

Probation Policy



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Probation Policy and Procedure

Introduction

The Probation Policy ensures that all new employees receive appropriate support and guidance during their probationary period. This period allows both the Council and the employee with an opportunity to assess suitability for the role in a fair and structured manner.

All new employees will have a probationary period, as outlined in their employment contract, including its duration and any related conditions. The Council is committed to supporting new starters throughout this time to help them succeed.

Purpose

This policy ensures a fair, structured and supportive process during the probationary period so that employees understand expectations, receive timely feedback and support, and the Council can make an informed, timely decision on suitability for the role. Managers must use this policy to monitor and document performance, conduct and attendance, addressing issues early and proportionately.

The probationary period provides as an opportunity to:

- Ensure new employees understand and meet the requirements of their role
- Enable employees to contribute effectively to the organisation
- Confirm that required standards are achieved within an appropriate timeframe

Commitment to Fairness and Equality

The Council is committed to promoting equal employment opportunities and preventing unlawful discrimination. We strive to maintain a workplace free from harassment and bullying, fostering dignity and respect for all. As an equal opportunities' employer, the Council ensures that both employees and prospective employees are treated equitably and fairly at every stage of employment.

Scope

This policy applies to all new Council employees, whether fixed-term, permanent, full-time, or part-time. Employees with continuous local government service may be exempt from a new probation unless a prior probationary period remains incomplete and is carried over.

The policy does not apply to agency workers or those engaged via a third-party arrangement.

The probationary period will assess the employee's performance, conduct, and overall suitability for the role. Any concerns, including alleged misconduct during probation will be managed in accordance with the Council's relevant policies and procedures.

Supporting Documents

- Absence and Sickness Management Policy
- Code of Conduct for Council Employees
- Disciplinary Policy
- Supporting Your Performance Policy

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1. Key Responsibilities under this Policy

Employees

1.1 It is the responsibility of all employees to:

- Understand the expectations during their probationary period, including job outputs and performance standards.
- Document timely evidence of progress against objectives.
- Inform their People Manager of any support or training needed to perform effectively, where needed.

People Managers

1.2 It is the responsibility of all People Managers to:

- Implement this policy and procedure fairly and consistently.
- Monitor and record employee performance and progress throughout the probationary period.
- Ensure employees complete induction and mandatory corporate training.
- Clearly communicating expectations and setting SMART objectives from the outset.
- Hold monthly one-to-one meetings to provide feedback, raise concerns, and document progress.
- Provide support, training, and development opportunities.
- Appoint a buddy/mentor where appropriate.
- Seek HR Guidance when concerns arise
- Consider reasonable adjustments.

PSPS Human Resources Team

1.3 It is the responsibility of the HR Team to:

- Monitor and review the effectiveness of this policy.
- Provide guidance to managers and employees to ensure consistent application.
- Support managers with probation monitoring, exceptional extensions, and potential terminations.
- Advise on reasonable adjustments and equality-related matters.

2. Principles

2.1 All new employees will complete a **four-month probationary period**, starting from the first day of employment

2.2 **Employment decisions must be confirmed before the employee's six-month service date. Probation cannot exceed this timeframe under any circumstances.**

- 2.3 Extensions are exceptional, must be short (normally up to 4 weeks) and narrowly defined, and may only be used where improvement is realistically achievable within that short period and where both the extension and the Extension Outcome Meeting can be completed before the employee's six-month service date. Where fewer than 4 weeks remain, the extension length is capped by the time remaining.
- 2.4 Extensions must be agreed with HR before being discussed with the employee.
- 2.5 People Managers must provide support, early feedback, and timely review points.
- 2.6 The probationary process is a two-way, transparent approach that encourages open discussion of achievements, concerns, and areas requiring support. Any issues should be raised promptly to allow time for improvement.
- 2.7 People Managers are responsible for providing the necessary training, tools, and guidance to help employees meet the required standards. This may include internal shadowing, training courses, external programmes, and on-the-job learning.
- 2.8 Monthly one-to-one meetings will be held to support employees with their new role. They will be an opportunity to review performance, conduct, timekeeping, attendance, and alignment with the Council's values and behaviours. These meetings are in addition to day-to-day management and should be documented digitally.
- 2.9 Early identification and support for underperformance are key to helping employees meet expectations within the probationary timeframe. Managers should work with employees to understand any underlying issues affecting performance, conduct, or attendance.
- 2.10 Employees with continuous service transferring internally will not normally undergo new probation unless their previous probation was incomplete.
- 2.11 Both the employee and People Manager share responsibility for ensuring review meetings are completed in line with this policy. While timescales may be affected by external factors (e.g., training availability), the focus remains on ensuring the employee has the support needed to succeed.

