

Introduction

1. This annual report to the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee provides assurance in respect of the Council's employment policies and employee conduct.
2. The requirements of employee conduct are established and regularly reviewed; requirements relating to employee conduct are communicated and feedback is collected on whether expected behaviours are being demonstrated; and employee conduct is monitored and reported.
3. From the review, assessment and on-going monitoring carried out, the Chief Officer HR has reached the opinion that, employee conduct is properly managed, policies are regularly reviewed and employee conduct forms part of normal manager/ employee relations.
4. Employment policy and procedure is comprised 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 our 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 April 2020 to March 2021.
7. The statement includes opportunities that have been identified to improve these arrangements.

Define and Document

Policy and Strategy

9. The Council's People Strategy 2020-2025 is clearly documented alongside our Best Council Plan (BCP) and outlines our ambition to be the best employer in the best city. 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](http://leeds.gov).
10. There is a wide breadth of employment policy at Leeds City Council from inclusion and diversity, wellbeing as well as those that relate directly to conduct and performance.
11. This report provides a specific update on Conduct and Discipline; Employment Policies; Employee Register of Interest and Gifts and Hospitality.

Conduct and discipline

12. All employees are required to work in accordance with the employee code of conduct (available via Insite and covered on day one of induction) and this is supported by a strong set of council values and manager expectations. The council's disciplinary policy exists to take action when an employee's conduct falls below the expected standards. The policy is ACAS compliant, and managers are supported in taking action by a skilled and professional HR team.

Employment Policies

13. Although a disciplinary policy is necessary it is the quality and effective operation of other employment policies that ensures that the vast majority of employees meet the expected standards of conduct at work. Between 2015 and 2019 the following employment policies were revised: disciplinary, improving attendance, dignity at work, alcohol and drugs, grievance resolution, improving performance, probationary and recruitment. In all of these policies there is 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.
14. Throughout 2020/21 HR support has been focussed on supporting the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, adapting policy and procedure as appropriate. This includes prioritising services and reallocating staff from to work on the frontline to do our best to ensure the citizens of Leeds still received vital services. The adapting of this HR policy was reviewed by internal audit in early 2021 with a positive outcome.
15. Following feedback from staff networks, particularly the BAME staff network the disciplinary policy is undergoing a best practice review with a Trade Union working group and the grievance policy will be reviewed in the same fashion in 2022.

16. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and building on the collectively agreed Flexibility Protocol in 2014, a Flexible Resourcing Plan was developed with the trade unions in March 2020 to support workforce agility and deployment. This team in HR supported services to identify employees who could be redeployed to services that were under significant pressure due to the pandemic from those that were closed or unable to operate due to the national lockdown.
17. To understand the reasons for those leaving the Council's employment, an exit interview process has been introduced for employees to complete online or with a manager either immediately prior to their exit or immediately after.
18. The supporting staff at work charter with accompanying reasonable adjustment and working carers passports were introduced in 2020 with additional sessions for managers to attend.

Politically Restricted Posts

19. In order to comply with The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 the council has a politically restricted posts policy and this was reviewed in 2019 by a member of the legal services team which resulted in no recommended changes. The identification of posts is built into the guidance notes accompanying the creation of new posts and also the redesignation of existing posts. There have been no referrals in 2020/21 to the HR casework team for any breach of the politically restricted posts policy and procedure.

20. Values and Behaviours

21. This year, in light of the current public health and financial challenges, we have also reviewed the expectations of our leaders and managers as part of our #TeamLeeds values and behaviours review, and the [updated version can be found here](#).
22. Our values and behaviours form part of everything we do and are throughout our appraisal system for comment by individuals and their line managers as part of the process.

Democratic Oversight

23. The Executive Member for Resources has oversight of matters in relation to human resources. The Executive member regularly attends the HR and Trade Union meetings and has a weekly briefing with the HR Leadership team to enable any required escalation. The Resources Scrutiny board also receives regular updates on the work of HR.

Clearly Communicate

Contracts of Employment

24. 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.
25. The politically restricted posts policy outlines the requirements of employees around political activity and specifically outlines politically restricted posts may be specified or because of the sensitive duties of the post, this is laid out in the Local Government and Housing Act (1989).

Communications

26. Regular ‘manager communication’ emails were established during the pandemic to get key messages out quickly to managers across the organisation. These helped to disseminate key information quickly and have been retained to date, instead of a sole focus on Covid-19 related information this has now been expanded out to include key messages for managers, this would include new policy updates with links for managers to access. An archive section has been established in late 2021 on InSite so employees can refer back to earlier messages.
27. In addition during the pandemic a section of the Leeds City Council website was created for staff to access who do not have regular access to computer use as part of their role, to ensure they could also access key messages and advice through links to personal devices.
28. The new employee expectations that were launched in 2021 were communicated directly by the Chief Executive to all staff and have been added as part of all mid-year appraisals for the 2021/22 year.

