
BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

**Held on Wednesday, 27 February 2013 at 10.00 am in
Norfolk Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Dereham**

PRESENT

Mr P.J. Duigan (Chairman)	Mrs B Canham
Mr T R Carter (Vice-Chairman)	Mr C. S. Clark
Mr S.G. Bambridge	Mrs S.M. Matthews
Mr W.P. Borrett	Mr B J Skull

In Attendance

Neil Fordham	- Payroll and Reward Manager
Helen McAleer	- Senior Committee Officer
Alison Peart	- Interim Senior HR Advisor
Cal Spearman	- HR Business Partner
Rod Urquhart	- Operations Manager (Support and Fraud)

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10/13 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 January 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

11/13 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs Steward and Mrs Chapman-Allen.

12/13 LOCAL JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE (AGENDA ITEM 6)

The Chairman noted that the LJCC had a Legislation Update as a Standing Item and suggested that it would be useful to have something similar on the General Purposes Agenda to ensure Members were aware of changes.

The recommendations in the Minutes would be taken into consideration when those items on the agenda were discussed.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Local Joint Consultative Committee meeting held on 14 February 2013 be adopted.

13/13 ARP HOMEWORKING POLICY (AGENDA ITEM 7)

The Operations Manager (ARP) presented the report and explained that currently the Partnership had three different Homeworking Policies which caused confusion, inefficiency and difficulties for Managers.

A new Policy had been developed following consultations with the HR Teams, Unison and staff. It had been presented to the LJCC and their suggested amendments had been incorporated. It was an ARP specific Policy and provided parity for all Partnership homeworking staff.

The scheme would be cost-neutral at worst and would possibly produce further efficiencies in productivity.

The Policy made clear who could work from home and the criteria required. Suitability for homeworking was carefully assessed and included psychometric testing. Homeworking staff were also regularly reviewed. In every instance a business case was required to support an application for homeworking to ensure a return on the investment, as kit provision cost about £800.

The two amendments suggested by LJCC had concerned the allowance paid and the system downtime options.

The allowance would be paid at the approved Inland Revenue rate. As some staff were currently on different rates to that there would be a consultation period before any change was introduced.

With regard to unplanned system downtime, the Policy had been clarified (on pages 19 and 20 of the agenda) to set out the actions required by staff and the options available to Managers in such instances.

Mr Carter asked about the psychometric testing as he knew there were a number of systems available. It was confirmed that the test used was specifically designed to address homeworking criteria.

Mr Clark asked if there were any legal implications for staff working from home and was advised that there were not. As the work involved access to the DWP database the system had to be extremely secure and nothing was stored locally.

Mr Borrett supported the idea of a single Policy across the four authorities and Mr Bambridge agreed and asked whether there were any comments from the ARP Joint Committee Members.

The Operations Manager (ARP) advised that the Joint Committee had considered the new Policy in December 2012 and had approved

it. The Assistant Director of Commissioning had requested that the Policy be referred to the LJCC and General Purposes Committee.

In response to a question from Mr Clark it was confirmed that there were currently about 130 homeworkers across the four authorities. Many of those were part time staff.

The LJCC had requested an update on how the Policy was working in October and any changes in the uptake for homeworking would be reported then.

Mrs Canham thought that homeworking was a good idea but noted that it did not suit some people. She asked how people working from home were monitored.

The Operations Manager (ARP) advised that there had been homeworkers for the past three or four years and there were a range of measures in place to ensure their welfare and performance, including keeping-in-touch days, when they were required to be in the office for team meetings and one-to-one's with their Team Leaders. At those meetings any issues could be raised. If there was a change in personal circumstances it might mean that homeworking could cease. That would not preclude the officer from applying for homeworking in future. With regard to performance, both output and accuracy were measured and assessed against an average. There was a rigorous performance management framework and statutory service targets from the DWP were strictly measured.

The Chairman noted that on page 19 the Policy required office space 'free from background noise'. He suggested that that was an unrealistic requirement and the Operations Manager (ARP) agreed and said that he would amend the wording to say 'without distractions'.

RESOLVED to approve the new ARP Homeworking & Home Enabled Policy.

14/13 ASSISTED CAR PURCHASE SCHEME (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The Payroll & Reward Manager introduced Alison Peart and Cal Spearman, two new HR Business Partners who were in attendance to learn about the General Purposes Committee. He then went on to give a brief overview of the report.

The Lease Car Scheme was being phased out following an earlier recommendation from the General Purposes Committee. When that decision had been made it had been agreed that the dormant Assisted Car Purchase Scheme would be reintroduced.

The Assisted Car Purchase Scheme offered car loans at attractive

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interest rates. In reintroducing the scheme the Payroll & Reward Manager had looked at similar schemes at other local authorities. The South Holland scheme had been in place for some time and the new scheme would mirror that one.

The number of applicants was not known but there had been five or six firm expressions of interest so far.

Mr Borrett noted that the scheme was for essential car users only but would also be available to casual users for the purposes of recruitment and/or retention.

Mr Carter asked whether there would be a list of the casual user posts which would be eligible for the scheme and the Payroll & Reward Manager advised that CMT were keen to have discretion to look at each case on its merits.

Mr Borrett asked if that was the same at South Holland and was advised that the key features were identical but at South Holland the scheme was also open to casual users who travelled over 500 business miles a year. Some parts of the South Holland scheme were considered to be out of date, the key features had been adopted and modernised.

Mr Borrett then asked what the scheme would cost.

The main cost would be the loss in bank credit revenue and it had been estimated that the potential loss of interest would amount to a few hundreds of pounds only. From information gleaned from other authorities it seemed likely that there would only be about 16 loans a year with an average amount of £4,000. The financial risk had been modelled on that estimated take-up.

Members debated the matter further and did not feel able to make a decision without having further information about the potential costs. They also raised concerns about the lack of equality with some casual users being eligible for the scheme and others not.

Mr Borrett clarified that he was not against the scheme but said that Members needed to know what it would cost and what it would achieve for corporate objective reasons. There also needed to be parity with South Holland.

Mr Bambridge had concerns and felt that the scheme should only be available for essential users with high mileage. He also wanted clarity on costs.

The Payroll & Reward Manager explained that the scheme would cost a lot less than the Lease Car Scheme with a potential six figure saving.

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The Chairman made various suggestions to Members to try to reach a compromise but acknowledged that more information was needed.

RESOLVED not to make a decision until further financial information was made available.

15/13 PAY POLICY STATEMENT (AGENDA ITEM 9)

The Payroll & Rewards Manager presented the report which was for information only. The Statement would be presented for Council approval on 28 February 2013.

It was a legal requirement for the Council to produce the Statement annually to improve transparency on Senior Officer remuneration. It had to be published by 1 April each year.

The Statement was identical to the one issued in 2012 apart from a 're-jig' of the wording regarding the Interim Chief Executive, which had been based on the Council having a permanent Chief Executive.

Mr Borrett asked about the reference to the Council's Lease Car Scheme and was advised that it had to be declared as it was a benefit in kind.

The report was noted.

16/13 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 10)

The arrangements for the next meeting, to be held on 17 April 2013 at 10.00am in the Norfolk Room, were noted.

The meeting closed at 11.14 am

CHAIRMAN