

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Staffing Portfolio Holder

12 March 2009

**AUTHOR/S:** Chief Executive / HR Coordinator

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### REVIEW OF FAMILY ISSUES POLICY

#### Purpose

1. To seek approval from the Portfolio Holder for the revised and updated Family Issues Policy, which is to be separated out into stand-alone policies as follows: Parental leave policy; Dependent leave policy; Compassionate leave policy; and Flexible working requests policy.

#### Background

2. The Family Issues policy was last review in 2003.
3. In this review we have considered forthcoming changes to legislation, Equality Impact Assessment information and taken account of staff survey feed back since 2003.
4. In 2003 the Government introduced the right for employees, with childcare responsibilities for children up to the age of six years (or 18 years in the case of a disabled child), to request flexible working - a change to their working pattern. From April 2009 the Government plans to extend the right to cover children up to the age of 16 years.
5. In 2007 the Government extended the right to request flexible working arrangements to carers of dependent adults. The change in legislation has been acknowledged in practice since then but is now reflected in the policy review.
6. In the interest of equality and to reflect fairness in employment practices, it is considered appropriate to extend the right to request flexible working to all employees, and this has been written into the policy.
7. Following the Equality Impact Assessment of the policy in July 2008 it was identified that HR should monitor the use of the policy. Therefore ways to monitor the policy have been introduced.
8. The policy has been edited to remove unnecessary repetition.
9. The group of policies within the 'Family Issues' policy have been separated out into stand-alone policies, associated forms and model letters to make them easier to access.
10. EMT October 2008 agreed to recommend the revised policies to the Portfolio holder for approval.
11. EMT also agreed that HR should research the areas outlined in paragraph 14 of this report: Flexible retirement arrangements, Secondments and Sabbaticals.

## Considerations

12. There is clear evidence that flexible working arrangements provide employees with improved work-life balance and increased employment satisfaction/loyalty and this enables them to be more productive. It is also worth noting that case studies show that flexible working arrangements also appear to reduce stress in the workplace and absenteeism.
13. **The right to request flexible working:** The policy and request form have been amended to include applications from carers of dependents and to open the option to all employees. Qualifying length of service applies to parents and carers and so this has been included as a requirement for all employees. There is no limitation on the reasons an employee has for applying for a flexible working arrangement. However the same process will apply in all cases with a sound business reason being required if a request cannot be granted.
14. **Monitoring the use of the leave policies:** When managers approve unpaid leave they must inform HR-Payroll by memo. This is because of the pay implications. By extending this arrangement to compassionate (paid) leave HR-Payroll will be able to maintain data and monitor the use of all of these policies.
15. **Other areas HR to research and put forward proposals for:**
  - i) **Flexible retirement arrangements:** Where an employee arranges to work lesser hours and have access to their pension. The Council does not have a policy for this.
  - ii) **Secondments:** Where a post needs to be covered for a short time, such as maternity leave cover, internal secondments have been arranged; employees broaden their knowledge and experience and managers gain from the skills the employee brings. Expanding this further to enable secondments to or from other local authorities/private sector organisations would be another way to further develop SCDC staff; and bringing in expertise from outside would also have benefits for the Council.
  - iii) **Sabbaticals:** Giving time out of the workplace to an employee to follow something they cannot do around work commitment, e.g. complete a course, take part in voluntary work or deal with a personal issue, will bring back expertise gained during the sabbatical or have a positive effect on the individual as undue stress can result when there is a conflict between work and home life.

## Options

16. Not approve the revisions, which will leave us in breach of legislation.
17. Agree to the revised policy as recommended by EMT.

## Implications

18. The policy would promote equal and fair opportunity to all staff and promote a sense of being valued, which in turn would contribute to improved employee relations.

19.	Financial	Could help to reduce absenteeism, which has financial implications.
	Legal	All legislation is addressed.

Staffing	Evidence suggests employees will be more productive and/or less stressed if they are helped to balance work and home commitments.
Risk Management	The policy needs to be implemented fairly and consistently across SCDC.
Equal Opportunities	The policy was judged as a good policy under the EIA and opening flexible working to all employees will improve this further.

### **Consultations**

20. The policy has been circulated to the Unions for comment and agreement.

### **Conclusions/Summary**

21. The purpose of the policy is to enable employees to balance their work and home responsibilities. The new elements in the policy will further improve this for employees.

### **Recommendations**

22. It is recommended that Portfolio holder approve the revised policies and asks HR to research and draft policies to cover flexible retirement, secondments and sabbaticals in order to give fair and open access to all staff in these areas.

**Background Papers:** the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

None

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