Corporate Services
Human Resources & Organisational Development

Probation Policy

TBC

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1. Introduction

It is recognised that a supportive and developmental probation period is necessary in providing the appropriate level of support and training for new employees upon commencement of their employment with the Council.

The Council is committed to promoting a positive working environment where the dignity and respect, to which all employees are entitled, is not undermined. In this respect, the probation process must be objective, clear, transparent, and free from discrimination.

Managers and employees will familiarise themselves with the probation policy and relevant supplementary documentation such as the job profile, Performance Development Review (PDR) process, and the Council Values to ensure that they are aware of the expected standards of performance and conduct.

2. Purpose and Scope

All Council employees are required to satisfactorily complete a four month probation period. The probation period includes employees who have been recruited to posts from another local authority.

Employees who have successfully passed probation in one role at the Council who then move into a different role will not be subject to a further formal probation process in their new role. It will still be necessary to ensure that an effective induction for the new employee is carried out, that objectives are set, and their performance is reviewed in accordance with the PDR process.

The aim of this Probation Policy is to set a clear framework for managers on assessing the performance and conduct of new employees, and to provide any necessary support if needed. The policy is intended to help new employees settle in, be enabled to work, fulfill their responsibilities and be successful in their new role.

There may be variations to the monitoring periods of employees who have additional professional requirements and who are appointed under terms and conditions for specific roles, such as a Newly Qualified Social Worker.

Teachers are required to undergo a two-year Early Career Teacher (ECT) induction period, which includes comprehensive training and support to ensure they meet the professional standards.

Those Teachers in their Early Career Teacher (ECT) period and who have completed a probation period and meet the council's criteria, are exempt from the standard Probation Policy.

This policy does not apply to those employees engaged on a casual or zero hours contract.

3. Duties and Responsibilities

Probation review meetings will need to be carried out when the employee has completed period of three and four months within their substantive role. There may be further review meetings held for employees who have additional professional qualifications such as Newly Qualified Social Workers.

The duties and responsibilities of all parties have been set out below. However, should you be unsure of any advice set out in the process you are advised to contact the HR Consultancy Team, for further information in relation to specific cases.

3.1 Managers

Managers are expected to conduct regular one-to-one meetings throughout the employee's probation period. These meetings are an important part of the probation process as they provide both the manager and employee the opportunity to meet regularly to discuss the employee's work performance, achievements, and where required areas for improvement.

The Council expects the majority of its new employees to progress effectively and in a timely manner through its Probation Policy. However, it is recognised that even with the highest standards of recruitment, selection, and induction there may be situations where new employees are not able to achieve the standards expected and required of their new role.

Where a new employee is not meeting the expected standards, managers will explain the shortcomings and the employee will be given an opportunity to make the necessary improvement(s) within a defined period.

In the management of this policy, managers should consider the individual needs of the employee either via informal conversation and/or meeting, or occupational health where the employee may be subject to the Equality Act 2010, to identify if any reasonable adjustments may be required to support in the undertaking of the role.

Consideration should be given to ensure all new entrants to the Council complete a robust induction process, as this will aid the employee to understand the Council

context, ways of working, alongside supporting employees to clearly understand the expectations on their conduct, attitude, behaviour, and the culture of the organisation.

Managers are responsible for ensuring the Probation Policy is managed effectively, proactively and in a timely manner. It is the responsibility of the manager to ensure that meetings are held, documentation is kept up to date and retained, and staff are supported. Should any issues arise within the probation period, it would be advisable to speak with the HR Consultancy Team, who may request to review any associated documentation to ensure adherence to the policy.

3.2 Employees

Employees have a responsibility to read, review and engage with the Probation Policy to create an awareness of the Councils values, ethics, and expectations.

Under the policy, employees are required to attend meetings and review any associated documentation, alongside completing the induction process and e-learning.

It is within the employee's personal responsibility to engage effectively with their line manager and service teams, raising any training, development, or support needs with their line manager at the earliest possible convenience as this will allow for an efficient review of any associated support requirements.

4. Commencement of Employment

In the first few days of employment, the employee should be inducted into the Council and informed what is expected of them, this will include :

- Information on the Council Corporate Induction and also any local induction.
- Step by step guidance and instruction from the 'Onboarding and Induction Checklist' available on the intranet.
- Schedule time to enrol and complete mandatory e-learning and any additional training i.e. statutory training elements.
- Shown the mandatory and important corporate and directorate policies and procedures including Council's Code of Conduct.
- The expected standards of attendance and timekeeping (sharing links to the Working Location Policy.
- To set role and performance expectations alongside standards of behaviour, conduct and responsibilities (sharing a copy of the job profile).
- An explanation of the purpose and nature of the Probation Policy.

