or transferred to alternative duties. Jobs which may come under this category are identified in the risk assessments that the Council has carried out under its health and safety policy. If you are affected by any health and safety issues connected with your pregnancy then the Council will discuss any detailed arrangements that need to be made until it is safe for you to return to your original duties.

Maternity Support Leave

Paid Maternity support leave of 5 days will also be granted to the child's father or the partner or the nominated carer of the expectant mother at or around the time of the birth. A nominated carer is the person nominated by the mother to assist in the care of the child and to provide support to the mother at or around the time of the birth.

4.4 Adoption Leave

Employees who are matched with a child for adoption may be entitled to take up to 52 weeks' adoption leave.

Adoption leave is also available to individuals fostering a child under the "Fostering for Adoption" scheme.

Where two parents are adopting a child, only one of them may take adoption leave, and the other (regardless of gender) is entitled to take paternity leave. If both adoptive parents qualify, they may each take shared parental leave.

The arrangements for taking adoption leave are similar to the arrangements for taking maternity leave, but there are several important differences. The key ones are set out

below, but if you believe you are entitled to adoption leave you should discuss the situation with an appropriate manager who will ensure that you have all the necessary information.

Notification

If you intend to take adoption leave you should notify the Council of this within seven days of being notified that you have been matched with a child for adoption (or as soon as is reasonably practicable).

Your notification should set out:

- the date when the child is expected to be placed with you; and
- the date when you want to start your adoption leave.

As with maternity leave, you can change your mind about the start date provided the Council is given at least 28 days – or as much notice as is reasonably practicable.

The Council is entitled to require proof of the adoption which usually takes the form of a matching certificate provided by the agency placing the child.

Adoption leave is the same in duration as that of maternity leave and will last for 52 weeks unless you choose to return early or take advantage of shared parental leave. You may choose to start the leave from the date when the child is placed with you or at any time in the preceding two weeks.

If, for any reason, the placement is ended – for example because the match turns out to be unsuitable – then adoption leave will continue for 8 weeks beyond the end of the placement. After that period, you will be expected to return to work as normal.

Enhanced Adoption Pay

The Council offers enhanced Adoption pay in line with the provisions of the Green book. An employee who meets the other qualifying criteria listed in this policy, and who have more than one year's continuous service at the point of the 11th week before the expected week of childbirth will be entitled to enhanced Adoption pay as follows:

- 6 weeks' leave payable at 90% of normal weekly earnings;
- 12 weeks' leave payable at 50% of normal weekly earnings, plus Statutory Adoption Pay (SAP) at the relevant rate (capped at 100% of normal pay); and
- 21 weeks' leave payable at the relevant rate of SAP

NB: Normal pay includes all earnings that would be paid during a period of normal working, but excluding any payments not made on a regular basis.

Statutory Adoption Pay

The arrangements for statutory adoption pay are similar to those for SMP (set out above).

Returning to Work Following Adoption Leave

Your return to work at the end of your adoption leave is on the same basis as for the end of maternity leave (set out above).

4.5 Paternity Leave

Employees with 26 weeks' continuous service, either ending with the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth or ending the week in which agency notifies you have been matched with a child, will be entitled to take paternity leave if they expect to have parental responsibility for a child and they are either the mother's partner or one of the adoptive parents. The purpose of the leave must be either to care for the child or to provide support for the child's mother or adoptive parent. This policy relates to a child whose expected week of childbirth (EWC) is after 6 April 2024 or whose placement date or expected date of entry into Great Britain for adoption, is on or after 6 April 2024. For a child, whose EWC or placement date is before this, please speak to your manager in order to discuss your rights regarding paternity leave.

There are a number of administrative requirements that must be met in relation to taking paternity leave and employees should discuss their plans with their Town Clerk at as early a stage as possible. The following paragraphs set out the basic requirements, but there are additional requirements that must be met when adopting a child from overseas and employees in this position should talk to their manager who will make sure that full information is provided.

Employees entitled to take paternity leave are entitled to two weeks of leave, which can be taken as two consecutive weeks, or two non-consecutive blocks of one week.

Paternity leave cannot start before a child is born or placed and must be taken at some stage within the first year following birth or adoption (except when the child is born prematurely in which case the leave must be taken within the 52 weeks following the expected week of childbirth).

Most new parents choose to begin paternity leave on the date their child is born, but you may if you wish to begin the leave at any time you choose provided that the whole of the leave is taken by the end of that year.

In order to qualify for paternity leave with regards to birth, you must notify the Council at least 15 weeks before the expected week of your child's birth and give at least 28 days' notice before the date you would like to take each period of leave. For adoption cases, you must notify the Council within 7 days of having been notified that a child will be placed for adoption. Your notification should specify how much leave you intend to take and when you intend the leave to begin. Should your plans change, you will need to give the Council 28 days' notice of any revision.

Paternity leave is payable at the statutory rate, which is subject to change every year. You can check the most up-to-date figure with the Town Clerk.

4.6 Parental Leave

Parental leave is a flexible form of unpaid leave designed to help employees spend time caring for their children. Parental leave can be taken up until the child's 18th birthday and is available to employees who have at least one year's service and who have formal parental responsibility for a child.

The basic entitlement is to 18 weeks of unpaid leave in respect of each child.

Parental leave must usually be taken in blocks of one week or more and no more than four weeks' leave will be granted in a single year. However, more flexibility is available in respect of disabled children, and you should discuss your requirements with the Town Clerk if this applies to you.

A request to take parental leave should be submitted 21 days in advance. While the Council will always try to accommodate requests for parental leave, it has the right to postpone any leave for up to six months in order to accommodate business need.

No postponement will be required if you choose to take your first instalment of leave immediately after the birth or adoption of your child. In such circumstances you need only inform the Council of your intention 21 days before the expected date of birth or placement. The leave will then begin automatically when your child is born or placed with you.

Parental leave is an entitlement that can be transferred from one employment to another. You may therefore join the Council with some outstanding parental leave attaching to a particular child. In such circumstances you should be aware that the qualifying period for taking parental leave still applies and you will need to have been employed for at least one year before you can resume taking parental leave.

4.7 Shared Parental Leave

Shared parental leave is a flexible form of leave available to both parents designed to encourage shared parenting in the first year of a child's life. It allows a more flexible pattern of leave than the traditional arrangement under which the mother takes extensive maternity leave, and the father takes a short period of paternity leave.

Employees who give birth or adopt remain entitled to take the full 52 weeks of leave if they choose to do so and the arrangements described above for maternity and adoption leave continue to apply. However, an employee may choose to share part of that leave with their partner provided that certain qualifying conditions are met. When leave is shared in this way, there is no need for the 'primary' leave taker to have returned to work. Both parents can be on leave at the same time, provided that the combined amount of leave taken by the parents does not exceed 52 weeks and provided that all of the leave is taken before the end of 52 weeks following the birth of the child or its placement for adoption.

Parents will qualify for shared parental leave provided that both are working and that each has at least 26 weeks' service with their respective employers. To exercise the right, both parents must inform their employer that they intend to take shared parental leave – usually at the same time as the employer is notified that an employee is pregnant or plans to adopt. They must also give an indication of the pattern of leave that they propose to take.

A parent proposing to take a period of shared parental leave must give the Council 8 weeks' notice of any such leave. Depending on the circumstances, it may be possible for the Shared Parental Leave to be taken in intermittent blocks, with one parent returning to work for a time before taking another period of shared parental leave. Such an arrangement can only be made with the agreement of the Council. While every effort will be made to accommodate the needs of individual employees, the Council may insist

on shared parental leave being taken in a single instalment. Any decision as to whether to permit intermittent periods of leave is entirely at the Council's discretion.

An employee absent on shared parental leave will be entitled to a weekly payment equivalent to the lower fixed rate of SMP. The number of weeks for which payment will be made will vary depending on the amount of SMP paid to the mother while on maternity leave. If the mother ends (or proposes to end) her leave with 10 weeks of SMP entitlement remaining, the parent taking shared parental leave will be entitled to be paid for the first 10 weeks of leave.

Because of the number of options available, shared parental leave can be quite a complicated entitlement. If you want to take advantage of shared parental leave you should discuss this with the Town Clerk who will check that you qualify and help guide you through the procedure.

4.8 Keeping in Touch Days/Shared Parental Leave Days

Employees during a period of maternity and adoption leave are entitled to 10 keeping in touch days (KIT days). These allow the employee to attend work to catch up on the latest developments, undergo training or some other development activity, or to take part in important meetings without losing their right to subsequent pay entitlements. Employees on shared parental leave are also entitled to 20 shared parental leave in touch days (SPLIT days).

KIT days and SPLIT days are entirely voluntary, and employees will not be required to take part, nor is the Council under any obligation to arrange for KIT or SPLIT days.

Any payment for attending work on such days will be agreed between the Council and the employee at the time the KIT or SPLIT day is arranged.

There is no legal requirement to receive pay for these days.

4.9 During Maternity/Adoption or Shared Parental Leave

The Council is keen to keep in touch with employees who are on extended periods of leave, to inform them of any news and consult them over any changes which may take place in the business. However, we appreciate that many employees would prefer to be left alone at this particularly important time in their lives. In order to get the balance right, your manager may, before your leave begins, discuss with you how best we can keep in touch while you are away.

Please be aware, however, that if an important issue arises on which you need to be consulted, the Council may have a legal obligation to discuss the issue with you and keep you informed.

4.10 Homeworking and Hybrid Working Policy

We support homeworking in appropriate circumstances, either occasionally (to respond to specific circumstances or particular tasks) or on a regular (full or part-time) basis. Homeworking can also be a means of accommodating a disability and can be requested as a means of flexible working under our Flexible Working Policy. If you are permitted to work from home, you must comply with this policy.

