



## FRONT PAGE LEAD

### THE EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS ACT IS NO LONGER BACKGROUND NOISE

The big employment law story for 2026 is not one single dramatic thunderclap. It is a rolling weather system: phased rights, new duties, consultation windows, payroll changes, policy rewrites and management behaviours that now need to be fit for scrutiny.

The Employment Rights Act 2025 received Royal Assent in December 2025 and the government has published an updated implementation timeline. Employers now have a staged map rather than a vague forecast. That is helpful, but only if someone in the business is actually reading the map rather than folding it into an origami swan and hoping HR will sort it later.

For SMEs, charities, hospitality, leisure, retail, professional services and founder-led businesses, the practical issue is readiness. Contracts, handbooks, disciplinary procedures, family leave wording, harassment controls, payroll settings, line-manager training and board reporting all need to be aligned before the changes bite.

The risk is not simply “getting the law wrong”. The bigger risk is process drift: old templates, managers using phrases from 2017, payroll rules not matching contracts, and directors assuming employment compliance is something that happens in a cupboard marked HR.

#### ALAN’S TRANSLATION SERVICE

Translation: the law is moving, and the business needs to move with it. Waiting until the first awkward employee query is not a compliance strategy; it is a game of legal Jenga with wet cardboard.

Source basis: GOV.UK Employment Rights Act implementation timeline, last updated April 2026; Acas Employment Rights Act guidance.

### THREE QUESTIONS FOR EMPLOYERS TODAY

First, does the business know which changes are already in force and which are scheduled? Secondly, are the documents people actually use aligned with that timetable? Thirdly, can the business prove managers have been told what has changed? If the answer to any of those is a cheerful shrug, the next board pack needs an HR compliance item.

## WHAT CHANGES FIRST?

### THE PRACTICAL 2026 SEQUENCE

Employers should treat 2026 as a transition year, not a “deal with it when it lands” year. Some changes have already started to affect employer planning; others are scheduled for later in 2026 and into 2027. The point is not to panic. The point is to sequence the work properly.

- Check April 2026 statutory rate changes against payroll, salary budgets, apprentice records, accommodation offset calculations and any salary-sacrifice arrangements.
- Review family-leave clauses, including paternity leave and parental leave wording, so contracts and handbooks do not accidentally describe old eligibility rules.
- Revisit harassment prevention work now, because the direction of travel is towards stronger proactive duties and third-party risk management.
- Audit contracts for probation, dismissal, flexibility, working patterns and policy cross-references before day-to-day managers rely on them.
- Put board or senior-leadership ownership around employment reform. Compliance handled entirely by memory is not compliance; it is folklore.

#### THE HRSG NEWSROOM VIEW

This is a classic “boring until expensive” moment. Most employers will not fall over because they missed a headline. They will fall over because a stale document, a rushed manager and a disgruntled employee all meet in the same room.

Good preparation is not a 70-page handbook nobody reads. It is a joined-up compliance framework: plain-English policies, proper decision records, documented training, manager scripts, investigation templates and support available before things become spicy.

#### WHAT “READY” LOOKS LIKE

Ready means the person handling the first complaint knows where the procedure is, which letter to use, who can chair the hearing, who can hear the appeal, and when to escalate. It also means payroll can confirm pay rules without a forensic archaeology exercise through old spreadsheets.

That level of practical discipline is what stops routine employment issues turning into expensive, slow-moving dramas with everyone suddenly remembering they meant to update the policy last year.

## BACK-OFFICE LINK-UP

### HR PLUS FINANCE: THE GROWN-UP COMBINATION

HR compliance rarely lives in a neat HR-only box. Pay rules sit with payroll. Holiday calculations sit with systems. Directors’ duties sit with governance. Fraud prevention sits with finance, operations and culture. That is why HR Support Group’s link-up with Bridgewater Accountants matters.

Bridgewater brings accountancy, payroll, tax and wider business support into the same client conversation. HRSG brings HR, employment law, company law, investigations, governance and people-risk management. Together, it means clients can get practical back-office support without bouncing between advisers who only see one corner of the room.

