



Cherwell

DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Probation Policy

DOCUMENT CONTROL

Organisation(s)	Cherwell District Council (CDC)
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DOCUMENT APPROVALS

This document requires the following committee approvals:

Committee	Date of meeting pending approval
Personnel Committee	4 March 2026
Personnel Committee	15 March 2023

DOCUMENT DISTRIBUTION

This document will be distributed to all employees of Cherwell District

DATE FOR REVIEW

No later than 1st March 2029 but sooner if impacted by legislative changes.

REVISION HISTORY

Version	Revision date	Summary of revision
3	30 December 2025	Reviewed as part of 3-year policy review cycle

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy does not form part of any contract of employment or other contract to provide services, and it may be amended at any time following consultation with trade union and subject to agreement from the Personnel Committee.
- 1.2 This policy will be reviewed and updated as necessary to reflect legislative changes.
- 1.3 This policy applies to all employees of Cherwell District Council, it does not apply to agency workers, consultants, self-employed contractors, volunteers or interns.
- 1.4 The council is committed to ensuring that all newly appointed staff receive the best possible support during their probation period to demonstrate their suitability to undertake the full range of duties to their post.
- 1.5 The Council is committed to equality and inclusion and will make reasonable adjustments during the probation period to support employees with disabilities or other specific needs, ensuring they have equal opportunity to demonstrate their suitability for the role.
- 1.6 The standard probation period is six months. In exceptional circumstances, this may be extended by up to three months. If a contract is shorter than the length of the probation period, the probation period will be for the length of time the employee is employed.
- 1.7 During the probation period meetings will be set up by the line manager to ensure regular two-way communication between the line manager and the employee, to discuss progress and to allow timely remedial action to be taken if required.
- 1.8 Confirmation of appointment is dependent upon the satisfactory completion of the probation period. In addition to successful probationary reviews, the probation period is only deemed to be complete once the new employee has completed all induction forms, mandatory training and the probation forms have been completed on the HR/Payroll system.
- 1.9 Any issues that arise will be dealt with immediately and not left until a formal review.
- 1.10 If, at any time during the probation period, the probationers conduct, performance, attendance or timekeeping is not satisfactory, and it is evident that the required standard will not be reached before the end of the probation period the council has the right to dismiss the employee with one week's written notice.
- 1.11 Minor disciplinary matters will be dealt with under the probation procedure. However, the formal disciplinary procedure may be invoked in cases of alleged serious or gross misconduct.

1.12 Probation is a two-way process, and the new employee has a duty to ensure they raise issues and seek to get action taken to resolve issues. The new employee should actively ensure review meetings are undertaken and recorded.

1.13 If at any time during the probation period the employee feels they are not suitable for the role, they must give the Council one week's notice to terminate their employment.

2. **Purpose**

2.1 A probation period provides:

- a) Time during which an employee can demonstrate, through performance, conduct, timekeeping and attendance, their suitability for the role.
- b) An opportunity to assess the employee's capability, reliability and suitability before deciding whether to confirm their appointment.
- c) Through regular reviews, opportunities to identify the employee's training needs and provide appropriate timely development activities, guidance and encouragement, to assist in meeting the required standards.

2.2 During the probation period the line manager will ensure that all employees receive the help and support they need to develop the appropriate skills, performance and attitudes to enable them to satisfactorily complete their probation period. The line manager will;

- a) Provide a thorough induction programme.
- b) Ensure that the employee fully understands the standards expected in the role.
- c) Provide guidance, training and encouragement to help the employee adapt to the new work environment.
- d) Conduct regular reviews of the employee's progress through the probationary period.
- e) Issue warnings at the earliest opportunity if the necessary standards are not being met, stating clearly what improvement is necessary.
- f) Give the employee the opportunity to improve before deciding whether or not to confirm their appointment, except in cases of gross misconduct.

3. **Probation Meetings**

3.1 Probation meetings are intended to be a positive way of supporting and guiding an employee through their probation period. The line manager will meet with the employee on a regular basis to discuss the employee's progress and give advice, guidance, and support where improvements are required. The emphasis is on a two-way communication between the employee and line manager allowing timely action to be taken in the early stages of appointment.

3.2 Formal probation review meetings will take place at 3 months and within the final month of the probation period but no later than 6 months.

