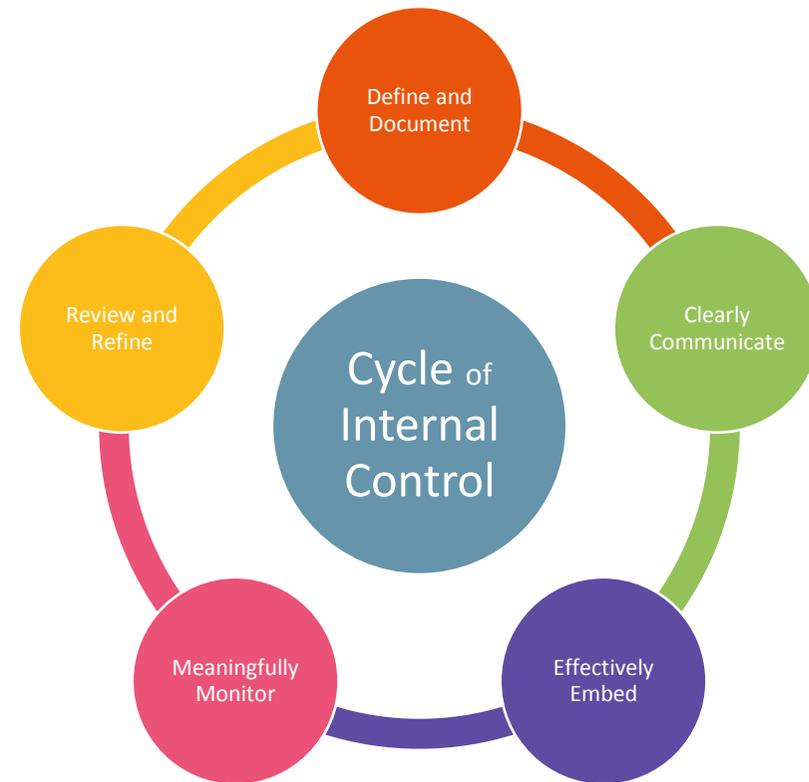


Introduction

1. This annual report to the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee provides assurance in respect of the Council's employment policies and arrangements we have in place to manage employee conduct.
2. Expectation in relation to employee conduct is communicated to staff through a communication framework as set out in the Organisational Plan and employee conduct is monitored and reported.
3. From the review, assessment and on-going monitoring carried out, the Chief HR Officer has reached the opinion that employee conduct is properly managed, policies are regularly updated and reviewed to ensure they meet any changes in legislation and employee conduct forms part of normal manager/employee relations.
4. Employment policy and procedures comprise of policy documents and accompanying toolkits which contain template documents and guidance for employees and managers. We work to collectively agree all our employment policies with the recognised Trade Unions.
5. In accordance with the Council's values and the People Strategy 2020-2025, our employment policies and procedures are a key tool in helping the Council to be the best place to work and have a workforce that feels they can be their best, be valued for who they are and be safe and well at work.
6. The statement sets out the standing arrangements for the internal control of employment policy and employee conduct and provides evidence of compliance over the reporting period from January 2023 to December 2023.
7. The statement includes opportunities that have been identified to improve these arrangements.



Define and Document

Policy and Strategy

8. The Council's People Strategy 2020-2025 is clearly documented alongside our Organisational Plan and outlines our ambitions to be the best employer in the best city, which will help support the delivery of the Best City Ambitions. This lays out our approach to supporting our managers and staff to be their best, valued for who they are and be safe and well whilst working for our organisation. The People Strategy is available on the [leeds.gov website](https://www.leeds.gov.uk).
9. There is a wide breadth of employment policies at Leeds City Council from inclusion and diversity, wellbeing and those that relate directly to conduct and performance, all of which are ACAS (Advice, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) compliant.

Employment Policies

10. Throughout 2023, the toolkit to support the recruitment and selection process was developed which provides detailed guidance to managers to support them to carry out a fair recruitment and selection process. The focus of the toolkits is to ensure the process is inclusive and we attract and select the right people that align with our values.
11. Following the grievance practice review (GPR) in 2022 the recommendations are being progressed. The pilot carried out in the Community, Housing and Environment directorate has provided further insight, the immediate next steps are to develop an early resolution process in support of better outcomes on grievance practice. This is under development.
12. A review of the Code of Conduct has begun, along with the development of a new flexible working policy, a regrade policy and changes to family leave, all to be implemented in 2024.
13. A review of the Health, Safety and Wellbeing policy has been carried out and is now live. This sets out our commitment and pledge; the roles and responsibilities; and arrangements to promote, prevent and support.
14. In all policies there continues to be an emphasis on managers taking early action to avoid issues escalating unnecessarily and also on taking an individualised approach to supporting their employees to be at work and be their best.
15. There is an on-going commitment to ensure that when policies are developed or reviewed, they follow a consistent format, are simple, easy to understand, access and navigate.
16. During 2023, the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian has started to embed within the organisation. Though this role has no direct management reporting into Human Resources this is an additional route for employees to raise any concerns they may have. Following queries raised through this route we have also developed additional guidance to support managers and employees through bereavement.