We recognise that there are a number of homeworking arrangements that you may request, and that these arrangements may be requested as part of a flexible working application, such as:

- a) working from home as your main place of work;
- b) working from home on a part-time basis on fixed days of the week; or
- c) splitting your working time between the workplace and your home subject to business factors and manager approval.

If you want to vary your working arrangements so that, either permanently or temporarily, you work from home for all or part of your working week, you will need to make a flexible working request in accordance with our Flexible Working Policy. Any request to work from home must meet the needs of our business as well as your needs.

A hybrid working arrangement is an informal flexible working arrangement which allows you to split your working time between the workplace and an agreed remote working location, such as your home. Hybrid working arrangements will differ depending on the nature of your role, duties and responsibilities and so are discretionary and subject to agreement in writing with the Town Clerk. Any hybrid working arrangement is subject to you spending a minimum of 50% of your work time working from your workplace. Your remaining working time may be worked from your workplace or your remote working location, as agreed in writing with the Town Clerk.

Any agreed hybrid working arrangement is subject to the requirement for you to attend the workplace on our reasonable request to accommodate the needs of our business, such as to attend training or meetings. All hybrid working arrangements are subject to ongoing review and may be modified for reasons including a change in business needs or performance concerns.

Conditions Necessary For Homeworking Hybrid Working

Not all roles and not all jobs are suitable for homeworking/hybrid working. You should not assume that a flexible working application to work from home will automatically give you the right to amend your working hours or any other aspect of your working arrangements.

A request for homeworking or hybrid working is unlikely to be approved, on either an occasional or permanent basis, if:

- a) you need to be present in the workplace to perform your job (for example, because it involves a high degree of personal interaction with colleagues or third parties, or involves equipment that is only available in the workplace);
- b) your most recent appraisal identifies any aspect of your performance as unsatisfactory;
- c) the Town Clerk/your line manager has advised you that your current standard of work or work production is unsatisfactory;
- d) you have an unexpired warning, whether relating to conduct or performance; or
- e) you need training or supervision to deliver an acceptable quality or quantity of work.

If you wish to apply to work from home or are working under a hybrid working arrangement, you will need to be able to show that you can:

- a) have a suitable working environment at your home that enables you to carry out your role effectively;
- b) continue to work the hours required by your contract of employment;

- c) work independently, motivate yourself and use your own initiative;
- d) manage your workload effectively and complete work to set deadlines;
- e) identify and resolve any new pressures created by working at home;
- f) adapt to new working practices, including maintaining contact with the Town Clerk, your line manager, and colleagues at work;
- g) decide for the care of any children or other dependants when you are working from home; and
- h) determine any resulting tax implications for yourself.

Location

If a homeworking arrangement is in place, you will be required to work from your home address. If you wish to work from a different location at any time, you will need to agree this with the Town Clerk in advance and that request is subject to their written approval.

Under a hybrid working arrangement, your primary remote working location should be agreed with the Town Clerk in advance and is subject to their written approval. Your primary remote working location must be within commuting distance of your workplace unless the Town Clerk has provided written approval. You will be required to finance any travel and/or related expenses incurred when travelling to and from your remote working location and your workplace.

Management, Training And Workplace Attendance

Your Town Clerk will remain responsible for supervising and assessing you in the same way as staff based in the workplace and will agree the best way to appraise your performance and provide ongoing supervision in a remote way. The Town Clerk will regularly review your working arrangements and take steps to address any perceived problems. They will ensure that you are kept up to date with any changes to the workplace or information relevant to your work.

You will be subject to the same performance measures, processes and objectives that would apply if you worked permanently in the workplace.

If you receive an unsatisfactory grade in an appraisal or informal review or are subject to a written warning for any reason, your homeworking/hybrid working arrangements may be terminated immediately, in which case you will be expected to return to work in the workplace.

You will be provided with the same opportunities for training, development and promotion as provided to staff based in the workplace. If your working arrangements will impact on your ability to apply for certain roles, the Town Clerk will discuss this with you to ensure that you are not denied any opportunity unfairly.

You agree to attend the workplace or other reasonable location for meetings, training courses or other events which we expect you to attend.

You understand that when you do attend the workplace, you may have to hot desk or share a desk with someone else.

Health And Safety

When working at home, you have the same health and safety duties as other staff. You must take reasonable care of your own health and safety and that of anyone else who might be affected by your actions and omissions. You must attend our usual health and

safety courses, read the Health and Safety Policy, which is on the shared drive and undertake to use equipment safely.

To identify any potential health and safety hazards in the home and take appropriate steps to minimise risk, we retain the right to carry out a health and safety risk assessment (either remotely or by arranging a home visit) before or shortly after you begin homeworking. We will contact you to arrange completion of the risk assessment. The need for these inspections will depend on the circumstances, including the nature of the work you undertake.

You must not have meetings in your home with customers or give customers your home address or telephone number.

You must ensure that your working patterns and levels of work when working at home are not detrimental to your health and wellbeing. If you have concerns about your health or wellbeing arising as a result of your workload or working pattern, you should inform the Town Clerk without delay so that we can discuss measures to deal with this.

You must use your knowledge, experience, and training to identify and report any health and safety concerns to the Town Clerk.

Equipment and Suitable Workspace

We will provide the equipment that we consider you require to work from home. We will make all necessary arrangements for and bear the cost of installing, maintaining, repairing, or replacing (where necessary), and removing equipment from your home. Where equipment is provided, it remains our property, and you must:

- a) ensure it is only used by you and only for the purposes for which we have provided it;
- b) take reasonable care of it and use it only in accordance with any operating instructions and our policies and procedures;
- c) make it available for collection by us or on our behalf when requested to do so; and
- d) not use any personal device or computer for work.

When travelling between your remote working location and your workplace, you agree to keep equipment provided by us secure at all times.

On termination of your homeworking/hybrid working arrangement or on termination of your employment, you must return all equipment provided by us. Where necessary, we may need to arrange a home visit to reclaim equipment and will contact you to make the appropriate arrangements.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have a suitable workspace at home with adequate lighting for working from home. We are not responsible for the associated costs of you working from home, including the costs of heating, lighting, electricity, broadband internet access, mobile or telephone line rental, or calls.

If you have a disability, you should inform us if you require any specialised equipment to work from home comfortably.

Insurance Requirements

We are responsible for taking out and maintaining a valid policy of insurance covering any equipment we provide against fire, theft, loss, and damage throughout your employment.

We are not liable for any loss, injury or damage that may be caused by any equipment that is not provided by us but required by you to work from home.

You are responsible for ensuring that working from home will not invalidate the terms of your home insurance. You should ensure that you check your home insurance policy before commencing homeworking and inform your home and contents insurance provider of your working arrangements as required.

You should check the terms of your mortgage, lease, or rental agreement before commencing working from home to ensure this does not breach any of the terms. It is your responsibility to inform your bank, mortgage provider or landlord that you are working from home and seek any necessary approval before commencing homeworking.

When you are working at or from home, you are covered by our insurance policy. Any accidents must be reported immediately to the Town Clerk in accordance with our Health and Safety Policy.

Data Security and Confidentiality

The Town Clerk must be satisfied that you are taking all reasonable precautions to maintain confidentiality of material in accordance with our requirements.

You are responsible for ensuring the security of confidential information in your home and when travelling to and from your workplace. You must not use your personal computer equipment for storing any confidential information.

When working from home, you undertake to:

- a) change your password every 3 months and comply with our instructions relating to password security;
- b) use our designated multi-factor authentication;
- c) comply with our instructions relating to software security and to implement all updates to equipment as soon as you are requested to do so;
- d) protect by password any confidential information held on any personal device or computer;
- e) send work-related emails and messages through our designated communication facilities;
- f) share data only through our designated channels
- g) make all work-related calls through our designated video-conferencing software;
- h) maintain a private space for confidential work calls;
- i) ensure that any display screen equipment is positioned so that only you can see it, or a privacy screen is used;
- j) lock your computer terminal whenever it is left unattended;
- k) ensure no one else in your home has access to confidential information stored on our equipment
- l) ensure any wireless network used is secure;
- m) keep all papers containing confidential information in filing cabinets that are locked when not in use, and ensure that no one else in your home has access to those papers; and

- n) shred or otherwise dispose securely of confidential information when it is no longer required and at all times comply with our instructions on document retention.

To comply with data protection obligations, you will only store or process Council data or personal data on equipment which has been provided by or authorised by us.

To comply with data protection legislation, we retain the right to conduct a data protection impact assessment (DPIA) to assess the risks involved with data processing in the home. Where this is necessary, we will contact you to arrange the DPIA.

If you discover or suspect that there has been a data breach or an incident involving the security of information relating to us, our clients, our customers, or anyone working with or for us, you must report it immediately to the Town Clerk.

Termination Of Homeworking or Hybrid Working Arrangement

We reserve the right to terminate your homeworking or hybrid working arrangement, for example, due to a change in business needs, performance concerns or if your role changes such that homeworking or hybrid working is no longer suitable, subject to 8 weeks' notice.

If you want to terminate your homeworking or hybrid working arrangement, you must give the Town Clerk 8 weeks' notice to allow us to arrange a desk space for you in the workplace and collect any equipment that is no longer required.

5

HOW WE RESOLVE ISSUES

When problems arise in the employment relationship it is important that they are dealt with fairly and promptly. This section sets out the procedures that the Council will follow in such cases.

Recording of meetings: Due to the confidential nature of disciplinary and grievance proceedings you must not make electronic or audio recordings of any meetings or hearings conducted under the procedures set out in section 5. You should ensure that any companion you may bring with you to such meetings is also aware of this rule.