Insite

29. 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.
30. 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
- [Values and behaviours](#) – including sections on employee register of interest; gifts and hospitality; employee code of conduct; political activity

31. 'Gifts, outside interest and political activity' is a specific toolkit containing the policy and template documentation for declarations, in addition there is a specific area for the Employee Code of Conduct

Training and Guidance

32. Training is available on key policies and direct support from the HR service when a manager has to use the policies with a member(s) of their team.
33. When staff begin their employment with the Council everyone undertakes the corporate induction, this outlines the council values and behaviour as well as a talk from both the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council.
34. Throughout 2020/21 a series of risk assessments were required as a result of the pandemic, particularly for individuals deemed high risk. Training was made available to managers via Microsoft Teams to ensure they were confident to correctly engage with employees when completing the assessments.
35. 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 teams to give advice. Where appropriate, HR may seek advice on complex cases from the employment law team in Legal Services.

Leadership

36. Corporate Leadership Team have regular updates on key employment practices and the newly established Best Council – People and Culture regularly receive updates to provide guidance on the implementation of HR policies.
37. The Deputy Leader and Executive member for Resources meets weekly with members of the HR leadership team on the full range of employment related activities.
38. 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

Appraisals and 121s

39. Policies and procedures are embedded through line management arrangements, using regular conversations through one to ones and the appraisal cycle.
40. Due to the need to respond to COVID-19 the decision was taken in consultation with CLT to suspend the full year appraisal cycle for 2019/20. Following the suspension of the full year appraisal cycle in 2019/20 it was felt important for the full year review to take place for employees in 2020/21. Regular manager and employee communication including discussion of job performance and amended responsibilities continued through 121s and where required individual risk assessments.
41. Employees have been asked to consider and comment on the revised values and behaviours as part of their mid-year check in. These include clearly set out expectations for all employees and arrangements are in place to assess the performance of employees against expected behaviours through the two formal appraisals each year, a ‘full year’ appraisal (1 April to 30 June) and a ‘mid-year’ (1 October to 31 December).

Policy and strategy

42. The key employment policies outlined above are monitored regularly for outcomes and trends.
43. An introduction to the councils 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.
44. Throughout 2021 a new management development offer has been created to ensure our managers can be their best whilst working for the organisation and covers a variety of topics, including management policy.
45. As policies are reviewed in addition to trade union consultation a discussion is had with staff networks for advice to understand experiences and to enable them to be as inclusive as possible.

Employee Register of Interests

46. 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.

47. 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.

During the period covering 2020 and 2021, declarations were submitted by 1,360 employees. This included all of those in posts that had been identified as 'high risk.'

48. Internal Audit have recently commenced an audit looking at how the arrangements in place to manage the risks associated with employee outside interests have been embedded and complied with

49. 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.

There were 2 referrals to the HR casework team in 2020/21 for a breach of the register of interests policy.

Gifts and Hospitality

50. 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.

51. 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 2019/20 to the HR casework team for any breach of the gifts and hospitality policy.

52. In 2019 a benchmarking exercise on the gifts and hospitality policy was undertaken with the core cities which confirms that our arrangements are broadly similar to other local authorities.

53. From January 2020 Directors were required to gain approval from the Chief Executive and in turn the Chief Executive gains approval from the Leader/ Deputy Leader for any gifts and hospitality declarations.

54. Those employees in identified "high risk" posts are required to actively confirm that they have complied with the gifts and hospitality policy at the same time that they completed their annual return for the register of interests. These employees are required to complete an annual declaration and there is a chase process in place with HR and the Business Support Centre (BSC) to ensure a response is received and the organisation is policy compliant.

55. 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.

56. The table below outlines the arrangements for reviewing any declaration of interest from high risk posts:

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

Disciplinary procedures

57. Disciplinary cases are regularly monitored by members of the HR Leadership team to ensure consistency of approach and application of policy.

58. In 2020/21 68 disciplinary cases were concluded, this represents less than 1% of the overall workforce, this is lower than previous years due the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the organisations ability to conduct all meetings. The council's response has been in line with the guidance issued by ACAS and discussions were held with the trade unions about adopting a case-by-case approach to select the best fit of holding a formal meeting from a range of options, supported by corporate and individual risk assessments. All meetings throughout the pandemic were dealt with on a case-by-basis following consultation with Trade Unions and appropriate risk assessments considering the impact of Covid-19 and included online hybrid and in-person options. The most urgent conduct issues were prioritised, including any that occurred during the pandemic, but casework began resuming to deal with all cases in Autumn 2020, acting on the most urgent first.

Meaningfully Monitor

Employee Engagement Survey

59. In 2020 due to the need to gather feedback from staff in response to COVID-19 two wellbeing pulse surveys were run, each one completed by over 4000 employees and a more in depth working from home survey was held which was completed by 5,400 employees.