Politically Restricted Posts

17. In order to comply with The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (as amended) the council has a politically restricted posts policy. The identification of posts is built into the guidance notes accompanying the creation of new posts and the redesignation of existing posts. There have been no referrals in 2022/23 to the HR team for any breach of the politically restricted posts policy and procedure.

Values and Behaviours

18. In 2023, Internal Audit provided final recommendations and action plan for implementation following the review of organisational culture, these actions have been progressed, some actions are on-going, however they are being tracked through the internal audit recommendation tracking process.
19. This year we have continued to embed the expectations of our leaders and managers as part of our #TeamLeeds values and behaviours through appraisal discussions and our #BeYourBest development programme, the values and behaviours are detailed within the [Organisational Plan](#) alongside the manager expectations, which provides clear guidance in terms of the expectations of our managers and leaders, including supporting their teams to be their best.

Democratic Oversight

20. The Executive Member for Strategy and Resources has oversight of matters in relation to human resources. The Executive Member regularly attends the HR and Trade Union meetings and has a fortnightly briefing with the HR Leadership team to enable any required escalation. Throughout 2023, reports have been provided to the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board and Executive Board providing further member oversight and scrutiny on key topics. Table 1 provides an overview of key reports that have provided assurance and action plans to progress work in each area.

Table 1 – Member oversight and scrutiny

Date & Board	Report	Outline
February 23 – S&R Scrutiny Committee	LGA Peer Review final report and recommendations	Including key employment related work linked to EDI, Be Your Best and Health Safety and Wellbeing, recognising current achievements and also supporting on going work to embed within these areas.
February 23 – Executive Board	LGA Corporate Peer – Action Plan	

February 23 – Executive Board	A refreshed approach to Equality Diversity and Inclusion	Outlining the EDI Vision Statement and action plan covering three strands included our response as an employer.
June 23 – Executive Board	Being Our Best – Organisational Plan	An overview of the refresh of the organisational plan linked to the Peer Review -setting clear expectation for managers and leaders.
June 23 – S&R Scrutiny Committee	Performance report	Covers key performance indicators.
July 23 – S&R Scrutiny Committee	People Management Report	Main focus on managing attendance and our approach to managing performance.
September 23 – S&R Scrutiny Committee	Staff Survey Analysis	Providing analysis and recommended actions to build into local service response.
October 23 – S&R Scrutiny Committee	Employee Mental Health Update	Highlights targeted interventions through policy, framework and management system.
October 23 – Executive Board	LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress review	Outlining finding of the one-day follow up visit and positive progress made.
December 23 – S&R Scrutiny Committee	LGA Peer Challenge Progress review	Recognising progress made under EDI, Be Your Best and positive results from the staff survey, albeit recognising more work to be done to support management of workload

Clearly Communicate

Contracts of Employment

21. Contract of employment documentation includes details of terms and conditions of employment and makes direct reference to employment policies, in line with legislation. Employees can also obtain copies of employment policy at any time by searching on Insite or asking their manager for a hard copy.

Communications

22. The well-established communications and engagement framework set out in the Organisational Plan continues to be utilised to ensure information is disseminated to different tiers of employees across the workforce, a full list of the well established communication routes can be found within the organisational plan. This begins at the corporate leadership team level down through appraising managers and to all staff. [A link to the organisational plan can be found here.](#)
23. The Be Your Best Manager Network continues to expand, this now includes over 500 managers, The network encourages collaboration and peer support and sharing of good practice around the management of staff.
24. Due to the financial challenges faced by the authority in 2023 all appraising managers continue to be invited to sessions with the Chief Executive to discuss the organisations financial challenges, including a question-and-answer session. The sessions have been a positive way to help embed the Team Leeds approach and have been an opportunity to help communicate key initiatives to support our teams.
25. Best Council Leadership Team (BCLT), Extended BCLT, Best Council People and Culture and the Be Your Best Manager network have been used to promote and frame the organisational approach to performance management, as detailed in the scrutiny report in July 2023 and is regularly used to share information and promote any new initiatives.
26. The new Health Safety and Wellbeing policy has been launched and is live on Insite, this has been communicated out to services via Directors along with the Directors health, safety and wellbeing pledge.
27. The weekly manager communications are well established and consistently provide key information to managers to disseminate to their teams. In addition, the Chief Executive issues a weekly blog via email to all staff, this information is also shared on the staff Facebook page to ensure it reaches as many people as possible and help close the digital divide by providing information outside of the council network. Managers that have employees that are not digitally enabled at work are encouraged to share this information with employees directly, in addition local Facebook and Whats app groups are used to share information with individuals.

