

## Slough Borough Council

<b>Report To:</b>	Employment Committee
<b>Date:</b>	8 <sup>th</sup> September 2025
<b>Subject:</b>	HR Policies
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Will Tuckley: CEO MD Commissioner Annabel Scholes: Executive Director of Corporate Resources
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Tracy Walters (Head of HR Policy and Strategy)
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Exempt:</b>	NO
<b>Appendices:</b>	Appendix 1: Sickness Absence Policy Appendix 2: Sickness Management Guide Appendix 3: Organisational Change Policy Appendix 4: EQIA Sickness Absence Policy Appendix 5: EQIA Organisational Change Policy

### 1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 The Workforce Strategy was published to all staff on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025, after extensive all staff consultation. The strategy covers a two-year trajectory and will be reviewed annually to ensure HR supports the business by focusing on and investing in, the right areas. One of priorities in the strategy is 'Getting the basics right' is ensuring our line managers have the tools to do the job. Key to this is to ensure managers support staff with their sickness absences and implementing organisational change. To this end, HR has prioritised reviewing two key policies.

#### Recommendations:

Committee is recommended to note updates to policies and endorse change.

**Reason:** The Workforce Strategy is focused on improving the organisational culture and key to this is support our workforce to thrive during times of change or return from periods of sickness. Having policies aligned with ACAS best practices is key to achieving this.

#### Commissioner Review

This report is outside the scope for pre-publication commissioner review; please check the [Commissioners' instruction 5 to CLT to sign off papers](#) for further details.

## 2. Report

### Introductory paragraph

- 2.1. The Corporate Plan 2023 – 2027 sets out our purpose, our approach and our strategic priorities; to achieve any of these, we need a high performing workforce who have a culture that supports them to thrive. Updated policies aligned with best practice is key to achieving this.

### Options considered

*This paper does not require any options. We are keen for Employment Committee to note, discuss and then endorse the updated policies.*

### Background

The Sickness and Absence policy was last updated in 2024 and the Organisational Change policy updated in 2018. See table below highlighting key changes to include

Policy Area	Old Policy	New Policy / Guidance	Benefits of Change
Sickness Absence – Triggers	Concern raised at 6+ days or 3+ occasions in 6 months; long-term = 28+ days	Concern at 3 occasions OR 10 days in 12 months; long-term = 4+ weeks	Simpler, clearer triggers; easier monitoring; consistency across rolling year
Sickness Absence – Process Stages	3 stages (informal → formal → dismissal) with monitoring periods	Structured timelines for long-term absence: Stage 1 (8 weeks), Stage 2 (16 weeks), Stage 3 (24 weeks); Attendance Improvement Plans embedded	Transparent, supportive process; earlier intervention; sets clear expectations
Return-to-Work	After every meeting, the manager checks adjustments	Still required, with detailed notes, formalised improvement targets, and documented support	More structured and accountable; stronger evidence base
Disability & Adjustments	Reasonable adjustments are required under the Equality Act, but the triggers still apply	Flexibility to adjust triggers for disability and progressive health conditions	Stronger equality compliance; fairer treatment of staff
Keeping in Touch (Sickness)	Expected (phone/email contact)	Formalised: meetings at 10 days, then every 4 weeks during long-term absence	Consistent communication; better support for recovery and reintegration
Redeployment & Ill-Health Retirement (Sickness)	OH referrals; ill-health retirement considered	Detailed redeployment scheme (trial periods, redeployment register, medical redeployment); structured ill-health retirement guidance	More employee options; clearer process; reduces risk of unnecessary dismissals
Appeals (Sickness)	Right of appeal within 10 days	Formal appeal forms, clear timelines, HR-supported	Fairer, more transparent, and consistent

Org Change – Scope	General guidance on restructures	Three categories: minor/business as usual, contractual (no redundancy), contractual (with redundancy)	Tailored approach; avoids unnecessary formal process for small changes
Consultation	Basic consultation reference	Clear statutory requirements: 30 days (20–99 redundancies), 45 days (100+); structured engagement with unions & staff	Improves fairness; ensures compliance with redundancy law
Job Matching & Selection	Limited redeployment principles	Direct match (75%), pooling/competitive selection, ring-fencing	Transparent, fairer allocation of posts; reduces disputes
Redeployment (Org Change)	General redeployment reference	Priority for at-risk staff; 4–12 week trial periods; 12 months' pay protection if redeployed lower	Supports retention; reduces compulsory redundancies; smoother transitions
Voluntary Redundancy	Not clearly defined	Clear framework: confidential, business-need dependent, the council has the final decision	Avoids misunderstanding; supports workforce planning
Fixed-Term Staff	Minimal reference	Clear rights: redundancy pay after 2 years; excluded if under 2 years/temporary cover	Legal compliance; fairer treatment
Appeals (Org Change)	Limited	Defined routes: direct match appeals, redundancy selection appeals, and independent manager involvement	Stronger fairness, accountability reduces the risk of grievances

Key matters for committee to consider are:

### 3. Implications of the Recommendation

#### 3.1 *Financial implications*

- 3.1.1 The financial impact of the revised policies is expected to be positive over the longer term, with benefits realised through more effective management of absence and organisational change. By reducing sickness absence levels through earlier intervention and structured support, the Council can lower costs associated with agency cover, overtime, and productivity loss. In relation to organisational change, robust redeployment and redundancy processes will help retain skills, minimise compulsory redundancies, and reduce the likelihood of costly legal disputes. While there will be ongoing requirements for HR support and management training to embed the policies, these investments are outweighed by the anticipated efficiency gains, cost avoidance, and strengthened value-for-money outcomes.

### 3.2 *Legal implications*

- 3.2.1 The revised Sickness Absence Guidance and Organisational Change Policy have been designed to ensure the Council meets its obligations under employment law. Key legal improvements include clearer processes for reasonable adjustments in relation to disability or health conditions, statutory consultation periods for organisational change, transparent and objective selection criteria, and formalised appeal routes. These provisions reduce the risk of employment disputes or tribunal claims and provide assurance that the Council is acting in a fair, consistent, and legally compliant manner.

### 3.3 *Risk management implications*

- 3.3.1 The Corporate Risk Register identifies a strategic risk relating to the Failure to Attract, Retain and Engage Our People. A positive organisational culture is a critical factor in mitigating this risk and in positioning the Council as an employer of choice. Clear, fair, and inclusive workforce policies are an essential tool in shaping that culture. The revised Sickness Absence Guidance and Organisational Change Policy strengthen consistency, transparency, and fairness in people management processes, thereby supporting employee engagement, wellbeing, and retention.

### 3.4 *Environmental implications*

None

### 3.5 *Equality implications*

- 3.5.1 Both policies represent a significant strengthening of the Council's commitment to equality and inclusion. They provide:

- Fairer treatment for staff with disabilities and long-term health conditions, by embedding reasonable adjustments into formal processes.
- Consistency in decision-making, reducing the scope for unconscious bias.
- Greater transparency, ensuring that all staff understand how policies apply to them and how decisions are made.
- Improved compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and associated case law, reducing the risk of legal challenge.

### 3.6 *Workforce implications:*

- 3.6.1 Both revised policies provide a more structured, transparent, and supportive framework for managing absence and organisational change. This is expected to have a positive impact on employee morale, engagement, and retention, while also ensuring managers are better equipped to handle sensitive workforce issues consistently.

## 4. **Background Papers**

None