

**Manchester City Council
Report for Resolution**

Report to: Personnel Committee - 13 February 2019

Subject: Flexible Working Policy Framework

Report of: Director of HROD

Purpose of Report

To seek approval from Personnel Committee to a number of policy and guidance developments in relation to flexible working which support the Our Ways of Working (OWOW) programme and broader aspirations of the Our People Strategy.

These changes specifically cover: strengthened Special Leave and Flexible Working Policies, and new clarified guidelines for flexitime and working from home.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

1. Approve the revised Special Leave Policy (Appendix A)
 2. Approve the revised Flexible Working Policy (Appendix B)
 3. Note the proposal to strengthen guidance in relation to flexitime and ad-hoc working from home in line with existing policy provision.
 4. Note the intention to proactively communicate these developments and the Council's broader suite of support for flexible working as a new Flexible Working Policy Framework.
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Wards affected:

All

Financial implications for the revenue and capital budgets:

None

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

Report to Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee: Human Resources
Subgroup, 22nd November 2018 - *Our Ways of Working*

1. Context

- 1.1 The Our Manchester approach is at the heart of the Council's people strategy; Our People Strategy. If the organisation is to truly embed this way of working and the associated Our Manchester behaviours throughout the Council then an enabling framework of people management policies are essential. The role of Policy here is to support managers in their role by providing a robust yet flexible framework which enables them to own their people management responsibilities and support staff effectively and equitably in a strengths-based way
- 1.2 In relation to embedding Our Manchester through the Council's approach to flexible working, the Our Ways of Working (OWOW) programme provides an overarching enabler to take this work forwards. OWOW is a fundamentally different approach to how, when and where we work. It seeks to support employees balance their responsibilities in and out of work and, at the same time, increase performance and productivity in delivering excellent services to the residents of Manchester.
- 1.3 The drivers for change are broad and include:
 - The rationalisation of our estate
 - Reduced carbon emissions through less staff travel
 - Modernising the organisation as an employer to attract and retain talent which responds directly to staff feedback through Bheard
 - Supporting our employee wellbeing and equality priorities (including working carers)
 - Supporting the employment of our social value priority groups.
- 1.4 Through delivering on this agenda the Council will be 'Walking the Talk' in providing the progressive, modern and supportive employment offer as an exemplar to other organisations in the City in support of our Work and Skills Strategy. In progressing this work, support has been provided by Timewise, a social enterprise who champion flexibility in the workplace. The Council's overarching plan has been reviewed and endorsed by Timewise with Manchester now formally recognised as a 'Timewise Council'
- 1.5 The approach is being underpinned by a refreshed framework of workforce policies, an ambition to rethink and refocus our office design and a commitment to take full advantage of technology to enable smart and improve working.
- 1.6 Whilst the commitment is organisational wide, the offer will look and feel different across services, recognising the different models of delivery. For example how OWOW works in frontline delivery teams will be very different to back office services. However, the commitment is for all staff to have access to part of the offer, this could include greater use of technology, ability to change work locations or the ability to work from home.
- 1.7 OWOW is not about looking at policies in isolation but rather is underpinned by ICT HR and Estates working together to support a modern employment offer

which promotes flexibility for all staff whilst prioritising business delivery through a shift in organisational culture. OWOW is not a project or programme but rather the culmination of a range of interconnected strands of action.

2. Background: Flexible Working Policy Framework

- 2.1 As noted above, creating a truly flexible working culture in line with the aspiration of OWOW is something which cannot be achieved through policy alone. However, a clear framework of supportive policies in this area is an essential prerequisite and as part of the OWOW programme a review of this framework has been conducted involving a cross section of staff and managers and the Trade Unions.
- 2.2 The review affirmed the view that the Council has an existing strong suite of flexible working policies. This includes an overarching Flexible Working Policy as well as specific policies in areas such as Special Leave, Flexitime, Career Breaks and Flexible Retirement. However, it identified a number of areas where this framework could be strengthened namely:
- Strengthening and clarifying the language within the Special Leave And Flexible Working Policy to make this more accessible.
 - Improving guidance and support for specific groups such as carers, foster carers and disabled staff
 - Providing sufficient flexibility within the policy framework and supporting guidance to meet the diverse needs of all Services.
- 2.3 Feedback also emphasised the importance of presenting the Council's policy and guidance in this area as one integrated framework and in a clear and coordinated way accessible to all staff. Central to this presentation will be a clear and visible commitment that, in the spirit of the Flexible Working Policy itself:

Recognising the benefit that flexibility brings to both the organisation and our employees: all flexible working requests will be granted, unless there is a genuine business reason not to.

