

Classification

Item No.

Open

Meeting:	Employment Panel
Meeting date:	20th July 2026
Title of report:	Workforce Policy Review
Report by:	Cllr. Sean Thorpe, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services
Decision Type:	
Ward(s) to which report relates	All

Executive Summary:

A key component of the Council's HR improvement and modernisation programme is the review of core HR systems, processes and policies to ensure they are fit for purpose, reflective of modern HR practice and align with the organisational culture described by the LET'S values.

This report sets out proposals for a number of new, changed, reviewed and replaced policies. Trade Union colleagues have been fully engaged in this work.

Recommendation(s)

That the Employment Panel agrees the following documents:

1. A new Leave Policy
2. A new Flexible Retirement Policy
3. An updated Salary Loans procedure
4. A revised Time Off for Reservists Policy
5. An updated Facilities Time Policy
6. A new Dignity at Work Policy
7. A revised Grievance Procedure
8. A revised Flexible Working Policy (revised following June Employment Panel)
9. Briefing Note – Equality Staff Networks

The documents will then go for endorsement to the Council's Corporate Joint Consultative Committee on 21st July 2026 and subject to approval will then be published on the Council's intranet pages and communicated to staff.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

1. Leave Policy

Background

Currently, the Council has a number of different policies and documents in place which cover the various types of leave:

- Annual leave FAQ document - last updated in January 2025
- Bank holiday guidance notes – last updated in 2012
- Special Leave guidance notes - last updated in June 2018
- Flexi-time – currently appendix J of the Local Conditions of Service - last updated in September 2021
- TOIL guidelines - last updated in May 2015

Policy Headlines

This policy brings together, in a single easy to understand document, the main provisions relating to employee leave, including annual leave, bank holidays, special leave, flexi-time and time off in lieu (TOIL). The existing documents listed above will be withdrawn. Other types of leave that are referred to in the Local Conditions (Section 4) are also referenced, so they can be found if further information is needed.

The policy has been developed to support a modern, flexible, and agile workforce, recognising the changing ways of working, particularly since COVID and the introduction of working in a more agile way. It reflects the Council's commitment to promoting employee wellbeing, enabling a healthy work-life balance, and supporting flexible working arrangements.

The Council's service needs and operational requirements remain the overall priority. All leave arrangements are subject to these requirements, ensuring that services are effectively delivered and that services are appropriately resourced to meet requirements.

The following changes/adjustments have been made to existing practices:

Annual leave

- If requesting a period of 3-weeks or more requires additional approval from the relevant Head of Service or equivalent. This is following a number of queries HR receive from Managers when employees request a longer period of leave
- Stating how annual leave should be booked to ensure iTrent is kept up to date and relevant. There have been instances where leave may not be recorded, resulting in an inaccurate record.
- Stating when employees have until to take any banked leave they may have

Special leave

- Including special leave may be granted in circumstances where an employee is affected by domestic abuse or domestic violence, in line with organisational support arrangements. This is following a discussion at JCC in December 2025.
- A more detailed explanation of special leave and the different categories (A & B). Managers often query with HR what category special leave should be recorded as.

Authorised absence

- A specific section on authorised absence has been included, as there are currently no dedicated guidelines for this within policy.
- The benefit of an Occupational Health referral has been added, to help gain a better understanding of any long-term conditions employees may have, resulting in using authorised absence.

Flexi-time

- Recognising that different services may operate during different hours, depending on individual service needs and requirements, caveating that work outside of the current bandwidth 7.00am-7.00pm may be possible with prior agreement from management.

Quick reference guidance document

The policy is supported by a new guidance document, which provides examples and scenarios explaining what type of leave should be used in which circumstances. This is aimed at assisting managers with commonly experienced situations but is not exhaustive of all scenarios.

2. Flexible Retirement Policy

Background

Flexible retirement was previously included in the Voluntary Exits Policy, but this was withdrawn in 2025.

Policy Headlines

A new Flexible Retirement Policy has been created so that employees can continue to make use of this opportunity. It enables them, subject to a business case which will result in salary savings and capital costs being repaid over 3 years, to reduce their hours or move to a lower graded job and draw their pension at the same time. They must however retire fully within 3 years.

3. Salary Loans Procedure

Background

The Council has offered salary loans to support employees with emergency financial circumstances since c.2022. These are payments of up to 2 weeks' net salary in advance, with a maximum repayment period via salary deductions of 12 months. However, it has become apparent that some employees are becoming overly reliant on the loans, taking another one out as soon as the first loan has been paid off.

Policy Headlines

To support employees to manage their finances and hopefully to move away from a reliance on loans, the Policy has been amended to state that '*only one salary loan is available in any rolling 18-month period*'.

Alongside this, and given our commitment to tackling socio-economic disadvantage, the Council is also revising its workforce wellbeing offer to further enhancing the financial wellbeing support and information it provides to staff. This currently already includes the Employee Assistance Programme helpline, Ask Bill money advice, Angel Advance debt advice, and Money Helper money and pensions guidance, plus links to a range of local and national organisations.

4. Time Off for Reservists Policy

Background

The Time Off for Reservists Policy sets out how Bury Council supports employees who are members of the Reserve Forces, including arrangements for paid time off, mobilisation, demobilisation and return to work. The policy was last reviewed in October 2013 and has now been refreshed and updated in May 2026 to align with current Armed Forces Covenant guidance, improve accessibility and remove outdated content.

