

HR NEWS ROOM

February 2026

Enabling businesses to grow & thrive through their people



HAUS
OF
HR®



Rachel

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

As we move through February, one thing is clear: the businesses that thrive won't be the ones "winging it" with their people practices - they'll be the ones being intentional, consistent and confident in how they lead, manage and support their teams.

In this month's issue, we're shining a light on the foundations that make (or break) performance. We start with **onboarding** and why the **first 90 days** are critical for setting expectations, accelerating productivity and protecting your culture if things don't work out. Alongside that, we explore why **employee engagement** matters more than ever and how a simple, early-year pulse check can give you clear insight into what's really going on in your workplace.

You'll also find an **HR legal update** on the key changes expected from **April 2026**, plus a blog spotlight on how to **recruit better, faster and smarter** without it becoming a time drain (or an expensive guessing game). And for this month's "**Question of the Month**", we tackle a practical one we're asked regularly: **jury service** - what employers can and can't do.

As always, there's space for the human side too. CHO Buddy is back with a reminder that small conversations can make a big impact (hello, **Time to Talk Day**), and we're proud to share how we're continuing to support **Worktree** and the next generation through their upcoming Career Mixer event.

Whether you're tightening up processes, planning for growth or simply aiming for a calmer, more confident year in HR - we hope this edition leaves you with something useful and actionable. And if you'd like support turning any of this into a plan, the Haus of HR team and I are here to help.



Onboarding: Why the First 90 Days Are Critical

Onboarding new employees often happens "on the go" - a quick intro, a few systems logins, then straight into the day job. But that approach is quietly costing businesses time, performance and, in some cases, legal risk.

A strong onboarding and probation process isn't about being corporate. It's about setting people (and managers) up to succeed, making expectations clear early, and spotting issues before they become expensive problems.

Why It Matters

Most hiring mistakes aren't obvious on day one. They show up weeks later as missed deadlines, confusion over priorities, inconsistent behaviour or a manager who "hopes it will sort itself out." When that drift happens, businesses often find themselves stuck: too late to reset expectations easily, but not confident enough to act.

Clear onboarding protects your culture, speeds up productivity and gives you the evidence you need to manage performance fairly if things don't work out.

What Employers Should Do

- Confirm role expectations and "what good looks like" from week one
- Issue contracts and key policies on time (before start date wherever possible)
- Build a simple 30/60/90-day plan with agreed priorities
- Schedule structured check-ins (don't leave probation to chance)
- Give early feedback and document it
- Train managers to handle "not quite right" conversations confidently and consistently

How Haus of HR Can Help

We help business owners create onboarding that's practical, people-friendly and defensible - from probation frameworks and check-in templates to manager coaching and performance support.

Because successful onboarding doesn't just welcome someone in. It sets them up to deliver and protects your business if they don't.

Want help developing Onboarding Plans? We're here to support you - just get in touch

From **April 2026**, several employment law changes are expected to expand day-one rights, strengthen enforcement, and increase redundancy consultation risk.

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP):

- All employees will qualify for SSP regardless of earnings level (removing the lower earnings threshold)
- SSP will be payable from day one of absence, instead of starting on day four

Employer action: update absence policies, payroll settings and manager guidance and be ready for day-one SSP to influence short-term absence trends.

Family leave: day-one entitlement

Employees will have day-one rights to:

- Paternity leave
- Parental leave

Employer action: refresh family leave policies/handbooks and ensure managers understand notice and process requirements.

New enforcement body: Fair Work Agency

A new Fair Work Agency will be formed to enforce laws, including minimum wage and SSP.

Employer action: consider a quick compliance audit (pay practices, record-keeping, sickness processes)

Redundancy: higher penalties for consultation failures

The maximum compensation for failure to consult during a large redundancy exercise will double to 180 days' pay.

Employer action: make sure collective redundancy triggers, timelines and documentation are watertight.

Our top tip is to undertake a short policy and process review now, which can prevent costly issues later. **Get in touch** if you need help with this.

Blog hotspot!

Recruit Better, Faster and Smarter

If recruitment has been keeping you (and your team) awake at night, our **latest blog** is for you. We break down the practical recruitment best practices that help businesses hire with more confidence - without it becoming a time-drain or a costly guessing game.

We cover the building blocks that make the biggest difference:

- Start with a clear job definition (so you attract the right people and deter the "nearly right" ones)
- Strengthen your employer brand - because most candidates will check your culture and values before they apply
- Use a structured process (screening criteria, structured interviews, scoring and feedback) to avoid inconsistent decisions
- Look beyond CVs with behavioural/psychometric insight to reduce the risk of a wrong hire
- Communicate quickly and clearly to stop great candidates dropping out mid-process

We also share how Haus of HR can support you, including a free recruitment audit. **Contact us** to find out more!