5.1 Performance Improvement Procedure

It is in everybody's interest for employees to perform well at their jobs and the Council aims to ensure that all employees are given the support needed to ensure that they do so. Where there are issues with performance then the employee should receive feedback from their manager setting out any concerns. Discussions should take place about how that performance can be improved. This procedure is designed to be used when such informal discussions do not lead to the employee's performance improving to an acceptable level.

Where an employee's poor performance is believed to be the result of deliberate neglect, or where serious errors have been made to the detriment of the Council then it may be more appropriate to use the disciplinary procedure. Which procedure to use shall be at the discretion of the Council.

The Council also reserves the right not to follow this procedure in full for employees who are within their first two years of employment with the Council.

The Right to be Accompanied

Employees are entitled to be accompanied at any formal meeting held under this procedure by a fellow employee or trade union official of their choice. The Council will provide any chosen companions with appropriate paid time off to allow them to attend the meeting. It is, however, up to the employee in question to arrange for a companion to attend the meeting.

If your chosen companion cannot attend on the day scheduled for the meeting then the Council will agree a new date. This will usually be within 5 working days of the date originally scheduled. If your companion is not available within that timescale then you may need to find someone else to take their place.

The Companion's role is to advise you during the meeting and make representations on your behalf. However, both you and your companion are required to cooperate in ensuring a fair and efficient meeting. The companion is not entitled to answer questions on your behalf.

Stage One

The employee's line manager will inform them of the nature of the problem and confirm this in writing. The employee will be invited to a formal performance management

hearing to discuss the issues raised by the manager's concerns. The invitation will set out the respects in which the employee's manager believes that the employee's performance still falls short of an acceptable standard. The hearing will be conducted by the employee's line manager and will consider any representations the employee may make about their performance, whether it needs to be improved, and if so what steps can be taken to help the employee reach the appropriate level.

Following discussion of the problem, the line manager may choose to take no further action; to refer the matter for investigation under the disciplinary procedure (if it appears the issues are linked to conduct rather than performance) or to issue a **written warning** and Performance Improvement Plan which will remain current for a period of 12 months.

Performance Improvement Plan

A Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) is a series of measures designed to help improve the employee's performance. Each measure will ideally be agreed with the employee, though the Council reserves the right to insist on any aspect of the PIP in the absence of such agreement.

Each PIP will be tailored to the particular situation, but will contain the following elements:

Timescale: the overall timescale in which the necessary improvement must be achieved will be set out, together with the timescale for reaching individual milestones where appropriate.

Targets: The PIP will specify the particular areas in which improvement is needed and set out how and on what criteria the employee's performance will be assessed. Where appropriate, specific targets will be set which will need to be achieved either by the end of the plan or at identifiable stages within it.

Measures: The PIP will specify what measures will be taken by the Council to support the employee in improving their performance. Such measures may include training, additional supervision, the reallocation of other duties, or the provision of additional support from colleagues.

Feedback: As part of the PIP the employee will be given regular feedback from their line manager indicating the extent to which the employee is on track to deliver the improvements set out in the plan

If at any stage the Council feels that the PIP is not progressing in a satisfactory way, a further meeting may be held with the employee to discuss the issue. As a result of such a meeting the employer may amend or extend any part of the plan.

Review

At the end of the PIP the employee's performance will be reviewed. If satisfactory progress has been made the employee will be notified of this fact in writing. If the manager feels that progress has been insufficient then they may decide to extend and/or amend the PIP to such extent as seems appropriate. Alternatively, the manager may refer the matter to a meeting under Stage Two of this procedure.

Following the successful completion of a PIP the employee's performance will continue to be monitored. If at any stage during the lifetime of the first written warning the

employee's performance again starts to fall short of an acceptable standard, their line manager may decide to institute stage two of this procedure.

Stage Two

If a PIP has not led to sufficient improvement in the employee's performance, the employee will be invited to attend a formal performance management hearing. The invitation will set out the respects in which the line manager believes that the employee's performance still falls short of an acceptable standard.

A member of the senior management team will conduct the hearing.

At the hearing, the employee will be given an opportunity to respond to any criticism of their performance and to make representations about any aspect of the way in which the process has been managed.

If the hearing concludes that reasonable steps have been taken which should have allowed the employee to perform to an acceptable standard but that these measures have not worked then a **formal final warning** may be issued. The warning will explain the nature of the improvement which is required in the employee's performance and state that the improvement must be immediate and sustained. It will also explain that if this improvement does not take place then the employee may be dismissed. Where it is appropriate, an extended or revised PIP may accompany the warning.

The warning will remain current for a period of 12 months, after which time it will cease to have effect.

Stage Three

If an employee has been issued with a warning under Stage Two which remains current, and the appropriate manager believes that the employee's performance is still not acceptable then the matter may be referred to a further performance management hearing.

The employee will be informed in writing of the grounds of which the hearing is being convened and in particular will be told of the respects in which their performance continues to fall below an acceptable standard.

An appropriate manager will conduct the hearing.

At the meeting, the employee will be able to respond to any criticisms made of their performance and make representations about how the situation should be treated.

The manager conducting the meeting may take such action as is judged appropriate up to and including a decision to dismiss the employee.

Any dismissal under this procedure will be with notice or payment in lieu of notice and the decision to dismiss together with the reasons for dismissal will be set out in writing and sent to the employee.

Appeals

An employee may appeal against any decision taken under this procedure. The appeal should be submitted in writing stating your full grounds of appeal within one week of the decision being communicated. An appeal hearing will then be convened to consider the

matter. Any PIP that is in force, together with any measures or objectives included within it, will continue in place during the appeal process.

The outcome of the appeal will be confirmed to the employee in writing explaining the grounds of which the decision was reached. The outcome of the appeal will be final.

Redeployment

There may be circumstances in which it becomes clear that an employee would be better suited to a different role within the Council. However, any offer to redeploy the employee will be entirely at the Council's discretion and will only be made when the Council is confident that the employee will be able to perform well in the redeployed role and where there is a suitable available vacancy.

Redeployment may be offered as an alternative to dismissal where the Council is satisfied that the employee should no longer be allowed to continue to work in their current role. While the employee is free to refuse any offer of redeployment, the only alternative available in these circumstances will usually be dismissal.

5.2 Sickness Absence Procedure

The Council may need to dismiss an employee whose attendance does not meet an acceptable standard either because of a long-term absence or because of a series of short-term absences. Such dismissals do not depend on any wrongdoing on the employee's part and do not mean that the Council does not accept that their absences are genuinely due to illness or injury. Rather, dismissal is recognition that unfortunately the employee is no longer able to perform their role or attend work on a sufficiently regular basis to make their continued employment a viable option.

The Council reserves the right not to follow these procedures in full for employees who are within their first two years of employment with the Council.

Short-term Absence

An employee who the Council considers having an excessive sickness absence record will be spoken to informally and usually have specific attendance targets set and be advised if these are breached, they will be invited to a meeting to discuss their attendance.

The meeting will usually be conducted by the employee's line manager and the employee will have a right to be accompanied by a fellow employee or a trade union official on the same basis as set out in the performance management procedure.

At the meeting, the employee will be asked to explain the level of their absence. Where there is any indication that the absences are caused by an underlying medical condition then the matter may be dealt with under the procedure for long-term absence set out below. The Council may also seek medical evidence from either the employee's doctor or an occupational health specialist in which case the meeting will be adjourned for a report to be obtained

Subject to any medical evidence, the manager conducting this first-stage meeting may decide to issue a warning to the employee setting out the Council's expectations regarding attendance and indicating the level of improvement needed. A review period will normally be set which may range from one month to 12 months depending on the circumstances.

If the employee's attendance does not improve to the extent required they may at any stage in the review period be invited to attend a second stage meeting to discuss the matter. The meeting will again be conducted by the line manager and the employee will be entitled to be accompanied by a fellow employee or trade union official. This meeting may result in an extension of the review period or the issuing of a final written warning requiring the employee's attendance to improve and setting out the level of improvement required over a specified period of up to one year.

If the employee does not meet this standard and there is no underlying condition where reasonable adjustments would assist the employee to attend then they may be dismissed. A final meeting will be convened which shall be conducted by a manager with appropriate authority to dismiss and will consider any representations made by or on behalf of the employee who will once again have the right to be accompanied by a fellow employee or trade union official.

Any dismissal arising out of this meeting will be with notice.

There is a right of appeal against a decision to dismiss which must be exercised within one week of the decision being communicated.

Long-term Sickness Absence

Where an employee is absent for an extended period – or it is clear that their absence is likely to continue for some time – then the Council will want to investigate the prospects for their return and consider what actions can be taken to facilitate this. The extent to which the Council can continue to accommodate an employee's absence will depend on a range of factors, including the role of the employee and the prevailing circumstances of the business.

The Council may seek medical advice as to the employee's condition either from the appropriate professionals caring for the employee or from a specialist occupational health practitioner. The focus will be on ascertaining when the employee will be able to return to work and what steps the Council can take to facilitate this.

An employee is not obliged to consent to any medical reports or records being shared with the Council as part of this process. However, in the absence of medical evidence the Council will have to work on the basis of what information is available in reaching its decision.

One or more meetings will be arranged with the employee to discuss their condition, the prospects for any return to work, and whether anything the Council can do more to help. The employee will be entitled to be accompanied at the meeting by a fellow employee or trade union official.

Every effort will be made to make suitable arrangements for the meeting to allow the employee to attend. Where the employee is simply too ill to take part in the process, however, the Council may proceed to dismissal in the absence of a meeting considering any representations made on the employee's behalf.

