

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

CORPORATE SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE- 4 JUNE 2002

LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, CRAFT EMPLOYEES AND CHIEF OFFICIALS – MANAGING ABSENCE AND RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Report by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to ask the Sub-Committee to approve proposed changes to the Council's Managing Absence Policy and Recruitment and Selection Policy.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As Members will be aware the Council's Managing Absence Policy has been in place since 1996 with appropriate amendments being made as necessary to reflect best practice. The Council has agreed that where employees have had 3 spells of absence in a rolling 6 month period or where absence exceeds 5% on a rolling 12 month basis then formal absence review meetings will take place between the employee and their line manager.
- 2.2 The Personnel and Property Sub-Committee at its meeting on 5 June 2001 approved changes to the Council's Recruitment and Selection Procedures. The procedures apply to all appointments and to internal and external candidates. They do not apply to teaching posts, which are the subject of separate documentation.
- 2.3 Changes are proposed to be made to the Policies to reflect best practice and as a result of changes in legislation e.g. Data Protection Act 1998, Part 5 of the Police Act 1997. From 24 October 2001 all computerised systems and manual information obtained on or after 1998 are fully subject to the DPA. The Information Commission's Code of Practice on recruitment which is aimed at helping organisations understand and comply with the DPA was issued in March 2002. The new arrangements for accessing criminal records history came into effect on 29 April 2002.
- 2.4 The main changes proposed in each policy are summarised below. Full copies of the revised policy documents are available for Members on request from the Head of Personnel.

3. MANAGING ABSENCE POLICY

- 3.1 Documentation has been amended to take account of the new Corporate Managing Absence Information System that became operational on 1 April 2002. This system has been developed to provide a corporate means of supplying accurate and timely information on employee sickness absence. It has the functionality to hold and review absence history as well as provide line managers with `trigger` reports for subsequent management consideration. The system will also provide service departments and Council with quarterly absence and annual statutory performance indicator statistical returns.
- 3.2 A referral to the Council's Occupational Health Advisor for a medical examination will follow a continuous period of 8 weeks sickness absence. In exceptional circumstances and where the reason for the employee's absence is known to have a recognised longer recuperation period

required the medical may not be required. However, a key principle of the revised process is to make the support of our Occupational Health Service available to managers and employees.

- 3.3** Further guidance/measures to encourage employees to return to work have been incorporated into the manager's guidelines including therapeutic return to work measures. Such measures include the ability for an employee to return to those aspects of their work which they are fit to undertake or to available alternative duties both of which would be to assist the employee's longer term recovery to full health.
- 3.4** Separate guidelines/checklist have been produced to ensure the Council complies with the duties placed upon it, as an employer, by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Detailed examples of reasonable steps which managers/supervisors may take are outlined in the documentation e.g. provision of special aids, modification of workload, duties etc.
- 3.5** Separate guidelines have been prepared for management and employees. Flowcharts/leaflets have also been introduced to enable quick reference and easier understanding of the Policy. These documents as well as the Council's general concerns about absence rates will be regularly communicated to employees.
- 3.6** The revised Managing Sickness Absence Policy and Procedures are intended to provide a comprehensive framework for East Ayrshire Council's management to secure and improve the attendance of employees throughout the working week. The Council's targets for sickness absence rates are 5% for former manual workers and 4% for former APT&C employees. The current absence levels exceed these targets and it is anticipated that as a result of the changes and further clarification/guidance proposed in the documentation that the current absence levels will decrease.

4. RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION POLICY

- 4.1** The Council's current application for employment form and notes of guidance for applicants have been amended to reflect the implications arising from the Data Protection Act. The Act makes serious data protection breaches a criminal offence and employers can only request data about an applicant that is relevant to recruitment. Applicants will be advised of the purpose of any information sought during the recruitment process and asked for their consent for the council to use the information for the purposes stated. They will be advised that application forms will be stored securely and can only be accessed by those involved in the selection process. Unsuccessful application forms will be securely stored for 6 months after the selection process is completed and then securely destroyed.
- 4.2** The Recruitment and Selection Policy has been amended to reflect the increased access to criminal history records for employment and other purposes as a result of the Implementation of Part 5 of the Police Act 1997 in line with the Policy and Resources decision of 18 April 2002.
- 4.3** The standard letters, forms etc used in the recruitment process will all be updated to reflect the proposed changes

5. POLICY/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1** The proposed changes will ensure that the Council meets its legislative requirements as an employer and continues to follow best practice guidelines.

6. TRAINING

- 6.1** The relevant corporate training courses are in the process of being updated to reflect the revised procedures and changes to policy as approved by the Council. Existing employees will be made fully aware of these changes. This can be delivered via workplace Toolbox Talks which will ensure maximum impact with minimum disruption to departments' service delivery.

7. COMMUNICATIONS

- 7.1** Employees will be made fully aware of the changes to the above policies. The existing recruitment and selection documentation including the application for employment form and notes of guidance will be amended. Existing employees and managers/supervisors will receive a copy of their respective revised Managing Absence Booklets. New employees will receive a relevant booklet on Managing Absence as part of their induction documentation.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1** Any additional costs arising from the proposed changes to the Managing Absence Policy and Recruitment and Selection Policy will be contained within existing budgets.

9. TRADE UNIONS

- 9.1** The Trade Unions have been consulted and agree to the proposed changes to the Recruitment and Selection Policy.

- 9.2** The Trade Unions recognise the need for the Council to have a Managing Absence policy in place but do not wish to consider its content within the normal consultation and negotiation framework.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1** The Sub-Committee is asked to: -

(a) approve the proposed changes to the Council's Managing Absence and Recruitment and Selection Procedures.

(b) otherwise note the content of the report

Fiona Lees
Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources
GP/YC
14 May 2002

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Report to Personnel and Property Sub-Committee on 5 June 2001 on Recruitment and Selection Policy.

Anyone wishing further information should contact George Park, Employee Relations Manager (Telephone 01563 576095).

AGENDA