3. Policy and guidance recommendations

- 3.1 The draft revised policies and guidance appended consist of four key areas - Special Leave, Flexible Working Policy, Ad hoc Working From Home, and Flexitime.
- 3.2 Policy in these areas will be supported by strengthened guidance on the intranet which will also include strengthened information in relation to career breaks and flexible retirement in-line with the current policy provision. This will be presented alongside other information on OWOW and Health and Wellbeing.

3.3 Special Leave

3.3.1 The CIPD and Acas view is that when properly utilised special leave is part of a wider toolset of flexible working options, that as a whole leads to a better work/life balance. Special Leave is, in normal circumstances unpaid but, as set out within the appended policy, can be paid in certain circumstances such as when related to bereavement or urgent caring responsibilities. Following the review of the current special leave policy the language has been improved and more explicit emphasis to the facility to support carers and foster carers has been added. The policy has also be strengthened in relation to disability related special leave (DRSL). These proposed changes are outlined for approval in the revised special leave policy (**Appendix A**).

3.3.2 *Carers*

The Council's current special leave policy, if utilised effectively, does provide a mechanism for supporting working carers. However, given the integral role that managers have in creating a supportive environment for employees with caring responsibilities, a dedicated section has been included in the revised policy (Appendix A, para 8). This is intended to outline when special leave should apply for carers. New guidance has also been developed which provides more detail to support carers and their managers. - The approach supports a broader range of developments to support working carers across the Council

3.3 *Fosterers*

As in the case with carers, a dedicated section in the revised policy has also been included to demonstrate the Council's support for foster carers (Appendix A, para 9). The revised policy makes clear that special leave should be available to fosterers when they need time off for training, the assessment process, and issues that arise as part of the fostering process that would require an employee to request leave. This will also be emphasised in the new online guidance to support the policy.

3.4 *Disability Related Special Leave (DRSL)*

DRSL is available for employees who would be considered as having a disability under the terms of the Equality Act 2010. It can be used as a reasonable adjustment where a disabled person is absent from work for rehabilitation, assessment or treatment. Circumstances in which DRSL may be authorised include time off during working hours for hospital appointments, physiotherapy, counselling, or treatment.

3.5 The language in the policy has been refreshed and updated to reference the correct legislation. In line with best practice, the policy position has also been strengthened to allow DRSL to be taken in hours or a bundle of hours, as well as half-days or full days. Current guidance in this area is limited and, in order to provide confidence to staff and managers, this will be expanded upon and improved.

3.4 **Flexible Working Policy**

3.4.1 Benchmarking and consultation have confirmed that the Council's overarching Flexible Working Policy aligns with current good practice and is fit for purpose. However, as the most recent policy was published in 2010 the language has been refreshed where appropriate to improve accessibility through the use of plain English (**Appendix B**).

3.4.2 Aside from the policy language refresh there are no substantive changes suggested to the policy.

3.5 Ad hoc Working from Home

3.5.1 As part of the drive to embrace OWOW, staff in a broader range of areas are being encouraged work away from their usual location (where appropriate) on an occasional basis. Whilst there is no intention to develop a formal policy in this area, as existing policy provision is seen as appropriate, guidance for staff and managers has been developed to confirm the corporate message. This is appended for information and comment (**Appendix C**).

3.6 Flexible Working Hours Scheme (Flexitime)

3.6.1 A policy review has confirmed that the current flexible working hours scheme remains fit for purpose. Since its establishment in circa 1993 a range of local variations have been agreed and the range and volume of these have increased in recent years. Feedback from services that have introduced variations, from the organisation as a whole following consultation exercises, and from engagement with the Trade Unions has informed the development of a plain English, accessible version of the current scheme with a clear process for agreeing local variations which is appended for information and comment (**Appendices D and E**).

4. Comments from Trade Unions

4.1 Awaited

5. Comments from the Director of HROD

5.1 The policy developments and guidance improvements proposed will provide a strengthened basis to further the Council's OWOW ambition whilst ensuring fair and effective people management practices. This will both support improved workforce engagement and wellbeing and drive increased productivity.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Draft policies and guidance are appended below. As noted above, these have been developed reflective of the organisation's commitment to best practice in flexible working as part of OWOW.

6.2 The policy changes have been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment and no disproportionate implications have been identified.

6.3 Members are asked to:

- Approve the revised Special Leave Policy as appended
- Approve the revised Flexible Working Policy as appended
- Note the proposal to strengthen guidance in relation to flexitime and ad-hoc working from home in line with existing policy provision
- Note the intention to proactively communicate these developments and the Council's broader suite of support for flexible working as a new Flexible Working Policy Framework.