Where the employee will be unable to return to work within a reasonable period then the Council may need to consider dismissal. Any dismissal will be with notice.

There is a right of appeal against a decision to dismiss which must be exercised within one week of the decision being communicated. You should submit your appeal in writing stating your full grounds of appeal.

5.3 Disciplinary Procedure

The Council always tries to deal with disciplinary issues fairly and promptly. This procedure sets out the framework under which allegations of misconduct will be investigated and considered. While the procedure set out in this policy will be appropriate in most cases, there may be situations in which it is not practicable to comply with a particular requirement of it. When this happens, the Council will do its best to deal with the matter fairly and will pay particular attention to the need to give the employee every opportunity to explain their version of events.

The Council reserves the right not to follow this procedure in full for employees who are within their first two years of employment with the Council.

Definition of Misconduct

Behaviour which is disruptive, disrespectful to colleagues, or which falls short of the requirements set out in this handbook will be treated as misconduct under the disciplinary procedure. While employees will not usually be dismissed for a first offence a failure to remedy the behaviour or to adhere to required standards may lead to dismissal once appropriate warnings have been given.

Definition of Gross Misconduct

Gross misconduct is behaviour which is fundamentally at odds with the employee's duty to the Council and their colleagues. In accordance with the disciplinary procedure, gross misconduct will usually result in dismissal without notice, or payment in lieu of notice, even in cases of a first offence.

It is not possible to list every example of gross misconduct which may arise, but the following provides an illustration of the sort of conduct that will fall into this category – some of which are then explained in more detail below:

- Theft;
- Fraud, forgery, or other dishonesty, including fabrication of expense claims and time sheets;
- Deliberate acts of discrimination, harassment, or victimisation;
- Refusal to carry out reasonable instructions;
- Violent or intimidating behaviour;
- Wilful damage to property;
- Causing loss, damage, or injury through serious negligence;
- Serious misuse of our property or name;
- Serious insubordination;
- Reckless behaviour posing a risk to health and safety;
- Any act or omission constituting serious or gross negligence/or dereliction of duty;
- Sleeping on duty;
- Bringing the organisation into serious disrepute;
- Unauthorised use or disclosure of confidential information or failure to ensure that confidential information in your possession is kept secure;
- Recording audio and/or video of any meeting, conversation or discussion with another person or people without the express prior consent of the person or people being recorded;
- Making untrue allegations in bad faith against a colleague;

- Making a disclosure of false or misleading information under our Whistleblowing Policy maliciously, for personal gain, or otherwise in bad faith;
- Repeatedly working from home contrary to the terms of your employment contract and without the prior written approval of management;
- Failing to work your contractual hours while working from home or as part of a hybrid working arrangement, or giving false or misleading information relating to your hours of work and activities while working from home;
- Any illegal act during working time or on Council premises; and
- Any act described as gross misconduct elsewhere in this handbook.

Informal Action

Most minor acts of misconduct can be dealt with informally through discussions between an employee and their line manager. This may consist of management guidance, or an informal warning given orally or in writing. These steps are an everyday part of the management process, and no formal procedure needs to be followed in respect of them.

Where informal action of this kind fails to resolve an issue, or where the misconduct alleged is considered too serious, then the matter will be dealt with formally under this procedure.

Investigation

If it is alleged that you have committed misconduct, an appropriate investigation will be carried out aimed at gathering all of the relevant evidence. You may be interviewed as part of this investigation and will have the opportunity to point the investigator towards any evidence that you feel is relevant. The right to be accompanied (see below) does not apply to any investigatory interview.

Suspension

If an allegation of misconduct is made against you, then you may be suspended from your duties on full pay while the matter is being dealt with. The Council will make every effort to ensure that any period of suspension is kept as short as possible. The purpose of a suspension is either to allow an unhindered investigation to take place, or to protect the interests of the Council and its employees. During any period of suspension, you may be instructed not to contact other members of staff except for the purposes of preparing for any disciplinary hearing, where specific arrangements will be made with you. This is not a disciplinary sanction and should not be seen as a predetermination of any disciplinary process.

Hearing

Once the investigation has been carried out, the investigating officer will decide about whether there is sufficient evidence to warrant a disciplinary hearing. If there is you will be informed of this and an appropriate date for the hearing will be arranged. This will take place within normal working hours wherever possible.

To ensure that you have adequate time to prepare for the hearing, the Council will provide you in advance with a copy of all of the written evidence that will be considered at the hearing. In exceptional cases the Council may need to withhold the identities of certain witnesses or hold back sensitive items of evidence. This will only be done where it is considered necessary to protect individuals or the essential interests of the Council and every effort will be made to ensure that you are given as much information as possible so that a fair hearing can be conducted.

You will be given sufficient notice of any hearing to allow you to prepare for it. While this will vary from case to case, the Council will try to give at least two days' notice of any hearing and in complicated cases a longer period of notice may be given.

The purpose of the hearing will be to consider the evidence gathered during the investigation and to consider any representations made by you or on your behalf. The hearing will be conducted by an appropriate manager who, wherever possible, has not previously been involved in the case and who was not responsible for carrying out the investigation.

The Right to be Accompanied

Employees are entitled to be accompanied at any disciplinary hearing by a fellow employee or trade union official of their choice. The Council will provide any chosen companion with appropriate paid time off to allow them to attend the hearing. It is, however, up to the employee in question to arrange for a companion to attend the hearing.

If your chosen companion cannot attend on the day scheduled for the hearing then the Council will agree a new date. This will usually be within 5 working days of the date originally scheduled. If your companion is not available within that timescale then you may need to find someone else to take their place.

The companion's role is to advise you during the hearing and make representations on your behalf; it is not to answer questions for you. However, both you and your companion are required to cooperate in ensuring a fair and efficient hearing. The companion cannot answer questions on your behalf.

Evidence

The hearing will consider any evidence you choose to present. Should witnesses be prepared to appear on your behalf they will be permitted to do so provided that their evidence is relevant to the issues that need to be decided. The Council will not compel or require any employee to appear as a witness on your behalf and in most circumstances evidence arising from the investigation will be presented in written form. You will be entitled to challenge any of the evidence presented but will not be entitled to cross-examine witnesses.

Disciplinary Action

After considering all of the evidence, including any submissions made by you or on your behalf, the manager conducting the hearing will decide on the outcome. If misconduct is found to have taken place then the usual outcome will be a **written warning** which will be placed on your personnel file.

A warning will stay active for a period of 1 year, after which it will not be considered in any future disciplinary action.

If however, a further instance of misconduct is found to have occurred (in accordance with this procedure) during the currency of a warning – or if any misconduct is considered to be serious enough to warrant it – then, subject to the formal process above being followed, you will be issued with a **final written warning**.

A **final written warning** will usually remain active for one year, but a longer period may be specified if the manager conducting the hearing feels that the circumstances warrant it.

An employee who is found to have committed further misconduct during a period covered by a final written warning will, following a hearing conducted in accordance with this procedure, be dismissed.

Dismissal

An employee will not normally be dismissed under this procedure for a single instance of misconduct unless a final written warning is already in place. However, where gross misconduct is found to have occurred then dismissal without notice or payment in lieu will be the usual outcome.

Gross misconduct is misconduct that is so serious that it fundamentally undermines the relationship between employer and employee. If you are accused of gross misconduct this will be made clear when you are invited to a disciplinary hearing. A wide range of behaviours can amount to gross misconduct but the most common involve dishonesty, violent or aggressive behaviour, the wilful destruction of Council property or a deliberate refusal to obey a reasonable instruction.

Appeal

An employee may appeal against the outcome of a disciplinary hearing by doing so in writing stating your full grounds of appeal within one week of being notified of the outcome. The person to whom an appeal should be directed will be detailed in the disciplinary outcome letter. An appeal hearing will be convened and conducted by an appropriate member of the senior management team.

The appeal will consider any grounds the employee chooses to put forward and they will have the same right to be accompanied as at a disciplinary hearing. The result of the appeal hearing will be final.

Employee Absence

It is important that disciplinary issues are dealt with promptly. The Council may therefore need to proceed with a disciplinary hearing even if the employee is absent due to ill health or simply does not attend. Before hearing the matter in an employee's absence, the Council will attempt to arrange the hearing in such a way that the employee will be able to attend or to submit written representations to the hearing and/or to arrange for an appropriate representative to attend the hearing on their behalf.

5.4 Grievance Procedure

The Council aims to be responsive to concerns raised by employees and if you are unhappy with something affecting you at work you are encouraged to raise this with your manager or in the case of the Clerk this should be addressed to the Personnel Committee on an informal basis. If that is not possible then you should speak to another manager who will try to assist you in resolving any issue you may have. The following procedure is designed to be used when these informal attempts to resolve any dispute have not been successful.

Any written complaint or grievance raised which alleges that a member or co-opted member of the authority has failed to comply with the authority's Code of Conduct will be dealt with under the Code of Conduct Procedure.

Examples of issues that could be dealt with under the grievance procedure include:

- a. terms and conditions of employment;
- b. health and safety;
- c. work relations;
- d. bullying and harassment;
- e. new working practices;
- f. working environment;
- g. organisational change; and
- h. discrimination.

The Grievance Procedure should not be used to complain about issues which do not relate to, or impact on, you and your work/ working environment.

The Grievance Procedure should not be used to complain about disciplinary action, reasonable action taken under the Performance Management Procedure or Sickness Absence Procedure. Any such complaints should be dealt with under the relevant appeal procedure.

Raising a Grievance

If you feel that the matter needs to be raised formally you should raise a grievance by making a written complaint, stating that it is being made under this procedure. You should give as much information about your grievance, including any relevant dates and times, as you can, so as to allow for any investigation into your concerns to take place.