3. Objective Setting

- 3.1 During the first week of employment, the People Manager will meet with the new employee to establish clear and measurable objectives. These objectives should be **SMART**—Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound—and tailored to the role.
- 3.2 The purpose of setting objectives is to provide the new employee with clarity on priorities and expectations, helping the employee to understand what success looks like in their new role. The objectives create a structured framework to monitor progress and identify development needs early.
- 3.3 For new starters, objectives should focus on:
 - Role Familiarisation: understanding key responsibilities, systems and processes

- Integration: building relationships with colleagues and adapting to team culture
- Learning & Development: completing essential training and gaining knowledge required for the role.
- Early Deliverables: Achieving initial tasks or duties that demonstrate capability and confidence

3.4 Objectives should align with the Council’s values and behaviours and be reviewed regularly throughout the probationary period.

4. Absence During the Probation Period

4.1 Where attendance issues arise during the probationary period, appropriate support will be provided to help the employee improve. However, if attendance continues to impact performance or overall suitability for the role, the employee may be invited to a probation review or hearing to consider next steps.

5. Required Reviews & Decision Points

5.1 Where, at a formal probation review, dismissal is a potential outcome, the meeting will be conducted as a formal meeting. The employee will be given reasonable written notice, advised of the concerns and the potential outcome, and reminded of their right to be accompanied. HR advice will be sought prior to the meeting.

5.2 The probation process contains fixed decision points at Month 2 and Month 4 (Final Review). Month 6 is not a standard review stage; it is only the conclusion of any exceptional extension window.

Review Stage	Timing	Purpose	Decision Options
Objective setting	Week 1	Clarify role, responsibilities, and performance expectations.	
First Month Review (Informal – 1:1)	End of Month 1	Assess early performance, integration, and identify support needs.	
Formal Probation Review – First	End of Month 2	Structured performance review with documented feedback.	Satisfactory; Improvement plan required; Early escalation for serious concerns.
Final Review (Conclusion of 4-month probation)	End of Month 4	Mandatory final decision point. Assess whether standards are met and confirm outcome.	Pass; Apply exceptional extension; End employment; Escalate to Probation Hearing.

Review Process Guidelines

- 5.3 Week 1: Clarify role and expectations; set SMART objectives; agree initial support.
- 5.4 End Month 1: Informal 1:1 to review early performance and integration; identify immediate support.
- 5.5 End Month 2 (Mandatory): Provide structured feedback; confirm gaps, improvements required, standards and timeframes. Record on the HR Portal.
- 5.6 End Month 4 – Final Review (Mandatory): The manager must make the final employment decision:
 - Confirm appointment; or
 - Apply a short, exceptional extension (only where realistic improvement is achievable, and time allows completion before the six-month service date); or
 - End employment; or
 - Escalate to a Probation Hearing.

The decision and rationale must be documented on the HR Portal and communicated to the employee. Where dismissal is a potential outcome, the review meeting will be conducted as a formal meeting. A separate Probation Hearing is not required unless HR advises that escalation is necessary due to the complexity or risk of the case.

- 5.7 Operational cap on extensions: If fewer than 4 weeks remain before the six-month service date, any extension is limited to the time remaining. Where no time remains, an extension cannot be used.
- 5.8 Managers should assess quality and speed of work, attitude and motivation, conduct, attendance and timekeeping, and any training or wellbeing needs. Concerns should be raised promptly rather than saved for reviews.

Ability to End Employment at Any Review Stage

- 5.9 At a formal review stage (Month 2 or Month 4 Final Review), if evidence shows that the employee is not meeting the required standards, and the concerns are sufficiently serious, sustained or fundamental, employment may be ended at that review.
- 5.10 Decisions must:
 - Be based on clear documented evidence of underperformance, conduct or capability concerns;
 - Demonstrate that the employee has been given reasonable opportunity and support to improve;
 - Be taken only following consultation with HR;

Where dismissal is a potential outcome, be confirmed as a formal meeting This ensures managers can act proportionately and avoid unnecessarily prolonging employment where there is no realistic prospect of improvement.

