

# HR NEWS ROOM

## Enabling businesses to grow & thrive through their people

January 2026



HAUS  
OF  
HR®

Hello and welcome to our **January edition** of the Haus of HR News Room.

As we step into 2026, one thing is clear: this year is about being intentional with how we plan, lead and support our people. The days of "winging it" in HR are well and truly behind us, and this edition is designed to help business owners start the year with clarity and confidence.

Inside this month, we're focusing on **people planning** in 2026 and why aligning your business goals with your workforce strategy is now essential, not optional. We've also shared our **Business Owner's HR Checklist for 2026**, highlighting the key areas employers should be reviewing now to stay compliant, reduce risk and support sustainable growth.

You'll also find practical guidance on some of the hidden HR risks facing SMEs, including **informal hiring practices** and misunderstandings around **protected conversations**, alongside our latest blog spotlight exploring what the **Employment Rights Bill** and wider changes mean for employers this year and beyond.

As always, there's space for humanity too. Our CHO Buddy is back with a timely reminder about **boundaries at work**, and we're proud to share how **giving back** - even just 45 minutes of your time - can make a real difference through our continued support of **Worktree**.

Whether you're planning for growth, tightening up processes, or simply looking to start 2026 on the front foot, I hope this edition gives you something useful, reassuring and practical to take away. As ever, if you'd like support turning any of this into action, the **Haus of HR team** and I are here to help.



Rachel



## People Planning in 2026: Why "Wing It" Won't Work Anymore

As we step into 2026, people planning is no longer a "nice to have" - it's a business essential. With rising employment costs, increased employee rights and tighter scrutiny on workplace decisions, reactive HR is becoming an expensive risk.

Many business owners know where they want the business to go this year, but far fewer have mapped what that means for headcount, capability, leadership and compliance.

### Why It Matters

Without a clear people plan, businesses often over-recruit, under-develop managers, or delay difficult decisions until they become crises. In a year shaped by legislative change and economic uncertainty, unclear people strategy can stall growth and drain leadership time.

Strong people planning helps you control costs, retain key talent and make confident decisions – even when circumstances change.



### What Employers Should Do

- Align business goals with workforce capacity and skills
- Review roles, structures and succession risks
- Identify capability gaps before they impact delivery
- Invest in manager capability, not just headcount
- Document decisions to ensure fairness and consistency

### How Haus of HR Can Help

We work with business owners to turn growth ambitions into practical people plans. From workforce mapping and role design to manager coaching and compliant implementation, we help you build teams that are sustainable - not stretched.

Because successful businesses don't just plan for growth. They plan for people.

**Want help developing a People Plan? We're here to support you - just get in touch**

# HR CHECKLIST 2026

## Here's our Business Owner's HR Checklist for 2026 - Is your people strategy ready for what's next?

2026 is a pivotal year for employers. With major employment law reform on the horizon, increased scrutiny on people decisions and rising expectations from employees, having your HR foundations in order is no longer optional.

Here are the key areas business owners should review as they head into 2026:

### ✓ Legal compliance (future-proofed)

Review contracts, policies and processes now to prepare for upcoming changes under the Employment Rights Bill.

### ✓ HR technology & AI use

Ensure systems and tools support consistent, well-documented and defensible people decisions.

### ✓ Recruitment & employer brand

Attract the right people with fair, inclusive and compliant recruitment processes that reflect your values.

### ✓ Onboarding & performance management

Set expectations early and manage performance consistently to reduce risk later.

### ✓ Retention, wellbeing & engagement

Monitor absence, engagement and conduct trends - not just when issues arise.

### ✓ Manager capability

Invest in managers. Strong people management is one of the biggest risk-reducers in 2026.

### ✓ Offboarding & reputation

Handle exits professionally to protect your brand and create "happy leavers".

### ✓ Ongoing HR support

Reactive HR is expensive. Proactive support helps you stay compliant, confident and in control.

**Final thought:** Businesses that plan their HR properly in 2026 will spend less time firefighting and more time growing.



# Blog hotspot!

## HR in 2026 - are you prepared?

2026 is shaping up to be a defining year for UK employers. With the **Employment Rights Bill** on the horizon and wider employment law changes planned, small businesses will need to pay closer attention to how they manage their people, processes and workplace culture.

This isn't just about compliance. It's about adapting to a shift towards stronger day-one rights, greater expectations around fairness and inclusion, and a growing emphasis on prevention rather than reaction when it comes to workplace issues.

From changes to sick pay and parental leave, to clearer expectations around contracts, manager capability and workplace behaviour, the direction of travel is clear. Employers will need robust foundations, confident managers and people-centred policies to navigate what's ahead.

The good news? With the right preparation, 2026 presents an opportunity to strengthen your HR approach, reduce risk and build a workplace where people feel supported and valued.

Our latest blog explores the key HR areas small business owners should be focusing on now to prepare for 2026 and beyond. Read the full blog [here](#).

## GIVING BACK IN 2026

### Why 45 Minutes Can Make a Real Difference

At Haus of HR, giving back isn't a side project - it's part of who we are.

Our Founder, Rachel Collar, is proud to be a Trustee Board Member for **Worktree**, a charity that supports young people as they prepare for work, build confidence and take their next steps into employment.

One of the most powerful things about Worktree's programmes is how accessible volunteering can be. In many cases, it starts with just 45 minutes - helping our future workforce understand the world of work from an employee's perspective.