Insite

28. Information is readily available to all Council employees on our policies and procedures. When available on the intranet, they sit as part of a toolkit that provides additional advice and guidance for employees and managers, including Frequently Asked Question sections.
29. Numerous toolkits are available through the Council intranet which gives access to employment policies, as well as accompanying guidance and templates to ensure managers and employees are fully up to date. These are covered through the following toolkits:
 - [Managing staff](#) – including sections on disciplinary; grievance; supporting staff at work; supporting staff who work remotely; improving performance; probationary periods; library of former manager communication emails

- [Health, Safety and Wellbeing](#) – including sections on health and wellbeing; risk assessments; occupational health; safeguarding; PPE
 - [Ill health and sickness absence](#) – including sections on improving attendance policy; improving attendance stages
 - [EDI](#) – including information and guidance, training materials and the EDI dashboard
 - [Values and Behaviours](#) – including sections on employee register of interest; gifts and hospitality; employee code of conduct; political activity
30. Other useful tools include the personal development section on Insite which provides access to a wide range of material and access to training to support employees, managers and leaders to be their best. Including a whole section dedicated to the leadership and management which cross references to the managing staff toolkit, mentioned above.
31. Information is shared through line managers or can be requested from HR for staff that do not have access to Insite. We continue to look for opportunities to close the digital divide and this is something that is being considered as part of the Core Business Transformation programme, to explore opportunities to provide better access to information for all staff.

Training and Guidance

32. When staff begin their employment with the Council everyone undertakes the corporate induction. Since the refresh in 2022 we continue to monitor content to ensure all materials are up to date. The council values and behaviour are prominent within the session, which includes a talk from both the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council.
33. Training is available on key policies, key elements are also included within the Be Your Best training programme for new and existing managers to help embed learning and refresh skills.
34. In addition, experienced officers with appropriate expertise are available through HR Business Partnering teams to advise managers on how to appropriately apply these policies, either through direct contact or through the general HR enquiry line which is covered by a range of HR team members to give advice. Where appropriate, HR may seek advice on complex cases from the employment law team in Legal Services.
35. The delivery the Be Your Best leadership programme continues with over 500 managers attending sessions through 2023 (24% of the manager cohort), providing opportunities to develop skills and provide appropriate support to teams and colleagues.
36. Steps two to four of the EDI training programme has been rolled out throughout 2023. 99.2% of all appraising managers attending the face to face session (around 2200 managers). As well as appraising managers, a further 800+ supervisory colleagues received training taking the total to 3025 being trained and services taking their teams through the wider training.
37. In line with our joint EDI vision in the organisation, step 3 of the training programme was also delivered to executive board members, chairs of scrutiny and community committee chairs.

Leadership

38. Corporate Leadership Team have regular updates on key employment practices and the Best Council – People and Culture board regularly receive updates to provide guidance on the implementation of employment policies and initiatives.
39. The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Strategy & Resources meets fortnightly with members of the HR leadership team on the full range of employment related activities.
40. Business Partnering teams also regularly communicate to Chief Officer's and their leadership teams key policy updates and raise awareness of any initiatives that they need to be implementing with their teams.

Effectively Embed

41. Throughout the year as mentioned above the Communication and Engagement Framework has been well utilised to help embed initiatives.

Appraisals and 1-2-1s

42. Policies and procedures are embedded through line management arrangements, using regular conversations through one to ones and the appraisal cycle.
43. The updated expectations of values and behaviours continue to feature in the appraisal cycle, asking staff to comment on how they feel they have performed against these in their work over the year as well as reflecting on their wellbeing and development. For the 2022/23 end of year appraisal that were completed mid-2023 (Between 5th June to 21st September) the completion rate was 94.42% across the Council, this is an increase from 2022 when completion rates were 91.5%.

Policy and strategy

44. The key employment policies outlined above are monitored regularly for outcomes and trends. There has been a particular focus on Managing Attendance, with monthly updates on sickness statistics being reported to the Corporate Leadership team for monitoring and

accountability. Focused work was also carried out with areas that required additional support to ensure processes were embedded and appropriate monitoring maintained. This has had a positive impact on reducing sickness levels in these areas.

