

## HR COMMITTEE – 8 January 2026

### HR Update Report

Purpose	For information
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	The report provides an overview of the work undertaken within the HR Service over and above the re-active casework.
<b>Recommendation(s)</b>	<b>That members note the ongoing work within the HR Service</b>
Reasons for recommendation(s)	Much of the work supports the council ambition to be an Employer of Choice and the corporate LEAF values
Ward(s)	All
Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Jeremy Heron
Strategic Director(s)	Alan Bethune – Strategic Director - Corporate Services and S151 Officer.
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### Introduction

1. This report gives an update on HR matters since the last HR Committee. These matters are in addition to the reactive caseload which includes job evaluations, restructuring advice, grievances, disciplinaries and sickness absence matters.
2. We also continue to provide Payroll, HR Advisory services and Health and Safety advice to the National Park Authority.

### Recruitment Update

3. Recruitment process update

The recruitment process review has now concluded and more details of this can be found in the People Strategy update report.

#### 4. Revised Induction Process

We have now finalised our revised induction process, and this has gone live from 1<sup>st</sup> January. This gives a series of short videos featuring the team across our locations with all the information needed for new starters, followed with an in-person induction with Payroll and Health & Safety colleagues joining us on a monthly basis. This is a great opportunity to connect with new starters once they've settled in, a chance to meet other new starters that month, and ensure they have all the information they need to do their jobs well. All inductions are recorded on the LMS. We have utilised the videos and links and created for induction, and created a SharePoint 'worklife guide', so that all employees at any time can use this as an excellent reference for their employment queries.

#### 5. Recruitment Update

There has continued to be a high level of vacancies in the last quarter (55). Additionally, many managers are requesting their vacancies are processed with high priority due to business need. Our team work hard to meet expectations, but this can be challenging. Once the new recruitment process has settled in and we are not trying to manage the legacy and new systems, we hope this makes it more manageable.

#### 6. Agency Use

There has also been a notable increase in agency use, and we are trying to assist managers so that agencies are used in the right way at the right time. Whilst the agency framework is contract administered by HR, day to day use of the framework or other agencies is at manager discretion. To ensure managers utilising agencies carry out robust selection and use of such workers, including pre-employment checks and induction coverage, HR have produced updated guidance and flow charts, which are held in the Agency Worker Employee Procedures. An Agency Worker brief bite training session has also been arranged for relevant managers to attend to ensure they are up to date.

### **LEARNING**

#### 7. Growth & Goals conversations

Growth & Goals conversations are now live, and over 130 managers have attended Meaningful conversations training. More details can be found on this in the People Strategy update report brought to this committee.

#### 8. Learning & Development considerations

With the development focus of the new Growth & Goals process, it was considered important to ensure we capture and consider all learning needs in a corporate and consistent way. A new L&D Considerations process and MS form have been designed to capture this. This automated form is linked to the SharePoint page detailed above.

Corporate/generic needs will go to our Learning Team in a list for consideration and appropriate action, and Professional/Technical needs will form a list which Leadership Team can access and assess needs fairly and transparently.

### **LGBTQ+ EMPLOYEE NETWORK**

9. The LGBTQ+ Network continue to meet regularly on a quarterly basis, hosting drop ins for staff to grow their network and support the workforce. The group have a chair, vice chair and secretary who support the group to agree discussion topics and focus for any drop-in sessions that are organised.

The Network contributes directly to the EDI group providing valuable support in this area, as well as continuing to plan how to expand and raise awareness for both groups across the Council.

### **EDI GROUP**

10. The EDI group continue to meet quarterly, discussing various work issues, commenting on policy and contributing to upcoming initiatives that support our inclusive culture.

The group have recently discussed policy updates, the LGBTQ+ engagement plan, celebrating success and ideas for topics to discuss next year. Feedback from those who are part of the group but do not attend will also be reviewed in 2026 to understand the reasons why and ensure that the group is being as representative across the Council as it can be.

The next meeting is scheduled for 4 March 2026 with plans to discuss the staff survey and any upcoming policy changes.

## EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS BILL

11. The Employment Rights Bill was introduced to Parliament in October 2024 as part of the Labour Government's "Plan to Make Work Pay". It represents the most comprehensive overhaul of UK employment law in a generation, aiming to modernise workplace protections, improve job security, and raise living standards. The Bill is currently in its final parliamentary stages and is expected to receive Royal Assent in late 2025, with phased implementation through 2026 and 2027.

