

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 25 JULY 2018

REPORT BY THE INTERIM 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 re-consider the report submitted to Human Resources Committee on 18 April together with this supplementary report and review the decision taken.

<b><u>RECOMMENDATION FOR HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE</u></b>	
<b>That:</b>	
<b>(A)</b>	<b>the earlier decision be noted.</b>
<b>(B)</b>	<b>The Council's offices be closed on 24 December 2018 and staff be required to take time off</b>
<b>(C)</b>	<b>the Policy Statement on the closure of council offices on 24 December where Christmas day falls on a Tuesday be approved</b>

**1.0 Background**

1.1 In March 2018, a request to close the Council's Offices on Christmas Eve (24 December) was submitted to the Leadership Team via the Staff Suggestion Scheme of East Herts.

1.2 The Leadership Team discussed the request and asked that

options be explored on the impact on customers of an extended closure. The Leadership Team was clear that the priority was to ensure customers' needs were balanced with benefits to staff.

- 1.3 A report was submitted to the Local Joint Panel on 21 March 2018 with two recommendations. These were supported and the following recommendations were submitted to Human Resources Committee on 18 April 2018 for approval:

*The Policy Statement on the closure of council offices on 24 December where Christmas day falls on a Tuesday be approved subject to:*

- *confirmation that appropriate and sufficient arrangements be put in place in terms of emergency cover over the five day holiday period; and*
- *assurances be provided that the public would receive advance notification of the proposed closure and given assurances in terms of continuity of service should an emergency arise during the closure of the offices over the Christmas period*

- 1.4 The recommendations were considered by the Human Resources Committee on 18 April 2018 and it was resolved *"that Christmas Eve should be viewed as a normal working day and the offices should be open and accessible to the public in the usual way"*.

## **2.0 Report**

- 2.2 The decision of the Human Resources Committee was cascaded to staff through team meetings, the Leadership "blog", the Staff Forum meeting, Connect and Updates.
- 2.3 Many staff took to the intranet to express their feelings at the decision taken. Additionally, staff approached individual members of the leadership team to express their depth of

feelings. More recently staff raised the issue again directly with the Leadership team at the Questions and Answers session at staff briefings (in July).

- 2.4 The swell and strength of feeling shown by staff generally, the different avenues staff have taken to make their feelings known, has continued since the decision was communicated, and persists.
- 2.5 A frustrating aspect of any job is a view that Leadership and/or Senior Managers are at odds with the feelings and mood of the majority of staff. The Interim Head of Human Resources and Chief Executive have met to discuss and assessed the strength of feeling displayed by staff which has necessitated a reassessment of the situation as detailed in the report .
- 2.6 The Council is concerned about the impact on staff morale and wanted to take this opportunity to demonstrate that the Council is listening to the views of staff. The Council understands, the pressures of balancing work and outside commitments particularly during the lead up to Christmas Day, and is asking Members to revisit the earlier decision made.
- 2.7 Christmas Eve will fall on a Monday in 2018 and then not until 2029. The Council's partners at Stevenage, with whom we have joint services, have already confirmed it will be closed on Christmas Eve.
- 2.8 The report submitted to Members on 18 April 2018 attached at **Essential Reference Paper "F"** outlined the options staff would be given in respect of the closure; all options require that time taken is repaid, or taken from leave. There is a pragmatic view that East Herts will benefit from an extended closure in terms of savings on heating and other associated costs, and that we have sufficient and safe cover for our customers.
- 2.9 In the light of the feedback from staff, Members are requested

to re-consider the report submitted on 18 April and the decision taken at that meeting.

### **3.0 Implications/Consultations**

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

#### Background Papers

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