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Jeff Hughes
*Head of Democratic and Legal
Support Services*

MEETING : HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE
VENUE : COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD
DATE : WEDNESDAY 15 JANUARY 2014
TIME : 3.00 PM

PLEASE NOTE TIME AND VENUE

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Councillors C Woodward (Chairman), P Ballam, Mrs D Hone, J Ranger (Vice-Chairman), P Ruffles, J Thornton and N Wilson

Substitutes

Conservative Group: Councillors A Warman

(Note: Substitution arrangements must be notified by the absent Member to Democratic Services 24 hours before the meeting)

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DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

1. A Member, present at a meeting of the Authority, or any committee, sub-committee, joint committee or joint sub-committee of the Authority, with a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI) in any matter to be considered or being considered at a meeting:
 - must not participate in any discussion of the matter at the meeting;
 - must not participate in any vote taken on the matter at the meeting;
 - must disclose the interest to the meeting, whether registered or not, subject to the provisions of section 32 of the Localism Act 2011;
 - if the interest is not registered and is not the subject of a pending notification, must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest within 28 days;
 - must leave the room while any discussion or voting takes place.

2. A DPI is an interest of a Member or their partner (which means spouse or civil partner, a person with whom they are living as husband or wife, or a person with whom they are living as if they were civil partners) within the descriptions as defined in the Localism Act 2011.

3. The Authority may grant a Member dispensation, but only in limited circumstances, to enable him/her to participate and vote on a matter in which they have a DPI.

4. It is a criminal offence to:

- fail to disclose a disclosable pecuniary interest at a meeting if it is not on the register;
- fail to notify the Monitoring Officer, within 28 days, of a DPI that is not on the register that a Member disclosed to a meeting;
- participate in any discussion or vote on a matter in which a Member has a DPI;
- knowingly or recklessly provide information that is false or misleading in notifying the Monitoring Officer of a DPI or in disclosing such interest to a meeting.

(Note: The criminal penalties available to a court are to impose a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale and disqualification from being a councillor for up to 5 years.)

AGENDA

1. Apologies

To receive apologies for absence

2. Minutes (Pages 5 - 10)

To receive the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2013.

3. Declarations of Interest

To receive any Member's Declaration of Interest and Party Whip arrangements.

4. Chairman's Announcements

5. Home working policy (Pages 11 - 40)

6. Human Resources - Quarterly Performance Report (Pages 41 - 50)

7. Local Joint Panel - Minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2013:
(Pages 51 - 58)

Members are asked to bring to the meeting their copy of the agenda for the Local Joint Panel meeting held on 3 December 2013

8. Urgent Business

To consider such other business as, in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration and is not likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information.

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD
IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
WEDNESDAY 2 OCTOBER 2013, AT 3.00
PM

PRESENT: Councillor C Woodward (Chairman)
Councillors P Ballam, Mrs D Hone, P Ruffles,
J Thornton, A Warman and N Wilson

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor D Andrews

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Glenda Bennett	- Interim Head of People and Property
Lorraine Blackburn	- Democratic Services Officer
Adele Taylor	- Director of Finance and Support Services

269 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor J Ranger. It was noted that Councillor A Warman was substituting for Councillor Ranger.

270 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting held on 3 July 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

271 HUMAN RESOURCES - QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Interim Head of People and Property Services submitted a quarterly performance report for the period up to 30 September 2013, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted and the supporting Essential Reference Papers. She drew Members' attention to the most recent people statistics in relation to the current headcount, the number of starters, the current turnover and common reasons for leaving. An update was provided in relation to those staff who had transferred to Stevenage Borough Council following the introduction of shared service arrangements.

In response to a query from Councillor P Ruffles regarding staff attending training sessions and whether the number of vacancies would be made available for public examination, the Interim Head of People and Property advised that attendees were always asked to evaluate the course attended. The number of vacancies were made available to the public through this report, but there was no specific body that examined the level of vacancies or benchmarked them. The Chairman stated that it would be useful to have statistics showing the numbers invited to attend training and those failing to attend. The Head of People and Property Services stated that HR would be taking steps to find out what type of training staff would wish to attend. She informed Members of the positive impact of staff turnover.

In response to queries from Councillor A Warman and P Ballam concerning long term sickness and attendance at training, the Head of People and Property Services stated that staff on long term sick were encouraged to return to work with a phased approach as appropriate and that training was made available to all staff with some tailored to specific work areas. Councillor J Thornton suggested that training be benchmarked to give the statistics more relevance.

The Chairman asked for further information on "e"-learning and whether this initiative had been taken up by Parish and Town Councils. Officers agreed to bring this forward as part of future reports.

The Head of People and Property Services stated that a “Wellbeing Day” had been programmed for 17 October 2013 when a number of activities would be taking place at Wallfields. She provided a summary of the initiatives.

Councillor N Wilson commented on stress and how this could be hidden especially in relation to those staff who had moved from Bishop’s Stortford to Wallfields and home wWorkers. The Director of Finance and Support Services stated that management was very much aware of stress especially on home workers and of the need for managers to take appropriate steps to ensure regular contact with them. Managers were also encouraged to consider what actions could be taken at particular times when workloads might increase and highlighted, as an example, action taken by the Shared Revenues and Benefits service as the welfare reforms had started. The Head of People and Property Services added that Line Managers also monitored stress levels, making sure that staff had the resources they needed.

The Committee noted the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

272 POLICY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Interim Head of People and Property submitted a report detailing a calendar of policy reviews which needed to be undertaken by Human Resources every three years, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted and the Essential Reference Papers. She stated that some policies needed to be reviewed as it had been more than three years since their last review and also because of legislative changes. These included “the duty to consider working past retirement age” and the policy relating to fixed term employment.

The Interim Head of People and Property drew Members’ attention to three policies which needed to be reviewed urgently as these had cost implications for the Council. These were the Redeployment Policy 2006, the Redundancy Policy

2012 and the Retirement Policy 2009.

Members were asked to agree that mileage rates be reviewed as part of the Policy Plan. This was supported.

The Committee approved the recommendations as submitted and requested that the list of policies include a column showing when the policy was last updated.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Policy Development Plan as amended, be approved;

(B) Policy 20 (the duty to consider working past retirement) be deleted; and

(C) the Fixed Term Employment Policy be terminated.

273 EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY

The Interim Head of People and Property Services submitted a report setting out the results of the Equality and Diversity in Employment Report 2012/13, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted and Essential Reference Papers. It was noted that the Council was required to publish data on equality in the workforce by 31 March 2014.

The Chairman drew attention to the numbers given for staff with disabilities and those statistics which were either “unknown” or “not given”. The Interim Head of People and Property stated that this reflected a reluctance on the part of staff, to let management know if they had a disability and of the possible reasons for this. It was noted that if this information was not provided, then the Council could not provide the necessary aids and adaptations.

In response to a query from Councillor J Thornton concerning benchmarking of the statistics relating to disabilities, the Interim Head of People and Property undertook to establish this information and let him know.

Councillor P Ruffles stated that he was pleased to see that people were allowed to work beyond retirement age and

referred to statistics regarding retirement ages and its impact on life expectancy within his profession.

The Interim Head of People and Property drew Members' attention to issues which needed to be addressed arising from the 2012/13 Employment Equality and Diversity report, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted. These were supported.