### Key Provisions

12. The Bill introduces **28 major reforms**, including:

#### ***Day-One Employment Rights***

- **Unfair dismissal protection** from the first day of employment (removal of the two-year qualifying period).
- **UPDATE - Please note: MPs have voted in favour of the government's amendments to the Employment Rights Bill, confirming that the new six-month qualifying period for protection against unfair dismissal would come into force with a retrospective start date of 1 January 2027**
- Statutory probationary period proposed (likely 9 months) with simplified dismissal procedures.

#### ***Flexible Working***

- Right to request flexible working from day one.
- Employers must meet stricter criteria to refuse requests.

#### ***Zero-Hours Contracts***

- Workers can request guaranteed hours after 12 weeks.
- Employers must provide reasonable notice of shifts and pay for cancellations.

#### ***Fire and Rehire***

- Dismissals linked to refusal to accept detrimental contract changes (e.g. pay, hours) will be deemed automatically unfair.

#### ***Sick Pay***

- Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) available from day one.
- Removal of the lower earnings limit.

#### ***Family Leave***

- Day-one rights for paternity and unpaid parental leave.

#### ***Harassment & NDAs***

- Employers must take "all reasonable steps" to prevent harassment.
- NDAs cannot be used to silence victims of discrimination or harassment.

#### ***Trade Union Rights***

- Reduced notice for industrial action (10 days).
- Simplified ballot rules and extended mandates (12 months).
- Enhanced access and recognition rights.

## **Current Situation**

13. A commitment to deliver most of these proposals are laid out in the [Employment Rights Bill](#) (ERB). In addition to the ERB, the Make Work Pay plan involves other non-regulatory consultations, new regulations and amendments to codes or guidance. There are also changes being introduced under the Equality (Race and Disability) Bill.
14. Government consultations are well underway however, even after the Bill receives Royal Assent, many of these measures will need public consultation followed by secondary legislation to flesh out the details.
15. At the time of writing this report the Bill has still not been passed. While the Government appears to want to stick to its original timetable, time is running out in 2025 for the Employment Rights Bill to receive Royal Assent. Parliament is in recess after 18 December 2025 and does not return until 5 January 2026.

## **Next Steps for NFDC**

16. Once agreement has been reached on the provisions and further detail is available there will need to be a comprehensive review of our policies and procedures to ensure that they reflect the updated legislation.
17. This will include reviewing our contracts of employment, employee policies and our brief bite training modules for managers to ensure managers understand the new rights and their obligations.
18. We will need to audit our workforce for any zero-hour contracts.
19. We need to consider how to strengthen our engagement with recognised unions and prepare for the possibility of increased activity.

## **BRIEF BITES**

20. We continue to offer the Brief Bite training to our managers. So far this year we have run sessions on Bullying and Harassment, Sickness Absence, Performance Management and Recruitment. The next upcoming sessions include *Managing Sickness*, *Day to Day Performance Management* and *Performance Management: When Things go Wrong*.

21. The HR team are going to be reviewing the Brief Bites that can be offered. Consideration is to be given to sessions on Agency Workers, Investigations, Accident Reporting and Probation.

### **CASE MANAGER**

22. The Case Manager system is proving to be a really useful tool in helping us to keep track of all our reactive cases. This will enable us to have up to date information readily available when we have our monthly catch ups with senior managers about issues within their own teams.
23. It also enables us to have a corporate overview of cases at any point in time.

### **UPDATED HR POLICIES**

24. The HR Advisory team has primarily focused on updating company policies in line with legal and operational requirements. This year, we adopted a targeted approach, revising policies only where there were changes in employment legislation or a clear business need. This strategy was implemented to ensure efficiency, maintain compliance, and reduce unnecessary administrative work, allowing the team to concentrate on high-impact priorities. As a result, updates were made to policies covering long-term and short-term sickness, buying and selling of annual leave, neonatal care leave, annual leave, and probation.

### **Corporate plan priorities**

25. Much of the work undertaken by the HR Service supports the council's ambition to be an employer of choice.

### **Options appraisal**

26. Not Applicable

### **Consultation undertaken**

27. Not Applicable

### **Financial and resource implications**

28. None

### **Legal implications**

29. As the Employment Rights Bill progresses there will need to be changes made to some policies to ensure we remain compliant.

**Risk assessment**

30. There are no risks associated with the recommendation.

**Environmental / Climate and nature implications**

31. None

**Equalities implications**

32. None from this report, however future changes in legislation may have implications but these will be reported as each policy changes.

**Crime and disorder implications**

33. None

**Data protection / Information governance / ICT implications**

34. None

**Appendices**

None

**Background Papers:**

None