- Where the employee has declared a disability and or requires additional support, occupational health guidance should be sought on what constitutes a reasonable adjustment in line with the Equality Act 2010.

The performance of the probationary employee should be continuously monitored and appraised, recorded on the Review Form for Employees on Probationary Employment.

Consideration may be given to the needs of individual services, who may wish to draw up a check list applicable to their own needs to assist in identifying some of the common or essential areas for consideration.

The Performance Development Review (PDR) process should be enacted following the successful completion of the probation period.

At all stages of this policy the employee should be aware where they are within the management of the policy. As part of their induction, the employee will be provided with the details of where to review the policy, to aid in their understanding of the policy they are subject to.

4.1 Stage One – Month Three

In all cases, there should be a formal review before the end of the third month with the employee invited by letter.

This should take the form of a formal meeting with the employee concerned, the purpose of which, is to let the employee know how they are progressing, review any learning, support and or requirements in the engagement of effective performance.

The outcome of the meeting should be documented on the associated form with a further review meeting scheduled as defined within the policy. The form should then be shared with the employee to review, sign, and return to the line manager for retention on the employee's file.

The employee should be informed of good performance, best practice guidance suggests that a probation period is more likely to be successful where the new recruit has been given plenty of opportunity to ask questions and raise any concerns they may have about their work or working environment. It is worth noting that entering a new job can be daunting and as such new entrants may not feel comfortable asking questions, to that end it is beneficial to ensure that the meeting is a two-way process.

Where the meeting draws attention to areas of unsatisfactory performance, attention should be drawn to those areas of their work where it is felt that improvements are necessary - especially the areas where, unless there is an improvement, the

appointment could not be confirmed. In such circumstances, it is important that they are given details and reasons as to why their work performance is below the required standard, and consideration could be given to setting time limits within which improvements should be made. Consideration may also need to be given to extra support in the form of training and closer supervision and the employee should be granted an opportunity to state their reasons/views.

There should be consideration at the meeting to the use of SMART targets, these are goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, and timely. By reviewing the job profile with the employee, and identifying areas of concern, a framework should then be created using the above, documented and reviewed with the aim of supporting improvement.

If the performance of the probationary employee is giving cause for concern the invitation letter should indicate the purpose of the meeting, giving an indication of the areas of work which fall below the required standards and recommend that the employee be accompanied, if they choose to do so, by a trade union representative or other work colleague.

It is the Line Manager's responsibility to collate evidence of the support and intervention in place; a document of information should be collated for review by the HR Consultancy Team which include:

- The job profile
- Supervision documentation
- The completed probationary review form
- Any documentation pertaining to support, training, or intervention
- Occupational health information and advice
- Issues arising with sickness absence, sickness dates, return to work meeting notes and any invite/outcome letters of sickness stage meetings should also be provided

At the conclusion of the review, the performance issues should have been clearly communicated and along with the improvement required by month four, any support or intervention to assist improvement should have been agreed. The employee should be aware of the consequences if the required standards/improvements are not achieved.

4.2 Stage Two – Month Four

A formal invitation should be issued to the employee inviting them to the review meeting and areas for discussion at this interview should be recorded on the Review Form for Employees on Probationary Employment.

In all cases, a decision on the overall suitability of the probationary employee will need to be made before the end of the four months of service and a decision by the Line Manager made as to whether the appointment should be confirmed.

The manager should discuss with the employee whether they have met the required standards of the post during the probation period.

There are three possible outcomes relating to the formal interview for the end of the fourth month:

- Satisfactory completion of probation period
- Extension to the probation period
- Unsuccessful probationary period

The outcome of the final review meeting will be confirmed in writing by the manager.

4.2.1 Satisfactory Completion of the Probation Period

The manager will inform the employee that they have satisfactorily met the required standards to complete their probationary period and will issue an outcome letter confirming appointment.

The manager will ensure that from this point, regular supervision meetings take place, and the PDR process is engaged to ensure that employee performance continues to be appropriately managed.

4.2.2 Extensions to the Probation Period

Where a manager identifies that there has been some improvement in the employee's performance discussed in Stage One, but their performance has still fallen short of the agreed improvement timescale, a decision will be made on whether to extend the probation period up to a further month.