The Committee approved the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the annual Equalities and Diversity Report 2012/13 be approved;

(B) the report be published on the Council's website to ensure compliance with statute by 31 March 2014;

(C) a data cleanse be refreshed as part of the Human Resources and Payroll upgrade and that the Disabilities Status be refreshed every two years; and

(D) training and evaluation forms be reviewed.

274 LOCAL JOINT PANEL - MINUTES OF THE MEETING: 3 JULY 2013 AND 3 SEPTEMBER 2013

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meetings held on 3 July and 3 September 2013 be received.

(see Minute 275 below)

275 GRIEVANCE POLICY

The Interim Head of People and Property Services submitted a report updating the Grievance Policy to reflect changes in legislation and the ACAS Code of Practice.

The Committee considered and supported the recommendations made at the Local Joint Panel meeting held on 3 September 2013.

RESOLVED – that the revised Grievance Policy, as

now submitted, be approved.

(see Minute 274 above)

The meeting closed at 3.55 pm

Chairman

Date

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

LOCAL JOINT PANEL – 3 DECEMBER 2013

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 15 JANUARY 2014

REPORT BY THE SECRETARY TO THE EMPLOYER'S SIDE

HOME WORKING POLICY

WARD(S) AFFECTED: NONE

Purpose/Summary of Report

To approve an amendment to the revised Home working Policy.

<u>RECOMMENDATION FOR LOCAL JOINT PANEL</u> that:	
(A)	The revised Home Working Policy be recommended for approval;
<u>RECOMMENDATION FOR HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE:</u> that:	
(B)	That the revised policy be recommended for approval

1.0 **Background**

1.1 The Council's Home Working Policy was last reviewed over three years ago. The Council's programme of policy review is that policies should be reviewed after three years.

2.0 **Key change**

The policy makes explicit that employees when working from home should provide a phone number to their line manager so that they can be contacted.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers - Home Working Policy

Contact Officer: Glenda Bennett – Head of People and Property Services
01992 531 635
Glenda.Bennett@eastherts.gov.uk

ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'A'

IMPLICATIONS/CONSULTATIONS

Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/ Objectives <i>(delete as appropriate):</i>	People This priority focuses on enhancing the quality of life, health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, particularly those who are vulnerable.
Consultation:	None
Legal:	None
Financial:	None.
Human Resource:	As detailed in the report
Risk Management:	None.

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East Herts Council

Home Working Policy

**Policy Statement No 9 (Issue No 2)
November 2013**

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1.0 Aims of the Policy

- 1.1 This home working policy and guidance should be read in conjunction with the Council’s Flexible Working Policy and confirms the Council’s commitment to facilitating wherever possible flexible working practices for employees while maintaining the delivery of high standards of care and service to the local community.
- 1.2 There are benefits to both the Council and the employee which include:
- Improved efficiency and productivity
 - Improved recruitment and retention of employees
 - More effective use of office space and reduced costs
 - Reduction in sickness absence
 - Greater flexibility in hours of working and managing workloads
 - Supports work life balance and welfare of staff
 - Increased goodwill, morale and motivation
 - Greater job satisfaction and personal responsibility
 - Reduction in travel time/commuting
 - Reduction in stress and sickness levels
 - Support Council’s Climate Change Strategy
 - Supports the Council’s Equality and Diversity policy
- 1.3 This home working policy provides guidance on assessing the job, employee and home working environment to establish the business need and suitability to work from home and the implementation of home working arrangements. This is necessary to ensure consistency across the authority.

2.0 Policy Statement

- 2.1 This policy and guidance applies to all employees who have a contract of employment with the Council. It does not apply to agency workers or contractors.
- 2.2 The Council will consider the introduction of a home working arrangement where it is based on the needs of the business and is considered to be of benefit to both the service and the individual member of staff concerned.
- 2.3 Home working is not a means of combining work with caring responsibilities. Employees with caring responsibilities need to have proper care arrangements in place during their contracted working hours.

- 2.4 Employees who are disabled or become disabled in the course of their employment should inform the Council if they require any reasonable adjustments which are considered necessary for the performance of their duties. Home working may be considered when making reasonable adjustments where appropriate and relevant to the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

3.0 **Key Principles of Home Working**

- Home working is not an employee right. Any employee requesting to work from home will be assessed for its impact on the service, the employee and the team.
- Not all jobs are suitable for home working. Suitability will be determined by the Head of Service following discussion between the employee and line manager.
- The Council's generic health and safety risk assessment on home working must be considered by the employee and line manager, control measures addressed, and the assessment agreed and signed off by the Head of Service.
- A Display Screen Equipment (DSE) / Work Station Assessment must be completed for home by the employee in accordance with the Health and Safety policy before work starts and agreed and signed off by the line manager and Head of Service.
- An employee will enter into any home working arrangement on a voluntary basis, unless appointed to a vacant post already established as a home working role.
- The Council's terms and conditions of employment continue to apply to home workers unless otherwise stated.
- An application for regular home working will be made in accordance with this policy and based on business need.
- Employees will be given a trial period of three months to ensure that the arrangement is working satisfactorily for both the employee and the Council.
- Regular home workers and field based workers who will work a regular number of days from home will be issued with a home working agreement and this will be contractual. Regular home working is a permanent arrangement unless otherwise agreed.
- The Council's code of conduct and all Council policies continue to apply to home-workers; including, data protection requirements as well as email and internet usage.

- Clear objectives and measurable outputs will be agreed with the home worker in accordance with the Performance Development Review Scheme (PDRS).
- Employees working from home must provide their line manager with a phone number they can be contacted on whilst working remotely.
- The line manager will undertake annual reviews of whether the home working arrangement is working including health and safety reviews.

4.0 Definitions

- 4.1 For the purpose of this policy and guidance a home worker is defined as either:

Home Worker (Regular)

This applies to employees who work a regular number of days at home (a regular pattern of home working is established - a minimum of 2 days per week). They do not have a designated workspace or desk in the office, although they have access to shared facilities, such as team desking.

Field Based Worker

This applies to employees, also known as mobile workers such as Revenue Inspectors, Benefits Visiting Officers, Environmental Health Officers or Building Control Officers who spend more than 20% of the normal working week on Council business away from an office or a home base. Their base could be the home or the office. They have access to shared facilities, as with the regular home workers.

Flexible Worker (Occasional Home Worker)

This applies to employees, also known as ad hoc home workers who are based in the office but who have a flexible arrangement that would allow them to work occasionally from home, at the discretion and authorisation of their manager, as and when appropriate. They do not have a regular pattern of working from home or their regular pattern of working from home is only one day or less per week and they do have a designated workspace and desk.

5.0 Occasional Home Working

- 5.1 Employees can request occasional home working. This would be on a voluntary basis and would benefit both the service and the individual. Agreement will be at the discretion and authorisation of their line manager as and when appropriate.

- 5.2 On occasions line managers may request an employee to work from home to complete a piece of work, for example write a report.
- 5.3 A DSE / Work Station Assessment at home must be completed by the employee in accordance with the Health and Safety policy before occasional work starts and agreed by the line manager. The generic health and safety risk assessment must be reviewed, and any necessary controls identified introduced.
- 5.4 The Council will not normally provide equipment to anyone who works from home on an occasional basis. In some instances a departmental pool laptop computer may be available to borrow to use to work occasionally from home. Should other equipment be required the line manager should request this from ICT on sign off by their Head of Service.
- 5.5 The Council will however provide a technical flexible home working solution using security access tokens. This solution enables secure web access remotely to emails and some Council systems.
- 5.6 The solution provides an additional level of security by providing a token which displays an 8 digit number which must be input when logging in, in conjunction with the usual login name and password. The solution can be used with an employees' own equipment as the login is via a web page.