#### CLIENT TAKEAWAY

If your employment documents say one thing, payroll does another, and managers explain a third version over WhatsApp, you do not have a process. You have an evidential buffet for a claimant.

The best client support joins the dots. Payroll changes should trigger contract checks. Contract changes should trigger manager guidance. Manager guidance should trigger evidence of communication. None of that is glamorous, but it is exactly the sort of dull competence that keeps organisations out of avoidable trouble.

#### THIS ISSUE COVERS

- Employment Rights Act readiness
- April 2026 wage and statutory-rate pressure
- Harassment prevention and investigation discipline
- Companies House ID verification
- Failure to prevent fraud procedures
- AI, recruitment and data protection
- Cyber governance for boards and SMEs
- A 90-day action plan for clients

## PAY DESK

### APRIL 2026 RATES: CHECK THE PAYROLL, NOT JUST THE POSTERS

**From 1 April 2026, the National Living Wage and National Minimum Wage rates increased. That is not just a payroll note. It is a contracts, budgeting, apprenticeships, deductions and working-time issue.**

The National Living Wage for workers aged 21 and over is £12.71 from April 2026. The 18-20 rate is £10.85. The 16-17 and apprentice rates are £8.00. The accommodation offset is £11.10. Those numbers need to be checked against actual hours worked, unpaid time, training time, travel time, uniform deductions and any salary-sacrifice arrangements that may accidentally drag pay below the legal floor.

The usual trap is assuming an hourly rate on paper tells the whole story. It does not. Minimum wage compliance is often lost in the details: staff arriving early for handovers, unpaid mandatory training, trial shifts, deductions, uniforms, accommodation, clocking systems, rounding practices and managers "just asking" someone to stay late.

#### SMALL EMPLOYER WARNING

"We pay above minimum wage" is not the same as "we have audited NMW risk". The first is confidence. The second is evidence.

*Source basis: GOV.UK National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage rates, April 2026.*

#### AUDIT TIP

Pick a sample of low-paid staff, apprentices, salaried workers with variable hours and anyone with deductions. Recalculate actual hourly pay across a pay reference period. Where the answer relies on "that's how we've always done it", pause and test it properly. Tribunal claims and HMRC enforcement do not give loyalty points for tradition.

Also check job adverts and offer letters. A rate advertised in March and paid in April can quietly become wrong if no one updates the template.

#### PAYROLL HOUSEKEEPING

Keep one clear pay-change file showing who checked the rates, when payroll was updated and whether any deductions were reviewed. That small evidence trail is invaluable if a worker later challenges pay or HMRC asks awkward but entirely reasonable questions.

## FAMILY LEAVE

### PATERNITY AND PARENTAL LEAVE: UPDATE THE WORDING BEFORE IT UPDATES YOU

Acas confirms important Employment Rights Act changes around family leave. Paternity leave has become a day-one right, and ordinary/unpaid parental leave has also become a day-one right. The old "you need a year" approach for parental leave should not be sitting in a current handbook.

This matters because employees and managers tend to find the old wording at exactly the wrong moment: pregnancy, new child arrangements, rota pressure, short staffing, holiday clashes or a strained relationship with a supervisor. That is when bad policy wording becomes more than cosmetic. It shapes decisions.

- Replace outdated qualifying-service wording.
- Update manager guidance and employee FAQs.
- Check contracts, handbooks, offer letters and family leave policies agree with each other.
- Train managers not to treat family leave requests as a personal inconvenience.
- Keep records of requests, responses and reasons.

#### ALAN'S TRANSLATION SERVICE

Translation: family leave is not a favour from the rota gods. It is a legal framework. Managers may have feelings about coverage; the law is notably unmoved by those feelings.

*Source basis: Acas Employment Rights Act 2025 updates and Acas paternity leave guidance.*

#### MANAGER BRIEFING NOTE

The right response to a family-leave request is calm, recorded and process-led. Managers should not imply that leave creates disloyalty, causes inconvenience, or will affect future opportunities. Those comments have a habit of returning later, wearing a suit and carrying a witness statement.

Where rotas are tight, the business should plan cover rather than apply pressure. Operational inconvenience is not a lawful veto.

