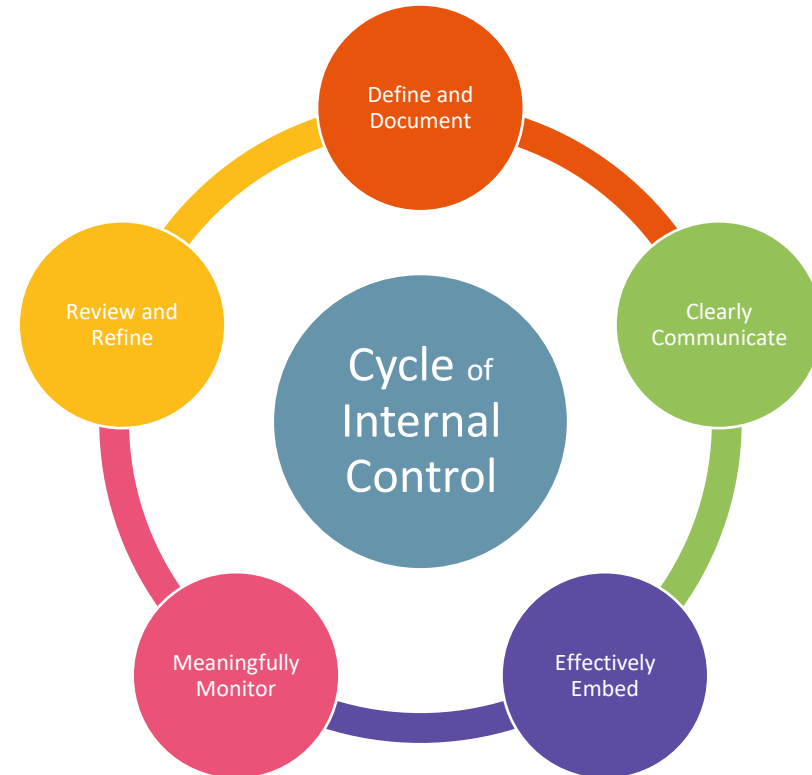


Introduction

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 January 2022 to December 2022.
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 Organisational Plan and outlines our ambitions 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](https://www.leeds.gov.uk).
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. In 2022 a review of the Recruitment and Selection policy began, including the accompanying toolkits which provide detailed guidance to managers. This will help support managers to carry out a fair recruitment process and ensure we attract and recruit the right people that align with our values. In addition, though the policy was deemed fit for purpose a Grievance Practice Review was conducted throughout 2022 with the report listing a number of recommendations to be actioned in 2023. 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.
14. During 2022 a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian was appointed in the Council, though this role has no direct management reporting in to Human Resources this is an additional route for employees to raise any concerns they may have. This is in addition to the existing employment policies and collective bargaining agreement.

Politically Restricted Posts

15. 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 the redesignation of existing posts. There have been no referrals in 2021/22 to the HR casework team for any breach of the politically restricted posts policy and procedure.

16. Values and Behaviours

17. Internal Audit have been carrying out a review looking at the culture of the organisation, with a particular emphasis on the values and behaviours and how these are embedded. HR have been in regular contact with Internal Audit throughout the review and are currently awaiting confirmation of the final recommendations before drawing up an action plan for implementation.

18. 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 new training offer #BeYourBest, the [values and behaviours can be found here](#).

19. Our values and behaviours form part of everything we do and are discussed through our appraisal system by individuals and their line managers as part of the process.

Democratic Oversight

20. 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 fortnightly briefing with the HR Leadership team to enable any required escalation. The Resources and Strategy Scrutiny board also receives regular updates on the work of HR.

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.

22. 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

23. In October 2022, the updated Organisation Plan included a refreshed internal communications and engagement framework that outlines how as an organisation we communicate to different tiers of employees. 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.](#)
24. An example of methods used outlined in the framework is the weekly ‘manager communication’ emails that are used to disseminate key information. Since their introduction during the pandemic these have now become a well-established part of how we disseminate key information to managers with an archive section available on InSite so employees can refer back to earlier messages.
25. Following discussions through 2022 a ‘Be your best manager network’ was piloted towards the end of 2022 with a planned launch to all managers in 2023. The network has been designed to encourage peer support and sharing of good practice around management of staff.

Insite

26. 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.
27. 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
28. ‘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

29. When staff begin their employment with the Council everyone undertakes the corporate induction. This has been refreshed in and relaunched in 2022 and outlines the council values and behaviour as well as a talk from both the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council.