6.0 Regular Home Working

6.1 Request

- 6.1.1 To make an application to become a regular home worker an employee is required to write to their line manager requesting to work from home stating how they believe their role will be suitable.

The line manager will undertake a joint discussion with the employee including a review of business needs and complete:

1. Regular Home Working Suitability Checklist (see Appendix A).
2. Safe Working Checklist for Home Workers (Appendix B)
3. DSE / Work Station Assessment (completed by employee)
4. Review the generic health and safety risk assessment and introduce any necessary controls identified.

These documents will be assessed as part of the application process, be taken into consideration when reaching a decision and signed off by the Head of Service.

- 6.1.2 The impact on the employee, service and team will be taken into consideration as part of the application process. There should be no increase or decrease in workload for colleagues as a result of an employee working at or from home.
- 6.1.3 Where a request for home working has been declined an employee has access to the Council's grievance procedure.
- 6.1.4 If the request is agreed details of a trial period need to be drawn up. A home working agreement will be issued by HR. The line manager should inform ICT, giving as much notice as possible to ensure the equipment needed is available.

6.2 Trial period

- 6.2.1 The home working arrangement will be subject to a trial period of 3 months. A letter of confirmation will be sent after the trial period confirming whether the arrangement has been made permanent. Please also read Termination and Variation of a regular home working arrangement.

6.3 Suitability of Home Working

- 6.3.1 In assessing the suitability of a post for regular home working, the following factors will be taken into account when assessing the duties and responsibilities of the post:
- It will fulfil a business need and be of benefit to the council.
 - Be capable of being done from home without having an adverse effect on the level and quality of service or on other employees .
 - Be capable of being done without day to day face to face contact with other staff or direct supervision.
 - Be self-sufficient in terms of administrative support or capable of being remotely serviced.
 - Have clear objectives and measurable outputs.
- 6.3.2 In assessing the suitability of the employee, some of the individual competencies/ behaviours are considered important for home working include:

- Self-motivation, self-reliance and discipline to work without direct supervision.
- The ability to complete work to scheduled deadlines.
- Initiative, flexibility and time management skills.
- The ability to communicate well by telephone and in writing.
- The ability to cope with reduced social contact and isolation.
- The ability to cope with the additional pressures of working in the home where the demands of family life are difficult to ignore (childcare arrangements must be in place before home working commences).

6.3.3 It is important that the line manager and employee, as part of the request consider what effect the proposed working arrangement would have on the rest of the team. Any issues identified need to be resolved this could include:

- Will the arrangement impact on appropriate cover in the office e.g. telephones and visitors?
- What will be the effect on the level and quality of the service?
- Is the employee flexible? so that team/service needs can be met. This might include working from the team location rather than home to cover absence of other colleagues at short notice
- A home worker must be contactable during contracted hours.

7.0 Health, safety, welfare and security

7.1 The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has produced “guidance for employers and employees on health and safety and home working”. This explains the employers’ duties towards home workers and should be read in conjunction with the council’s health and safety policy.

7.2 The following key principles will apply:

- Employees will complete a DSE / Work Station Assessment before home working commences and then annually for their work areas. This is available on the Intranet. This will be signed off by the Head of Service.
- Employees will review, with their line manager, the Council’s generic health and safety risk assessment and introduce any necessary controls identified. The assessment will be signed off by the Head of Service.
- Line managers will complete with the employee a Safe Working Checklist for Home Workers before home working is commenced

and then on an annual basis. This will be signed off by the Head of Service.

- All home workers will be supplied with a copy of the Health & Safety Executive pamphlet “Health and Safety Law – What You Should Know.” <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/law.pdf>. This should be read by the home worker and held on file at their home working location.
- Line managers will ensure that home workers are subject to an annual review that will take full account of all the health and safety issues associated with home working and make adjustments to working arrangements as necessary.
- All employees who work from home have a duty to ensure, insofar as is reasonably practicable, that they work in a safe manner and that they follow all health and safety instructions issued by the Council.
- All employees who work from home are reminded that if they are visited at home e.g. by their line manager or Safety Liaison Officer that they should keep the work environment smoke free in accordance with the Health and Safety legislation.
- A random 10% sample of all homes selected by Health and Safety will be visited by trained line managers or Safety Liaison Officers. In addition, employees homes will be visited where health and safety concerns have been identified during discussions about home working, or when any assessments are undertaken. Visits may be made at any time within designated working hours and the date/time of any such appointment should be agreed in advance between the Council and the employee. A record of any inspection visits/risk assessments should be sent to HR and made available as appropriate for inspection purposes.

7.3 Fire and Accident Precautions

The home worker must have an evacuation plan for exiting the workspace safely in the event of fire and be expected to keep their exit routes clear of obstruction.

A small first-aid kit will be provided on request and should be kept within easy reach of the workspace.

7.4 Avoiding Isolation/Stress

In some circumstances home workers can feel isolated or stressed without regular contact with colleagues and their employer. Line

managers should ensure that employees are in regular contact with colleagues. Regular face-to-face team meetings and/or conference calls should be supplemented by increased contact between line managers and their employees via email and telephone. This will be set out in the operational agreement (see Section 12).

Formal and informal debriefing mechanisms should be put in place to support employees who are routinely making home visits or dealing face-to-face with members of the public who may be either hostile or distressed. Employees could be asked to attend regular group meetings to discuss visits or cases and/or establish pairs with colleagues who they are able to telephone after difficult visits.

Employees are also able to use the Employee Assistance Programme or visit Occupational Health.

8.0 Equipment and furniture and office supplies

8.1 The Council will ensure that all equipment and furniture supplied to regular home workers to carry out their duties are suitable for the purpose intended, with due regard to health and safety.

8.2 The specification of equipment to be provided will be dependant upon the definition of the home worker and the duties of the employee. The line manager should request from IT the equipment needed for the home worker, this must be signed off by the Head of Service. The range of equipment, which could be provided, includes:

- PC/laptop or monitor, keyboard, modem and mouse or laptop with docking station.
- Broadband.
- Surge protection plugs.
- Printer
- Business telephone, such as Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP)
- Desk, chair, footstool and/or equipment rack for installation of equipment.
- Lockable storage unit.
- Stationery and other office supplies.

Home Worker (Regular) Equipment: Monitor Keyboard, Mouse, Thin Client Processor, Voice over IP Phone, Secure Broadband Connection. The full IT kit will not be supplied to regular home workers until they have confirmed as part of their trial period that they wish to work from

home for a minimum of 12 months due to the financial implications of setting up a regular home worker.

Field Based Worker Equipment: Laptop or Tablet PC, Docking Station, Monitor, Keyboard, Mouse, Mobile Telephone (OCS enabled), Scanner (on request) Car Kit (on request), Secure Broadband Connection, Voice over IP Phone for home office useage.

Flexible Worker (Occasional Home Worker) Equipment: Pool Laptop and other equipment* as deemed necessary (*upon approval of business case set out by Head of Service).