45. An introduction to the council's values and behaviours is provided through the corporate induction, then further training is available on policies through the PAL system and HR guidance is given regularly through the HR Business Partner teams and the general enquiry line.
46. The HR Business Partnering team work closely with services to ensure issues are brought to a resolution early in the process to help avoid issues escalating and progressing to a formal process.
47. The Be Your Best leadership development offer has continued to support both new and existing managers to be their best whilst working for the organisation and covers a variety of topics, including management policy.
48. As policies are reviewed in addition to trade union consultation, links are also made with staff networks for advice and to understand lived experiences.
49. Throughout 2023, workshops have taken place to inform the development of the new core HR and Payroll system which is due to go live in 2025. The build will ensure that key policy requirements are reflected to help support the monitoring and management of employees.
50. The Health, Safety and Wellbeing Framework is using the management model of HSG 65 which is the Health and Safety Executive's recommended management system (this includes the adoption of the plan, do, check, act approach to help achieve a balance between the system and behavioural aspects of management and places health and safety as an integral part of good management, not stand alone.), which is supported by the Health and Safety Executive. Through a devolved Health and Safety Framework, we can ensure greater ownership through directorate leadership cascading information down to all employees in relation to health, safety and wellbeing and ensuring everybody recognises the role they need to play.

Employee Register of Interests

51. New starters are required to declare any interests when they commence employment, and all employees are required to register any interests as specified in the register of interests policy on an ongoing basis. Examples of declarations include duties such as school governors and other voluntary activities, employment outside the council and personal relationships with contractors.
52. In addition, there is an annual exercise covering employees in high-risk posts which are identified using the following criteria:
 - posts that give significant advice or speaking for the council;
 - posts where there is significant authority to make decisions; and
 - posts with significant discretion over spending.

In 2023 declarations were submitted by 1430 employees that had been identified as 'high risk' by Chief Officers.

53. Directors and chief officers have a responsibility to assess declarations and take the necessary actions to address any potential conflict of interest as detailed in the toolkit guidance, “Assessing outside interests.” Advice is available from the HR team.

Gifts and Hospitality

54. All individual declarations are reviewed and either approved or rejected by a Director or their nominee. The declarations are logged on a central register at the Business Support Centre.

55. On an annual basis Directors are sent a copy of the register for their directorate and they are responsible for reviewing this to ensure that they are satisfied that there are no concerns, either with what individual officers have declared over the year or with any particular firm making inappropriate offers.

No concerns in relation to declarations of gifts and hospitality were identified in the last annual review and there have been no referrals in 2023 to the HR team for any breach of the gifts and hospitality policy.

56. Clear processes are in place linked to approvals at different levels across the organisations. This is supported by an annual return where high risk posts are required to confirm they have complied with the gifts and hospitality policy at the same time as completing their declaration in relation to register of interest.

57. HR currently works with the BSC to ensure the collection of the information, but the responsibility for risk assessing the declarations lays with the line manager.

58. Table 2 below outlines the arrangements for reviewing any declaration of interest from high-risk posts:

Tabl2 2 – Arrangements for reviewing declarations of interest

Role of employee declaring interest	Reviewer of declaration
Up to and including Chief Officer	Director
Director	Chief Executive
Chief Executive	Leader of the Council