These surveys ensured that the views of staff were gathered, that support for their wellbeing has been put in place and that CLT have received information from employees to assist in the planning for future service provision and delivery. For those who were unhappy if they chose to leave their contact details then they have received an individual phone call from a member of the HR team to offer further support.

60. Further surveys have been carried out in 2021, and analysis shared with Chief Officers with actions plans created to respond to issues that were raised by employees through the survey.
61. 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 and advice as required.
62. CLT receive regular reports on a variety of workforce related matters, examples in 2020/21 includes updates on the People Strategy 2020-2025, apprenticeships, reallocation of staff through covid and the wellbeing agenda.
63. The Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Resources has weekly meetings with the HR Leadership team and is kept abreast of any key developments.
64. 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 HR Business Partner with the lead for casework meet regularly (approximately every 2- 3 months) to identify any disciplinary cases which may be reportable to the annual fraud and corruption survey or require intervention by the audit team.
65. 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.
66. Health and safety compliance is monitored through monthly meetings between the Head of Health and Safety and the Director of Resources and Housing and 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.

Review and Refine

Legislation, Policy and Guidance

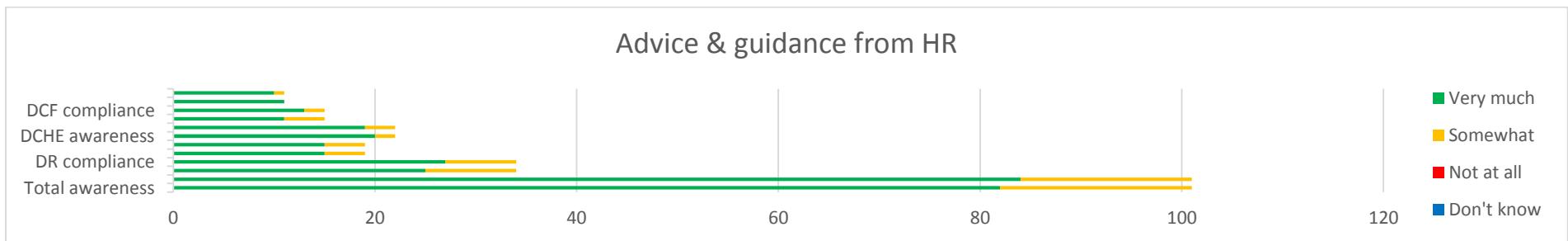
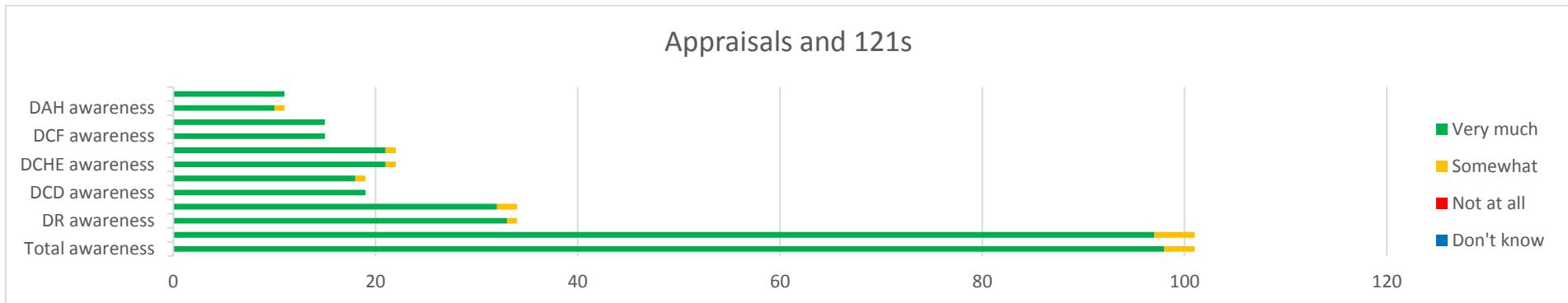
67. All Council policies and guidance are regularly reviewed to ensure they are in line with any new legislation.
68. As an employer there is legal responsibility to ensure that certain employment policies are in place and as a good employer Leeds City Council wants to achieve a culture where all employees are clear on their responsibilities and can be their best.