The Facilities department will provide home workers where necessary with the following health and safety appliances for use in the home office through stationary request:-

- Small First Aid Kit

- 8.3 The line manager will maintain a signed inventory of Council purchased equipment and furniture supplied to the employee, and a copy of this should be sent to HR to be placed on the employee's personal file.
- 8.4 All equipment supplied will be PAT tested to meet current safety standards and be subject to regular safety checks by the line manager in line with relevant legislation. The council will not accept responsibility for any internal supplies to IT equipment (Electrical Supplies) and employees should make their own arrangements for the testing of such Electrical supplies by authorised contractors, including costs.
- 8.5 The Council is responsible for installing, maintaining and servicing Council equipment and will make clear the arrangements for reporting and dealing with faulty equipment. The Council will be responsible for replacing lost, stolen or damaged Council equipment unless the damage or loss occurred as a direct result of an employee's negligence. The employee must immediately report all identified hazards/defects/damage to the line manager for replacement/repair.
- 8.6 The employee will provide reasonable access to enable installation and maintenance of equipment. The Council will be responsible for any IT equipment attached to and from the power supply as long as adequate power breakers are installed and have not been subjected to outside interference.
- 8.7 All equipment and software supplied by the Council will remain the property of the Council and must be returned in good condition should

the home worker move or revert to an office-based role or leave the employment of the Council.

- 8.8 The Council will consider additional or specialist equipment for employees with specialist requirements as part of the assessment of eligibility for home working. In particular, employees may need adaptations to accommodate a disability as recognised under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Employees with specialist requirements will be assessed where necessary to ensure the equipment provided is suitable for their particular needs.
- 8.9 The employee is responsible for the ordering and collection of supplies from the office. The employee should make arrangements with their line manager to collect and send work related post, if applicable.

9.0 Use/Misuse of Equipment

All equipment provided by the Council is for Council work only, subject to current Council policies and the code of conduct. The equipment should be operated in conjunction with the instructions and training provided in line with the relevant policies stated. The Council reserves the right to make a deduction from pay for any maintenance/repairs/replacements required due to the misuse by the employee, that are not met by insurance or the Council.

Equipment to be used at home and in the office should be taken directly to / from the employee's home / office, and not left in an unattended vehicle.

10.0 Administration and work performance

- 10.1 The home worker will be required to attend Council offices for Performance Development reviews, regular contact with line manager, customer/employees meetings, all staff meetings and any other meeting; during normal office hours where required and notified by the employee's line manager or the Council.
- 10.2 The home worker remains subject to the Working Time Regulations 1998 with the requirement to take regular breaks and not work more than an average of 48 hours per week, in any 17 week period. A minimum break of 20 minutes every six hours is laid down in the Council's terms and conditions of employment.

- 10.3 Employees will be required to record their working patterns daily including their hours worked at home, using their electronic time sheets which must be saved on a shared drive so that their line manager has access to them.
- 10.4 Business meetings and customer visits must be arranged at a suitable venue away from the home worker's home. Under no circumstances should home workers meet with customers at their home.
- 10.5 Regular pre-planned meetings will be held between the home worker and their line manager in order to maintain their work performance and enable appropriate support to be provided.
- 10.6 Clear objectives/targets/deadlines and performance standards must be agreed in accordance with the Council's PDR scheme.
- 10.7 Annual reviews of the DSE / Work Station Assessment and Safe Working Checklist for Home Workers must be completed between the employee and line manager.

11.0 External difficulties

There may be occasions when circumstances beyond the home workers control mean that work cannot be carried out, for example, a power cut or loss of the internet. It is expected that the home worker should identify other duties that could be carried out at home. However, where this is not possible the home worker would be expected to come into the office to work.

12.0 Contact and communication

The line manager and employee must take joint responsibility to ensure that regular contact and communication between them and the rest of their team is maintained.

The following needs to be agreed between the employee and manager as part of an operational agreement:

- The arrangements for regular contact and communication between the home worker and their line manager, colleagues and other departments within the organisation. The home worker must be contactable during contracted working hours: they must provide their line manager with a phone number they can be contacted on during working hours.

- The requirement for the home worker to visit the office for meetings, staff briefings, training, Performance Development Reviews or any other face to face contact. Ideally these should be at least monthly.
- The arrangements for home visits by line managers, including the frequency, duration and amount of notice to be given.
- The requirements on the home worker to provide access for e.g. routine maintenance and equipment repairs.
- Home workers will be kept as up-to-date and involved with developments in the organisation as office based staff and the means by which this will happen will be agreed e.g. by regular briefings, access to the intranet, staff meetings, staff magazine, newsletters, email, instant messaging, training sessions, etc.
- When, how, and in what circumstances the home worker is expected to be available to speak to clients of the organisation.

13.0 Reporting illness/incidents

Employees working from home must report any sickness/incidents in accordance with the Council’s Absence Management policy and reporting procedures. Following sickness absence, the employee must contact their line manager to inform them when they are fit to work. A return to work interview will be conducted when the home worker is fit to work either by telephone or face to face.

14.0 Training and Employee Development

14.1 As a general principle, the following will apply:

- Employees working flexibly or from home are entitled to the same training, personal development, and job or secondment opportunities as other staff.
- Employees working flexibly or from home will not be discriminated against when applying for new posts.

14.2 Home workers will be required to attend training and read the health and safety policy focussing on the following areas:

- Risk assessment and health and safety awareness.
- Display Screen Equipment awareness – Work Station Assessments
- Manual Handling awareness.
- Incident reporting procedures.

15.0 Expenses

- 15.1 If applicable, the Council will cover any associated Internet and telephone call costs where an employee is undertaking Council business at home. Where business calls are made from an employee's personal home telephone these will be separately identified by the employee and reimbursed by the Council on receipt of written evidence through the Expense procedure.
- 15.2 Where an employee is required to spend a large amount of time travelling, e.g. because their main work activity is to visit customers or service users, travel and/or subsistence payments will be paid in accordance with normal conditions of service. Home workers may not claim for journeys to an East Herts office base unless covered by the disturbance allowance scheme. However, managers may agree on an exceptional basis only to reimburse journeys, which are over and above the normal requirements for keeping in contact.
- 15.3 Regular home workers (minimum of 2 days per week at home) are entitled to a tax free allowance of £156 per annum (Inland revenue rate for 08/09 - pro-rata part-time staff), based on inland revenue limits, as re-imbusement for such expenses as heating, lighting and electricity. This is paid on a monthly basis. In the event that the employee is unable to work for more than one month, the Council reserves the right to suspend payment, until such time as the employee is able to resume working from home.

16.0 Confidentiality and security on data

- 16.1 The Council will ensure that appropriate technical security measures are in place and provide suitable equipment to protect the information used by the employee. In order to protect Council data, it will only be possible for the home worker to save on the network and not on the PC hard drive.
- 16.2 It will be the responsibility of the employee to maintain this secure environment in order to safeguard the confidentiality of information and the physical security of furniture and equipment in line with current Council policies and the code of conduct. The Council's policies on data protection, email and internet usage and the Council's code of conduct apply to all staff and should be followed wherever the employee is working whether they are office based, home or field working. All policies are available on the Council's intranet.