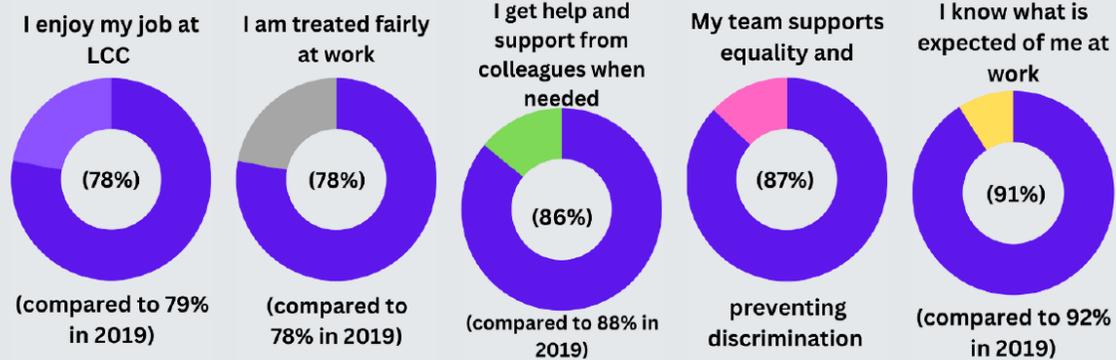
Meaningfully Monitor

Employee Engagement Survey

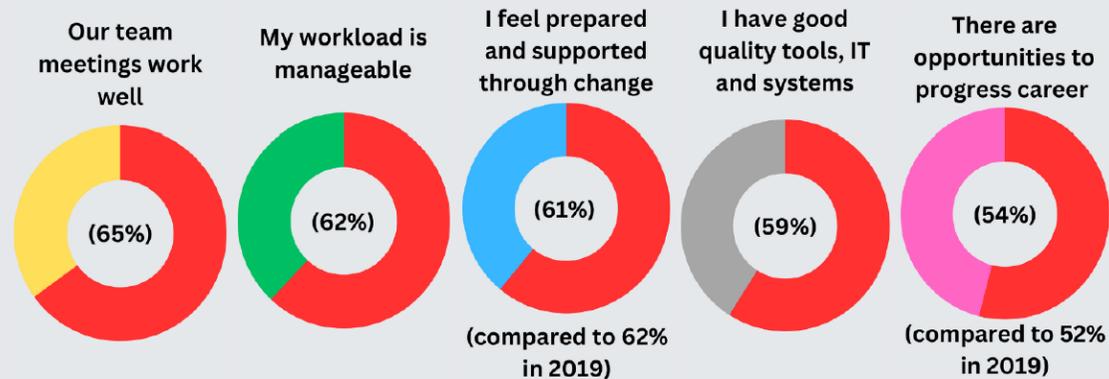
- 59. The Council conducted its latest Staff Survey in Spring 2023. In total, 14729 staff were sent the survey and 7647 completed it – an overall response rate of 52%.
- 60. The Staff Survey offers valuable feedback to help the Council gauge progress against its Best Place to Work ambitions and provides an important measure relating to the Organisation Plan and People Strategy outcomes.
- 61. The Survey offers a voice to all colleagues at the council, and provides an insight into how staff feel about their job, their team, their workplace and employer. It helps the Council to identify what is working well, and what needs improvement. The feedback is used to direct our employment and people agenda and actions. It gives us a good sense of how well our values are embedded in everyday work.
- 62. In the 2023 Survey, colleagues gave an overall satisfaction score for their jobs at Leeds City Council as 7.4 out of 10.
- 63. 76% of all council colleagues who responded gave an overall satisfaction score of 7 out of 10 and above.
- 64. Response rates varied from service to service and group to group. 64% of online colleagues responded compared to 32% of those without IT access through work. Directorate level responses ranged from 43% to 55%. Individual team response rates ranged from 12% to 96%.
- 65. A summary of the results can be seen in the following graphic



Highest agreement levels



Lower agreement levels



- 66. The feedback from the Staff Survey is being used to direct our employment and people agenda and actions. It complements and sits alongside other workforce intelligence we have.
- 67. Action will be expected and needed at various levels. All managers and teams will play a crucial role, responding locally and working with their teams to develop their specific response plans. Some of the solutions will sit at corporate, council wide level, and be delivered as part

of our Organisational Plan. All employees can make a contribution by making suggestions and changes and by living council values and behaviours day to day.

68. Further details of our response planning can be found in the Scrutiny Board report, which is referenced and linked in this report in table 1. The next staff survey is due in 2025, this will follow the implementation of the new Core HR and payroll system, with a view to utilising the functionality within the system to help reach more staff through the self-service functionality.

Controls

69. All policies are documented with a suggested review date. However, subject to any legislative changes or issues arising that require changes the schedule will be flexed accordingly. There are established controls in place to support open and transparent decision making in relation to employment policies, including regular oversight by the HR Leadership team and legal support as required.
70. CLT receive regular reports on a variety of workforce related matters, examples in 2023 includes updates on improving attendance approach, Health, Safety and wellbeing agenda, the EDI agenda, staff survey, as well as managing the workforce response to the financial challenges.
71. The information flow mentioned above in relation to BCLT, Extended BCLT. Best Council People and Culture and appraising managers meetings ensure appropriate information is made available with actions for managers to take information back to their service areas to ensure initiatives are communicated and embed within their service.
72. In addition to general monitoring by HR Business Partnering teams with Chief Officers, casework figures are regularly monitored and the principal audit manager and the appropriate HR colleague with the lead for casework meet regularly (approximately every 2- 3 months) to identify any disciplinary cases to ensure audit are appraised of any areas where further work may be required. This ensures the internal audit team have an understanding of the control environment and have a risk-based plan for proactive counter fraud reviews.
73. Regular meetings take place between the HR and the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian to identify any recurring themes or areas that require additional attention.
74. The Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board receives information on the workforce twice a year and this is monitored through key performance indicators such as employee absence rates, number of apprenticeships and details of workforce protected characteristics.
75. Health and safety compliance is monitored through monthly meetings between the Head of Health and Safety and the Director of Strategy & Resources through a quarterly health, safety and wellbeing priority board with Chief Officers. In addition, health and safety matters are reported to CLT twice a year and Executive Board receive an annual report and there is an established Trade Union working group. The reporting process is currently under review