30. 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.
31. 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.
32. Due to the financial challenges faced by the authority in 2022 all appraising managers were invited to a session with the Chief Executive to discuss the organisations financial challenges, including a question-and-answer session. All managers as part of the session were invited to submit any ideas through to a central inbox that could help the organisation save money.
33. Throughout 2022 a 'Be your best' updated leadership and management development programme was designed and launched, including core training for existing managers and specific courses for first time managers. The initial launch sessions were attended by 1716 appraising managers and was led by the Chief Executive. In autumn 2022, further elements were launched with 4 'be your best' core management courses running, some for first time managers and some for experienced managers, in total 47 managers have been through these courses so far with a number of programmes scheduled for 2023.
34. A further offer to our leaders and managers has been a refresh on our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training offer, in November and December 2022 there were 9 EDI launch sessions all hosted by a member of CLT. In total 1693 appraising managers attended the sessions with a further two sessions scheduled for January 2023. This launch is the beginning of a 5 step training programme on the EDI agenda that will be carried out throughout 2023. Step 2 will launch in February 2023 with compulsory face to face training sessions for managers. HR have worked with directorates about the best approach for each area due to the diversity of services that the Council delivers to ensure attendance and engagement.

Leadership

35. 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 HR policies.
36. The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Resources meets fortnightly with members of the HR leadership team on the full range of employment related activities.
37. 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

38. Policies and procedures are embedded through line management arrangements, using regular conversations through one to ones and the appraisal cycle.
39. 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. For the 2021/22 end of year appraisal that were completed mid-2022 (Between 1st April and 30th June) the completion rate was 91.5% across the Council.

Policy and strategy

40. The key employment policies outlined above are monitored regularly for outcomes and trends. In late 2022 HR introduced sharing monthly updates on sickness statistics with the Corporate Leadership team for monitoring and accountability.
41. 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.
42. In 2022 a new management development offer has been launched to ensure our managers can be their best whilst working for the organisation and covers a variety of topics, including management policy.
43. 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.
44. The recent Grievance Practice Review recognised the policy in place was fit for purpose, but that following extensive discussions with stakeholders there are some inconsistencies in the practical application. This review has been shared with Corporate Leadership Team with the recommendations for embedding consistent practice being rolled out throughout 2023.

Employee Register of Interests

45. 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.

46. 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 2022 declarations were submitted by 1302 employees that had been identified as 'high risk' by Chief Officers.

47. During 2022 Internal Audit completed a review of the arrangements in place to manage the risks associated with employee outside interests to ascertain if the policy is embedded and complied with. The outcome was deemed the control environment is acceptable with the recommendations being implemented working in conjunction with colleagues at the Business Support Centre (BSC).

48. 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

49. 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.

50. 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 2022 to the HR casework team for any breach of the gifts and hospitality policy.

51. 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.

52. 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.

53. 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.

54. 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.

55. 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

56. Disciplinary cases are regularly monitored by members of the HR Leadership team to ensure consistency of approach and application of policy. In 2022 86 disciplinary cases were concluded, this represents less than 1% of the overall workforce.

Meaningfully Monitor

Employee Engagement Survey

57. Following on from the approach in 2020 and 2021, in 2022 a further wellbeing pulse survey was carried out which was an important way for the organisation to gauge how the workforce was feeling whilst at work. The 5th survey in 2022 have 3868 respondents with 65% of respondents working from home or in a workplace and 35% identified as working in a frontline or customer facing role.

58. As with previous surveys, for any employee who were unhappy or felt they wanted a further conversation 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.

59. 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.

60. CLT receive regular reports on a variety of workforce related matters, examples in 2022 includes updates on the People Strategy 2020-2025, the organisations improving attendance approach, resourcing and recruitment and the wellbeing agenda.

61. 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.
62. 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.
63. Health and safety compliance is monitored through monthly meetings between the Head of Health and Safety and the Director of 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.