- 16.3 Before agreeing to home working, line managers must discuss and be satisfied with the arrangements the employee has for keeping equipment and data safe in their homes and on their computers. IT staff can provide advice where required. Home workers must agree to reasonable requests for access to their homes for the purpose of routine maintenance of equipment and for security assessments and auditing requirements.
- 16.4 If the work involves confidential or personal information, any waste paperwork must either be brought into the workplace for shredding or shredded at the employee's home.

17.0 Tax, insurance, mortgage and moving home

17.1 Home workers will:

- Inform the tax office that they are working at or from home. They cannot claim tax relief on their council tax, but may be able to claim relief on lighting and heating costs. The amount will depend on the size of bills and the number of rooms in the house. Claims should be made direct to the local tax office of the Inland Revenue. The use of one room in the home for work purposes is unlikely to attract capital gains tax, but if a substantial part of the property is being used exclusively for work purposes it could have capital gains tax implications.
- Check their tenancy/mortgage agreements to ensure there are no provisions that prevent home working and inform their mortgage lender/landlord in writing that they will be working at or from home.

Inform their insurance company to avoid the risk of invalidating their home insurance policy and ensure equipment is covered. The policy schedule must be shown to your line manager prior to home working. Employees will not be required to pay business rates as a home worker and employee of the Council

- In the event that an employee moves to another home, the employee must give as much notice as possible (at least one month). The continuation of home working will be subject to the location and facilities of the new home being acceptable to the Council and a complete review of the home working arrangement (including risk assessment) will need to be conducted. Any new arrangement will be subject to a new home working agreement in all cases.

- 17.2 The Council's liability policies indemnify the Council, its staff and members from claims arising from their official duties. This includes homeworking.

If an employee suffers injury, or personal property is damaged, the Council will not meet any costs unless legally liable.

Home insurance policies usually have a public liability extension.

- 17.3 The payment of council tax will continue to be the full responsibility of the employee working at home.

18.0 Roles and responsibilities

18.1 Management

- Line managers must ensure that a DSE / Work Station Assessment and Safe Working Checklist for Home Workers is completed and that the employee has entered into a home working agreement to determine their home working status before home working commences and annually thereafter. These are subject to sign off by the Head of Service.
- Line managers must undertake annual reviews to ensure that full account of health and safety issues associated with home working are taken.
- Line managers should ensure that home workers are kept well informed of work developments and, where appropriate, consulted about any changes (in particular reorganisations).
- Line managers must ensure home workers attend training courses to support their duties and ensure proper understanding of health, safety, welfare and security issues.
- Line managers will draw up an operational agreement in conjunction with the employee on contact and communication. This will be subject to sign off by the Head of Service.

18.2 Employee

- The home worker is responsible for exercising reasonable care to prevent unauthorised access to the Council's information systems. The home worker and other designated employees or contractors are the only persons authorised to use the Council's equipment.
- The home worker is responsible for ensuring the confidentiality of Council information and for the safety and security of equipment and

information located at his/her home. The home worker is also responsible for maintaining their working environment to the agreed health and safety standards, notifying any material changes and completing a DSE / Work Station Assessment and Safe Working Checklist for Home Workers annually.

- It is the home worker's responsibility to inform all relevant external bodies of their working arrangements. These include the landlord or mortgage provider, insurance provider and local tax office.
- The home worker must adhere to all Council policies and procedures and comply with the operational agreement.

19.0 Termination and variation of a regular home working arrangement

- 19.1 Regular home working is a permanent arrangement subject to a 3 month trial period. Due to the financial implications of setting up a regular home worker, those employees who during their trial period opt to work from home on a permanent basis (Home Worker – Regular) will be required to do so for a minimum of 12 months (excluding the trial period) before they can give notice to terminate the home working arrangement. However, in exceptional circumstances the Council may agree to the employee returning to office based working before the end of the 12 month period should they request to do so.
- 19.2 It is the line manager's responsibility to record and take action regarding work performance so that if agreed performance targets are not met over an agreed period of time then the home worker may be required to work from an office location. This will be in accordance with the Managing Performance Policy.
- 19.3 Similarly, changes in service provision and business needs may also result in home workers being required to work from an office location.
- 19.4 If there is evidence to believe that health and safety issues are being ignored, the line manager must consult the Health and Safety Officer, who may in consultation with the Head of Human Resources request the suspension of the arrangements while issues are being addressed.
- 19.5 If an employee wishes to change their agreement they have to write to their line manager requesting a change in their working arrangements, giving one months notice. If the Council wishes to terminate a home working agreement it will be subject to one months notice. This is separate from the period of notice that is required to terminate employment set out in the contract of employment.

19.6 Where a home worker is appointed to a new job, the home working arrangement will be reviewed to see if the new post meets the home working criteria. If the post is not suitable for home working the arrangement will be terminated and one months notice given of a change in work location unless otherwise agreed. Home working will only continue if a new agreement is reached.

20.0 Policy Review and Amendment

This Policy shall be reviewed after three years or sooner in line with legislation and best practice.

REGULAR HOME WORKING SUITABILITY CHECKLIST

Name: _____ Line Manager: _____

Service: _____ Directorate: _____

Job Title: _____

The manager is required to complete the suitability checklist in conjunction with the employee. This needs to be considered together with the employee's flexible working application.

When assessing the suitability of the home this needs to be supplemented by a health and safety risk assessment.

The checklist must be signed by both the manager and employee. This should then be signed off by the Head of Service and sent to HR to be kept on the employee's personal record.

The Post	Suitability Yes/No	Comments
Capable of being done from home without having an adverse impact on the quality of service or on other employees.		
Capable of being done without on-going face to face contact with other staff or direct supervision.		
Self sufficient in terms of administrative support.		
Have clear objectives and measurable outputs.		
Requires limited supervision and checking.		
Is not dependent on large numbers of paper files or other work- based records/equipment that cannot be accessed from other locations.		
The work can be performed on an individual basis e.g. drafting/writing reports, planning/reviewing/ researching, computer programming, data entry, word processing.		
The Employee		
Are they self motivated, have self reliance and discipline to work		

without direct supervision.		
Do they have the ability to complete work to scheduled deadlines.		
Do they have initiative, flexibility and time management skills.		
Do they have the ability to communicate well by telephone and in writing.		
Do they feel they are able with reduced social contact and isolation.		
Is the employee flexible so that team/service needs can be met; this might include working from the team location rather than home to cover absence of other colleagues at short notice.		
The Home		
Is the home environment conducive to work and not subject to frequent interruptions/distractions/noise.		
Is there enough space to work comfortably.		
Is there adequate room for storage to maintain confidentiality and ensure security of Council property.		
Does the home where the work will be carried out meet health and safety requirements including a health and safety risk assessment.		
The Team		
Will the arrangement impact on appropriate and fair cover in the office e.g. telephones, visitors.		
Is the team flexible so that the team/ service needs can be met.		
Have the team been consulted on the arrangement and if so are there any issues to be resolved.		

Signed (employee): _____

Date: _____

Signed (manager): _____

Date: _____

Signed (HoS): _____

Date: _____

SAFE WORKING CHECKLIST FOR HOME WORKERS

Name: _____ Line Manager: _____

Service: _____ Directorate: _____

Job Title: _____

Home address: _____

Post Code: _____ Date Completed: _____

Please complete this form for regular home working. It will be used to assist the Council in safeguarding your health and safety whilst you work at home. It should be completed before you start working at home and reviewed on an annual basis.