A probation period may be extended for up to one month, depending upon the circumstances of each individual case, and during this period a time should be agreed for a further review to be held. The manager must contact the HR Consultancy team for advice prior to extending the probation period.

Where the probation period has been extended, the manager will explain to the employee at the final review, the reasons for the extension, agree an action plan and continue to have regular reviews with them detailing the additional support that will be given throughout the review process to enable them to reach the required standard.

The employee must be advised that if they fail to improve to the required standards during the extension period, their employment may not be confirmed.

At the end of the extended probation period, a final meeting should take place as in stage two above.

At any meetings between management and the employee to discuss the probationary service, the employee may be represented by his or her trade union representative or other work colleague.

Provided the policy was followed during the extended period of probationary service, then, if the appointment is not confirmed at the end of this period, there would be no further right of appeal.

Further advice may be given by the HR Consultancy Team.

4.2.3 Unsuccessful Probation

Where the employee's performance has remained unsatisfactory and it is considered that further training or support would not lead to the reaching or maintaining the required standard, the manager will recommend that the employees' employment will not be confirmed. If the decision is not to recommend the confirmation of the appointment, the reasons should be discussed and confirmed with the Service Director (who can delegate authority in alignment with the disciplinary process) and recorded on the Review Form for Employees on Probationary Employment.

Where it is decided that the appointment will not be confirmed, a letter should be sent to the employee concerned, inviting them to a hearing and an indication again given of the areas where they have failed to meet the standards required. The employee should be notified in writing 7 calendar days prior to the date of the hearing and will be reminded of their right to be accompanied at the hearing by either a trade union representative or other work colleague.

At this hearing, reference should be made to previous discussions where the areas and reasons why their work performance were below the required standard were explained, and they should be given full reasons as to why it is not intended to confirm the appointment. The employee and their representative should be granted the opportunity to state their case in relation to this matter.

The decision not to confirm an appointment should be communicated to the individual concerned in writing by the appropriate level manager (as outlined in the Disciplinary Policy).

4.2.4 Cause for Concern

In the course of the probation period where an employee fundamentally breaches the Council Code of Conduct by way of gross misconduct, this will be managed as per section three of the Councils Statement of Terms and Particulars of Employment, in which the Probation Policy will take precedence over the Councils Disciplinary Policy.

Where there is a reasonable belief that the employee is answerable of gross misconduct, a cause for concern meeting will be arranged with the appropriate level of management (as set out in the delegated authority document which is depicted in the Council's Disciplinary Policy).

Where in exceptional circumstances there is a requirement to hold a cause for concern meeting, a letter should be sent to the employee concerned, inviting them to a meeting (providing reasonable notice). The purpose of the meeting should be clearly set out within the invitation letter; this should explain to the employee the reason(s) of unsatisfactory conduct/standards. The employee should also be informed of their right to be represented at this meeting by a trade union representative or other work colleague.

The employee should be notified that the meeting will be an opportunity for a discussion regarding the issues that have occurred, any mitigation, and where appropriate, any support and assistance that may be required. A decision will then be made in respect of the employees' future employment with the Council, a potential outcome of which may be non-confirmation of appointment (dismissal due to unsuccessful probation period).

5. Right of Appeal

Following non confirmation of appointment, an employee would have the right of appeal against the decision if the policy above had not been followed i.e., if there had not been a formal review at which the employee concerned had been made clearly aware that a failure to improve in certain areas would result in the appointment not being confirmed or where it is believed that the reason for the dismissal was inherently unfair. Such an appeal would be to Employment Appeal Panel and should be submitted in writing, clearly setting out the grounds of appeal, to the Service Director, Human Resources & Organisational Development within 7 calendar days of receipt of the letter setting out the decision not to confirm the appointment. The appeal hearing should be arranged, wherever possible, within 14 days of receipt of the appeal. The decision of the Employment Appeal Panel is final.

Revision Tracker:

Date Revised	Date Approved	Summary of Changes	Author
September 2026			Emily Danylkiw, HR Policy & Compliance Lead
March 2025	March 2025	Updated document with changes so that probationary periods apply to all new employees to the Council. Additional clarification on the process with details for managers and employees on their responsibilities. Also includes details on the probationary process for Teachers	Leanne Winder, Snr HR Consultant.
24/11/2022	24/11/2020	Document put in new template	Emily Searle
Dec 2020	Dec 2020	Revised	
June 2016	June 2016	Revised	