#### POLICY ALIGNMENT

Family leave wording should be checked against holiday, sickness, redundancy, flexible working and enhanced benefit policies. Problems often start where one policy has been updated and another still carries the old rule, quietly waiting to ruin everyone's afternoon.

## DOCUMENT CONTROL

### THE STALE HANDBOOK PROBLEM

A surprising amount of employment risk comes from documents that are not malicious, just ancient. Old disciplinary wording. Out-of-date probation clauses. Policies that cross-refer to managers who left in 2019. Grievance procedures that promise steps the employer never actually follows.

When a dispute lands, those documents are no longer admin. They become evidence. An employee will say: "This is what your procedure says." The employer will then say: "That is not how we do things now." At which point the process starts to smell faintly of smoke.

#### WHAT TO AUDIT THIS MONTH

- Employment contracts and offer letters.
- Handbook introduction and policy status wording.
- Disciplinary, grievance and appeal stages.
- Probation and capability wording.
- Holiday, sickness, family leave and flexible working sections.
- Anti-harassment, whistleblowing and safeguarding wording.
- Data protection, monitoring, AI and device-use policies.

#### HRSG SERVICE NOTE

A policy audit should not just produce red ink. It should produce a usable action plan: what is compliant, what is risky, what is missing, and what needs fixing first.

A proper audit should also check tone. The best policies sound human while still being legally robust. If a policy reads like it was written by a Victorian debt collector during a thunderstorm, staff will not use it and managers will avoid it. Practical language is not weakness; it is usability.

For HRSG clients, we would usually prioritise red/amber issues first, then rebuild documents into a consistent suite so the handbook, contracts, templates and management practice all point in the same direction.

#### tone matters

Clear documents reduce management improvisation. They also reassure employees that process exists before conflict starts. That is not fluffy; it is preventative risk control with better manners.

## CULTURE AND CONDUCT

### HARASSMENT PREVENTION: THE DUTY IS GETTING HARDER TO BLUFF

**Sexual harassment prevention is no longer just a policy paragraph near the back of the handbook where legal duties go to be forgotten.**

The EHRC continues to emphasise proactive prevention: risk assessment, action planning, communication, training, reporting routes, monitoring and review. The Employment Rights Act timeline points towards further strengthening in 2026, including a move to “all reasonable steps” and obligations relating to third-party harassment.

That means employers should be moving beyond the old model: policy exists, staff once clicked through a training slide, and someone in the office still thinks “banter” is a legal defence. It is not. The practical question is whether the employer can show it identified risk, acted on it and kept the matter under review.

- Risk-assess roles, sites, shifts, client-facing work and lone-working situations.
- Train managers on early intervention, not just formal complaints.
- Create safe reporting routes and keep them genuinely usable.
- Record what action is taken and why.
- Review culture indicators: absence, turnover, complaints, exit interviews and rumours that keep reappearing.

*Source basis: EHRC employer guidance and GOV.UK Employment Rights Act implementation timeline.*

### EVIDENCE BEATS INTENTION

It is not enough for a senior leader to say they “care about culture”. The question is what the organisation actually did. Risk assessments, attendance records, training content, reporting data, board minutes and review notes all help demonstrate active prevention. Warm words are lovely. Evidence is better.

Employers should also look at third-party settings: customers, clients, contractors, volunteers, service users and visitors. The most obvious risk in the room is often not technically on the payroll.

### CULTURE METRIC

If the same location, supervisor, client group or shift pattern keeps producing low-level concerns, treat that as data. Patterns are evidence waving politely before they start shouting.

## INVESTIGATION DESK

### WHEN “JUST HAVE A CHAT” BECOMES EXHIBIT A

Informal resolution has its place. So does proportionate management. But employers get into trouble when they treat serious allegations as awkward diary clutter rather than evidence-led matters requiring clear handling.

The golden rule is simple: match the process to the risk. A minor misunderstanding may not need a full investigation. A serious harassment, bullying, safeguarding, whistleblowing, fraud or discrimination concern probably does. What cannot happen is selective curiosity: asking the questions that are easy, ignoring the ones that are uncomfortable, and then calling it “reasonable”.