A DSE / Work Station Assessment must be completed. Please note if you are using potentially hazardous substances a COSHH assessment is also required.

The checklist must be signed by both the manager and employee. This should then be signed off by the Head of Service and sent to HR to be kept on the employee's personal record.

Where you answer 'No' please give further details in the comments column.

General Health & Safety and Emergencies	Yes/No	Comments
Have you attended the Introduction to Home/mobile working workshop?		
Do you have a room at home which will be used specifically as an office base?		
Is there adequate ventilation, reasonable temperature, suitable and sufficient lighting within your home to perform your role effectively and with comfort?		
Is the work area tidy, free from obstructions including waste materials?		
Is combustible material e.g. stationery, stored away from sources of heat?		
Do you have an escape plan? (i.e. know exactly what you would do in an emergency)		
Is a smoke alarm fitted? (Alarms must be tested weekly and battery replaced annually)		
Do you have a first aid kit available whilst working at home?		
Do you know the procedure for reporting any accidents/incidents or work related illnesses while at home?		

Can you make telephone contact with EHDC and vice versa? Do you have a specified contact(s) at work in the event of an emergency?		
Are you aware that you must comply with the normal health and attendance reporting procedures (i.e. as if you were office-based)?		
Do you have childcare arrangements in place?		
Electrical Equipment (Please note that the EHDC is only responsible for equipment it has supplied. Equipment, electrical sockets and other parts of your domestic electrical system are your responsibility.)		
Have you received training/information in how to use any equipment or software in your work?		
Do you check the equipment regularly to ensure it is in a good condition? For example is there any apparent damage or evidence of overheating in any equipment including leads or plugs (e.g. cracked/loose casing, missing screws, discolouration, broken insulation on leads etc.)?		
Is any equipment connected via an anti-surge extension (or similar device) without using multi-plug adaptor?		
Are the cables secure in all plugs and have you ensured there are no trailing wires?		
Has all EHDC equipment been tested? (Must be retested periodically in line with the local policy)		
Manual Handling and Slips Trips & Falls		
Have you received information and/or training providing guidance on manual handling and avoiding slips trips and falls?		
While doing work at home will you carry out abnormal manual handling activities such as handling heavy, unstable or bulky loads, awkward lifting, pushing or pulling etc		Where you answer 'yes' please give further details.
Are all floor coverings sound and without defects?		
Are work areas and walkways clear of tripping hazards e.g. trailing cables, boxes?		

Well-being		
Are you in good health, not suffering from any discomfort or ill health, from working at home (including stress)?		
Security		
Do you have adequate security measures in place in your home – e.g. Are your exit doors secured by a mortise deadlock and/or security bolts? Are your accessible windows secured by key operated window locks?		
Are you aware of your responsibilities in relation to the Data Protection Act (e.g. – work related computer files are password protected, confidential paper files locked away when not in use?)		
Do you consider you are safe when working from home, with little risk of violence?		
Do you have access to a phone in case of emergencies?		

Please use this space to make any further comments:

Signed (employee): _____ Date: _____

IMPORTANT:

- If there are any changes in your health or you make any adjustments to your working conditions, you should inform your Manager as a new self assessment may need to be undertaken
- Expectant mothers – please notify your Line Manager as soon as possible of your pregnancy as an additional risk assessment will need to be undertaken.

Signed (manager): _____ Date: _____

The line manager must review this assessment of the risks which may arise from the work activity and the workplace. The line manager (acting as the employer) has specific responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and subsequent statutory regulations.

Signed (HoS): _____ Date: _____

Name of HoS: _____

This section is to be completed by the line manager

Based on the above self assessment please tick the most appropriate overall evaluation of the situation.

- 1. The working environment is satisfactory – working at home may start.
- 2. The working environment requires some adjustment/advice – working at home may start once a plan to make improvements is agreed.
- 3. The working environment is unsatisfactory – working at home may not proceed at present.

If there are any issues indicate what action is to be taken.

Issue/Problem	Recommended Action, Person Responsible and Date for Completion	Priority Rating (Urgent, Important, Useful or Desirable)

Signed (manager): _____

Date: _____

Signed (HoS): _____

Date: _____

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HR Quarterly Performance Report, October – December 2013. (as at 16 December 2013)

Current Headcount	350	Number of Leavers	5
Number of Starters	9	Vacant Number of FTE posts (funded hours expressed as FTE)	16.01
Current Turnover	1.42%	Average number of short term sickness days per FTE staff in post: (as in November)	2.43 days
Common reason for leaving	1 retired. 1 personal reasons. 1 end of contract. 2 change in career.		

Absence Levels

Short term absence is currently at 2.43 (FTE days for the year so far as at November) days lost per FTE. Last year in November it was 2.74 days. This shows a reduction this month of 0.31 days per FTE.

Long term absence is currently at 0.80 days lost per FTE. Last year in November it was 1.43 days. This shows a reduction of 0.63 days per FTE.

The total figure for days lost due to absence was 6.19 days per FTE last year: this is expected to be similar in this year.

Recruitment

In the last quarter, East Herts have advertised 14 posts- a mixture of both internal and external vacancies.

Learning and Development

As part of the Corporate Training Plan 2013/14 the following training opportunities have been delivered in this quarter.

- Corporate Induction - 24
- Mental Health Training – 24
- Project Management – 4
- Supervisory Workshop – 9
- Land Inspection – 14
- Get Ready for Microsoft Office 2010 – 114

This is in total 189 training sessions.

One town council has requested further information on the authorities E Learning Platform. Human Resources are currently working with Vine HR Ltd the hosting company to develop further learning programmes and update the E Learning site.

Human Resources are starting to create a development programme for front line managers. The aim of the programme is to support managers so they can fulfill their managerial roles and responsibilities successfully within the spirit of 'here to help'.

East Herts has also joined the East Of England coaching pool so that staff who want support through coaching can access this easily. As part of the coaching pool agreement East Herts is required to contribute coaches who are qualified. One member of staff is doing the training at the moment, and will be involved in championing this project and look to encourage greater participation going forward.

Policies

The following policy is requested to be approved by HR Committee January 2014:

- Home working

As HRC requested , the expenses policy has been revised to bring mileage rates in line with HMRC rates: this is being discussed with UNISON.

The absence policy has been drafted and revised and is in discussion with managers at the moment. It should be ready for approval at the next HRC meeting.

The next policy to revise is the disciplinary policy.

Terms and conditions

UNISON submitted a report to Local Joint Panel requesting the permanent suspension of further planned reductions in the local award. This is being negotiated at the moment.

PDR's

65% of PDR's reviews and objectives have been completed by November 2013. One service is on a different cycle of PDRs and they have completed 85% of the objectives setting part of the PDR process.

The next round of PDR's are due to take place in December 2013 and January 2014.

Here to help

'Here to help' is a Council wide development to demonstrate to all our external and internal customers, stakeholders and partners that East Herts Council has a great reputation for and is 'Here to Help'. The development of this work is built on spreading good practice and building on existing good practice, so that it is clear to every single member of staff that here to help is what East Herts Council stands for. Helping others and sharing common approaches and values will become the norm, the way we do things round here. All employees will have their say in developing the values, what they mean and how they will be practised by themselves and others.

