



Dear Cllr Batchelor,

Council Office Christmas and New Year Closing Arrangements 2008/09

I am writing to you on behalf of the UNISON Executive at South Cambs to request that you consider calling-in the above decision. It is our view that this decision contravenes three of the six principles of decision-making shown in paragraph 13.02 of the Constitution.

(b) Due consultation and the taking of professional advice from officers

The report states that 54 UNISON members have all voiced their opposition to this proposal and a summary of their comments was included in the appendix. The report also stated: "General responses from staff have been very negative with many comments against the decision to open the offices over the Christmas period." The report clearly showed that there were more arguments against this report than in favour. The views of the report writer and the staff who oppose the decision (also professional officers) have been ignored.

(d) Presumption in favour of openness, helpfulness and consistency

Staff with newer contracts will be able to continue to take their two statutory days between Christmas and New Year because their contracts state: "By national agreement there are two extra statutory days; which are taken during the Christmas holiday period." Those who have older contracts do not have this clause and so will need the agreement of their line manager to take leave during this time. This is unfair and inconsistent.

Incidentally, the decision to use the concessionary day to close the office on 2 January is inconsistent with the decision to open the office during a less busy time.

(f) Consideration of available options and giving reasons for decisions

No monitoring of the number of calls and visits made by residents during this period has been made or planned for, so there is no evidence that this will provide an improved service for residents.

In fact the reverse is true. When the office was opened during the Christmas period, approximately eight years ago, it was deemed a failure due to low demand. This was before the Council had a Contact Centre and when it was arguably more accessible to residents in the holiday period, as we were situated in Cambridge during the time of the post Christmas sales.

The current arrangement actually offers a better service to residents as it ensures that staff take leave at the least busy time of the year and so are available at other peak times. The cost of keeping the office open during this time is a bad use of tax payers' money.

Benefit to staff

The closure of the office during the Christmas period is a benefit greatly valued by staff. At the same meeting the portfolio holder received a report on the Employee Satisfaction Survey and expressed concern at the declining satisfaction rates. Nobody should be in any doubt that the decision to open the office during Boxing Day and New Year will exacerbate a deeply concerning situation.

In short if the Council cares about its staff it needs to rethink this decision.

Yours sincerely,

M Williams
UNISON Branch Chairman