### INVESTIGATION DISCIPLINE

A good investigation records the allegation, scope, evidence reviewed, witnesses spoken to, facts found, gaps in evidence and rationale. It does not rely on “everyone knows what happened” as if workplace folklore has evidential weight.

### COMMON FAILURES

For serious cases, independence can protect everyone: the complainant, the accused, the decision-maker and the organisation. It shows the employer took the matter seriously and reduces the risk of internal politics infecting the outcome.

### SCOPE MATTERS

The terms of reference should say what is being investigated and what is not. Without that discipline, investigations either drift into everything or miss the one issue that actually matters.

- The investigator is too close to the facts.
- The chair has already expressed a view.
- Witnesses are not asked consistent questions.
- Notes are vague, missing or edited beyond usefulness.
- The outcome letter gives conclusion, not reasoning.
- Appeal is heard by the same person who made the first decision.

## MANAGER-PROOFING

### YOUR WEAKEST POLICY IS THE ONE A LINE MANAGER IMPROVISES

A beautiful policy is useful only if managers understand how to apply it. In most disputes, the risk does not come from the HR document. It comes from a hurried manager sending a short, emotional message at 8.47pm because they wanted it “off their desk”.

Manager-proof HR means building tools that reduce the chance of improvisation. Scripts. Checklists. Decision templates. Investigation plans. Letters that say what they need to say without sounding like they were assembled during a fire alarm.

- Give managers plain-English process maps.
- Use template invitation, suspension, investigation and outcome letters.
- Create “do not say this” guidance for sensitive situations.
- Require HR/legal sign-off for dismissal, whistleblowing, discrimination, pregnancy, sickness and grievance-linked decisions.
- Keep escalation points visible and easy to use.

### ALAN'S TRANSLATION SERVICE

Translation: the phrase “I didn't think it would matter” has funded many a claimant solicitor's printer cartridge.

### HRSG CAN HELP

Independent investigations, grievance hearings, disciplinary chairing, appeal reviews, policy audits and manager training - built to stand up to scrutiny, not just look tidy in a folder.

The aim is not to frighten managers. It is to give them enough structure that they do not create risk while trying to solve it. In high-risk matters, a short pause for advice is almost always cheaper than repairing a process that has already gone sideways.

That is especially true where the employee has raised discrimination, whistleblowing, pregnancy, trade union, health and safety or disability issues. Those are not “normal HR problems”; they are risk multipliers.

### ESCALATION RULE

If a case could affect dismissal, reputation, safeguarding, discrimination, whistleblowing or senior leadership credibility, get experienced support before the first formal letter goes out.

## COMPANIES HOUSE

### IDENTITY VERIFICATION: THE CLOCK IS NOT DECORATIVE

From 18 November 2025, Companies House identity verification became a legal requirement, with a 12-month transition period for directors and people with significant control.

This is part of the wider Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act reforms. For small companies, family businesses, charities with subsidiaries and dormant-looking group structures, the immediate job is not philosophical. It is administrative: identify every director, PSC and relevant filer; confirm who has verified; record the status; and make sure filings are not left until someone discovers the company cannot easily do what it needs to do.

This is particularly important where there are historic directors, nominee arrangements, old service addresses, changed email accounts or individuals who are “technically still on there” because nobody tidied the register. The corporate register is not a dusty cupboard. It is increasingly an active compliance environment.

#### BOARDROOM NUDDGE

If the phrase “I think Companies House has the old details” appears in a board meeting, the next agenda item should be “why are we like this?”

*Source basis: Companies House/GOV.UK identity verification guidance, November 2025 transition period.*

### HOUSEKEEPING THAT MATTERS

Check registered office, service addresses, officer details, PSC information, confirmation statement deadlines and who has authority to file. Where a company has grown quickly, changed advisers, brought in investors or changed directors, do not assume the register tells the current operational truth. For groups, charities, subsidiaries and dormant entities, build a simple schedule. Boring? Yes. Useful? Also yes. Future-you will be grateful when an urgent filing is not blocked by avoidable confusion.