Review and Refine

Legislation, Policy and Guidance

64. All Council policies and guidance are regularly reviewed to ensure they are in line with any new legislation.
65. 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

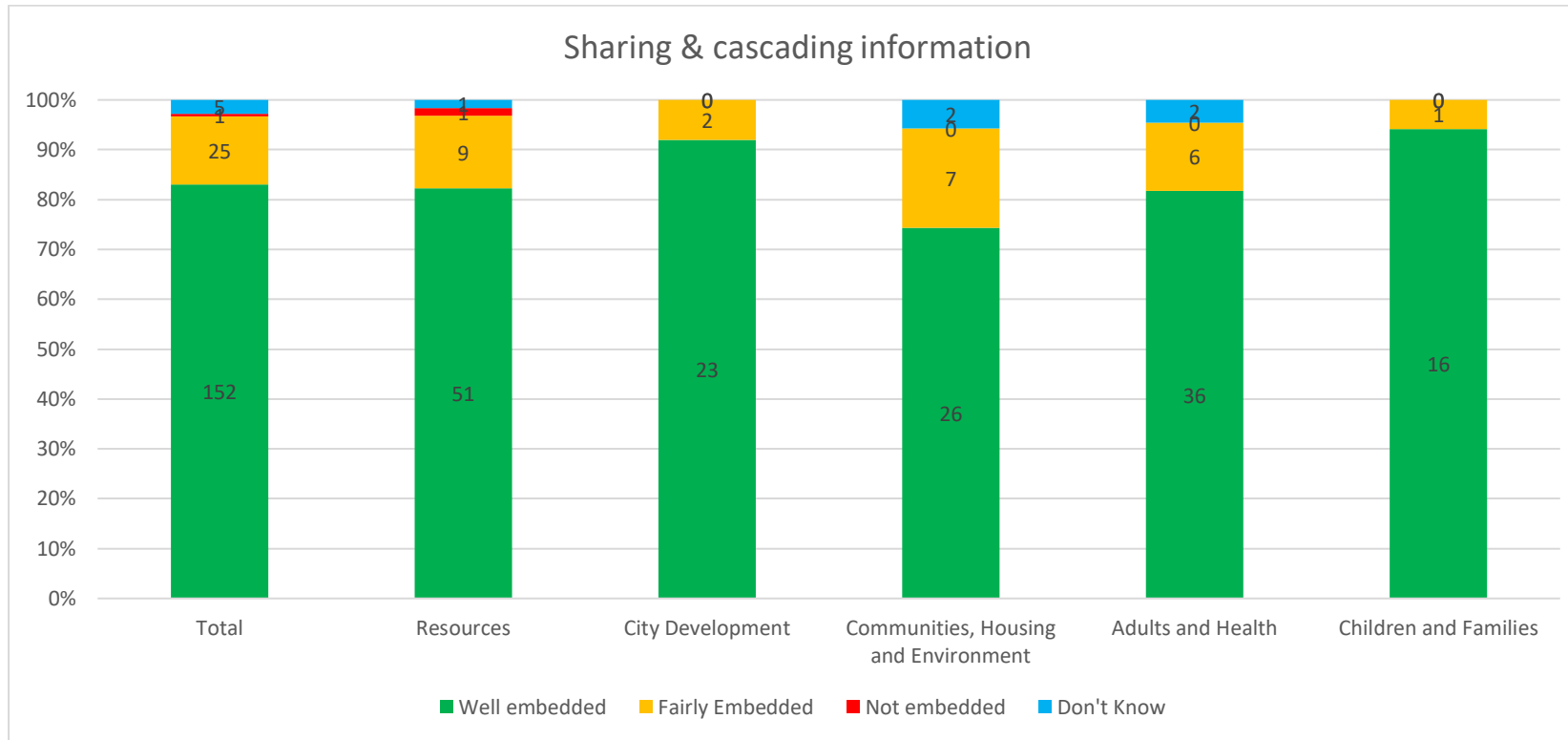
66. Key stakeholders to employment policies include managers, legal services for compliance and our recognised Trade Unions as we endeavour to collectively agree our employment policies. We also seek input from our staff networks where possible.

Survey of Internal Control

67. In 2022 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.
68. The Survey included questions relating to arrangements for the employment policies and procedure and the capacity and capability to be effective.

69. 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.

70. 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.



Opportunities for Improvement

71. 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.

72. The newly launched leadership and management offer should assist in helping our managers to continue to grow to be their best for the organisation.

Benchmarking opportunities

73. 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.

74. 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

75. Internal Audit have a timetable of HR policies and procedures that they regularly review. In 2022 audit undertook a review of the Employee Register of Interest Policy and a Culture and Values audit in the organisation.

Statement of Assurance

76. 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.

77. 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 2023 to ensure they are fully informed and kept up to date with any changes
Effectively Embed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training on the EDI agenda will continue it's 5 step process throughout 2023 to ensure inclusive practices are fully embedded across the organisation
Meaningfully Monitor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.