

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

CORPORATE SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 12 FEBRUARY 2002

WORK LIFE BALANCE PROJECT

Report by Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1** To advise the Sub-Committee of the Council's progress in managing its Work Life Balance Project following a successful bid for financial support from the Government's Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund to address local issues.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** These policies are intended to help men and women cope with the dual demands of work and family life and to ensure that organisations recruit and retain employees with the right levels of skills and knowledge required to respond to changing business needs. The Employment Relations Act 1999 introduced legislation in support of a number of family friendly policies such as parental leave and time off for dependants. The Employment Bill currently progressing through Parliament will further strengthen employee's rights to "family friendly" leave etc.
- 2.2** The Government recognises that many employers already support a number of work-life balance policies however also have to continuously consider ways to improve their effectiveness by making more effective use of their employees. To assist employers identify and introduce new working arrangements that benefit the business, the customer and the employee, the Government introduced the Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund (The Challenge Fund) last year.
- 2.3** The Sub-Committee at its earlier meeting of 25 September 2001 noted that the Council had been successful in gaining support from the Challenge Fund and agreed to support the initiative throughout the process. An early emphasis was placed on encouraging employees to complete and return the employee attitude survey which was issued in October 2001.

3. THE CHALLENGE FUND

- 3.1** The Challenge Fund is a resource which enables employers to receive free advice from specialist consultants to support them in developing and implementing Work-Life Balance policies and practices. The Challenge Fund is open to employers from the private, public and voluntary sector and successful applicants receive free advice from specialist consultants.
- 3.2** Within East Ayrshire Council, there already exists a number of Work-Life Balance policies such as job-share, flexitime, paternity leave, adoption leave, etc. However with the increased need for efficiency, effectiveness and economy in the way in which local government provides and delivers services, the specialist consultancy advice funded by the Challenge Fund has provided an opportunity to review current arrangements and explore solutions which meet both Council and employee needs. A particular driver for

the review was a demand for flexibility by service departments within the recent round of consultation on the preferred Single Status Conditions of Service package.

3.3 Having consulted employing departments on the need for additional flexibility to support the Council's business and ensure that our employment policies support these business needs, the Councils Work Life Balance Fund bid highlighted our key issues as:

- Absenteeism levels
- Recruitment
- Employee Morale

4. WHO HAS BENEFITED FROM THE CHALLENGE FUND SO FAR?

4.1 Following its launch in March 2000 there have been 3 rounds of funding. 181 organisations have been successful with bids to the Government receiving £6.5 million of funding support. This provides an average £37,000 per employer and members will be pleased to note that East Ayrshire Council received £55,000 from its July 2001 bid.

4.2 The Government has advertised its final round of bidding for the spring of 2002 with £4 million pounds available as funding support to employers.

5. EMPLOYEE CONSULTATION PROCESS

5.1 The Council undertook an employee attitude survey in October 2001. The key findings of this survey, as well as feedback from the undernoted Focus Groups, are summarised for members in Appendix 2. It is intended that the March edition of Eastwards will inform employees of the results from the attitude survey as well as generally focussing on Work-Life balance issues. Trade unions will also be informed of the employee feedback and it is expected that the matter will be the subject of a specific report to the next round of JCC meetings.

5.2 The Attitude Survey included a specific section on Work Life Balance and the responses here were supported by information gained from Focus Groups formed to provide the representative viewpoint of employees. The Focus Groups were run by volunteer employees and represented Teachers, Senior Managers, Middle Managers/Supervisors, Junior Administrative Staff, Craftpersons and Manual Workers.

5.3 Having gathered the information, a special Senior Staff Management Team meeting was convened by the Chief Executive on 14 December 2001. The meeting agreed:-

- a) the Work-Life Balance Vision Statement attached as Appendix 1 should be adopted by the Council
- b) the Council had a number of positive policies in place and these should be reviewed to ensure that they continue to represent "best practice".
- c) the policy areas identified by employees as being of priority to enhance their work-life balance should be investigated further and any appropriate policies referred to Council for approval. An emphasis was placed on any such developments being in the Council's interests and enhance service delivery as well as employee satisfaction; and
- d) a review of the Council's methods of employee communication with a view to ensuring consistent knowledge, awareness and practical application of its employment policies.

6. PROGRESS OF PROJECT TO DATE

- 6.1** Appendix 3 provides a Project Plan. All targets are on line and it is expected that the Sub-Committee will, at their next meeting on 9 April 2002 receive a further update report with related employment policy recommendations.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1** The costs of the project have been contained within the £55,000 provided by the WLB Challenge Fund.
- 7.2** Any proposals to amend existing conditions of service or introduce new employment policy initiatives will be recommended to this Sub-Committee prior to implementation and will be expected to be met from within existing resources.

8. LEGAL/POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1** The Work-Life Balance Project will enable the Council to strengthen its employment policies and further promote itself as a good employer to respective job applicants. It will also ensure compliance with existing legislation and the anticipated direction of the Employment Bill being considered by Parliament.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1** The Sub-Committee is asked to:
- a) note the Council's progress within its Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund Project
 - b) approve the Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund Vision Statement as attached at Appendix 1
 - c) ask the Head of Personnel to provide an update report and any related policy considerations to the Sub-Committees meeting on 9 April 2002.

Fiona Lees
Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources
29 January 2002

East Ayrshire Council and Work-Life Balance

Vision Statement

"We are determined that East Ayrshire will be a good Council to have working for you, and a good Council to work for".

The Council operates in an environment of increasing public expectation in which flexibility is key to delivering effective services to the citizens of East Ayrshire. At the same time, it is acknowledged that employees need to be able to balance work with their other interests. The Council recognises that employees are more productive if they are able to balance their work and personal lives effectively, thereby facilitating enhanced delivery of organisational objectives.

As part of its commitment to creating a culture which supports to work-life balance, the Council:

- Recognises that effective practices to promote work-life balance will benefit the Council and its employees
- Acknowledges that individuals at all stages of their lives work best when they are able to achieve an appropriate balance between work and other aspects of their lives
- Demonstrates leadership from the top of the organisation managing by example
- Encourages its managers and employees to develop a partnership in assuming responsibility jointly to identify workable solutions
- Develops appropriate policies and practical responses that meet the specific needs of the Council and its employees
- Communicates positive commitment to work-life strategies to its employees

David Montgomery
Chief Executive
January 2002

WORK LIFE BALANCE – SUMMARY OF EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK**1. Feedback from Focus Groups**

What are the current barriers to implementing a healthy work-life balance at East Ayrshire Council?

- “Flexi-time is not Flexi”
- Inconsistent communication
- Inconsistent application of work-life balance policies and practice across the Council
- Culture of EAC & management attitudes do not support work-life balance
- Workload and efficiency
- Initiative overload and feeling of apathy

2. Feedback from Employee Attitude Survey – Work Life Balance Issues

a) Top 5 most desired work-life balance options based on Employee Attitude Survey results:

1. Discretionary Flexi-time
2. Home/Remote Working
3. Reduced Working Week (Compressed hours)
4. Career breaks/sabbaticals
5. Study Leave

b) Top 5 least desired work-life balance option based on Survey results:

1. Dry Cleaning
2. Hot Desking
3. Home/Remote Working
4. On Site Creche
5. Job Sharing

3. General Feedback from the Employee Attitude Survey**a) Key Strengths**

- Commitment to Objectives
- Understand vision, direction, core values
- Health and Safety
- Inter-departmental relationships
- Career opportunities/Development
- Working at a personal level

b) Areas for Improvement

- Communication
- Recognition
- Stress Management
- Leadership/Management of change
- Consistency in standards across departments