A grievance will normally be dealt with by your manager and should be addressed to them directly. In the case of the Clerk this should be addressed to the Personnel Committee on a formal basis. Where the grievance is directly concerned with your manager's behaviour, however, you should submit your grievance to another member of the management team who will arrange for somebody who is not directly involved in the issue to deal with it.

Grievance Hearing

A grievance hearing will then be arranged so that you can explain the issue and suggest how it can be resolved. There may be some cases where your grievance can be dealt with in writing, subject to your agreement. You will have the right to be accompanied by a fellow employee or trade union official to any grievance hearing. The manager conducting the hearing will consider what you have said and may either deal with the matter immediately or decide to carry out further investigations. In that case the hearing will be adjourned until the investigation has been completed.

Once the investigations are concluded, if new information becomes known, if it is considered appropriate, you may be invited to a reconvened meeting, to have the opportunity to consider and respond to the findings of the investigation. Following this a decision on the outcome of your grievance will be made.

Allegations of Misconduct

Where an employee is making allegations of misconduct on the part of other employees then the Council may need to carry out an investigation into the allegations and pursue the matter through the disciplinary procedure. Where this happens the grievance will be held over until the disciplinary process has been concluded and it may not be possible for the Council to provide you with specific detail in relation to what disciplinary action, if any, has been taken.

Relationship with Other Procedures

Where your grievance relates to the conduct of other procedures such as the disciplinary or performance management procedures then the Council may choose to either delay the consideration of the grievance until that procedure has been completed or to deal with the grievance in the course of that procedure or by way of appeal if that appears to be a fairer or more straightforward way of dealing with the issue.

Appeals

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of a grievance then you may appeal. You should submit your appeal in writing stating your full grounds of appeal within one week of being informed of the outcome of your grievance. Your appeal should be directed to the Chair of the Council. An appeal hearing will then be convened and conducted by a Panel drawn from the Full Council. You will have the right to be accompanied at the appeal by a fellow employee or trade union official. The outcome of any appeal will be final.

5.5 Redundancy Policy

About this policy

We will always try to avoid the need for compulsory redundancies but sometimes these may be necessary. The pattern or volume of our business or methods of working may change and requirements for employees may reduce.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that, whenever reduction in employee numbers may become necessary:

- a. we communicate clearly with all affected employees and ensure that they are treated fairly;
- b. we try to find ways of avoiding compulsory redundancies;
- c. we consult with employees (and where appropriate with recognised trade unions and /or employee representatives); and
- d. any selection for compulsory redundancy is undertaken fairly, reasonably and without discrimination.

This policy applies to all employees. It does not apply to agency workers, consultants, or self-employed contractors.

Avoiding compulsory redundancies

Where we are proposing to make redundancies, we will enter into consultation with all affected employees on an individual basis and, where appropriate, also with recognised trade unions and / or employee representatives.

In the first instance we will consider steps that might, depending on the circumstances, be taken to avoid the need for compulsory redundancies. Examples of such steps include:

- a. Reviewing the use of agency staff, self-employed contractors, and consultants.
- b. Restricting recruitment in affected categories of employee and in those areas into which affected employees might be redeployed.
- c. Reducing overtime in affected departments to that needed to meet contractual commitments or provide essential services.
- d. Freezing salaries for a specified period.
- e. Considering the introduction of short time working, job-sharing or other flexible working arrangements, where these are practicable.
- f. Identifying suitable alternative work with the Council that might be offered to potentially redundant employees.
- g. Inviting applications for early retirement or voluntary redundancy. In all cases the acceptance of a volunteer for redundancy will be a matter of our discretion and we reserve the right not to offer voluntary redundancy terms or to refuse an application where it is not in the interests of our business to do so.

Any measures adopted must not adversely affect our operations.

Making compulsory redundancies

When it is not possible to avoid making compulsory redundancies, we will advise all affected employees and, where appropriate, recognised trade unions and / or employee representatives that compulsory redundancies cannot be avoided and on the procedure that will then be followed and the criteria that will be applied.

In carrying out any redundancy exercise we will not discriminate directly or indirectly on grounds of gender, sexual orientation, marital or civil partner status, gender reassignment, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, disability, or age. Part-time employees and those working under fixed-term contracts will not be treated differently to permanent, full-time comparators.

The criteria used to select those employees who will potentially be made redundant will be objective, transparent and fair and based on the skills required to meet our existing and anticipated business needs.

We will then consult individually with those employees who have been provisionally selected for redundancy.

Where selection for redundancy is confirmed, employees selected for redundancy will be given notice of termination of employment in accordance with their contracts and written confirmation of the payments that they will receive. Employees will be given the opportunity to appeal against this decision.

We will continue to look for alternative employment for redundant employees until their termination dates. The manner in which redundant employees will be invited to apply for and be interviewed for vacancies will be organised depending on the circumstances existing at the time. Alternative employment may be offered subject to a trial period where appropriate.

6

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

6.1 Equal Opportunities Statement

We are committed to encouraging equality, diversity and inclusion among our workforce, The aim is for our workforce to be truly representative of all sections of society and our customers, and for each employee to feel respected and able to give their best.

We are fully committed to:

- Treating all of our employees and job applicants equally in all aspects of employment including recruitment and selection, promotion, transfer, opportunities for training, pay and benefits, other terms of employment, discipline, selection for redundancy and dismissal.
- Creating a working environment that is free of bullying, harassment, victimisation, and unlawful discrimination, promoting dignity and respect for all, and where individual differences and the contributions of all staff are recognised and valued.
- Training managers and all other employees about their rights and responsibilities under this equal opportunities, diversity & inclusion policy.
- Employing, training, and promoting employees on the basis of their experience, abilities, and qualifications, without regard to race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity, gender reassignment, age, marriage and civil partnership or disability. In this policy these are known as the "Protected Characteristics".
- Making opportunities for training, development, and progress available to all employees, who will be helped and encouraged to develop their full potential, so their talents and resources can be fully utilised to maximise the efficiency of the Council.
- Complying with our obligations under the Equality Act 2010 in respect of our Public Sector Equality Duties to:
 - Have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation
 - Have 'due regard' to the need to advance equality of opportunity
 - Have 'due regard' to the need to foster good relations
 - Publish equality information
 - Publish equality objectives.

We will not condone any form of bullying, harassment, or unlawful discrimination whether engaged in by employees or by outside third parties who do business with us, such as clients, customers, contractors, and suppliers.

Employees have a duty to co-operate with us to ensure that this policy is effective in ensuring equal opportunities and in preventing discrimination, harassment, or bullying. Action will be taken under our Disciplinary Procedure against any employee who is found to have committed an act of improper or unlawful discrimination, harassment, bullying or intimidation. Serious breaches of this policy will be treated as potential gross misconduct and could render the employee liable to summary dismissal.

All employees should understand they, as well as the Council, can be held liable for acts of bullying, harassment, victimisation, and unlawful discrimination, in the course of their employment, against fellow employees, customers, suppliers and the public.

You should draw to the attention of the Town Clerk any suspected discriminatory acts or practices or suspected cases of harassment. You must not victimise or retaliate against an employee who has made allegations or complaints of discrimination or harassment or who has provided information about such discrimination or harassment. Such behaviour will be treated as potential gross misconduct. Employees should support colleagues who suffer such treatment and are making a complaint.

Discrimination

You must not unlawfully discriminate against or harass other people, including current and former employees, job applicants, clients, customers, suppliers, and visitors. This applies in the workplace, outside the workplace (when dealing with customers, suppliers, or other work-related contacts or when wearing a work uniform), and on work-related trips or events including social events.

The following forms of discrimination are prohibited under this policy and are unlawful:

- Direct discrimination – when someone is treated less favourably than another person because of a Protected Characteristic.
- Indirect discrimination - occurs where an individual's employment is subject to an unjustified provision criterion or practice which e.g. one sex or race or nationality or age group finds more difficult to meet, although on the face of it the provision, criterion or practice is 'neutral.'
- Associative discrimination or discrimination by association – direct discrimination against someone because they associate with another person who possesses a Protected Characteristic.
- Discrimination by perception – direct discrimination against someone because it is thought that they possess a particular Protected Characteristic even if they do not actually possess it.
- Harassment – unwanted conduct related to a relevant Protected Characteristic which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual. You may complain of such offensive behaviour even if it is not directed towards you personally.
- Victimisation – when an employee is treated less favourably because they have made or supported a complaint or raised a grievance about unlawful discrimination or are suspected of doing so.

- Disability discrimination: this includes direct and indirect discrimination, any unjustified unfavourable treatment because of something arising in consequence of a disability, and failure to make reasonable adjustments to alleviate disadvantages caused by a disability.

Our Commitment

Recruitment

The recruitment process will be conducted in such a way as to result in the selection of the most suitable person for the job in terms of relevant abilities and qualifications. We are committed to applying our equal opportunities policy statement at all stages of recruitment and selection.

Recruitment publicity will aim to positively encourage applications from all suitably qualified people when advertising job vacancies, in order to attract applications from all sections of the community.

Where vacancies may be filled by promotion or transfer, they will be published to all eligible employees in such a way that they do not restrict applications from employees with a particular Protected Characteristics. However, where having regard to the nature and context of the work, having a particular Protected Characteristics is an occupational requirement and that occupational requirement is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim, we will apply that requirement to the job role, and this may therefore be specified in the advertisement.

The selection process will be carried out consistently for all jobs at all levels. We will ensure that this equal opportunities policy is available to all staff, and in particular is given to all staff with responsibility for recruitment, selection, and promotion.

