



South Tyneside Council

People and Organisational Development Committee 29 July 2026

People and Organisational Development Committee Minutes

Minutes of 27 May 2026

Councillors: Elsander (Chair), Fox, Leather, Oughton, Rice, M Smith, S Smith, Stonehouse, H Wildhirt.

Claire McLaren (Head of People and Organisational Change), Karl Burgon (Operational Development Advisor), John Turbitt (Health and Safety Advisor), Suzanne Bell (HR and Occupational Health Advisor), and Kelly Ellwood (Democracy Support Officer).

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes of 11 March 2026

Agreed: That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee be agreed as a true and accurate record.

3. Chair's Urgent Items

There were no urgent items raised.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

This verbal update gave Members an introduction to the People and Organisational Development service, outlining areas overseen by the service and key officers.

The Terms of Reference for the Committee were noted, and it was emphasised that the Committee was apolitical, here to advise and guide. It was explained that wherever possible, report authors were encouraged to attend and present their own reports.

Details were provided on who to contact if support was required.

Agreed: That the update be noted.

5. Workforce and People Strategy

This presentation explained further the role of the Committee and how it supported the Council's workforce.

The Committee was responsible for employment policies, staff wellbeing, recruitment, pay, and organisational development, with a sub-committee supporting senior appointments and disciplinary matters.

The work of the People and Organisational Change (POC) Service was explained, which supported all employees. This service provided HR, payroll, organisational development, health and safety, and transformation support, aiming to help the Council remain safe, efficient, and high-performing while improving culture and ways of working.

An overview of the workforce showed that the Council employed over 5,600 staff, with more female employees than male. A large proportion of staff were aged over 55, and many had caring responsibilities highlighting the need to support a diverse workforce.

The presentation also outlined the Council's cultural journey and transformation programme. It introduced new PROUD values, leadership programmes, employee engagement activities, and a People Strategy. These changes aimed to create a modern, fit-for-purpose organisation with the right culture, skills, and technology to meet the Borough's needs.

Results from staff surveys showed broadly positive feedback, with a high number of employees stating they felt proud to work for the Council, trusted in their roles, and felt supported by their managers. Wellbeing support and flexible working were seen as key strengths, although concerns were noted around career progression, pay and rewards, communication, and access to equipment. Feedback showed the need to continue improving processes and listening to staff views. The survey showed a 55% return rate, up 70% on the previous year.

The People Strategy focused on attracting and keeping skilled staff, improving engagement, and supporting development. Actions included apprenticeships, early careers programmes, improved recruitment processes, and stronger employee networks.

On future priorities, these included introducing a new payroll and HR system, updating policies to meet new laws, and developing a new People Strategy for 2027–2030. There was also a focus on improving health and safety and supporting staff wellbeing.

Clarity was sought around school employees, and it was explained that while they were employees of South Tyneside Council who would

oversee payroll, schools would have a governing body and headteachers could run the school as they deemed necessary.

Around remote working, it was advised that approximately one-third of employees were on-site at any time, this was at the discretion of managers so long as the needs of the business were being met. The impact on wellbeing was acknowledged, noting that working from home could be isolating.

On work experience, it was noted that there was high interest and a recent apprenticeship event had been well attended. It was further noted that the Council was fully insured and compliant with relevant health and safety legislation so any young person would be fully safe and supported.

A Member queried whether any changes had been made following the comments on the employee survey. It was advised that a Corporate Action Plan had been implemented in a “you said... we did” style, with over 100 improvements made across all directorates.

Agreed: That the presentation be noted.

6. Housing Professionals Development Policy

This report introduced the Housing Professionals Development Policy, which was created to prepare the Council for new national standards coming into effect from October 2026. These standards required senior housing staff to have the right qualifications, skills, and behaviour to deliver high-quality housing services for residents.

The policy set out a clear framework, outlining that affected staff either already held, or were working towards, recognised housing qualifications at Level 4 or Level 5, depending on their role. The policy explained which roles were included, what qualifications were required, and what support would be provided.

Support was a key part of the policy. It was explained that staff were given access to training, study time, and learning resources and managers would help staff balance their workload and learning, while reasonable adjustments were made where needed to support individual circumstances. It was clarified that in some cases, the Council would fund qualifications, with conditions around repayment if staff left their role early.

It was recognised that some staff may face challenges completing qualifications, such as workload pressures, personal responsibilities, or health issues, with measures in place to reduce these risks such as flexible learning arrangements. The policy also considered equality and

fairness, acknowledging that some groups could be more affected than others and included actions to ensure equal access to opportunities.

A Member asked about the mechanism to reclaim costs if an employee left shortly after completing the qualification. It was explained that this would not be the case for apprenticeships as these were funded via the Government levy, however a pro-rata amount could be claimed for qualifications at Level 5.

A Member highlighted that this requirement could be a barrier to employment for some who may be unable to do the qualification or may choose not to, risking the loss of experienced staff. It was advised that there was the possibility that an employee could be transferred or redeployed in these circumstances.

It was queried how long employees would be given to complete the qualifications, and it was noted that timescales could run from 12 months and one day to 18 months. It was asked whether there was any leeway for those who did not pass, and it was confirmed they would be supported for up to three attempts.

Discussion around performance took place, with Members informed that a robust system was in place to track this, and it could also be monitored via check-ins and annual reviews.

Further information was circulated to Members after the meeting to provide finer detail on questions raised.

Agreed: That the policy and progress so far be noted.

Reasons for Decision:

- *To ensure Committee is informed of the Council's approach to supporting compliance with new regulatory requirements, strengthening professional competence in housing leadership roles, and maintaining high-quality services for tenants.*

7. Occupational Health and Safety Team

This report gave Members a review of South Tyneside Council's health and safety performance between April 2025 and March 2026.

It was explained that the Occupational Health and Safety Team was a small group made up of a manager, four advisors, and one technician. The team provided advice, carried out audits and inspections, investigated incidents, and supported all council services and schools.

It was noted that staff accidents increased slightly, but the overall rate remained stable. Transport incidents were the most common cause, especially in waste services, while slips, trips, and falls also remained frequent. In schools, a pattern of staff being hit by sports balls had been identified, and guidance was issued.

Data showed incidents of violence and abuse towards staff had decreased but remained high, mainly within schools and Children's Services. Support such as wellbeing checks, training, and risk assessments was ongoing.

Audits and inspections identified no major concerns, and improvements were made where needed. The team had also supported construction and demolition projects.

It was noted that fire safety had seen improvement in some areas, with fewer residential fires, although false alarms had increased. Safety advice continued to be shared with residents.

Members were advised that policies and procedures had been updated, reporting systems improved, and health and safety training continued across the organisation.

It was queried how often Health and Safety Executive visits took place, and it was answered that these were ad-hoc and may be undertaken in line with campaigns or focus areas.

It was asked whether conflict resolution training was offered to Elected Members. It was confirmed that this was the case, acknowledging the risk of working in the public domain, and it was advised that a "risk of harm" list was available which employees and Members would have access to.

A Member highlighted the rise in violence towards teaching assistants and noted that people have the right to report and may wish to do so anonymously. It was advised that reporting was strongly encouraged; the process had been revised and support and intervention was offered. It was further advised that work was ongoing to combat suppression, and workers could not be protected if the Service were unaware of incidents.

Agreed: That the report be noted.

Reasons for Decision:

- *To ensure the People and Organisational Development Committee are kept informed on work undertaken in relation to occupational health and safety and the service provided to the organisation.*