### DO NOT LEAVE IT TO ONE INBOX

Use shared compliance records and adviser access where appropriate. If only one person knows how filings, verification and records are managed, the business has built a key-person risk with a Companies House logo on it.

## FRAUD PREVENTION

### FAILURE TO PREVENT FRAUD: PROCEDURES, NOT POSTERS

The new corporate offence of failure to prevent fraud came into force on 1 September 2025. It applies to large organisations meeting statutory thresholds, but smaller organisations should still pay attention because supply chains, funders, insurers, auditors, lenders and counterparties increasingly expect fraud prevention discipline.

The official guidance focuses on reasonable fraud prevention procedures. In practice, that means leadership commitment, risk assessment, due diligence, communication, training, monitoring and review. It also means employment controls: recruitment checks, finance authority levels, whistleblowing routes, disciplinary consequences and clear expectations for staff and associated persons.

- Map fraud risks by role, department and transaction type.
- Check finance approvals, expenses, procurement and supplier onboarding.
- Train staff on red flags, reporting routes and document integrity.
- Keep whistleblowing and investigation processes credible.
- Review gifts, hospitality, conflicts of interest and commission arrangements.

*Source basis: GOV.UK and Ministry of Justice guidance on the failure to prevent fraud offence.*

### HR'S ROLE IN FRAUD PREVENTION

Fraud prevention is not solely a finance matter. HR controls are central: recruitment vetting, references, probation monitoring, disciplinary standards, exit processes, whistleblowing routes and manager awareness. Culture matters too. If staff think concerns disappear into a drawer, they will stop reporting them.

A strong framework connects finance controls with people controls. That is where HRSG and Bridgewater can work together particularly effectively.

### ASSOCIATED-PERSON RISK

Think beyond employees. Agents, consultants, intermediaries and outsourced providers can create exposure. Contracts should set expectations, but training, monitoring and reporting routes make those expectations real.

## DIRECTORS AND GOVERNANCE

### COMPANY LAW IS PEOPLE MANAGEMENT IN A SUIT

Directors' duties, corporate filings, fraud controls and employment decisions often collide. A dismissal may be an HR issue, but it can also reveal governance gaps. A payroll error may be a finance issue, but it can also expose contractual failure. A conflict of interest may begin as a boardroom awkwardness and end as a serious compliance matter.

For growing SMEs, the sensible approach is joined-up oversight: HR, payroll, accountancy, risk and governance all reporting into a practical compliance rhythm. That is precisely where HRSG and Bridgewater can add value.

#### HR + ACCOUNTS = FEWER BLIND SPOTS

The payroll file, the contract, the handbook, the board minutes and the Companies House record should tell a consistent story. When they do not, the business has avoidable risk.

### QUICK BOARD CHECKLIST

Directors should also remember that employment problems can become board problems quickly. A mishandled dismissal, ignored whistleblowing concern or unresolved harassment complaint can affect insurance, reputation, management time and commercial relationships.

### MINUTES MATTER

Where boards discuss employment reform, fraud prevention or major people-risk, minute the discussion and the agreed action. A board that considered risk and acted reasonably is in a stronger position than one relying on collective amnesia.

- Are directors and PSCs verified or scheduled to verify?
- Do board minutes show awareness of employment law reform?
- Are HR risks part of management accounts or board packs?
- Is fraud prevention owned at senior level?
- Are conflicts recorded and actively managed?
- Does the business know who can legally sign what?

## RECRUITMENT TECHNOLOGY

### AI RECRUITMENT: FAST IS LOVELY; UNFAIR IS EXPENSIVE

AI and automation in recruitment can save time, but the ICO has been clear that employers need proper safeguards around automated decision-making, personal data and candidate fairness.

The danger is not the use of technology itself. The danger is buying a shiny tool, feeding it CVs, letting it rank human beings, and then being unable to explain how decisions were made. That is uncomfortable under data protection law and deeply unattractive in any discrimination argument.

Employers using AI or automated tools in recruitment should understand what data is being processed, whether special category data could be inferred, how candidates are informed, whether humans genuinely review decisions, and whether the system has been tested for bias or error.

