

The business owner's 2026 HR checklist



There's a lot happening this year in the world of employment law and HR, which is why we've created this 2026 HR checklist to give you some guidance on what you'll need to focus on.

Work through them at your own pace, but don't put it off. And remember, we're here to support you.



1. Legal foundations

If your contracts are out of date, you're leaving yourself open to problems. Same goes for your policies. You don't need to be a legal expert, but you do need documents that actually protect your business and are applied consistently to everyone.

Assessment: where are you now?

- When did you last review your employment contracts? (Over a year ago / Within the past year)
- Is your employee handbook current? (No, it's been over a year / Yes, updated recently)
- Do you document your HR decisions, especially the difficult ones? (Rarely / Always)
- How confident are you that your current policies are up to date and legally sound? (1–5)

What to do:

Pick the one area that worries you the most, maybe it's your dismissal process or how you handle sickness. We can help you to review that first, then work through the others quarterly.



2. Smart systems

Do you find yourself wasting hours every week on HR admin? There are affordable, easy-to-use tools that handle all of this automatically without the spreadsheet headaches.

Assessment: where are you now?

- How many hours per week do you spend on HR admin? (More than 5 / Less than 5)
- Still using spreadsheets for holidays? (Yes / No)
- Are you confident your employee data is stored securely and meets GDPR requirements? (Not sure / Yes, definitely)
- What's your biggest HR time-waster right now?

What to do:

Start small. Pick your biggest time-waster and we'll help you to fix that first. Once you see the difference, you'll want to automate more. But don't try to change everything at once.



3. People performance

Can you attract decent people, get them productive quickly and keep them around?

Replacing staff is expensive and disruptive. Good people want interesting work, a chance to develop and to feel like they're making a difference. That's something small businesses can actually offer better than corporates.

Assessment: where are you now?

- Do your job ads sell what's different about working for you? (Not really / Yes, clearly)
- Got a written 90-day onboarding plan? (No / Yes)
- How often do you check in with new starters? (Randomly / Weekly then monthly)
- When did you last ask your best people why they stay? (Never / Recently)
- How settled does your team feel right now? 1 (lots of change and disruption) → 5 (steady and dependable).

What to do:

Have a chat with your best employee. Ask them why they stay and what might make them leave. The answers will surprise you and they'll tell you exactly what to focus on.



4. Wellbeing and culture

When your team is healthy and engaged, your business performs better. This isn't about yoga classes or fancy perks. It's about spotting when people are struggling before they burn out, quit, or make expensive mistakes.

Assessment: where are you now?

- Can your managers spot burnout warning signs? (No / Yes)
- Are work expectations clear and realistic? (Could be clearer / Yes, very clear)
- Do people have a way to raise concerns safely? (Not really / Yes, definitely)
- Team morale right now: 1 (terrible) to 5 (great)

What to do:

Start with a team check-in. Ask everyone individually how they're really doing. You'll quickly spot who needs support before it becomes a bigger issue. If you have managers, train them to recognise the early warning signs of burnout.



5. Growth readiness

Your team structure needs to support your growing business. That means knowing your numbers, developing your people and making sure that you're not stuck if someone important leaves.

Assessment: where are you now?

- Do you track monthly HR metrics? (No / Yes)
- How many roles would cause real disruption if vacant? (Several / Just 1-2 / None)
- Are people cross-trained in critical functions? (No / Yes)
- Does your skills development match your business strategy? (Not aligned / Fully aligned)
- Single points of failure in your team: none / 1-2 / too many



What to do:

Choose three numbers that matter to your business. Track them every month, same time, same way. Consistent tracking reveals patterns you'd otherwise miss and helps you to act before problems become crises.



Your next steps

Pick one thing from this list that's been nagging at you. The thing that makes you think "I really should sort that out." Start there. Fix it properly. Then move on to the next.

The goal isn't to overhaul everything at once. It's about building a steady rhythm of improvement that fits your business.

Ready to ensure that your business thrives in 2026?

Get in touch to discuss your HR needs and get ready for the year ahead.

Get in touch

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