For businesses, volunteering time isn't just good for the community - it's good for your people too. It builds purpose, develops leadership skills, strengthens local connections and reminds us all why inclusive employment really matters.

As we head into 2026, we'd love to encourage more businesses to get involved. You don't need a big budget or a long-term commitment - just a willingness to share your experience and a small amount of time.

Because sometimes, 45 minutes is all it takes to change someone's direction.



If you'd like to learn more about volunteering with Worktree, now is a brilliant time to start. Find out more [here](#).

**worktree**

# Question of the month

## What are the differences between "without prejudice" and "protected conversations"?

Both "without prejudice" and "protected conversations" regulate the admissibility of documents and discussions, usually before a settlement agreement, in future legal proceedings. But there are differences in the application and use of "without prejudice" and "protected conversations" and the case law is separate. It can be expensive for the employer if it gets it wrong.

### Without prejudice

"Without prejudice" is a common law principle - it is derived from case law. It prevents statements, whether written or oral, from being put before an employment tribunal or court as evidence in legal proceedings. It can apply to any type of claim - for example, unfair dismissal, unlawful discrimination, unlawful deduction of wages and breach of contract. But there are the following conditions.

- It must relate to an existing dispute - this usually means that the employee is considering bringing a claim.
- Both parties must make a genuine attempt to resolve that dispute. There must be no "unambiguous impropriety" in the conduct of the parties during the settlement discussions, such impropriety might include blackmail, fraud, threats, physical intimidation or assault.

### Protected conversations

"Protected conversations" are a statutory scheme under s.111A of the Employment Rights Act 1996. They permit discussions between an employer and employee with a view to terminate employment on agreed terms to remain confidential and inadmissible in proceedings for unfair dismissal before an employment tribunal. There are certain differences from the "without prejudice" rule.

- The protection only applies to unfair dismissal. It does not apply to any other claims such as discrimination or whistleblowing. There is no need for an existing dispute - the offer to the employee can come, therefore, "out of the blue".
- Protection will be lost where there is improper behaviour - such as pressure for the employee to resign, harassment or bullying.
- The principle does not apply in Northern Ireland.

For any further advice or questions about this, contact the team at Haus of HR [here](#).



## Boundaries Are Not the Enemy

CHO Buddy here. This month's wisdom comes from observing you all - never logging off.

I see it every day. Emails answered late at night. Messages replied to "just quickly." Lunch breaks that mysteriously disappear. Even I know when it's time to stop and I nap professionally.

Here's your CHO reminder: boundaries aren't a lack of commitment. They're how humans stay effective.

Clear finish times. Proper breaks. Permission to switch off. These things don't reduce performance - they protect it. Teams with healthy boundaries are more focused, less burnt out and far nicer to sit next to (trust me).

As leaders, the biggest signal you send is what you do. If you log off, others feel safe to do the same. If you rest, they rest. If you respect boundaries, they will too.

Strong workplaces don't expect humans to behave like machines. They design work that humans can actually sustain.

If you're not sure how to reset expectations without losing momentum, Haus of HR can help you put clear, kind boundaries in place that work for everyone.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm enforcing my own boundary with a nap.

## GROWING YOUR TEAM IN 2026 - WHY INFORMAL HIRING IS A HIDDEN HR RISK

For many small business owners, recruitment starts with a conversation rather than a process. A recommendation from someone you trust, a CV sent via WhatsApp, or "seeing how it goes" for the first few months can feel quick, flexible and sensible. But in 2026, informal hiring is becoming one of the biggest hidden HR risks for SMEs.

As employment expectations continue to tighten and candidate awareness increases, the way you hire and onboard matters far more than it used to.

### The Problem with "Casual" Recruitment

When hiring happens without structure, businesses often skip essential steps, such as:

- Clearly defining the role and expectations
- Using fair and consistent selection criteria
- Confirming terms in writing before someone starts
- Completing robust right-to-work and reference checks
- Setting probation objectives or review points

While things may feel fine initially, issues often emerge later - when performance dips, expectations don't align, or the employment relationship breaks down.

### Why This Matters More in 2026

From day one, employees gain key statutory rights, and employers are expected to demonstrate fairness and consistency. Without clear documentation and evidence, small business owners can find themselves struggling to:

- Manage poor performance during probation
- End employment confidently and fairly
- Defend decisions if challenged
- Maintain morale across the wider team

What feels like flexibility early on can quickly turn into complexity later.

### What Good Hiring Looks Like for Small Businesses

Recruitment doesn't need to be corporate or complicated, but it does need to be clear. In 2026, good SME hiring should include:

- A written role outline with realistic expectations
- A consistent approach to interviews and selection
- Clear contracts and policies issued on time
- Structured onboarding and probation reviews
- Early feedback and documentation

These steps protect your business while helping new starters succeed faster.

### How Haus of HR Can Help

At Haus of HR, we support small businesses to hire with confidence - without losing their agility. We help employers:

- Put simple, compliant recruitment processes in place
- Create contracts and probation frameworks that actually work
- Train managers to have better early-stage conversations
- Reduce the risk of costly hiring mistakes

Our approach is practical, people-focused and designed for real-world SMEs. Hiring quickly is understandable. Hiring informally is risky. As your business grows in 2026, the way you bring people in will directly impact performance, culture and legal risk.

If recruitment currently relies on gut feel alone, now is the time to add a little structure - before problems arise. Want to strengthen your hiring process without slowing down? We're here to help - just get in touch [here](#).