

Title of Report: A Revised Employee Relations Framework

Key Decision - Is it likely to result in spending or saving £250k or more, or to have a significant effect on two or more electoral wards?	Not applicable
Key Decision - Is it in the Council's Forward Plan (key decisions and private reports?)	Not applicable
The Decision - Is it eligible for call in by Scrutiny?	No
Date signed off by <u>Strategic Director</u> & name	Rachel Spencer-Henshall, Strategic Director Corporate Strategy, Commissioning and Public Health
Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance	Eamonn Croston
Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning Support?	Julie Muscroft
Cabinet member portfolio	Councillor G Turner

Electoral wards affected: Not Applicable

Ward councillors consulted: Not Applicable

Public or private: Public

1.0 Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Council on the revised Employee Relations (ER) Framework; it is also to seek approval to make a constitutional amendment to delete the ER Sub-Committee.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The previous ER Framework (known as the IR Strategy Framework) was agreed in March 2017 and is attached for information at Appendix 1.
- 2.2 Following the appointment of a new Head of People Services in February 2018, a review of the ER Framework was undertaken, with views sought from trade union colleagues, managers and staff within People Services on the effectiveness of that framework. Feedback highlighted that the framework was complex and not easy to navigate, which led to confusion about where consultation and negotiation should properly take place; feedback also highlighted that there was a lack of clarity about the route for decision-making within the framework.

2.3 As a result of this, a review of the framework was undertaken and a revised framework was jointly developed by management from People Services, trade union colleagues (representing support staff and teaching staff) and the portfolio holder for HR matters. This revised framework is based upon a standard model that is in place across a range of other local authorities.

3.0 Key issues

3.1 The revised ER Framework is attached at Appendix 2. The new framework is modern and transparent, clearly setting out the arrangements for engagement with trade unions at a local, directorate and corporate level. It also provides clarity on:

- Where consultation takes place;
- Where negotiation takes place;
- Where decision making takes place;
- How disputes should be escalated and resolved.

3.2 The framework also provides clarity on the scope of attendees at each meeting, the minimum frequency of those meetings and, most importantly, terms of reference for each meeting, along with standard agendas and a requirement for formal minutes to be taken. This ensures that there is a clear and consistent approach to our engagement with trade union colleagues across the organisation (including schools) and gives transparency around decision-making.

3.3 In terms of dispute resolution, the new framework allows for workplace issues to continue to be managed at a local level with a clear escalation route for unresolved issues to be raised at a formal directorate meeting, chaired by the Strategic Director, a corporate meeting, chaired by the portfolio holder for HR matters and ultimately to the relevant Joint Secretaries for resolution. Implementation of any associated resolution is then delegated back to the appropriate Strategic Director. The new framework therefore sets out a clear pathway for dispute resolution and negates the requirement for a formally constituted ER Sub-Committee, which formed part of the previous framework.

3.4 The spirit of the new framework is one of inclusion and working collaboratively with trade unions colleagues; it is not one rooted in conflict. This is evidenced by the inclusion of teaching and non-teaching unions in the agreement and also by the use of joint working groups to work collaboratively on pieces of work such as policy development and terms and conditions reviews. These were not features of the previous framework.

3.5 The agreement has been accepted by all trade union colleagues, including the teaching unions and by the Head of People Services.

3.6 We are currently in the process of transitioning to the new framework and have convened a number of initial JCG meetings at a directorate level, with meetings scheduled as per Appendix 3. Early feedback is that the meetings are positive and welcomed by all parties.

3.7 Outside the formal framework, the Head of People Services continues to meet on a monthly basis with trade union colleagues to share information, resolve any issues at

the lowest level and plan any additional agenda items for the formal meetings. These meetings are known as 'Workforce Matters' meetings.

- 3.8 There is a commitment to jointly review the effectiveness of the new framework after 12 months.

4.0 Impact of the Revised ER Framework

- 4.1 The aim of the revised framework is to improve engagement and relationships with the trade unions across the organisation and to resolve conflict at the lowest level and in a constructive and transparent way.
- 4.2 As a result of the changes, there is a requirement to make some constitutional amendments as there will no longer be a need for the ER Sub-Committee.

5.0 Relationship to the Corporate Plan

- 5.1 The principles of our Corporate Plan are integral to this new framework; in particular, the spirit of the framework is based upon working together, with a common sense of purpose and values.
- 5.2 The new framework also supports us to achieve our shared outcome of working smartly to be efficient and effective.

6.0 Recommendations

- 6.1 This report has been considered by Personnel Committee on 1st July 2019 and by Corporate Governance & Audit Committee on 5th July 2019; both committees support the new ER Framework and recommend that Council approves the constitutional amendment with regard to the deletion of the ER Sub-Committee.

Report Sponsor: Rachel Spencer-Henshall Strategic Director – Strategy, Commissioning & Public Health	Contact Officer: Deborah Lucas Head of People Services
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