External validation

76. The LGA peer review carried out in 2022/23 reported back that the council's values are lived and breathed by the Council and recognised by its partners.
77. The LGA peer review revisit in September 2023 recognised the success of the Be Your Best manager development programme, and that the EDI 5 step approach is having a wide-reaching impact across the organisation.
78. The 5 STEP EDI programme has also been the subject of a good practice case study by the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE).

Review and Refine

Legislation, Policy and Guidance

79. Regular checks are made by the HR team to ensure that any changes in legislation are identified and appropriate changes are made to policies and guidance.
80. As an employer there is legal responsibility to ensure that relevant employment policies are in place and as a good employer Leeds City Council ensure this is the case and wants to achieve a culture where all employees are clear on their responsibilities and can be their best.

Stakeholder engagement

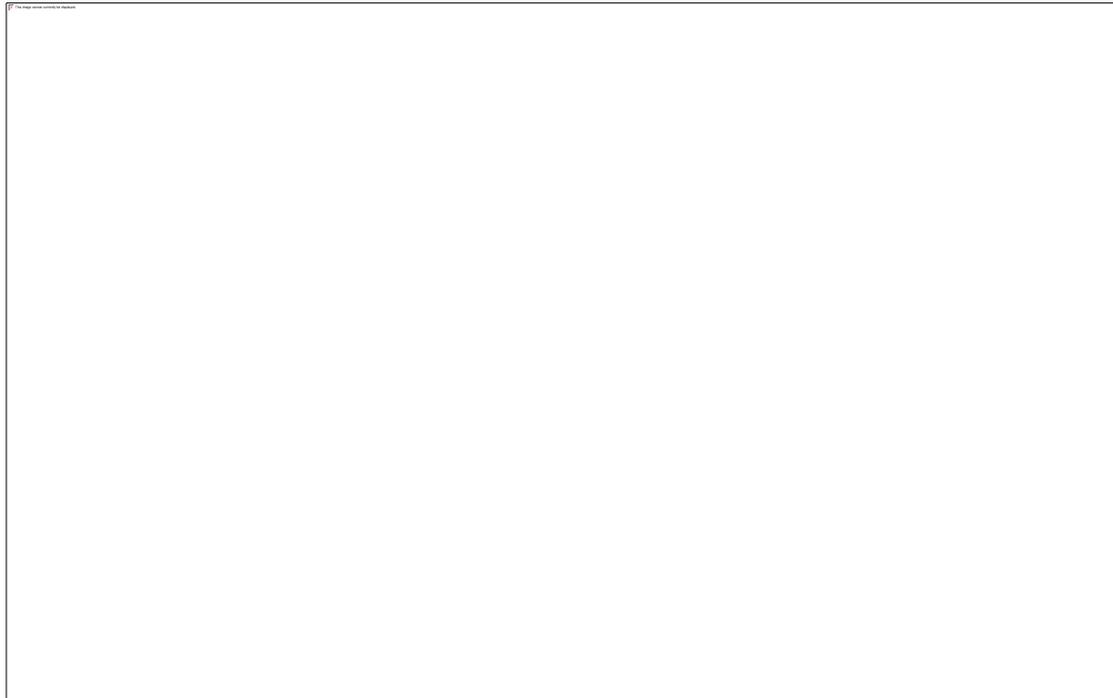
81. Key stakeholders to employment policies include managers, legal services for compliance and our recognised Trade Unions are engaged when any changes need to be made, as we endeavour to collectively agree our employment policies. We also seek input from our staff networks where possible.

Survey of Internal Control

82. In 2023 the council undertook the Survey of Internal Control amongst senior officers to provide first line assurance in relation to all key systems of internal control by seeking an assessment from operational managers, as to how the arrangements underpinning the Corporate Governance Code and Framework are working on the ground. Following additional tracking and chasing we have seen an increase in the level of responses from 44% in 2022 to a 93% response rate in 2023.
83. The Survey included questions relating to arrangements for the employment policies and procedure and the capacity and capability to be effective.
84. The survey was updated in 2023 and asked whether, in the view of respondents, regarding the management of staff in relation to staff welfare; induction, training and development, supervision; attendance and discipline; appraisals and 1-2-1s; and arrangements for obtaining advice and guidance in relation to human resources. The majority agreed this was well embedded as detailed in Graph 1 with