Pull-Forward Review Hearing

5.11 Where concerns arise between scheduled formal review points, managers may convene a Pull-Forward Review Hearing for example, where;

- Concerns have deteriorated significantly
- New information indicates suitability concerns
- There are repeated failures to engage with support
- Service or compliance risks increase

Possible outcomes:

- End employment
- Allow probation to continue with tightened objectives
- Progress to a full Probation Hearing

5.12 Where dismissal is a potential outcome, a Pull-Forward Review Hearing will be conducted as a formal meeting, including written notice, clarity of concerns and potential outcomes, the right to be accompanied, and prior consultation with HR. HR must be consulted before issuing an invite.

5.13 The employee retains the right to be accompanied.

6. Formal Probation Reviews

6.1 Formal reviews are essential checkpoints in the probationary process. Month 2 and Month 4 (Final Review) are mandatory decision points.

First Review (Month 2)

6.2 The Month 2 review is a formal decision point at which the manager must determine whether the employee is:

- Meeting expectations,
- Requiring an improvement plan, or
- Presenting concerns serious enough to trigger early escalation.

6.3 The review must be documented on the HR Portal and communicated to the employee. The manager must clearly record:

- Identified gaps
- Required improvements
- Expected standards
- Timeframes for improvement

Final Review (Month 4) (Mandatory and Concluding Decision Point)

6.4 At Month 4 the manager must make the final employment decision:

- Confirm appointment,

- Apply an exceptional, short extension, only with HR agreement and only where there is sufficient time to complete the extension and hold the Extension Outcome Meeting before the six-month service date);or
- End employment at the review, or
- Escalate to a Probation Hearing.

6.5 Where dismissal or extension is being considered:

- HR must be consulted before the meeting,
- The employee must receive written notice (minimum 5 working days),
- The meeting will be conducted as a formal meeting with the right to be accompanied.

6.6 If an extension is applied at Month 4, the manager must schedule an Extension Outcome Meeting to occur before the employee's six-month service date. The Extension Outcome Meeting confirms the final decision (confirm appointment or end employment; escalation to a Probation Hearing may be used where time allows and HR advises).

6.7 Possible Outcomes across Month 2 and Month 4:

- Successful completion (Month 4 only): Appointment confirmed.
- Improvement required: Continue probation with a clear improvement plan.
- Exceptional extension: Only where short, tightly defined and realistically achievable.
- End employment at the review: Where concerns are sufficiently serious, sustained or fundamental.
- Escalate to a Review Hearing or Probation Hearing: Where concerns require formal consideration

6.8 Where dismissal is appropriate, the manager may end employment without the need for a separate Probation Hearing, provided HR has been consulted and the decision is taken following a formal meeting with employees being given the right to be accompanied.

A Probation Hearing, which includes HR presence will only be used where escalation is appropriate due to the seriousness or complexity of the concerns.

6.9 **Employment cannot continue beyond six months under any circumstances.**

7. Exceptional Extensions

7.1 An extension does not extend the total length of probation. The six-month limit is fixed. Extensions only extend the decision period within that fixed timeframe. They provide a

short, focused window for improvement, but the Final Review must still take place before the employee reaches six months' service.

7.2 Extensions are not routine and may only be used after the Month 4 Final Review where:

- The employee has shown meaningful partial progress, and
- Improvement is genuinely considered achievable in a short, additional period, and
- There is sufficient time to complete the extension and the Extension Outcome Meeting before the six-month service date; and
- The reason for needing extra time is not due to lack of effort or engagement (e.g., unavoidable absence affecting assessment, delayed training).

7.3 Extensions must be **short, normally no more than 4 weeks**, and only where strictly necessary to complete assessment. Where fewer than 4 weeks remain before the six-month service date, the extension is capped by the time remaining. Where no time remains, an extension cannot be used.

7.4 HR approval is mandatory before proposing an extension.

7.5 Objectives for the extended period must be clear, time-bound, and realistically achievable within the short timeframe.

7.6 A formal midpoint review must occur during the extension to assess progress and determine if escalation to a hearing is required.

7.7 Following the extension, the manager must hold an Extension Outcome Meeting before the six-month service date to confirm the final decision. Possible outcomes are:

- confirm appointment;
- end employment; or
- escalate to a Probation Hearing (where time allows and HR advises).

