

Rother District Council

Report to	-	Council
Date	-	18 September 2023
Report of the	-	Human Resources Committee
Subject	-	Reference from the Human Resources Committee – Staff Pay Award

The Council is asked to consider the recommendation arising from the Human Resources Committee meeting held on 30 August 2023 as set out below.

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 30 AUGUST 2023

HR23/08. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HOME WORKING ALLOWANCE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Members received the report of the Human Resources Manager which summarised the work of the Home Working Allowance Task and Finish Group (HWA T&FG) and outlined the Group's final recommendations to the Human Resources Committee.

The HWA T&FG had been tasked with examining the Council's role, through its policies, in supporting home working and to consider payment of any allowances. The Group considered the current lack of provision of a payment of a home working allowance to all staff and explored all possibilities, including the Council's neighbouring authorities' current provision.

The Council's current Flexible Working Policy covered management, general employment and working advice, advice on Health and Safety and guidance on technology. The policy aimed to facilitate increased productivity enabling the Council to better serve its customers, whilst helping staff balance their work and home commitments. The policy gave managers and staff much greater scope to change working patterns, whilst at the same time guiding them in good practice and the expectations of the organisation.

The Council did not currently contract any staff member to work from home and individual teams made their own arrangements in the form of Team Agreements. The favoured working option for staff was currently two to three days per week in the office and an increase in staff returning to offices had been seen.

The Council currently followed the National Joint Council (NJC) terms and conditions of employment but implemented a local pay scheme. Apart from Wealden District Council (WDC), all other councils in East and West Sussex followed the national pay conditions. The outcome of the Local Government Pay 2023 was still awaited, but the latest response rejected the Home Working Allowance (HWA) requested by unions in the original claim.

WDC was the only neighbouring authority of the Council's that paid a HWA. WDC currently paid staff a HWA of £26 per month for gas/electric and £15 per month for broadband, subject to tax, pro-rated to days in the office/contracted hours, with reports sent to payroll each month to confirm payments required.

The HWA T&FG considered the following options:

- follow WDC's policy and pay an allowance to staff all year round;
- pay an allowance from October to April as a contribution to heating costs;
- fully join the national conditions of service, which would cut out the additional work and meetings necessary to agree the pay award each year; or
- take no action and follow what happens with the current Local Government Pay 2023.

Due to the fact that the Council did not employ any permanent home workers, desk space within the Town Hall was currently being reviewed to ensure staff could be accommodated when and if they wished and an increase in staff returning to offices had been seen, the HWA T&FG recommended that a HWA should not be paid to staff at the current time.

Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and the following points were noted during the discussions:

- it was unlikely that every member of staff would be working from the Town Hall at any one time, but additional accommodation had been identified in Amherst Road to provide more space. The situation would continue to be monitored;
- each team had prepared 'Team Agreements' which set out their working patterns;
- during the COVID-19 pandemic, risk assessments were undertaken for staff working at home and any issues raised were dealt with, including the provision of additional equipment as necessary;
- staff members were given the choice to work at home to suit their personal circumstances and the needs of the business. No staff member was contracted to work from home;
- staff members wishing to work from the office would be accommodated;
- the only council in East and West Sussex to pay an HWA was WDC, where a number of members of staff were contracted to work from home;
- the NJC had not offered to pay an HWA but may do so in the future and therefore the Council would keep this under review;
- a Hybrid Working Policy was currently being developed by the HR Manager, in conjunction with managers and their teams;
- potential cost implications of awarding an HWA had not been provided to the HWA T&FG, therefore the recommendations had not been made on a financial basis but on the principal of incentivising working from home; and

- as an employer, the Council had a responsibility to ensure staff were working in the correct environment and provided with the necessary equipment.

RECOMMENDED: That a Home Working Allowance payment not be introduced at the current time.

(Human Resources Committee Agenda Item 5)

Councillor Oliver
Chair of the Human Resources