

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

LOCAL JOINT PANEL - 21 MARCH 2018

REPORT BY HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND ORGANISATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

CLOSURE OF COUNCIL OFFICES ON 24 DECEMBER WHERE
CHRISTMAS DAY FALLS ON A TUESDAY

WARD(S) AFFECTED: NONE

Purpose/Summary of Report

Members are invited to recommend to Human Resources Committee approval of :

- a Policy Statement on the closure of council offices on 24 December where Christmas day falls on a Tuesday and
- the council offices be closed on 24 December 2018

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL JOINT PANEL:

That: Human Resources Committee be advised that:

(A)	the Policy Statement on the closure of council offices on 24 December where Christmas day falls on a Tuesday be approved
(B)	the Council offices be closed on 24 December 2018 and staff be required to take time off

1.0 Background

1.1 A suggestion to close the council offices on Monday 24

December 2018 was received through the Staff Suggestion Scheme on 28 December 2017. Due to 25 December 2018 falling on a Tuesday, it was felt that demand for staff requesting time off on that day would be high and may cause conflict within teams regarding who would have to cover the office.

- 1.2 The Leadership Team discussed the suggestion on 5 March 2018 and tasked Human Resources with looking at the options for implementing a closure on 24 December 2018.
- 1.3 Initial informal and brief discussions with UNISON regarding a closure on that day were positively received.
- 1.4 It was agreed that a policy statement should be implemented covering future closures of the council offices where Christmas day falls on a Tuesday.

2.0 Report

2.1 Implications

Closing the council offices on Monday 24 December will mean that the offices will be closed for 5 consecutive days (including the weekend) from Saturday 22 – Wednesday 26 December as follows:

Date	Open/ Closed	Comments
Friday 21 December	Open	Normal working day
Saturday 22 December	Closed	Weekend
Sunday 23 December	Closed	Weekend
Monday 24 December	Closed	Proposed enforced closure
Tuesday 25 December	Closed	Public Holiday - Christmas Day
Wednesday 26 December	Closed	Public Holiday - Boxing Day

Thursday 27 December	Open	Normal working day
Friday 28 December	Open	Normal working day

The Leadership Team have considered the impact on services of closing on 24 December and of having such an extended closure period. The usual emergency procedures will be put in place to cover the closure.

For 2018, staff may have already booked, or taken, all of their annual leave entitlement and do not have current annual leave entitlement to take 24 December 2018 as annual leave. The Leadership Team will therefore be providing alternative options available to staff should the final decision be to close on 24 December (see 2.5).

2.2 Current practice on taking annual leave

Aside from public holidays (Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day), the council does not currently enforce annual leave during the Christmas/New Year period: employees can choose to either work or request annual leave during this period provided the service is appropriately covered. All annual leave is requested and taken with the approval of the manager.

There are two main documents that refer to the terms and conditions relating to annual leave: the General Leave Policy and the Contract of Employment. Please see ERP C and D for the extracts from each document on annual leave. There is no reference in either document as to when annual leave should be taken.

2.3 Benefits of closing the office

- Potential of improved health and wellbeing - all employees will be able to have an extended rest break over the Christmas period;

- Promotes the council as a family friendly employer – 24 December is often a time spent with family;
- It will avoid any potential conflict amongst employees over who has annual leave approved on 24 December;
- All of the above could boost staff morale;
- Potential reduction in heating and lighting costs as the offices will not need to be heated/lit on 24 December for 1 day before being closed again for 2 days.

2.4 Risks of closing the office

- Potential reputational risk - there will be no face to face services available to customers for 5 consecutive days and on a day that customers might normally expect the council offices to be open;
- Potential complaints from those staff who do not wish to take annual leave over the Christmas period;
- Potential complaints from those staff who do not have annual leave to request and do not wish to be “required” to take leave;
- Some services will need emergency cover to be provided and there may be conflict in the team over who should cover this.

2.5 Options available for staff regarding the closure on 24 December 2018

Where possible, staff should save 1 day of their annual leave entitlement to use on 24 December 2018.

It is recommended as a reasonable approach that staff are given various options to help them with the requirement to book a day of leave.

Where staff have already booked, or taken, all of their annual

leave entitlement and do not have current annual leave entitlement to take 24 December 2018 as annual leave they may choose one or a combination of the following options:

- Take 1 day from next year's leave entitlement;
- Accrue flexi time in the months preceding December and be able to 'bank' the hours to take 24 December off as flexi leave;
- Use accrued Time off In Lieu (TOIL) and be able to 'bank' it to take the time off on 24 December – this needs to be with the prior approval of the manager and must be in line with service requirements;
- Take unpaid leave.

2.6 Next steps

- Agree a joint statement with Unison (supporting the proposal) and cascade to all staff in a timely way (a draft can be found in ERP B);
- Place an article on the intranet with regular reminders throughout the year;
- Reminders of the arrangement to be given at staff briefings;
- Communicate to the public in due course e.g. notices in reception, on the EHC website etc.

2.7 The Policy Statement can be found at **Essential Reference Paper 'B'**.

The extract on annual leave from the General Leave Policy can be found at **Essential Reference Paper 'C'**.

The extract on annual leave from the Contract of Employment can be found at **Essential Reference Paper 'D'**.

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

None

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