

Report for: General Purposes Committee, 8th February 2024

Item number: 8

Title: HR Policies – Proposal and revised forward plan

Report authorised by: Dan Paul, Chief People Officer

Lead Officer: Tanya Patchett, Head of Employee Relations, Business Partnering and Reward

Ward(s) affected: None

Report for Key/ Non-key Non-Key Decision:

1 Describe the issue under consideration

The report sets out a new proposal for approaching the revision of policies in Haringey council and presents a forward plan for policy review in 2024/25.

2 Cabinet Member Introduction

Not applicable.

3 Recommendations

That Committee consider the proposal and approve the approach as well as the policy forward plan for the coming Municipal Year.

4 Reason for decision

The report is presented following extensive feedback the Employee Relations team and managers in respect of the use of our current policies. This has been discussed at length with Trade Unions who are in agreement with the revised approach and suggested priority policies for the forward plan.

5 Alternative Options Considered

Not applicable.

6 Background information

6.1 We have approximately 40 HR policies. For many policies there is a set of practice notes. Previously each policy has been reviewed in isolation, even in the event that there could be an impact on another policy, for example- A grievance raised under the grievance policy can lead to a disciplinary investigation under the disciplinary policy.

6.2 The vast majority of HR casework in the Council is related to one of the following five policies:

- Disciplinary Policy
- Capability Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Dignity at Work Policy
- Sickness Absence Policy

These are the policies proposed for review in 2024/25. These policies have developed over a number of years and require review because they could be made shorter and easier to understand and operate. This would have benefits to employees, managers and also the HR team, and reduce confusion among managers and inconsistent application of policies.

6.3 Due to the complexity of policies, each of these policies has an accompanying set of practice notes meaning managers, employees and ER specialists must be versed in both documents. By simplifying existing policies, we aim to remove the need for separate practice notes. A template simplified policy is shown at Appendix A. It should be noted that this an example for style only and councillors are not being asked to approve this as a Council policy.

6.4 The proposed process for replacing our existing policies is as follows:

- Start with base policy (sourced from ACAS/ XpertHR)
- Add in collectively agreed terms to ensure employees are not disadvantaged
- Create policy flow chart for ease of reference
- Include Appendices if there are any points of clarification
- Seek feedback from Unions, Staff Networks, Manager reference group and HR colleagues
- Make any suggested amendments and re-circulate as final versions
- Present to GPC for sign off

These five policies will be brought to the Committee in stages during the 2024/25 Municipal Year. We aim to bring 1/2 policies to the June meeting.

6.5 It is recognised that other policies may require amendment during the year, and these will be brought forward as necessary. However, these reviews will be ad-hoc and are likely to be less substantive than the policy reviews referred to in 6.2 above.

7 Statutory Officers' comments (Chief Finance Officer (including procurement), Legal and Governance.

7.1 Finance

There are no direct financial implications of the proposal. Finance Business Partner commented that it is a sensible approach. There may be indirect positive financial implications in the reduction of time taken to resolve issues such as sickness and cases where there is suspension where people may be on full pay for an extended period.

7.2 Head of Legal and Governance

The remit of the General Purposes Committee covers the approval of new and revised HR policies

8 Use of Appendices

Appendix A- Priority Policies to be reviewed & replaced

Appendix B- Example ACAS policy

9 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

Not applicable.

Appendix A - Example Disciplinary policy

Example disciplinary procedure

We will use this procedure to help and encourage all employees to achieve and maintain standards of conduct, attendance and job performance.

The company rules (find these [for example on the intranet, displayed in the office]) and this procedure apply to all employees. The aim is to ensure consistent and fair treatment for all in the organisation.

A disciplinary process can be stressful for everyone involved. Different people might respond differently to stressful situations. We understand the prospect of disciplinary action might cause distress and affect your mental health.

We will support you throughout to help avoid this happening to you. Please talk to [named person or job title] about how we can support your wellbeing.

[add any other support or signpost, for example any employee assistance programme, mental health first aiders or staff networks you have]

Principles

We will consider informal action, where appropriate, to resolve problems.

We will not take disciplinary action against you until the case has been fully investigated.

For formal action we will advise you of the nature of the complaint against you and we will give you the opportunity to state your case before any decision is made at a disciplinary meeting.

We will provide you, where appropriate, with written copies of evidence and relevant witness statements before a disciplinary meeting.

You will not be dismissed for a first breach of discipline, except in the case of gross misconduct, when the penalty is dismissal without notice and without payment in lieu of notice.

You have the right to appeal against any disciplinary action.

The procedure may be used at any stage if your alleged misconduct needs this.

Your right to be accompanied

You have a statutory right to be accompanied by a companion where a disciplinary meeting could result in:

- a formal warning
- some other disciplinary action
- confirmation of a formal warning or other disciplinary action (for example, at an appeal hearing)

The right is to be accompanied by:

- someone you work with
- a trade union representative who's certified or trained in acting as a companion
- an official employed by a trade union

You should tell us as soon as possible if you would like a companion and who they will be so we can make arrangements in good time.

If you need any reasonable adjustments, for example for a disability, speak to [job title or name of person].

The procedure

First stage of formal procedure

This will normally be either:

- an improvement note for unsatisfactory performance if performance does not meet acceptable standards. This will set out the performance problem, the improvement that is required, the timescale, any help that may be given and the right of appeal. We will advise you that this is the first stage of the formal procedure. We will keep a record of the improvement note for [number of months], but it will then be considered spent – as long as you achieve and maintain satisfactory performance
- or
- a first warning for misconduct if conduct does not meet acceptable standards. This will be in writing and set out the nature of the misconduct, the change in behaviour required and the right of appeal. The warning will also tell you that a final written warning may be considered if there is no sustained satisfactory improvement or change. We will keep a record of the warning, but it will be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after [number of months]

Final written warning

We might give you a final written warning if:

- the offence is sufficiently serious
- there is further misconduct
- there is failure to improve performance while you're still under a prior warning

This will confirm the full details of the complaint, the improvement required and the timescale. It will also warn that failure to improve may lead to dismissal (or some other action short of dismissal) and will refer to the right of appeal.

[job title of person who will keep records] will keep a copy of this written warning but it will be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after [number of months], as long as you achieve and maintain satisfactory conduct or performance.

Dismissal or other action

If there is still further misconduct or failure to improve performance the final step in the procedure may be dismissal or some other action short of dismissal such as demotion or transfer (as allowed in the contract of employment).

Dismissal decisions can only be taken by the appropriate senior manager.

You will be provided in writing with the:

- reasons for dismissal
- date your employment will end
- confirmation of all final payments you are owed, including holiday pay and notice pay
- right of appeal

If an action short of dismissal has been decided on, you will:

- receive confirmation of the full details of the complaint
- be warned that dismissal could result if there is no satisfactory improvement
- be advised of the right of appeal

Your supervisor will keep a copy of the written warning but it will be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after [number of months] as long as you achieve and maintain satisfactory conduct or performance.

Gross misconduct

The following list provides some examples of offences which are normally regarded as gross misconduct:

- theft or fraud
- physical violence
- bullying
- deliberate and serious damage to property
- serious misuse of an organisation's property or name
- deliberately accessing internet sites containing pornographic, offensive or obscene material
- serious insubordination
- discrimination, harassment or victimisation
- bringing the organisation into serious disrepute

- causing loss, damage or injury through serious negligence
- a serious breach of health and safety rules
- a serious breach of confidence

We might consider suspending you while carrying out a disciplinary investigation if there's a serious issue or situation. Suspension is when we tell you to temporarily stop working. You would be on full pay throughout any suspension period.

We will consider each situation carefully before deciding to suspend you. Suspension will not be needed for most investigations. Suspension does not mean you have done anything wrong and will not be used to discipline you.

We understand being suspended might be stressful so we will:

- only suspend you if there's no other option
- support you throughout the suspension period, always considering your mental health and wellbeing

Appeals

If you want to appeal against a disciplinary decision you must do so within **[number of days]**. The senior manager will hear all appeals and their decision is final. At the appeal any disciplinary penalty imposed will be reviewed.