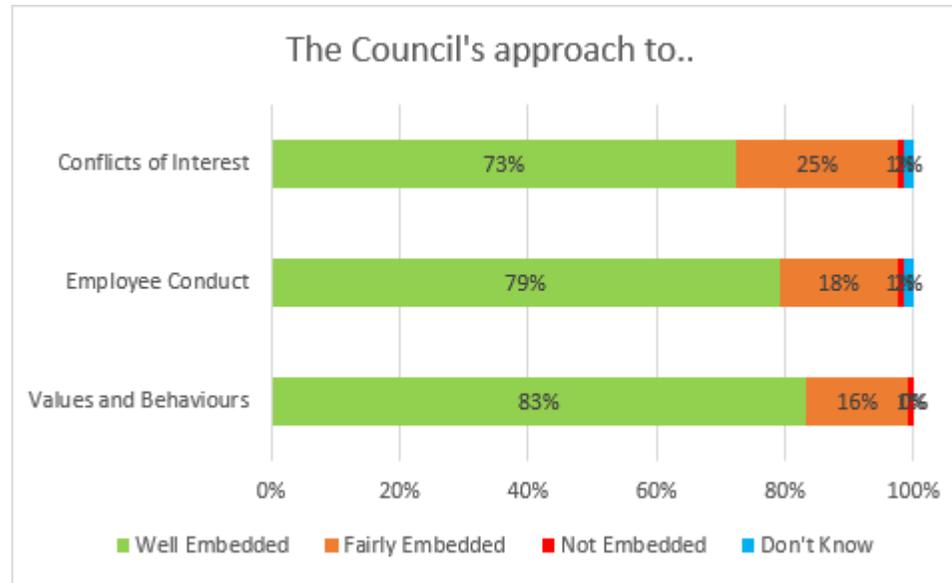
over 90% in all categories responding well or fairly well embedded. As questions were slightly different this year it is difficult to make a direct comparison, however we will be able to in 2024 as the same questions have been used.

Graph 1 – Summary of responses to Human Resource Controls



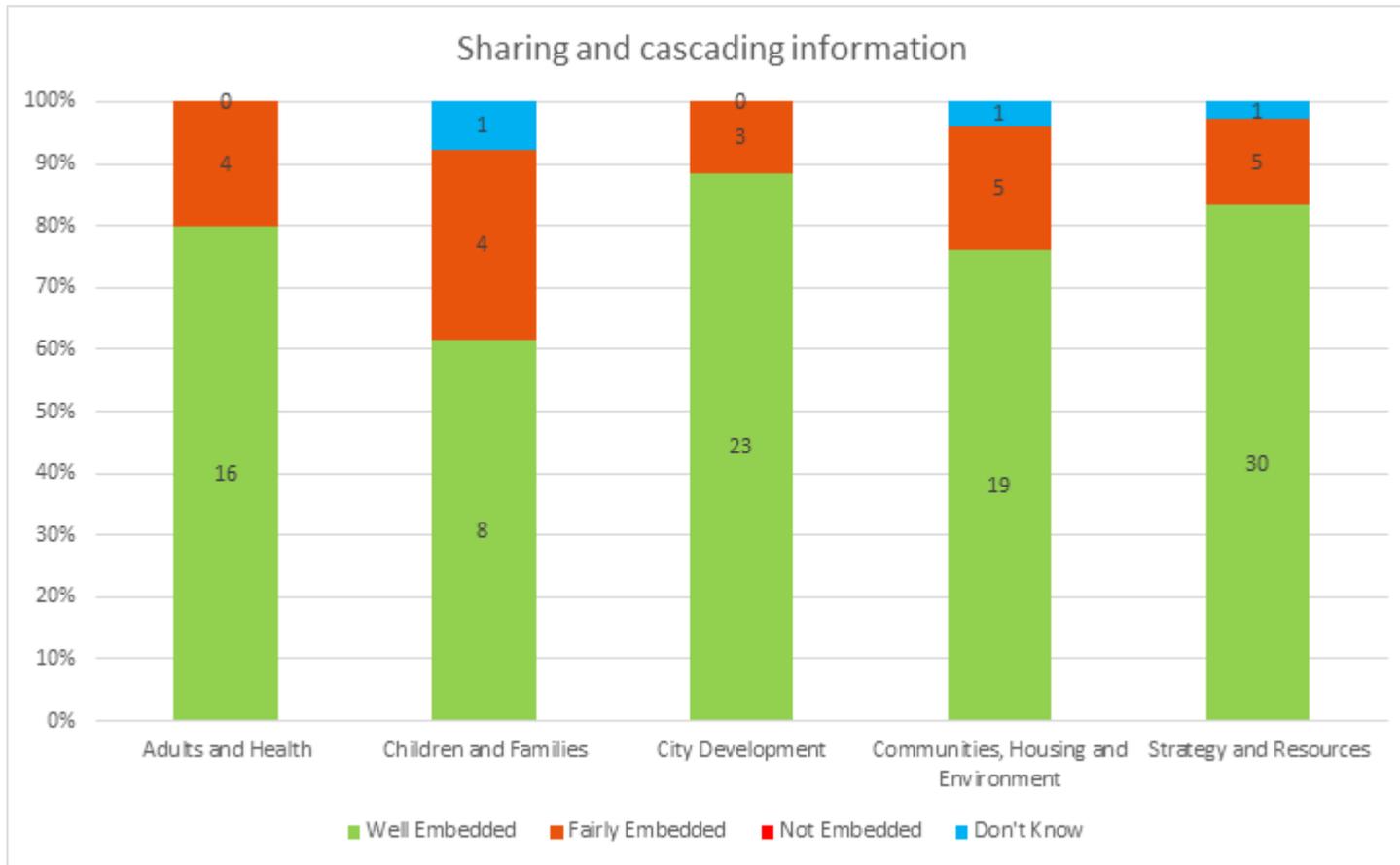
85. The response in relation to our approach for managing conflict, conduct and how well embed our values and behaviours are, was also positive with over 90% responding either well or fairly well embedded as detailed in graph 2.