Stakeholder engagement

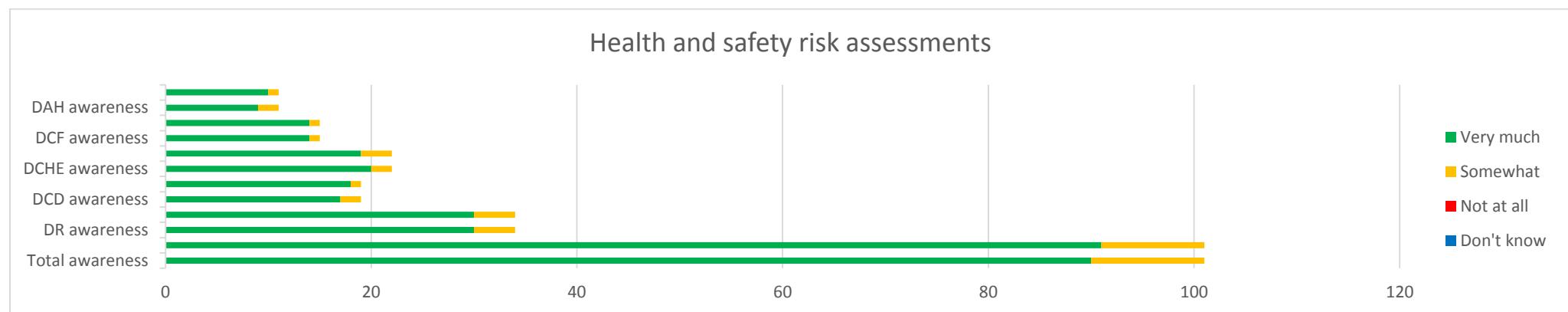
69. Key stakeholders to employment policies including managers, legal services and our Trade Union colleagues.
70. HR are always mindful of feedback when refreshing employment policies and work with our employment law team to ensure legal compliance and work to collectively agree these with our recognised Trade Unions.
71. Following the Black Lives Matter movement that emerged in 2020, there has been a refreshed approach to working with our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff network to better understand the impact of employment policies on this group.
72. This work is led by members of the HR Leadership team (HRLT) who feed directly in to CLT, with a quarterly meeting to update against an agreed action plan. All of this work is not solely aimed at employment policy, but the employee experience forms a significant part of this work.

Survey of Internal Control

73. In May 2021, the council undertook a new 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.
74. The Survey included questions relating to arrangements for the employment policies and procedure and the capacity and capability to be effective.
75. The survey asked whether, in the view of respondents, officers in their service are aware of, and whether they work in compliance with a range of relevant HR policies and procedures.
76. Respondents were requested to say how they could give the assurances set out; whether the Covid-19 pandemic had any impact on relevant policies; whether there were weaknesses and if so whether suggestions could be made to improve them. In this way the survey has provided both quantitative and qualitative assurance.
77. Positive feedback received through the survey demonstrates that staff were aware and working in accordance with the organisations policy on appraisals and one to one meetings as well as been able to obtain advice and guidance from HR.



78. In relation to Health and Safety incidents and reporting this has also received positive feedback from those in services as showing in the table below.



Opportunities for Improvement

79. Feedback received through the survey identified the need for ongoing support and advice to managers when they need to help and employee who isn't performing to the best of their ability.
80. A comment left in the survey stated '*Training for managers on how to deal with conduct or performance issues would be useful, so they have the confidence to do this. Managers also need to know they have the support of their own managers to have these difficult conversations.*'
81. Though there is training and support available, this can be an area in which HR can strengthen over the next 12 months as part of the Leadership and Management Development offer to ensure everyone can be their best at work.

Benchmarking opportunities

82. The Chief Officer HR 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 Anchors network and the Local Government Association (LGA) as well as HR specific links to the CIPD and PPMA.
83. The Yorkshire and Humber Regional Employers Association (YHEA) meets regularly and has a network of Elected Members from the region linked in to this too. When renewing and refreshing policies this group is regularly contacted.
84. As part of the Council's approach to Covid sickness, a benchmarking exercise was undertaken in the region to ensure consistency across Yorkshire and the Humber in application of the LGA advice. It was found that Leeds was in line with other Local Authorities in the region in their application.

Independent Review

85. In 2020/21 Internal Audit completed a review of the Application of HR Policies with respect to the impact of COVID. An opinion of substantial assurance was provided for the control environment, noting that HR policies had the flexibility to be adapted to the guidelines set by the government in response to the pandemic, and that the requirements had been effectively communicated.

Statement of Assurance

86. 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 Officer HR has reached the opinion that, employee conduct is properly managed, policies are regularly reviewed and employee conduct forms part of normal manager/ employee relations.

87. The Chief Officer Human Resources has identified the following opportunities for enhancement

Opportunities for improvement

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Define and Document | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Chief Officer HR 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 |
| 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 2022 to ensure they are fully informed and kept up to date with any changes |
| Effectively Embed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of training for managers around supporting individuals around their performance at work will be created and delivered as part of the refreshed Leadership and Management offer |
| Meaningfully Monitor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular reporting of covid sickness data will continue in to 2022 to enable CLT to make swift decisions to reallocate the workforce as needed to support the citizens of Leeds Regular reporting to the Elected Member leadership will continue alongside 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. |