The selection of new staff will be based on job requirements and the individual's suitability and ability to do, or to train for, the job in question. Person specification and job descriptions will be limited to those requirements that are necessary for the effective performance of the job. Candidates for employment, promotion or transfer will be assessed objectively against the requirements of the job.

With disabled job applicants, we will have regard to our duty to make reasonable adjustments to work provisions, criteria and practices or to physical features of work premises or to provide auxiliary aids or services in order to ensure that the disabled person is not placed at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with persons who are not disabled.

All applications will be processed consistently. The staff responsible for short listing, interviewing, and selecting candidates will be clearly informed of the selection criteria and of the need for their consistent application. All questions that are put to the applicants will relate to the requirements of the job.

Training, transfer, and promotion

We will take such measures as may be necessary to ensure the proper training, supervision and instruction for all line managers in order to familiarise them with our policy on equal opportunities, and in order to help them identify discriminatory acts or practices and to ensure that they promote equal opportunity within the departments for which they are responsible. The training will also enable line managers to deal more effectively with complaints of bullying and harassment.

We will also provide training to all employees to help them understand their rights and responsibilities under the equal opportunities and anti-harassment policies and what they can do to create a work environment that is free of bullying and harassment.

All persons responsible for selecting new employees, employees for training or employees for transfer or promotion to other jobs will be instructed not to discriminate because of one or more of the Protected Characteristics. Where a promotional system is in operation, the assessment criteria will be examined to ensure that they are not discriminatory. The promotional system will be checked from time to time in order to assess how it is working in practice.

When a group of workers who have a particular Protected Characteristic appear to be excluded from access to promotion, transfer, and training and to other benefits, our systems and procedures will be reviewed to ensure there is no unlawful discrimination.

Terms of employment, benefits, facilities, and services

All terms of employment, benefits, facilities, and service will be reviewed from time to time, in order to ensure that there is no unlawful discrimination on the grounds of one or more of the Protected Characteristics.

Equal pay and equality of terms

We are committed to equal pay in employment. We believe our male and female employees should receive equal pay for like work, work rated as equivalent or work of equal value. In order to achieve this, we will endeavour to maintain a pay system that is transparent, free from bias and based on objective criteria.

Disabilities

If you are disabled or become disabled, we encourage you to tell us about your condition so that we can support you as appropriate.

If you experience difficulties at work because of your disability, you may wish to contact your line manager/the Town Clerk to discuss any reasonable adjustments that would help overcome or minimise the difficulty. Your line manager/the Town Clerk may wish to consult with you and your medical adviser about adjustments. We will consider the matter carefully and try to accommodate your needs within reason. If we consider a particular adjustment would not be reasonable we will explain our reasons and try to find an alternative solution where possible.

We will monitor the physical features of our premises to consider whether they might place anyone with a disability at a substantial disadvantage. Where necessary, we will take reasonable steps to improve access.

6.2 Menopause Policy

We are committed to supporting staff affected by the menopause. We recognise that many members of staff will experience the menopause and that, for some, menopause will have an adverse impact on their working lives.

All women will experience menopause at some point during their life. Menopause can also impact trans and non-binary people who may not identify as female. Most of those who experience menopause will do so between the ages of 45 and 55. However, some

start experiencing symptoms much earlier. Often, symptoms last between four to eight years, but they can continue for longer.

The majority of those going through menopause will experience some symptoms, although everyone is different, and symptoms can fluctuate. Symptoms can include, but are not limited to, sleeplessness, hot flushes, memory loss or poor concentration, headaches, muscle and joint pains, depression, and anxiety.

Menopause is preceded by perimenopause, during which the body prepares itself for menopause. Perimenopause can also last several years and can involve similar symptoms to menopause itself. For the purpose of this policy, any reference to menopause includes perimenopause.

Open Conversations

Menopause is not just an issue for women. All staff should be aware of menopause so that they can support those experiencing it or otherwise affected by it.

We encourage an environment in which colleagues can have open conversations about menopause. We expect all staff to be supportive of colleagues who may be affected by menopause in the workplace.

Anyone affected by menopause should feel confident to talk to their line manager or the Town Clerk about their symptoms and the support they may need to reduce the difficulties menopause can cause them at work.

Line managers and the Town Clerk should be ready to have open conversations with staff about menopause and what support is available. These conversations should be treated sensitively and any information provided should be handled confidentially and in accordance with our Data Protection Policy.

Risk Assessments

We are committed to ensuring the health and safety of all our staff and will consider any aspects of the working environment that may worsen menopausal symptoms. This may include identifying and addressing specific risks to the health and well-being of those experiencing menopause.

Support and Adjustments

While many who experience menopause are able to carry on their working lives as normal, we recognise that others may benefit from adjustments to their working conditions to mitigate the impact of menopause symptoms on their work. If you believe that you would benefit from adjustments or other support, you should speak to your line manager or the Town Clerk.

Physical adjustments could include temperature control, provision of electric fans or access to rest facilities. Depending on individual and business needs, adjustments such as flexible working, we may also consider more frequent rest breaks or changes to work allocation. These are examples only and not an exhaustive list.

We may refer you to a doctor nominated by us or seek medical advice from your GP to better understand any adjustments and other support that may help alleviate symptoms. An employee will not be eligible to receive paid bereavement or compassionate time-off

benefits while off, or absent from work because of holiday, sickness (paid or unpaid) or for any other reason. you at work.

6.3 Sexual Harassment and Bullying

In accordance with the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023, effective from 26 October 2024, the council has a duty to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. This includes:

Implementing preventive measures such as regular training and clear communication of this policy.

Creating a culture of respect and inclusion.

Taking proactive steps to identify and mitigate risks of sexual harassment.

Definition of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is any unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature that makes someone feel offended, humiliated, or intimidated. It can include, but is not limited to:

- Unwelcome sexual advances or touching
- Requests for sexual favours
- Displaying sexually explicit materials
- Sending sexually suggestive emails or messages
- Making sexual comments or jokes
- Intrusive questions about a person's private life or body
- Unwelcome comments about a person's appearance
- Spreading sexual rumours about a person

Scope

This policy applies to all employees as well as volunteers and elected officials associated with Stotfold Town Council.

Prohibited Conduct

Sexual harassment in any form is prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Making sexual propositions, innuendos, or suggestive comments
- Physical contact of a sexual nature without consent
- Sending sexually explicit messages or materials

- Creating a hostile or offensive work environment based on gender or sexual orientation.

Prevention Measures

Stotfold Town Council will take all reasonable measures to prevent sexual harassment of its staff and members. These steps include:

- Providing training on sexual harassment prevention for all staff and councillors.
- Displaying information about the Council's zero-tolerance to sexual harassment
- Ensuring all employees understand the complaints procedure
- Regularly reviewing and updating this policy.
- Fostering a culture of respect and dignity in the workplace.

A risk assessment has been carried out and this will be regularly reviewed to ensure it remains appropriate. The risk assessment will be shared with all employees.

Reporting Procedure (staff member)

Any employee who believes they have experienced or witnessed sexual harassment is encouraged to report it immediately. Reports can be made to:

- The Mayor who is also Chair of the Governance & Resources committee
- The Town Clerk

Reports can be made verbally or in writing and will be kept confidential to the extent possible. Retaliation against individuals who report sexual harassment is prohibited and will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Reporting Procedure (Councillor)

Complaints against elected Members must be addressed to the Monitoring Officer at Central Bedfordshire Council.

Investigation Procedure

Upon receiving a report of sexual harassment, Stotfold Town Council will promptly and impartially investigate the allegations. The investigation will be conducted by the Town Clerk, or Public Realm Manager, and the Chair of the Governance & Resources committee, or another member of the Governance & Resources committee, who will interview the parties involved and any witnesses. All parties will be afforded due process and confidentiality to the extent possible.

Disciplinary Action

If an investigation confirms that sexual harassment has occurred, appropriate disciplinary action will be taken depending on the severity of the offense and the circumstances involved.

Compliance

All employees are expected to always comply with this policy. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

False Accusations

While the Council encourages reporting of genuine concerns, knowingly making a false accusation of sexual harassment will be treated as a serious disciplinary matter.

Dignity at work

The council has a separate dignity at work policy concerning issues of bullying and harassment on any ground, and how complaints of this type will be dealt with.

Conclusion

Stotfold Town Council is dedicated to fostering a respectful and inclusive workplace where all employees can thrive. The council takes allegations of sexual harassment seriously and will take prompt and appropriate action to address them.

We have carried out an assessment to assess the risk of different forms of harassment, including sexual harassment and third-party harassment, occurring in our workforce, including in different roles, the steps we could take to reduce those risks and which of those steps are reasonable. This risk assessment will be reviewed regularly.

What is harassment?

Harassment is any unwanted physical, verbal, or non-verbal **conduct** that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. A single incident can amount to harassment.

Unlawful harassment may involve **conduct**:

- **related to a protected characteristic** of age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partner status, pregnancy or maternity, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation;
- of a sexual nature (**sexual harassment**); or
- of **treating someone less favourably because they have submitted, or refused to submit to, sexual harassment or harassment related to sex or gender reassignment** e.g. where a manager gives a junior employee a poor performance review because they rejected the manager's sexual advances.

Harassment is unacceptable even if it does not fall within any of these categories.

Harassment may include (this is a non-exhaustive list), for example:

- a. racist, sexist, homophobic or ageist jokes, or derogatory or stereotypical remarks about a particular ethnic or religious group, religion or belief, or gender;
- b. disclosing or threatening to disclose someone's sexual orientation or gender identity against their wishes;

- c. offensive e-mails, text messages or social media content; or
- d. mocking, mimicking, or belittling a person's disability.

