

## **Report to Staffing Committee**

**Report Title:** Employee Handbook Report

**Prepared by:** Hannah Bowden, Chief Executive

**Meeting Date:** 7<sup>th</sup> October 2025

**Status:** For information and action

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### **A. Employee Handbook**

The Employee Handbook has been updated and a copy is included with the meeting papers. The significant changes have been highlighted below including their justification.

#### **1. Key Principles**

##### **1.3 Ethical Conduct**

A bribery policy has been included. It outlines the definitions, whilst providing a clear guidance on the procedures against anti-bribery. Please amend those sections highlighted in yellow.

**1.4 Whistleblowing** - Amendments to paragraph 3 and the addition of paragraph 4.

#### **2. How We Do Things**

**2.4 Adverse Weather and Traffic Disruption** – addition of traffic disruption and delayed returns from holiday.

**2.8 Social Media Policy** - Updated policy in accordance with the guidance and regulations of the new duty of prevention, which employers are obligated to abide by in order to actively prevent harassment in the workplace.

#### **3. Absence**

**3.4 Sickness Absence - Sick Pay** - Full Green Book sick pay terms have been included here.

**3.11 Carer's Leave** – This is a new policy to reflect the new statutory right to one week's unpaid carer's leave from 6 April 2024.

Employees are able to take a week's leave in any 12-month period to care for, or arrange care for, a dependant with a long-term care need. This comes with various requirements and timeframes for notification, and the ability for the employer to postpone the leave in certain circumstances.

#### **4 Flexible Working**

**4.1 Flexible Working** - Updated policy to reflect the legal changes from 6 April 2024 to the right to request flexible working. In summary:

- It is now a day one right;
- Two requests are permitted in any 12-month period;
- The information required in the request has changed;
- The outcome of the process, including any appeal, must be communicated within two months;
- Employers can treat requests as withdrawn in certain circumstances;
- Employers will need to consult with employees before rejecting a request.

**4.2 Maternity Leave - Dismissal or Resignation** - As from 6 April 2024, employees who have notified their employer of their pregnancy, or are on, or have recently returned from, maternity/adoption/shared parental leave have a priority right to be offered any suitable alternative

vacancy in a redundancy situation. The priority right lasts for 18 months after the birth of the child/date of adoption placement. Before 6 April 2024, the priority right only applies to employees on maternity/adoption/shared parental leave.

**Enhanced Maternity Pay** – Additional wording following the green book principles.

**4.4 Paternity Leave** - Updated policy to reflect the legal changes as to the way in which statutory paternity leave can be taken. The changes apply to children whose expected week of childbirth is after 6 April or expected date of placement for adoption is on or after 6 April.

Namely, it allows:

- Leave of two weeks to be taken as separate one-week blocks rather than consecutively;
- Leave to be taken at any point within the first year after the birth/adoption;
- Shorter notice of 28 days prior to each period of leave in birth cases;
- Variation of the dates by giving 28 days' notice.

**4.9 Neonatal Care Leave** - Reflects the new statutory right for employees to take up to 12 weeks neonatal care leave and pay for babies born on or after 6 April 2025 who require specialist neonatal care. It comes with various requirements and timeframes for notification which are provided by Worknest in separate guidance notes.

**Interaction with other family leave** - From 6 April 2025, employees on neonatal care leave or who have returned to work from a period of at least six consecutive weeks of neonatal care leave and are within an additional protected period of 18 months from the child's date of birth or date of adoption placement (or date entered GB if adopting from overseas) have a priority right (along with others who have taken qualifying statutory family leave) to be offered any suitable alternative vacancy in a redundancy situation.

## **5. How We Resolve Issues**

Included a paragraph about recording of confidential meetings.

**5.3 Disciplinary Procedure – Definition of Gross Misconduct** – Additional examples included

## **6. Equal Opportunities, Diversity & Inclusion – Complete new section**

**6.1 – Bullying and Harassment** - Updated policy reflects the new mandatory legal duty, effective from 26 October 2024, on employers to take reasonable steps to actively prevent sexual harassment of their employees and the updated EHRC guidance on both sexual harassment and other forms of harassment. A failure to do so can result in an uplift of up to 25% to all (uncapped) compensation awarded to the worker under the discrimination legislation, not just to the compensation awarded for sexual harassment, if a claimant is successful in their sexual harassment claim. Workers can report concerns that their employer has breached the preventative duty directly to the EHRC (although they should first consider raising them with their employer/trade union). The EHRC can also take separate enforcement action outside of any litigation.

Compliance with the EHRC guidance may assist employers in showing that they have complied with this new, proactive, duty and help establish a “reasonable steps” defence to a claim under the discrimination legislation. You may want to undertake the risk assessment first (see below) and then produce a more tailored policy. To comply with this duty, employers will need to show that they have provided meaningful training to all staff and managers (as referred to in the Equal Opportunities Statement in section 6.1).

### **6.3 Bullying and Harassment**

This updated policy reflects the new mandatory legal duty, effective from 26 October 2024, on employers to take reasonable steps to actively prevent sexual harassment of their employees and the updated EHRC guidance on both sexual harassment and other forms of harassment. A failure to do so can result in an uplift of up to 25% to all (uncapped) compensation awarded to the worker under the discrimination legislation, not just to the compensation awarded for sexual harassment, if a claimant is successful in their sexual harassment claim. Workers can report concerns that their

employer has breached the preventative duty directly to the EHRC (although they should first consider raising them with their employer/trade union). The EHRC can also take separate enforcement action outside of any litigation.

**Officers will be conducting a risk assessment on other harassment as per the policy.**

### **Recommendations**

For the committee to adopt the updated Employee Handbook and for this to be implemented from the date adopted.

### **Implications**

**Financial:** Low

**Environmental:** Low

**Legal:** High – compliance alignment.