7.8 The meeting must;

- Be formally invited with appropriate notice;
- Allow the employee to be accompanied by a trade union representative or workplace colleague;
- Be followed by written confirmation of the decision.

7.9 Under no circumstances can employment continue beyond six months without a confirmed outcome.

8. Probation Hearing

8.1 A Probation Hearing will be convened only where dismissal is being considered in a complex, sensitive, disputed, or higher-risk case, and where escalation beyond the Month 4 Final Review is appropriate to ensure procedural fairness (e.g., independent chair, contested evidence, serious conduct/safeguarding, potential bias concerns). A hearing may be arranged at any point during the 4-month probation or any

post-Month-4 extension window, provided there is sufficient time to conclude the process before the employee's six-month service date and HR has been consulted.

8.2 The hearing will be chaired by an independent manager with the authority to dismiss who has not previously been involved in the case. HR will attend to advise. The People Manager will attend to present a concise summary of the probation period and the evidence relied upon. The employee has the right to be accompanied by a trade union representative or workplace colleague.

8.3 The employee will receive a written invite setting out:

- The nature of the concerns and the potential outcome (including dismissal).
- The date, time, location/format, and their right to be accompanied.
- The evidence bundle (e.g., objectives, one-to-ones, review notes, support provided, performance data, any relevant conduct/attendance records).
- Any witnesses the Council intends to call (where applicable).

A reasonable period of notice must be given to allow the employee to prepare.

8.4 At the hearing, the chair will:

- Review the employee's performance, capability, conduct and overall suitability for the role with reference to the documented evidence and support provided.
- Hear the People Manager's summary and any witness evidence (where relevant).
- Invite the employee and/or their companion to respond and present any relevant information or mitigation.
- Consider whether the concerns are sufficiently serious, sustained or fundamental to justify dismissal, or whether a lesser outcome is appropriate.

8.5 Possible outcomes include:

- Dismissal (employment ends; outcome confirmed in writing).
- Continue employment (e.g., confirm appointment, or continue the extension already in place with tightened objectives) only where time allows completion and a final decision before the six-month service date.
- No further action (rare).

8.6 The chair may exceptionally endorse a short extension only where time remains before the six-month service date, objectives are tightly defined and realistically achievable, and HR agrees. An Extension Outcome Meeting must then be scheduled to confirm the final decision before the six-month service date.

8.7 If dismissal is the outcome, the employee will be informed promptly and provided with written confirmation setting out:

- The reasons for dismissal;
- The termination date and any notice (in accordance with the contract of employment);
- The right of appeal and the timeframe for lodging an appeal.

8.8 All documentation (invite, evidence bundle, notes, outcome letter) will be retained on the employee's HR file in accordance with data protection requirements.

9. Appeal Process

9.1 An employee has the right to appeal against an outcome of dismissal at a Probation Hearing and dismissals at review meetings.

9.2 An appeal must be submitted to HR, clearly stating the grounds for appeal.

9.3 The appeal should be submitted within 10 working days from receipt of the decision letter.

9.4 Appeals will normally be heard as soon as reasonably practicable.

9.5 The appeal will be heard by a manager acting as chair that has not previously been involved in the case. HR will attend to provide advice and guidance.

9.6 The Chair will notify the employee of the hearing date and ensure all relevant documentation is shared in advance.

9.7 The purpose of the Appeal Hearing is to determine:

- Whether the decision reached at the Probation Hearing was procedurally fair
- Whether the decision was reasonable based on the evidence available
- Whether any new, relevant evidence or mitigating circumstances should be considered

9.8 The Appeal Panel will review the findings of the Probation Hearing / Review Meeting (whichever is appropriate) and reach a decision to uphold, amend, or overturn the dismissal decision.

9.9 There is only one stage of appeal. The outcome of the Appeal Hearing will be confirmed in writing as soon as reasonably practicable.

10. Data Protection

10.1 The Council processes personal data in accordance with its Data Protection policy. Data collected is held securely and accessed by, and disclosed to, individuals only for the purposes of managing the recruitment exercise effectively to decide to whom to offer the job. Inappropriate access or disclosure of job applicant data constitutes a data

breach and should be reported in accordance with the Council's Data Protection policy immediately.