Policy Headlines

A number of minor amendments have been made throughout the policy to ensure Bury Council is aligned with the Armed Forces Covenant expectations of supporting Reservists under the Gold Award criteria. Terminology has been refreshed to remove gender-specific pronouns and information to signpost employees to the correct support has been updated.

Overall, the review has streamlined the policy, improved readability and ensured employees who are reservists have access to clear, up-to-date guidance on their rights, responsibilities and available support.

5. Facilities Time Policy

Background

The Facilities Time Policy forms Appendix K of Local Conditions of Service, and sets out the facilities time arrangements for trade union representatives who are employed by the Council. It also acts as a guide for managing arrangements for time off for trade union duties and activities. It was last amended in January 2026.

Policy Headlines

Further changes have been made, linked to the Employment Rights Act 2025, to remove the references to publishing facilities time data. Public sector organisations no longer have to do this from 2026.

6. Dignity at Work Policy

Background

The Dignity at Work policy has been drafted as part of the council's commitment to zero tolerance of unwanted, inappropriate and unacceptable behaviours. This supports the corporate plan objectives of becoming an anti-racist organisation and a neuroinclusive employer. Dignity at Work policies are widely viewed as best practice in providing a framework for understanding, reporting and addressing unacceptable behaviours towards staff in the workplace.

Policy Headlines

The policy describes unacceptable behaviours and expectations of all employees in the course of their work. It sets out a clear and supportive process for reporting unacceptable behaviours and how these reports can be addressed informally. The policy links into existing disciplinary and grievance procedures where there is a need to take a formal approach to addressing behaviours.

7. Grievance Procedure

Background

The Grievance Procedure takes account of the ACAS Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures and replaces any previous procedures that were in place. The procedure covers all employee concerns, problems or complaints.

The procedure is designed to deal with either individual or collective grievances. Collective grievances can be raised either by a Trade Union representative or a member of staff nominated to do so by those raising the complaint.

Policy Headlines

Due to the introduction of a sole Dignity at Work Policy, all reference to Dignity at Work within the Grievance Procedure has now been removed.

8. Flexible Working Policy

Background

The Flexible Working Policy provides choices to help employees achieve a healthier work/life balance and enables them to combine their work responsibilities with other commitments or personal aspirations. Services benefit too with more flexibility, extended opening/cover arrangements and supported employees with increased morale and motivation who are more productive. It was last updated in February 2024.

Policy Headlines

The following minor changes have been made to the policy:

- General process related updates throughout.
- Section 5.10 has been updated to reflect amendments to the LGPS Regulations with effect from 1 April 2026. It now reads:

“LGPS 2014 Regulations state that pension contributions are compulsory for any authorised period of unpaid absence of less than 15 consecutive days. If the period of authorised unpaid leave is more than 14 days no pension contributions will be made. Therefore, if flexible working options result in unpaid periods of absence greater than 14 days pension benefits will be reduced. Active members of the Scheme can recoup lost benefits by paying Qualifying Additional Pension Arrangements (QAPAs)”

Previously, no pension contributions were paid for unpaid absence.

- Part 7.6.3 updated to clarify that career breaks should not be used to cover long term sickness absence.

Following Feedback provided at June’s Employment Panel, wording has been amended on Part 7.6.3, regarding Long Term Sickness and a Career Break.

9. Briefing Note – Equality Staff Networks

Background

Bury has four staff equality networks which meet regularly and contribute to workplace culture at the council. The networks have a combined membership of approximately 90 staff from the four directorates and their departments, led by leads elected by network members. There is no structured protected time for network leads or members to lead the network or deliver network activities.

Headlines

Staff equality networks play an important role in supporting inclusion, employee voice and equitable service delivery across the council. Network leads and members currently undertake most network activity on a voluntary basis and often in their own time, limiting the networks’ capacity to deliver strategic activity, maintain engagement, develop action plans and contribute fully to the council’s inclusion objectives.

Providing protected time for network activity would enable networks to operate more effectively and increase their contribution to corporate priorities. It is therefore recommended that staff network activity is recognised, with up to two hours per month for members to participate in network meetings and activities, and an additional half day per month for network leads to undertake leadership responsibilities.

Community impact/links with Community Strategy

A modern and effective employee policy framework is essential to ensuring the effective operation of the organisation and, in turn the delivery of our commitment to the Community Strategy.

Equality Impact and considerations:

Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;*
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;*
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.*

The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.

Equality Analysis Please provide a written explanation of the outcome(s) of either conducting an initial or full EA.

No negative impact identified.

Assessment of Risk:

The following risks apply to the decision:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Trade Union objection to policy changes	Prior discussions have taken place with Unison

Consultation:

All of the above proposed changes have been shared with the Trade Unions, and where appropriate there have been consultations with HR colleagues, managers, the EDI Manager and the Legal Team.

Legal Implications:

There are no immediate legal implications

Financial Implications:

There are no immediate financial implications

Report Author and Contact Details:

Catherine King
HR Business Manager
c.king@bury.gov.uk

Tim Normanton
Assistant Director of Human Resources
t.normanton@bury.gov.uk

Background papers: