Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority **Item 5**

Finance and Resources Committee

16 December 2025

Probation Policy

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek Member approval of the revised Probation Policy, which sets out the Authority's approach to supporting new staff and assessing suitability for their role.

Recommendation

2. That Members approve the revised Probation Policy, as set out in **Appendix A**.

Strategic Framework

3. The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and support the strategic planning framework:

    - Corporate Plan Objective 31:
      Ensure that we have HR policies, procedures, terms and conditions to attract and support the right people with the right skills to deliver the Authority's work effectively.

Background

4. Probation periods are a key part of the employment lifecycle. They provide a structured opportunity for managers and new staff to assess suitability for the role, clarify expectations and establish a foundation for future performance. They also ensure that appointments are confirmed only when the individual has demonstrated their capability, supporting fairness and consistency in how new starters are welcomed, trained and assessed.

5. Staff who have already completed six months' continuous service with an organisation listed under the Redundancy Payments (Continuity of Employment in Local Government, etc.) (Modification) Order 1999 are not subject to a probation period. This reflects the principle of continuity across participating public sector bodies, recognising that such individuals have already demonstrated their capability in a similar setting. However, managers are still expected to provide induction, support and regular review meetings to ensure a smooth transition into the Authority.

6. The current policy was last reviewed in 2018. Regular updates to policy are necessary to ensure continued compliance with legislation, reflect best practice and address evolving organisational priorities.

7. The revised draft policy was shared with the Member Champion for Corporate Management, UNISON representatives and the Senior Management Team for feedback.

Summary of key changes

8. The main amendments to the policy include:
    - Clearer structure for probation review stages (2, 4 and 6 months).
    - Stronger focus on induction, target-setting and behaviours and ongoing support.
    - Updated templates to support collaborative feedback and values-based reflection.
    - Improved process for managing underperformance and appeals.
    - Clarified eligibility criteria, including treatment of staff with continuous service under the Modification Order.

9. These changes are expected to strengthen the Authority's probation process by improving clarity, consistency and confidence for staff and managers.

Financial Implications

10. The proposed changes are not expected to incur any additional costs.

Legal Implications

11. The revised policy ensures continued alignment with current legislation and legal obligations.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

12. The revised policy promotes fairness and transparency by embedding consistent review processes and encouraging two-way feedback. It supports inclusive practice by ensuring all staff receive appropriate support and are assessed against clear and objective criteria.

Human Resources Implications

13. The revised policy offers clearer guidance for managers and promotes a consistent, transparent approach to probation across the Authority. The HR team will continue to advise and oversee implementation to ensure alignment with organisational values and fair practice.

Conclusion

14. The revised Probation Policy reflects current best practice and strengthens the Authority's approach to supporting new staff. It provides a clear framework for managers and ensures that expectations, behaviours and values are embedded early. Approval of the revised policy will promote consistency, fairness and improved outcomes across the Authority.

Vikki Thomas
Head of HR

Appendix A

Probation Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 The Authority recognises that starting a new role can be both exciting and demanding and is committed to supporting staff throughout their probation period to help them settle in and succeed.

1.2 The probation period provides a structured opportunity for managers to assess if the individual is suited to the role and for the individual to determine if the role meets their expectations.

1.3 The probation period is designed to ensure that new staff:

- understand and meet the requirements of the role; and
- achieve the expected standards within a reasonable timeframe.

2. Scope and status of policy

2.1 This policy applies to all new staff employed by the Authority except those who have completed more than six months' service with an organisation listed under the Redundancy Payments (Continuity of Employment in Local Government, etc.) (Modification) Order 1999 ('the Modification Order').

2.3 Staff will only undertake one probation period during continuous employment with the Authority. If a staff member moves to a new role while still within their probation period, this will continue under the new manager, who will carry out the remaining review meetings.

2.5 Where the contract of employment is shorter than the standard probation period, the probation period will run for the duration of the contract.

2.6 This policy does not form part of any contract of employment and it may be amended.

3. Principles

3.1 Managers will provide appropriate training, support and resources to help new staff develop the skills and knowledge required for their role.

3.2 Performance and conduct will be monitored throughout the probation period, with regular review meetings to provide feedback and guidance.

3.3 The standard probation period is six months. Where necessary, managers may, in consultation with the HR Team and the relevant Director, extend this by up to three months if performance standards have been partly achieved and there is strong evidence they will be fully met within the extended timeframe.

3.4 If it becomes apparent during the probation period that a staff member does not possess the qualifications, experience or knowledge claimed during recruitment, the matter will be discussed with the individual to establish the facts. HR advice and guidance must be sought in such cases.

3.5 Upon successful completion of the probation period, the notice period will increase from one week to the duration stated in the contract of employment.

4. Probation process

Probation reviews

Review	Time period	Purpose
Induction and objective setting	First month	Manager sets initial objectives and begins the induction process. New starter completes the corporate induction and ELMS training courses.
First probation review	2 months	Formal review of progress against objectives.
Mid-probation review	4 months	In-depth review of progress. Discussion of potential extension, if needed.
Final probation review	6 months	Final review. If successful, confirmation of successful probation period.

Monitoring during probation

4.1 Managers will monitor:

- Alignment with the Authority's values and behaviours;
- Performance, including quality of work and relationship-building;
- Conduct;
- Time-keeping;
- Attendance and sickness absence.