East Herts Council already has many successes and a positive reputation with customers and residents. We know that as a council, there are many good examples of services. However we also know that if everyone in the council and its partners act together and share common ways of working, we could probably do even more. This is why alongside the here to help value, there is a further value 'we work together and support each other' so that we provide a seamless service to our residents and to each other. Without working together we are only as strong as our weakest link. The third value, we aim high to make a difference, sets out our ambitions to go the extra mile.

Based on the principle of we can do 'more of' here to help, all staff who attended the staff briefings, have had the opportunity to put forward examples of when they have seen here to help in action, and to discuss how we can do more. These successes will be part of our here to help journey, so that we can move from some to even more examples of here to help.

Line managers will be part of developing the values, and they will own and take responsibility for those values because they will be facilitating and 'fronting' the workshops on values with staff. They will be an integral part of sustaining this change in the future. Workshops started in December and will be ongoing throughout January 2014 so that we can develop enthusiasm and spread good practice.

A steering group has been set up to review and monitor the implementation of here to help. The group includes the CX, Directors and HOS from each Directorate. Going forward the group will include representatives from staff and the unions to ensure that actions are progressed and the change is sustainable. The role of the steering group will include co-ordinating actions which are council wide and ensuring actions are fully resourced and implemented. Some actions will be delivered within services in teams and in service plans.

As we implement actions, we will also be including examples of suggestions from staff and residents so that we can demonstrate action in response to feedback – 'you said' and 'we did'. East Herts will have many more examples of being known as and celebrated for being a council which is here to help, and will justify its reputation through examples and case studies. We will

be able to regularly communicate those success stories to residents, and to our staff. This will improve public satisfaction and build our reputation.

A survey is being included as part of the here to help workshops so that there is some quantitative and qualitative data on staff's views. Survey questions are attached in the survey questionnaire. (**Essential Reference Paper "B"**) Questions from the survey can be extracted to take a 'pulse' of staff's views on a regular basis so that management can respond appropriately, and swiftly

HR Strategy

Work on revising the HR strategy has begun. Here to help will be an important part of the HR strategy.



East Herts Staff Survey

Dear Colleague,

As we start the ‘Here to Help’ initiative, CMT would like your help. It’s your chance to tell us exactly how you feel. Your thoughts and views are important to us so we are setting time aside within the ‘Here to Help’ workshops for you to give us your views.

The survey is confidential and we are not asking for any information which can identify you. We will share the results with you in due course, but as the survey is anonymous, your individual responses will not be shared.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I understand my job and I know what is expected of me at work						
I have the resources I need to do my job						
At work, I have the opportunity to use my skills and knowledge						
In the last year I have received recognition or praise for my work						
At work I feel that my opinions count						
My line manager trusts me to do my job						
Colleagues in my team are committed to performing quality work						

	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My line manager holds regular (1-1) meetings with me and listens to me						
My line manager and I agree objectives for me to achieve as part of the PDR (Performance & Development Review)						
My manager lets me know how I am doing						
I feel that my manager values the contribution I make to the work of the team						
I discuss my development with my line manager						
At work I am listened to and my opinions seem to count						
I look for opportunities to improve my performance						
I am committed to working for the Council						
I understand the need to adapt and develop the way that I work to improve services						
I am happy to be involved and to participate in improving Council services						
I am taken seriously when I put forward new ways of doing things						

Essential Reference Paper “B”

	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel comfortable about raising ideas						
Senior managers regularly communicate with me						

Which of these phrases best describes the way you would speak about East Herts as an employer to people outside the organisation?	Speak highly if asked	
	Speak highly without being asked	
	Don't know	
	Critical if asked	
	Critical without being asked	
	Don't know	

Which of these phrases best describes the way you would speak about East Herts services if you were speaking to people outside the organisation?	Speak highly if asked	
	Speak highly without being asked	
	Don't know	
	Critical if asked	
	Critical without being asked	
	Don't know	

	Excellent	Very good	Fairly good	Satisfactory	Fairly poor	Very poor
Overall how would you rate the service provided by East Herts to its customers						
I am proud to work for East Herts Council						
I would recommend East Herts services to others						

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about customer service at East Herts Council?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
It is as important to provide good quality customer service to colleagues inside the council, as it is to our external customers						
It is difficult to get things done here						
If I had an idea about improving customer service, I would be listened to						

	Fully	Fairly	A little	Not very	Rarely	Not at all
How well informed do you feel about what is happening at East Herts Council?						

Essential Reference Paper “B”

	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My work environment is free from bullying and/or harassment						
The Council addresses inequality/unfair practice and discrimination against staff						
Participating in this survey will bring about improvements at East Herts Council						

<p>Please give us your thoughts and views on how we can we work together better across the council.</p>	
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<p>Please tell us your thoughts and views on how we can help our residents, better</p>	
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MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
LOCAL JOINT PANEL HELD IN THE
COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS,
HERTFORD ON TUESDAY 3 DECEMBER
2013, AT 2.30 PM

PRESENT: **Employer's Side**

Councillors M Alexander, L Haysey, A Jackson
and J Thornton

Staff Side (UNISON)

Andy Stevenson (Chairman)
Mr S Ellis and J Francis

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor J Ranger

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Glenda Bennett	- Interim Head of People and Property
Lorraine Blackburn	- Democratic Services Officer
Adele Taylor	- Director of Finance and Support Services

14 **RESPONSE TO UNISON ON LOCAL AWARD**

The Secretary to the Employer's Side submitted a report setting out possible options following a request by UNISON to permanently suspend further planned reductions in the local award and its impact on staff, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted.

The Secretary to the Employer's Side explained that she had reviewed the arrangements in a number of other Council across Hertfordshire. She explained that

Hertsmere staff had benefited from a 2% pay increase and that staff in Broxbourne earning less than £35,000 had been paid £300.

Councillor A Jackson stated that there was a need to show empathy during challenging times but reminded the Panel of the need to also take account of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). He commented that the Panel should not be making any decision which would impact negatively on the Council's need to manage its finances.

Councillor Jackson added that there was merit in recognising that in the medium term, option 5.2 (amending the reduction in the local award to 0.5%) and 5.4 (changes in terms and conditions), the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted, could be explored further and that savings might be achieved by a review of Terms and Conditions but that this needed to be balanced against the requirements of the MTFP.

The background to the loyalty / retention bonus was discussed. Councillor J Ranger reminded the Panel that the bonus was not part of employees' contractual pay and that this should be mentioned in any future offer letter of employment. The Director of Finance and Support Services stated that this was current practice.

In reviewing the options further, Councillor A Jackson reminded the Panel that it could recommend the removal of the discretionary award. UNISON reminded the Panel of the impact this would have on morale. Councillor Jackson stated that he was trying to find a way which was manageable.

UNISON referred to the inequity of arrangements in terms of working with new people who were benefitting from the recent 1% pay increase. The Director of Finance and Support Services reminded the Panel that everyone received a 1% pay rise but that those who were eligible for the local award were paid a 4% discretionary bonus instead of 5%.

Councillor A Jackson reiterated the need to show empathy during challenging times but reminded the Panel of the need to also take account of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). He recognised the merit of exploring options 5.2 and 5.4, and that savings might be achieved by a review of Terms and Conditions but that this needed to be balanced against the requirements of the MTFP. The Panel supported a decision to recommend this approach to Human Resources Committee.

