

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

LOCAL JOINT PANEL – 4 APRIL 2005

REPORT BY THE SECRETARY TO THE STAFF SIDE

5(A) FLEXIBLE WORKING SCHEME

RECOMMENDATION – that the flexible working scheme piloted in Revenue Services be extended throughout the Council as the first step towards promoting an effective work-life balance policy in East Herts.

---

1.0 Background

- 1.1 UNISON was first consulted in February 2002 about revising the flexi-time scheme to bring it in line with the EC working time directive. Some minor changes were incorporated into the scheme but in essence the scheme remained unchanged.
- 1.2 At the same time discussions took place with a view to developing a work-life balance policy in East Herts.
- 1.3 From April 2003 parents of children under six, or of disabled children under 18 were given the right to apply to work flexibly and their employers had a duty to consider their requests seriously.
- 1.4 Despite these changes and attempts to 'tweak' the current scheme, East Herts has not yet adopted a work-life balance policy and little has changed in the last three years.
- 1.5 It was however decided to pilot a scheme in Revenue Services, where the only 'flexi' rules to be applied were that service needs had to be met and that employees had to 'bank' flexi hours in order to have time off. All other rules with regard to core hours and carrying forward a certain number of credit or debit hours in a given period were abandoned. The working day was extended in order to increase flexibility from 7:30 AM to 7:00 PM.

## 2.0 The Pilot Scheme

- 2.1 Information regarding the success of the pilot scheme can be obtained from the Head of Revenues. All evidence points to an increase in productivity, which can be verified by the reduction in the backlog of outstanding work. This in turn has led to higher customer satisfaction and a reduction in customer complaints.
- 2.2 There has been no abuse of the system and where staff have chosen to come in earlier or work later, productivity has increased dramatically. This is due largely to the quieter periods being outside the switchboard's operating hours of 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM. It is also evident that staff have individual patterns of working where their level of productivity fluctuates. Some work better in the mornings and others in the evenings. All output is logged on the various databases and can be constantly monitored.
- 2.3 Cover during peak hours of 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM is rarely a problem. Staff, having been given greater flexibility to meet domestic or other commitments will in turn ensure that service needs are met. Morale is higher and there is a genuine desire to work as a team and co-operate fully with each other.
- 2.4 Lunch time cover has improved dramatically since staff stagger their lunch times over a longer period and many prefer to take their lunch at times when the shops are quieter.
- 2.5 Time off for visits to the dentist, hospital or children's schools etc has reduced since it is no longer necessary to book off a whole or half day. Staff can take as little or as much time as the visit requires and then return to work.

## 3.0 Conclusion

Having decided to pilot a new scheme, it is now necessary to decide the way forward. The Staff Side would prefer to adopt a comprehensive work-life balance policy, incorporating the 'Revenues' flexi scheme as well as a policy on home working, term-time working, career breaks and other new work patterns.

However, given that it has taken three years to progress this far, a practical way forward would be to introduce the changes gradually and extend the pilot scheme to other service areas as a first step. We could then introduce other aspects of work-life balance initiatives at a later stage.

Contact Officer: Jane Sharp Ext. 2120

Nps\Local Joint Panel\25 Apr 2005\LJP Flexible Working Scheme 0405