Ongoing support and communication

4.2 Regular 1:1 meetings should take place throughout the probation period. Managers should not wait for formal reviews to raise concerns or provide feedback. Notes from 1:1 meetings should be uploaded to Civica.

4.3 Managers should use the Probation Review and Feedback Form (**Appendix A**) to guide conversations and focus on behaviours, not just tasks. The form is designed to be light-touch and collaborative.

Addressing underperformance

4.4 Early support for underperformance helps ensure expectations are met within the required timeframe.

5. Objective setting and induction

5.1 Managers will meet with the new starter during the first week to set clear SMART targets to support performance expectations during the probation period.

6. Probation reviews

6.1 The Probation Review and Feedback Form (see **Appendix A**) should be completed collaboratively with the staff member and uploaded to Civica within five working days of a review meeting taking place.

First probation review – Two months

6.2 The first review meeting should take place after two months and provides an opportunity to assess progress against objectives and discuss performance.

6.3 Any initial concerns should be raised to support improvement and alignment with expected standards.

Mid-probation review – Four months

6.4 The mid-point review allows for a more detailed discussion of progress. Managers should assess the relevance of current targets and agree any necessary changes.

6.5 Managers will:

- Share feedback from colleagues or other managers;
- Assess performance and suitability for the role;
- Discuss any concerns about work performance or conduct
- Update targets where appropriate;

Final probation review – Six months

6.6 This meeting reviews overall performance and effectiveness during the probation period.

6.7 Staff should provide evidence that their targets have been met to support the discussion.

6.8 Managers will:

- Share feedback from colleagues;
- Assess performance, capability and suitability for the role;
- Discuss any remaining concerns;
- Confirm the outcome of the probation period.

6.9 If probation is successfully completed, new objectives should be set that are proportionate and achievable by the next Annual Appraisal.

6.10 There are three possible outcomes from the final review:

- **Expectations met** - appointment is confirmed;
- **Expectations partially met** - probation period extended by up to three months with agreed targets;
- **Expectations not met** - a Probation Hearing will be arranged to consider termination of employment.

6.11 Where expectations have been met, the Confirmation of Post Report (**Appendix B**) must be completed by the manager and authorised by the Director and Chief Executive. This formalises the transition from probation to established staff.

7. Probation hearing and termination of employment

7.1 If expectations are not met, the staff member will be invited in writing to a Probation Hearing, chaired by the relevant Director.

7.2 The meeting allows both the staff member and manager to:

- Present their case.
- Submit any relevant evidence.

7.3 Staff have the right to be accompanied by a trade union representative or a work colleague.

7.4 The Director will be supported by a member of the HR Team for procedural guidance.

7.5 The outcome will be confirmed in writing within five working days.

8. Appeal process

8.1 Staff may appeal the outcome of a Probation Hearing.

8.2 Appeals must be submitted in writing to the Head of HR within five working days of receiving the outcome. stating the grounds for appeal.

8.3 An appeal hearing will be arranged within ten working days. Staff may be accompanied by a trade union representative or work colleague.

8.4 Appeals will be heard by a member of the Senior Management Team not previously involved in the case.

8.5 The appeal hearing will:

- Review if the original decision was procedurally correct;
- Assess the reasonableness of the action taken;
- Consider any new evidence or mitigating circumstances.

8.6 The appeal outcome will be confirmed in writing within five working days.

8.7 If the appeal overturns a dismissal, the staff member will be reinstated immediately and reimbursed for any lost pay.

8.8 This is the final stage of the appeal process and there is no further right to appeal.

Appendix A Probation Review and Feedback Form

This form is designed to support a meaningful and balanced probation review process. It encourages two-way feedback and focusses on behaviours aligned with the Authority's Core Values.

Managers should ensure the form is completed collaboratively with the staff member and uploaded to Civica after each review.

Section 1: Details

Staff member's name	
Job title	
Manager's name	
Start date	Click or tap to enter a date.
Date of review meeting	Click or tap to enter a date.
Type of review	☐ 2-month ☐ 4-month ☐ final (6-month) ☐ Extension ☐Other

Section 2: Reflections on Core Values and Behaviours

To be completed by the staff member ahead of the meeting. Manager to comment during and/or after.

Core Value	Staff Reflection	Manager Comments
Improvement		
Accountability		
Commitment		
Integrity		
Open and Approachable		
Valuing and Empowering People		

Section 3: Progress and Support

Area	Staff reflection	Manager Comments	Actions (if needed)	Responsible Person
Duties and responsibilities				
Targets				
Support received				
Training and development				

Section 4: Feedback and Communication

Question	Staff Response	Manager Response
Are there any challenges of concerns?		
Is there any support or training required?		
How do you feel about management and communication?		

Section 5: New or revised targets

Targets	Date	Support Needed	Responsible Person

Section 6: Sign-Off

	Name	Signature	Date
Member of staff:			
Manager:			

Appendix B – Confirmation of Post Report

Confidential

To: **Chief Executive**

Report on staff holding probation appointments

Name:	
Job title:	
Directorate:	
Start date:	Click or tap to enter a date.

Comments by manager*

I consider that this member of staff has demonstrated their ability to meet the expectations of the role and as a result should be placed on the established staff of the Authority.

	Name	**Signature**	**Date**
Recommended by: Manager			
Authorised by: Director			
Approved by: Chief Executive			

* Where possible refer to behaviours, initiative, ability etc. – please be aware the member of staff may receive these comments

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