RECOMMENDED - that (A) in the medium term, option 5.2 (amending the reduction in the local award to 0.5%) be explored further; and

(B) the impact of the above be explored via a review of terms of conditions (option 5.4) in order to address the need to make savings of £46,000 each year in the MTFP.

15 MINUTES

Councillor J Thornton apologised for not submitting his apologies for the meeting.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

16 EXPENSES POLICY REVIEW

The Secretary to the Employer's Side submitted a report setting out the key changes on the revised Expenses Policy, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted and supporting Essential Reference Papers. The Secretary to the Employer's Side reminded the Panel that a review of the policy had been requested by Human Resources Committee (HR) at its last meeting, to ensure that all employees were in line with other Councils and were paid at HM Revenues and Customs rates.

The Chairman expressed concern that UNISON had not had

an opportunity to fully consider the content of the report nor the chance to discuss the revisions with UNISON's Executive. He suggested that the report be deferred so that UNISON could review the implications of the report. The Chairman also suggested that Officers review the timetable for the submission of reports to both the Panel and HR Committee.

Councillor A Jackson stated that if the Panel could not consider and recommend approval of the report, then this would delay its submission to HR Committee. He referred to the need for the Council to ensure that it functioned in an efficient manner.

To facilitate debate, the Director of Finance and Support Services referred to a previous precedent used by the Panel. She suggested that the policy be considered by the Panel then submitted to Human Resources Committee subject to both sides resolving any anomalies in advance of the meeting. In the event that issues could not be resolved, then the policy would be referred back to Local Joint Panel for further consideration.

The Chairman acknowledged the way forward and stated that UNISON would like the opportunity to discuss the matter with their Regional Advisor. He reminded Members that his role on UNISON was as a volunteer and that he had other roles to fulfil and reiterated his concerns about the Panel's timetable for the consideration of reports. Councillor A Jackson reiterated the need for the Council's business to be moved along efficiently.

After being put to the meeting, there being an equality of votes, a recommendation by the Chairman to defer the report remained on the table. The Chairman requested a short adjournment so that he could consider the suggested precedent with other UNISON Members. This was supported.

The meeting reconvened and the Chairman, on behalf of UNISON, reiterated his concerns on having insufficient time to consider the content of the report and asked that in future, Officers ensure that sufficient time was allowed between the submission of reports to the Panel and Human Resources

Committee. The Director of Finance and Support Services reminded the Panel that HR Committee had asked for the report and were keen to have a rigorous review of policies.

UNISON requested that tracked changes to future policies would help the review process.

The Secretary to the Employer's Side provided a summary of the changes which had been made in order to comply with HMRC rates. She stated that the proposed change of 45p per mile would apply to all East Herts employees claiming business mileage and had been revised to remove the separation of "in District" and "out of District" mileage. In response to a query from UNISON regarding what savings the Council would achieve, the Secretary to the Employer's Side explained that this would depend on how tax returns were completed and on the individual's personal circumstances.

Councillor A Jackson suggested that the Petty Cash Claim form be amended with the inclusion of words and numerals. This was supported.

In response to a query from Councillor M Alexander regarding how this would affect the joint working arrangements, the Director of Finance and Support Services provided an update. The Secretary to the Employer's Side confirmed that there was no change to the subsistence rates and that this was set by the National Joint Council.

The Panel supported the suggestion that the Expenses Policy review policy be submitted to Human Resources Committee, subject to both sides resolving any anomalies in advance of the meeting. In the event that issues could not be resolved then the policy would be referred back to Local Joint Panel for further consideration.

RESOLVED – that the Expenses Policy be submitted to Human Resources Committee, subject to both sides resolving any anomalies in advance of the meeting. In the event that issues could not be resolved, then the policy be referred back to the Local Joint Panel for further consideration.

17 HOME WORKING POLICY

The Secretary to the Employer's Side submitted a report recommending a minor amendment to the Home Working Policy to ensure that home workers provided a phone number to their line manager so they could be contacted. The revised Home Working Policy was set out in the supporting Essential Reference Paper.

The Chairman reiterated his concerns that UNISON had not had an opportunity to fully consider the content of the report nor the chance to discuss the revisions with UNISON's Executive.

To facilitate debate, the Director of Finance and Support Services suggested, that the policy as before, be considered by the Panel then submitted to Human Resources Committee subject to both sides resolving any anomalies in advance of the meeting. In the event that issues could not be resolved, then the policy would be referred back to Local Joint Panel for further consideration. This was supported.

In response to a query from Councillor M Alexander regarding the accuracy of paragraph 15.3 (tax free allowances), the Secretary to the Employer's Side undertook to double check this. Councillor J Ranger suggested that paragraph 12.0 (page 26) be amended by the deletion of the word "ideally" so that the paragraph read:-

"The requirement for the home worker to visit the office for meetings, staff briefings, training, Performance Development Reviews or any other face to face contact. These should be at least monthly". This was supported.

In response to a query from Councillor L Haysey, the Director of Finance and Support Services explained what steps were currently taken regarding counteracting stress, including the need for managers to contact their staff regularly, to keep up to date.

RESOLVED – that that the Home Working Policy, as

amended, be submitted to Human Resources Committee, subject to both sides resolving any anomalies in advance of the meeting. In the event that issues could not be resolved, then the policy be referred back to the Local Joint Panel for further consideration.

18 ABSENCE MANAGEMENT POLICY

The Secretary to the Employer's Side submitted a report setting out a number of revisions following changes in legislation and best practice, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted and within the Essential Reference Papers.

The Chairman reiterated his concern that UNISON had not had an opportunity to fully consider the content of the report nor discuss the revisions with UNISON's Executive.

The Secretary to the Employer's Side referred to a rise in short term sickness levels and provided a summary of the key changes proposed, including the need to monitor levels of sickness and the inclusion of "trigger" points so that Managers could take action on sickness absence.

In response to a query from UNISON regarding who would take action should a Manager fall ill, the Secretary to the Employer's Side explained that the referral would be sent to the Line Manager's Manager.

Concerns were expressed generally by the Panel regarding the need to ring in each day (even when on long term sick) and report to the Line Manager. The Panel suggested that this requirement should be subject to the Line Manager's discretion including the need to allow a relative or suitable representative to report a sickness.

In response to a query from Councillor M Alexander regarding the need to ring the office if sick, when on holiday abroad, the Secretary to the Employer's Side explained the need for this, the impact this could have on the employee's holiday pay entitlement should they leave the Council and referred to

recent cases which had been considered at employment tribunals.

The Panel supported a suggestion that the paragraph on sickness absence be amended by the inclusion of a sentence stating that “the Council would take very seriously any actions which were later to be found untruthful”.

The Panel supported a suggestion that a paragraph on “Planned Absence” be included in the Policy.

The Panel supported a suggestion that the Absence Management Policy, as amended, be submitted to Human Resources Committee, subject to both sides resolving any anomalies in advance of the meeting. In the event that issues could not be resolved then the policy would be referred back to Local Joint Panel for further consideration.

RESOLVED – that the Absence Management Policy, as amended, be submitted to Human Resources Committee, subject to both sides resolving any anomalies in advance of the meeting. In the event that issues could not be resolved, then the policy be referred back to the Local Joint Panel for further consideration

The meeting closed at 4.35 pm

Chairman
Date