- Ask suppliers how the tool works and what data it uses.
- Complete a data protection impact assessment where appropriate.
- Tell candidates how automation is used.
- Keep meaningful human review in the process.
- Test outputs for bias, anomalies and exclusion patterns.
- Do not let “the system said no” become the whole explanation.

*Source basis: ICO recruitment and AI/automated decision-making guidance, including 2026 recruitment automation materials.*

## PROCUREMENT QUESTION

Before signing up to an AI recruitment platform, ask the supplier to explain the logic, data inputs, audit controls, human override, deletion periods, UK GDPR support and bias testing. If the answer is mainly marketing fog, do not build your recruitment process on it.

Keep humans in charge of employment decisions. Technology can assist; it should not become the unchallengeable oracle of who gets an interview.

## CANDIDATE COMMUNICATION

Recruitment privacy information should be visible, accurate and written for real people. Candidates should not need a law degree and a torch to find out how their data is being used.

## DATA PROTECTION

### EMPLOYEE DATA: STILL NOT A FREE- FOR-ALL

Employment data is messy, sensitive and often emotionally charged. Sickness records, disciplinary notes, grievance evidence, monitoring data, performance records, absence patterns, location data, emails, chat messages and recruitment notes all carry risk.

The practical compliance test is whether the employer can explain the lawful basis, necessity, transparency, retention period and access controls. In plain English: why do you have it, who can see it, how long do you keep it, and what would you say if the employee made a DSAR tomorrow?

#### DSAR REALITY CHECK

If your document would look dreadful when disclosed, do not write it like that in the first place. “But I only meant it internally” is not a legal cloak of invisibility.

## WATCH LIST

The cleanest rule is this: write every internal note as though it may one day be read by the employee, their solicitor and a judge with excellent eyesight. That does not mean avoiding honest analysis. It means avoiding sarcasm, speculation and casual comments that make the employer look careless.

## RETENTION DISCIPLINE

Set retention periods and follow them. Holding everything forever feels safe until a DSAR arrives and the business discovers it has preserved years of unnecessary commentary like a museum of poor judgment.

- Manager WhatsApp groups discussing staff.
- Informal notes that influence formal decisions.
- Over-retention of disciplinary or sickness records.
- Unclear CCTV, vehicle tracking or device monitoring.
- AI summaries used without checking accuracy.
- Sensitive data held in personal inboxes or downloads.

## CYBER AND BOARDS

### CYBER GOVERNANCE IS NOW A BOARD TOPIC, NOT AN IT CUPBOARD TOPIC

The UK Cyber Governance Code of Practice is aimed at boards and directors, setting out actions senior leaders should take to govern cyber risk. That matters because HR and payroll data are prime targets. A breach involving employee bank details, right-to-work documents, sickness records, DBS material or grievance evidence is not just an IT incident. It is a people, legal, reputational and operational incident.

Board-level cyber questions should include training, incident response, supplier risk, access controls, backups, payroll system security and who will communicate with employees if something goes wrong. A cyber plan nobody has rehearsed is just a PDF with ambitions.

- Make cyber risk a standing board or leadership item.
- Limit HR/payroll data access to those who actually need it.
- Check supplier contracts and breach notification processes.
- Train staff on phishing and payment diversion fraud.
- Rehearse who does what in the first 24 hours.

*Source basis: GOV.UK Cyber Governance Code of Practice, April 2025; NCSC board guidance.*

## PAYROLL IS A CYBER TARGET

Payroll diversion fraud, fake supplier changes and compromised inboxes are not exotic risks. They are everyday business risks. Staff should know how payment changes are verified, who can authorise them and what to do when a request feels urgent, odd or emotionally pressurised. “Please pay this today” is not a control environment.

## INCIDENT FIRST HOUR

Decide in advance who contacts IT, payroll, legal, insurers, affected employees and advisers. Crisis plans written during the crisis have a known tendency to become interpretive dance.