Sexual harassment does not need to be sexually motivated; it only needs to be sexual in nature and may include (this is a non-exhaustive list), for example:

- a. unwanted physical conduct or "horseplay", including touching, pinching, pushing, and grabbing;
- b. continued suggestions for sexual activity after it has been made clear that such suggestions are unwelcome;
- c. sending or displaying material that is pornographic or that some people may find offensive (including emails, text messages, video clips and images sent by mobile phone or posted on the internet);
- d. unwelcome sexual advances or suggestive behaviour (which the harasser may perceive as harmless);
- e. intrusive questions about a person's private or sex life or a person discussing their own sex life; or
- f. sending sexually explicit e-mails or text messages or sexual posts/contact on social media.

A person may be harassed even if they were not the intended "target". For example, a person may be harassed by racist jokes about a different ethnic group if the jokes create an offensive environment; or sexually harassed by pornographic images displayed on a colleague's computer in the workplace.

What is victimisation?

Victimisation includes subjecting a person to a detriment because they have done, or are suspected of doing or intending to do, any of the following protected acts:

- a. Bringing proceedings under the Equality Act 2010.
- b. Giving evidence or information in connection with proceedings under the Equality Act 2010.
- c. Doing any other thing for the purposes of or in connection with the Equality Act 2010.
- d. Alleging that a person has contravened the Equality Act 2010.

Victimisation may include (this is a non-exhaustive list), for example:

- a. Denying someone an opportunity because it is suspected that they intend to make a complaint about harassment/sexual harassment.
- b. Excluding someone because they have raised a grievance about harassment/sexual harassment.
- c. Failing to promote someone because they accompanied another staff member to a grievance meeting.
- d. Dismissing someone because they gave evidence on behalf of another staff member at an employment tribunal hearing.

Harassment/sexual harassment and victimisation are unlawful and will not be tolerated. They may lead to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal without notice if they are committed:

- a. In a work situation.
- b. During any situation related to work, such as at a social event with colleagues.

- c. Against a colleague or other person connected to us outside of a work situation, including on social media.
- d. Against anyone outside of a work situation where the incident is relevant to your suitability to carry out your role.

We will consider any aggravating factors, such as abuse of power over a more junior colleague, when deciding the appropriate disciplinary action to take.

If any harassment/sexual harassment or victimisation of staff occurs, we will take steps to remedy any complaints and to prevent it happening again. Action may include updating relevant policies, providing further staff training, and taking disciplinary action against the perpetrator.

What is third-party harassment?

Third-party harassment occurs where a person is harassed/sexually harassed by someone who does not work for, and who is not an agent of, the same employer, but with whom they have come into contact during the course of their employment. Third-party harassment could include, for example, derogatory comments about a person's age, disability, pregnancy, colour, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation, or unwelcome sexual advances, from a client, customer, supplier or visitor visiting the employer's premises, or where a person is visiting a client, customer or supplier's premises or other location in the course of their employment.

Third-party harassment can result in legal liability and will not be tolerated. All staff are encouraged to report any third-party harassment they are a victim of, or witness, in accordance with this policy. Any harassment by a member of staff against a third-party may lead to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

We will take active steps to try to prevent third-party harassment of staff. If any third-party harassment of staff occurs, we will take steps to remedy any complaints and to prevent it happening again. Action may include warning the harasser about their behaviour, banning them from our premises, reporting any criminal acts to the police, and sharing information with other branches of the business.

What is bullying?

Bullying is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour involving the misuse of power that can make a person feel vulnerable, upset, humiliated, undermined, or threatened. Power does not always mean being in a position of authority but can include both personal strength and the power to coerce through fear or intimidation.

Bullying can take the form of physical, verbal, and non-verbal conduct. Bullying may include (this is a non-exhaustive list), for example:

- a. physical or psychological threats;
- b. overbearing and intimidating levels of supervision;
- c. inappropriate derogatory remarks about someone's performance.

However, legitimate, reasonable, and constructive criticism of a worker's performance or behaviour, or reasonable instructions given to workers in the course of their employment, will not amount to bullying on their own.

If you are being harassed/sexually harassed/victimised/bullied

If you are being harassed/sexually harassed/victimised/bullied, consider whether you feel able to raise the problem informally with the person responsible. You should explain clearly to them that their behaviour is not welcome or makes you uncomfortable. If this is too difficult or embarrassing, you should speak to your line manager (or another manager where it concerns them) who can provide confidential advice and assistance in resolving the issue informally or formally. If informal steps are not appropriate, or have not been successful, you should raise the matter formally under our **Grievance Procedure** and it will be dealt with under that procedure, considering the below.

We will investigate complaints in a timely and confidential manner. The investigation will be conducted by someone with appropriate experience and no prior involvement in the complaint, where possible. Details of the investigation and the names of the person making the complaint and the person accused must only be disclosed on a "need to know" basis. We will consider whether any steps are necessary to manage any ongoing relationship between you and the person accused during the investigation.

Once the investigation is complete, we will inform you of our decision. If we consider that there is a case to answer and the harasser or bully is an employee, the matter will be dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure as a case of misconduct or gross misconduct. The outcome of our investigation may be put on hold while disciplinary action is taken. If the harasser or bully is a third party such as a customer or other visitor, we will consider what action would be appropriate to deal with the problem. Whether or not your complaint is upheld, we will consider how best to manage any ongoing working relationship between you and the person concerned.

Protection and support for those involved

Staff who make complaints, report that they have witnessed wrongdoing, or who participate in good faith in any investigation must not suffer any form of retaliation or victimisation as a result. Anyone found to have retaliated against or victimised someone in this way will be subject to disciplinary action under our Disciplinary Procedure.

Record-keeping

Information about a complaint by or about a staff member may be placed on their personnel file, along with a record of the outcome and of any notes or other documents compiled during the process. These will be processed in accordance with our Data Protection Policy.

6.4 Monitoring equal opportunities and dignity at work

We will regularly monitor the effects of selection decisions and personnel and pay practices and procedures in order to assess whether equal opportunity and dignity at work are being achieved. This will also involve considering any possible indirectly discriminatory effects of its working practices. If changes are required, we will implement them. We will also make reasonable adjustments to its standard working practices to overcome barriers caused by disability.

Breaches of this Policy

We take a strict approach to breaches of this policy, which will be dealt with in accordance with our Disciplinary Procedure. Serious cases of deliberate discrimination may amount to gross misconduct resulting in dismissal.

If you believe that you have suffered discrimination you can raise the matter through our Grievance Procedure or Bullying & Harassment Procedure. Complaints will be treated in confidence and investigated as appropriate.

You must not be victimised or retaliated against for complaining about discrimination. However, making a false allegation deliberately will be treated as misconduct and dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure.

Related Policies

This policy is supported by the following other policies and procedures (in the Employee Handbook):

- (a) Grievance Procedure.
- (b) Disciplinary Procedure.
- (c) Flexible Working Procedure.
- (d) Maternity, Paternity, Adoption and Shared Parental Leave Policies.
- (e) Parental Leave Policy.
- (f) Time Off for Dependants Policy.
- (g) Data Protection Policy.

EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK RECEIPT

This Handbook has been drawn up by the Council to provide you with information on employment policies and procedures.

The policies and procedures contained within this handbook do not form part of your contract of employment; therefore, the Council reserves the right to make amendments as necessary, for example reflecting changes to the law. Any change will be communicated to all staff. However, you are expected to read and comply with the policies and procedures contained within this handbook. Failure to do so could result in disciplinary action.

If you have any questions or any part of the Handbook is unclear to you, please do not hesitate to raise any queries with a member of management.

I acknowledge I have read and understood the policies and procedures contained within this handbook

Received by (Employee)

Signed

Date

STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL

COMMITTEE: GOVERNANCE & RESOURCES

DATE: 2 APRIL 2025

OFFICER RESPONSIBLE: EMMA PAYNE, TOWN CLERK

SUBJECT: PERFORMANCE REVIEW

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The annual performance management process for the Town Council's staff has been successfully completed in accordance with the Performance Management Policy. This review ensures that all employees are fairly evaluated and consistently. If the Town Council had an adopted Strategic Plan, then their objectives would mirror those of the Town Council. As it is, the goals have been set according to the current needs of the organisation and ongoing projects.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Key highlights of the performance management process include:

- a) **Performance Reviews:** Each staff member underwent a thorough performance review, assessing their achievements (where applicable), areas for improvement, and overall contribution to the organization. These reviews were conducted by the Town Clerk or line manager and included self-assessments to provide a holistic view of performance. Reviews will take place quarterly, with regular 1-2-1 meetings in between to ensure continuous feedback and support.
- b) **Feedback and Development:** Constructive feedback was provided to all employees, highlighting their strengths and identifying opportunities for professional growth. Training plans have been created to support staff in enhancing their skills and achieving their career objectives. The following staff will undertake specific training:
- Projects Officer – Price 2 Foundation Training (£795)
 - Democratic Services Manager – CiLCA (£450)
- c) **Salary Scale Increases:** Any salary scale increases are contingent upon satisfactory performance reviews. Employees who have met performance standards will be eligible for salary scale increase as per their contracts of employment.
- d) **Continuous Improvement:** The performance management process is an ongoing effort to foster a culture of continuous improvement. Regular check-ins and follow-up reviews will be conducted to ensure that staff remain on track and receive the necessary support to succeed.

