KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Personnel Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Monday, 14 September 2026.

PRESENT: Ms L Kemkaran (Chair), Mr O Bradshaw, Mr W Chapman, Mr B Collins, Mr M Ellis, Mrs B Fordham, Mrs G Foster, Mr S Jeffery, Ms C Nolan, Mr R Palmer (Substitute for Miss D Morton), Mr R G Streatfeild, MBE (Substitute for Mr A J Hook), Mr P Webb and Mr N Williams (Substitute for Mr H Rayner)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr B Watts (Deputy Chief Executive), Mrs K Hunter (Head of People Strategy), Mrs S Hunter-Jones (People Policy Team Manager) and Mrs A Taylor (Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Scrutiny))

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

30. Apologies and Substitutes
(Item 1)

Apologies had been received from Miss Morton, for whom Mr Palmer was substituting, Mr Rayner, for whom Mr Williams was substituting, and Mr Hook, for whom Mr Streatfeild was substituting.

31. Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this meeting.
(Item 2)

Mr Palmer declared that he was an adult volunteer with the Kent Air Cadets (Air Training Corps).

32. Cadet Force Adult Volunteers Special Leave
(Item 3)

1. Mrs Susie Hunter-Jones introduced the report which set out a revised proposal to introduce a formal special leave entitlement of up to two weeks per leave year for Cadet Force Adult Volunteers in support of the Council's commitments under the Armed Forces Covenant and its Gold Employer Recognition Scheme status. She reminded Members that the Committee had previously deferred consideration of the matter to enable additional analysis and information to be provided.

2. Officers outlined the additional information that had been provided since the Committee's previous consideration of the matter, including estimated costs, benchmarking against other authorities, and the rationale for limiting the proposal to Cadet Force Adult Volunteers rather than extending it to other volunteering groups. Members were advised that the proposal would support the Council's Armed Forces Covenant commitments and that the currently known level of eligibility suggested a limited financial impact.

3. Mr Watts and Mrs Hunter-Jones answered questions of clarification from Members and noted comments which included the following:

a) Members discussed whether further work should be undertaken to establish the number of employees involved in cadet and other volunteering organisations and were advised that, whilst possible, such work would require officer capacity and resources;
b) Some Members considered that the proposal should remain focused on Cadet Force Adult Volunteers and the Council's Armed Forces Covenant commitments, whilst others expressed the view that similar consideration should be given to volunteers undertaking comparable roles in other organisations;
c) Members discussed whether support for Cadet Force Adult Volunteers was necessary to maintain the Council's Gold Award status and were advised that the proposal was not a formal requirement but would strengthen the Council's position during future revalidation;
d) Members noted the wider national emphasis on increasing participation and recruitment within cadet organisations and the role employers could play in supporting volunteers;
e) Members discussed the Council's existing volunteering leave arrangements and the potential for future consideration of wider volunteering activity across the organisation.

4. Members expressed differing views regarding the proposal. Some Members supported the recommendation as an appropriate means of recognising and supporting Cadet Force Adult Volunteers and the Council's Armed Forces Covenant commitments. Other Members raised concerns regarding fairness and the principle of providing enhanced leave to one group of volunteers but not others.

5. Following debate, the recommendation set out within the report was put to the vote and was carried by majority vote.

RESOLVED that the Personnel Committee agree the proposal to introduce a formal special leave entitlement of up to two weeks per leave year for Cadet Force Adult Volunteers to support Kent County Council's Gold Employer Recognition Scheme award, effective from 1 October 2026.

In accordance with paragraph 16.31 of the Constitution, Mr Jeffery asked that it be recorded in the minutes that he voted against the recommendation. Mr Ellis and Mr Streatfeild abstained on the vote.

Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

EXEMPT ITEMS

(Open minutes)

33. KCC Employee Probation Policy

(Item 4)

1. Mrs Hunter introduced the report which set out proposed changes to the Council's probation policy, including reducing the standard probation period from six months to three months, introducing a revised probation review framework, and providing flexibility to extend probation in exceptional circumstances. Members were advised that the proposed changes had been developed in response to forthcoming employment legislation and associated organisational risks.

2. Mr Watts and Mrs Hunter answered questions of clarification from Members and noted comments which included the following:

    a) Members discussed the importance of effective induction, onboarding and early performance conversations to ensure new employees were supported during their probationary period;
    b) Clarification was provided regarding how the proposed arrangements would be communicated to new starters and incorporated into induction processes;
    c) Members discussed workplace attendance, access to managers and colleagues, and the importance of ensuring new employees felt supported and integrated within teams;
    d) Questions were raised regarding whether the shorter probation period could impact existing induction programmes and officers confirmed that service-specific induction arrangements would continue alongside the revised policy framework;

3. The recommendation set out within the report was put to the vote and was carried by majority.

RESOLVED that the Personnel Committee agree:

a. a reduction of the current probation period from six months to three months;
b. a revised structured probation review framework;
c. flexibility to extend probation for up to one month in exceptional circumstances or up to two months where extenuating circumstances relating to reasonable adjustments apply; and
d. the new policy applying to all new starters from 1 October 2026.