Graph 2- Responses to the survey in relation to managing conflict, conduct and embedding values and behaviours.



86. Positive feedback received through the survey demonstrates that the sharing and cascading of information is working well, though due to the diversity of services the organisation delivers, this is always an area we strive to keep improving. Graph 3 shows breakdown of the responses within each directorate, which shows the large majority think is either, well embedded/fairly well embedded.

Graph 3 – Sharing and cascading information.



Opportunities for Improvement

87. Though we have received positive feedback for the management of staff, it is recognised that this is an area that requires continuous improvement and investment in our managers, which is supported by the Be Your Best Leadership and Management Programme.

Benchmarking opportunities

88. The Chief HR Officer and the Deputy Chief Officer HR are part of wider employment networks for benchmarking, sharing best practice and opportunities to improve employment policy. These include the core city networks, the Leeds Anchors network and the Local Government Association (LGA) as well as HR specific links to the professional body, Chartered institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and the sector network Public Services People Management Association (PPMA).

89. The Yorkshire and Humber Regional Employers Association (YHEA) meets regularly and has a network of Elected Members from the region linked into this too. When renewing and refreshing policies this group is regularly contacted.

Independent Review

90. Internal Audit have a timetable of HR policies and procedures that they regularly review. In 2023, a review linked to the mileage policy was carried out, action progressed to remind staff of the policy and arrangement when claiming mileage.

Statement of Assurance

91. This is the annual report to the committee concerning the Council’s employment policies and employee conduct. From the review, assessment and on-going monitoring carried out, the Chief HR Officer has reached the opinion that, employee conduct is properly managed, policies are regularly reviewed and employee conduct forms part of normal manager/ employee relations.

92. The Chief HR Officer has identified the following opportunities for enhancement

Opportunities for improvement

Define and Document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chief HR Officer will continue to ensure that the employment policies and procedures are robust and fit for purpose. • Work will continue across the authority to achieve our People Strategy 2020-2025, which will be reviewed during 2024. • Develop support to ensure managers can manage workload with confidence. • Progress policy reviews in line with legislative changes and review schedule.
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Clearly Communicate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing communications regularly to managers updating on key pieces of policy and relevant information will continue in 2024 to ensure they are fully informed and kept up to date with any changes.
Effectively Embed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop early resolution process to support effective role out of findings from the GPR pilot • Training on the EDI agenda will continue including the completion of step 5 to ensure inclusive practices are fully embedded across the organisation • Maintain promotion and delivery of Be Your Best leadership programme. • Develop specific toolkit for performance management ensuring all related materials are easily accessible in one place, making connections through the focus of me, we and us. • Health Safety and wellbeing framework to be embedded, alongside the delivery of a BYB Health and Safety Module, risk assessor training and implementation of the violence and aggression toolkit, and the Mental health toolkit.
Meaningfully Monitor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular reporting to the Elected Member leadership will continue through the usual scrutiny boards and other committees, to ensure democratic oversight is maintained.
Review and Refine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No further changes are proposed at this time. • On going development of the replacement Core HR and Payroll system throughout 2024.