# THE HR SUPPORT GROUP COMPLIANCE GAZETTE



UK HR, compliance & company law briefing | May 2026 edition

PAGE 6 | THE HRSG 90-DAY CLIENT ACTION PLAN

## PULL-OUT GUIDE

### THE 90-DAY COMPLIANCE SPRINT

This is the bit to tear out, pin up and then actually do. Preferably before a director says, “Can someone just check we’re compliant?” at 4.55pm on a Friday.

#### DAYS 1-30: FIND THE GAPS

- Collect current contracts, handbook, policy documents, offer letters and template letters.
- Check payroll rates, deductions, working-time records and apprenticeships against April 2026 NMW/NLW rates.
- Identify all directors, PSCs and company filing responsibilities.
- Map live HR risk: grievances, disciplinaries, sickness absence, performance issues, whistleblowing, harassment concerns and settlement discussions.
- Review recruitment tools, candidate data handling and any AI or automated shortlisting.
- List key suppliers handling payroll, HR, IT, finance, recruitment or employee data.

#### OUTPUT BY DAY 30

A risk register with green, amber and red actions. Not a “we should probably look at this” list. A proper owner, deadline and priority for each issue.

The best first month is honest, not pretty. If the handbook is old, say so. If the contract suite is inconsistent, record it. If managers are doing their own thing, find out before a claimant does. A clean diagnosis is the only useful starting point.

## IMPLEMENTATION

### DAYS 31-60: FIX THE DOCUMENTS

This is where tidy intentions become client-ready documents. The aim is not to produce policies for the sake of policies. The aim is to make sure managers, employees and directors are all working from the same compliant script.

- Update contracts and handbook clauses affected by Employment Rights Act changes.
- Refresh grievance, disciplinary, capability, absence and appeal procedures.
- Strengthen harassment prevention wording and third-party risk controls.
- Add or update fraud prevention, conflicts of interest and whistleblowing sections.
- Update data protection, monitoring, AI, recruitment and retention wording.
- Create practical manager guides: what to do, what not to say, when to escalate.
- Align payroll wording with Bridgewater or payroll-provider processes where relevant.

#### QUALITY CONTROL

Every policy should answer three questions: what is the rule, who does what, and what evidence will prove it happened?

### DAYS 61-90: TRAIN AND EVIDENCE

A policy update without training is a half-built bridge. The business needs evidence that people were told, trained and given workable processes.

- Brief managers on new processes and escalation points.
- Issue updated documents with a clear implementation date.
- Keep records of training, acknowledgements and questions asked.
- Schedule a 6-month review rather than letting the documents fossilise again.

Implementation should be practical. A short manager briefing with useful examples will usually do more good than a dense policy launch email that everyone pretends to read while making coffee.

## COMMERCIAL CLOSER

### HOW HR SUPPORT GROUP AND BRIDGEWATER HELP

HR Support Group supports employers across HR, employment law, company law, independent investigations, grievance and disciplinary chairing, appeal work, policy audits, contracts, handbooks, governance support, settlement agreement support, complex ER and board-level people risk.

Through our link-up with Bridgewater Accountants, clients can also access payroll, accountancy, tax and wider commercial support. That means HR documents, payroll logic and financial controls can be made to work together rather than politely ignoring each other across the room.

#### USEFUL CLIENT SERVICES

- HR policy audit and RAG report.
- Contract and handbook rebuilds.
- Independent grievance, disciplinary and appeal chairing.
- Harassment prevention training and risk assessments.
- Fraud prevention and whistleblowing framework review.
- Companies House and director compliance support through the right professional channels.
- Payroll/accountancy alignment with Bridgewater Accountants.
- Manager-proof HR templates and practical retained support.

#### FINAL WORD

Compliance does not have to be terrifying. It does, however, need to be done properly. HRSG brings the people-law sharp edges; Bridgewater brings the numbers, payroll and accountancy backbone. Together, fewer nasty surprises.

## SUGGESTED NEXT STEP

Start with a policy and contract audit. That gives the business a clear compliance baseline, a prioritised action list and a sensible route into deeper work only where needed. No drama. No theatre. Just the work done properly.

And if a matter has already become difficult, bring in independent support early. The sooner a process is stabilised, the less likely it is to become a costly lesson in hindsight.

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