- 3.3 Employees should be proactive in seeking support if they have any concerns about the requirements of the role or their capability to perform the role.
- 3.4 Probation meetings should take place in an uninterrupted environment allowing sufficient time in the meeting for both parties to contribute constructively to the discussion.
- 3.5 In line with our values of working collaboratively, acting with integrity, demonstrating accountability, being innovative and thinking sustainably, line managers should:
- Provide constructive, balanced feedback on performance and achievements to date against the objectives set at induction, recognising successes and contributions while being honest and respectful about areas for development.
 - Review timekeeping and attendance, including sickness absence, in a supportive and consistent way, seeking to understand any underlying issues and working collaboratively with the employee to identify appropriate solutions or adjustments where needed.
 - Review and agree training and development needs, encouraging continuous learning and identifying opportunities for growth that support both the individual's development and the longer-term needs of the service.
 - Identify any aspects of performance or conduct that require improvement, clearly setting out expectations and agreed actions, while acting with integrity and fairness and ensuring the employee understands their responsibilities and accountability.
 - Explore any problems or barriers the employee has encountered in their role, creating a safe and inclusive space for open discussion and working together to find practical, innovative and sustainable ways forward.
 - Provide appropriate guidance and support, including signposting to relevant resources or colleagues, and fostering a sense of shared responsibility for achieving positive outcomes.
 - Introduce and agree any changes to objectives, ensuring they remain realistic, achievable and aligned with Council priorities, and that ownership and timescales are clearly understood.
 - Set the next review meeting, confirming actions, responsibilities and timescales to support ongoing progress and accountability.
- 3.6 A copy of the probation meeting documentation should be recorded electronically in within the council's current HR/Payroll system.
- 3.7 It is the line manager's responsibility to ensure that reviews are conducted within the timescales described in this policy.
- 3.8 In between reviews the line manager should keep brief notes of the probationer's achievements, development points, training requirements and any advice or warnings given, to be used at the next review meeting.

4. **Extension of probation period**

- 4.1 The line manager, may, after discussion with their Human Resources Business Partner, seek to extend an employee's probationary period where performance, actions and/or conduct have been identified as not quite meeting the required standards. Extensions to the probation period should be on a month-by-month basis

and will not exceed 3 months in total. Managers will need to complete regular reviews during the extension.

- 4.2 Employees will be formally notified in writing of an extension to their probationary period by Human Resources and will be provided with a clear outline of areas where improvement and/or action is required within an agreed timeframe.

5. **Confirmation of appointment**

- 5.1 If the employee's performance, conduct, timekeeping, and attendance have been satisfactory and fully meet the council's expected standards for the role the line manager will complete the final probationary review and form on the HR/Payroll system.
- 5.2 Employees will be advised in writing of the successful completion of their probation period.
- 5.3 Employees will not be deemed to have passed their probationary period of employment unless they have received written confirmation from Human Resources

6. **Terminating Employment**

- 6.1 Probation periods will usually be confirmed as successful at the end of the period however, where performance or required actions have failed to reach the standards required by the line manager, and where reasonably considered there is very little likelihood of the employee being able to reach the required standards within reasonable timeframes, despite additional support and/or training, the line manager should advise the employee that they may not be confirmed in post.
- 6.2 If this is the case, the line manager will arrange a meeting with both their Human Resources Business Partner and the employee. The employee has the right to be accompanied at this meeting by either a workplace colleague or Union Representative.
- 6.3 The purpose of the meeting is to enable the line manager to review the case for termination of employment and to consider any views expressed by the employee before a decision is made.
- 6.4 After a brief adjournment the line manager will state the outcome of the meeting.
- 6.5 The decision will be confirmed in writing to the employee as soon as reasonably practical and normally within 5 working days of the meeting.
- 6.6 Should the outcome of the meeting be dismissal; the employee will be provided with one weeks' notice. For cases of gross misconduct, summary dismissal may be considered.

Appendix 1

Probation review forms are accessible on the Manager Self Service (MSS) iTrent portal

This form will be made available against the person when they start at the organisation and can be accessed in MSS as follows:

- Select the person, whose form needs to be completed
- Click on Questionnaires and Forms under the links section
- Click on Review Questionnaires and Forms
- Click on the Probation Form on the right-hand side of the screen and follow the instructions detailed within the form

Once the manager has completed the form and saved it, the employee will have an opportunity to comment.

All probation documentation stored within the HR/Payroll system will be handled in accordance with data protection legislation, including GDPR, to ensure confidentiality and secure processing of personal information.

Should managers or employees have any queries about the form, please contact:
humanresources@cherwell-dc.gov.uk