4. TOWN CLERK'S PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 The Town Clerk's performance management was undertaken by Cllr Buck and Cllr Hyde. The objectives were set as:

Democratic Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan and deliver a different annual town meeting with more information and opportunities for engagement than ever. Tweak it to deliver an inclusive opportunity to talk to residents. Deliver strategic plan including relevant consultation 	April 2026 September 2025
Facilities Management	Look into potential of operating the café in house to make a revenue generation stream for the town council, whether CIC or direct employment. Pros/cons of each	June 2025
Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise a staff and Cllr's together to bolster those relationships, enabling some development of those small interactions. Continue to mentor the direct reports to manage staff, deliver proper 121's and mentor their own reports to maximise their development. 	June 2025 December 2025
Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the opportunities to engagement with the local businesses and see what we can do to help those relationships. 'Bizz for Bizz' kind of thing, again, supporting the community of small businesses would be a further enhancement to the work we do supporting the community. Roll out e-bulletin 	October 2025 June 2025
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the investments for the Town Council to maximum return Instigate a Medium to long term financial plan 	June 2025 September 2025

5. FINANCIAL

5.1 Salary scale increases are factored into the budget when it is set. There is a training budget for training needs identified and a training agreement will be entered into with any officer undertaking training to reimburse the town council in the even that they leave within a certain time period. This agreement has been drawn up by Worknest.

6. IMPLICATIONS

Strategic Plan	N/A
Risk Management	Regular performance management manages the risk of poor performance.
Legals	Contract of Employment
Resources/Stakeholders	Staff
Contracts/Financials	Budget in place
Crime & Disorder	N/A
Equalities	Equality Act
Biodiversity	N/A

STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL

COMMITTEE: GOVERNANCE AND RESOURCES

DATE: 2 APRIL 2025

OFFICER RESPONSIBLE: EMMA PAYNE, TOWN CLERK

SUBJECT: STAFF PERFORMANCE –
SICKNESS AND HOLIDAY LEAVE

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 Measuring and monitoring staff absenteeism helps maintain a productive, engaged, and healthy workforce, especially in a small workforce where every employee plays a vital role, and a long period of absence can have a knock-on effect on productivity. By understanding trends, addressing root causes, and ensuring employees take their full annual leave entitlement, organisations can create a balanced work environment that benefits both employees and the organisation as a whole.
- 1.2 It is an effective management tool to measure staff absenteeism and compare this against previous years. This can also form part of the Key Performance Indicators for the Town Council and be included as part of the Annual Report.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Measuring absence can identify trends such as high absenteeism or specific days, increased sick leave during specific times of the year or season. Absence can adversely affect productivity, leading to increase deadlines, project delays and an increased workload on remaining staff, leading to a loss of morale.
- 3.2 The Clerk can only compare the figures from 2023-24 and 2024-25 as the record keeping before those dates is not accurate.
- 3.3 The number of staff has been calculated on a Full Time Equivalent for comparison purposes as of 31st March. There are no national average figures calculated for 2024-25.

	STC	NATIONAL AVERAGE	STC
	2023-24		2024-25
FTE No of Staff	6.25		9.8
Amount of Sick leave taken	106		24
Sick Days per Staff Member	16.96	7.19	2.45

- 3.4 2023-24 was quite heavy for staff absences due to two members of staff having prolonged periods of ill health. Going forward, it will be interesting to monitor the ongoing absence trends.

- 3.4 The majority of staff have used all their annual leave entitlement, with some staff carrying forward holiday in 2025-26, not exceeding 5 days, which has to be taken within 3 months.
- 3.5 The flexitime scheme, introduced earlier this year has proved popular with all staff who are eligible to accrue it. It has been used for a variety of reasons including when children are off school for inset days or sickness or when cars need servicing. It has enhanced the work life balance of the office.
- 3.6 In a recent staff wellbeing survey, which was undertaken as part of the stress management policy, the following responses were received regarding leave and work life balance.

I feel encouraged to take my full annual leave entitlement.



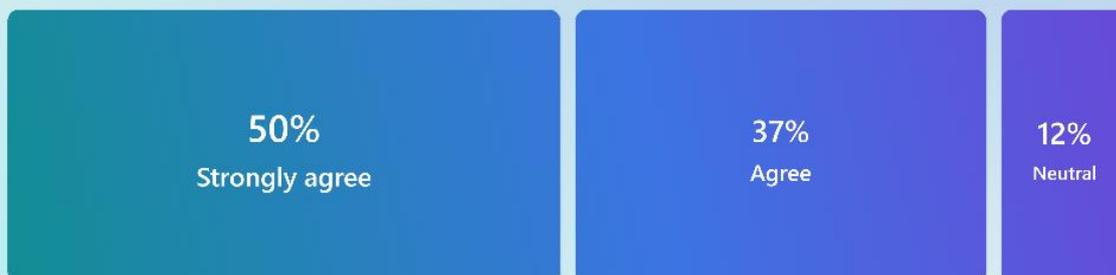
I feel able to take annual leave without negatively impacting my workload.



My team and manager provide support to cover my responsibilities when I am on leave.



Overall, I feel supported by the organization in managing my work-life balance.



4. FINANCIAL

- 4.1 Long term absence would have an effect on the HR budget in the event that short term cover would need to be considered.

5. IMPLICATIONS

Strategic Plan	N/A
Risk Management	Monitoring staff absence and encourage leave reduces the risk of long-term absence
Legals	Contractual sick pay
Resources/Stakeholders	Staff, Residents, Councillors
Contracts/Financials	HR budget
Crime & Disorder	N/A
Equalities	N/A
Biodiversity	N/A

FUTURE MEETINGS

	Overview and Scrutiny WP	To consider introducing a Working Party to over a scrutiny function, including MOP	Town Clerk
	Medium to Long Term Budget	To consider the Council's medium to long term budget.	Town Clerk
	Local Council Award Scheme	To consider the Town Council applying for the Local Council Award Scheme	Town Clerk
	Internal Auditor	To consider extending the contract for Internal Auditor after initial 1 year	Town Clerk
	Vehicle Driver Policy	To review a Vehicle Driver Policy for the safe management of the Town Council's vehicles and recommend its adoption by Full Council.	Town Clerk
	Driver Handbook	To review a handbook for Council Officers driving Town Council vehicles and recommend its adoption by Full Council.	Town Clerk
	Disability Confident Scheme	To consider the Town Council registering as a Disability Confident Employer	Town Clerk
	Customer Care Policy	To consider a new Customer Care Policy,	Town Clerk
	Long Service Awards for Councillors	To consider awards for long service for Councillors at Stotfold Town Council	Town Clerk / Democratic Services Manager

Decision Date	Responsible Committee	Contractor/Service Provider	Reason/Authority	Financial Implication Outcome/Action	
02/01/2025	Governance & Resources	Wellers Hedley	Lease for library café	£1,250.00	Solicitor instructed
02/01/2025	Governance & Resources	Wellers Hedley	Lease for Box of Cakes	£900.00	Solicitor instructed
02/01/2025	Governance & Resources	Wellers Head	Lease for Library and licence for alterations	£2,500.00	Solicitor instructed
07/01/2025	Governance & Resources	Copycare	Maintenance Charge - Printer	£231.27	Contractor instructed
07/01/2025	Governance & Resources	Copycare	Maintenance Charge - Printer	£416.97	Contractor instructed
20/01/2025	Governance & Resources	Wellers Hedley	First registration of Cemetery	£890.00	Solicitor instructed
21/01/2025	Governance & Resources	Herts Fullstop	Various supplies	£191.69	Contractor instructed
23/01/2025	Governance & Resources	Ocean Creative	Budget Infographic	£175.00	Contractor instructed
11/02/2025	Governance & Resources	SMG	Professional Services for IT	£270.00	Contractor instructed
17/02/2025	Governance & Resources	Culligan UK Ltd	Water Coolers, supplies and service	£528.22	Contractor instructed
19/02/2025	Governance & Resources	S Riley	Window cleaning	£170.00	Contractor instructed
27/02/2025	Governance & Resources	Rogers of Bedford	Izuzu Service	£435.50	Contractor instructed
17/03/2025	Governance & Resources	Strawberry Fieldz	AV equipment for ATM	£375.00	Contractor instructed

Table of contents

2/4/25 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM

1. - APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE 4

2. - DISCLOSURES OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS 4

3. - PUBLIC SECTION 4

4. - MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING 4

Attachments

2025-02-12 - Extra Governance _ Resources Committee - Minutes - Draft 5

5. - CLERK'S REPORT, CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED & MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS COUNCIL MINUTES, FOR INFORMATION 4

6. - REPORTS TO COMMITTEE 4

6.1. - Policy Review 4

Attachments

Policies for Review 9

Grants Policy 2025 - DRAFT 11

Credit Control _ Bad Debt Policy 2025 14

Equality and Diversity Policy 2025 16

6.2. - Policies for Adoption 4

Attachments

Policies for Adoption 21

Vexatious Complaints Policy - 2025 - DRAFT	22
Internal Control Statement	26
6.3. - Financial Regulations	4
<hr/>	
Attachments	
Financial Regulations Update	29
STC Financial Regulations 2025	30
6.4. - Staff Handbook	4
<hr/>	
Attachments	
Employee Handbook Report	46
Stotfold Town Council Employee Handbook April 2025.pdf	47
6.5. - Performance Management	115
<hr/>	
Attachments	
Performance Management	116
6.6. - Staff Performance - Sickness Absence and Holiday Leave	115
<hr/>	
Attachments	
Staff Performance	118
6.7. - Bank Reconciliations	115
<hr/>	
7. - MEMBERS' ITEMS FOR INFORMATION PURPOSES ONLY	115
<hr/>	
8. - WORK PROGRAMME	115
<hr/>	
Attachments	
WP G_R April 2025	121
9. - DELEGATED DECISIONS	115
<hr/>	
Attachments	

10. - DATE OF NEXT MEETING

115

11. - CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

115

11.1. - Staff Recruitment

115