SUPPORTING THE NEXT WORK GENERATION

At Haus of HR, giving back to our local community is an important part of who we are. That's why we're proud to support **Worktree**, where our Founder, Rachel Collar, is a Trustee Board Member.

Worktree's upcoming **Career Mixer Networking Event** on **Tuesday 10 February 2026, 18.15 - 19.45** marks the finale of its Career Kickstarter programme for students aged 13-18. The event introduces young people to professional networking for the very first time, helping them build confidence, practice communication skills and gain insight into the world of work.

It's also a fantastic opportunity for local businesses across Milton Keynes to connect with one another, share experience and engage with emerging talent in a meaningful, practical way.

The Career Kickstarter and Career Mixer project is made possible thanks to the support of **MK Community Foundation** and its donors, enabling Worktree to reach and support even more young people develop confidence and valuable skills for their next steps.

If you're a business owner or leader looking to give back in 2026, this is a simple but impactful way to get involved.

Book your place **here**.

Sometimes, a short conversation can make a lasting difference.



Question of the month



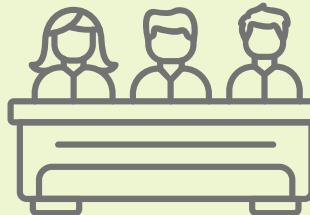
Do I have to allow my employees paid time off when they are called for jury service, or can I delay it?

There is no legal right to time off for jury service, paid or otherwise (although employees can claim for loss of earning expenses directly from the courts if they are selected for jury duty).

However, employers may be held in contempt of court if they don't allow an employee to fulfill their duty. Also, dismissing an employee for taking time off for jury service is automatically unfair.

If the employee's absence would seriously harm your business, you can ask the employee to defer their jury service. The employee must apply for deferment themselves, but you can write a letter supporting their application which the employee can give to the court. Note, this can only be done once in a 12-month period.

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



Small Conversations - Big Impact!

Time to Talk Day on **5 February** is a simple reminder that workplace wellbeing starts with conversation - not policies, posters or "big initiatives".

When people feel safe to speak up, problems get spotted earlier, support happens sooner, and teams feel more human.

A few small ways to make talking easier:

- Ask twice: "How are you... really?"
- Listen without rushing to fix it
- Create natural moments: brew break, walk-and-talk, quick Teams check-in
- Signpost support early (Employee Assistance Programme, Mental Health First Aider, NHS Talking Therapies)

On 5 February, check in with one person properly. One genuine conversation can make a bigger difference than you think.



WHY EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT MATTERS MORE THAN EVER



Employee engagement isn't about perks, ping-pong tables or once-a-year surveys. At its core, engagement is about how connected people feel to their work, their manager and the organisation they work for.

As we head into the year ahead, engagement is becoming one of the most important indicators of business health. With rising employment costs, increased employee rights and ongoing pressure on productivity, engaged teams are no longer a "nice to have" – they're a business essential.

Engaged employees are more productive, more committed and more likely to stay. They're also more likely to speak up early when something isn't working – which helps businesses address issues before they become costly problems.

On the flip side, low engagement often shows up as higher absence, performance issues, increased turnover and disengaged managers trying to "fix" problems too late. For many employers, the challenge isn't a lack of care – it's a lack of clear insight. You can't improve what you don't understand!

Strong employers don't guess how their people are feeling. They create structured opportunities to listen, measure and respond. They use engagement data to:

- Identify what's working well and should be protected
- Spot pressure points early
- Understand how leadership and management behaviours are landing
- Prioritise actions that will have the greatest impact

Engagement isn't about perfection. It's about awareness and action.

At Haus of HR, we offer a **free Employee Engagement Survey** to help employers gain a clear, honest picture of how their people are really experiencing work.

The survey gives insight into:

- Engagement and motivation levels
- Management and communication effectiveness
- Wellbeing and workload pressures
- Culture, trust and alignment
- Where employers are doing well and where there's room to improve

It's designed to be simple, practical and genuinely useful, not a tick-box exercise.

Running an engagement survey early in the year gives employers a powerful starting point. It helps shape priorities, inform people plans and ensure actions taken throughout the year are based on evidence, not assumptions.

Most importantly, it shows employees that their voice matters and that feedback leads to action.

If you want to understand your workforce better and set the right focus for the year ahead, you can access our **free Employee Engagement Survey** by contacting us [here](#).

And if you'd like support interpreting the results or turning insight into action, our team is here to help.

Because engaged people build stronger, more sustainable businesses.