

**WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL****Report by Strategic Lead – People and Technology****Corporate Services Committee: 19<sup>th</sup> February 2019**

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**Subject: Career Break Policy****1. Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline provisions of the new career break policy for Local Government employees and seek approval of same.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to approve the Career Break policy attached as appendix 1.

**3. Background**

- 3.1 Historically there has been no formal career break policy available to local government employees. However, career breaks have been progressed informally through the relevant line management structure. The attached career break policy has been developed to provide a clear, robust and consistent approach to career breaks within West Dunbartonshire Council and ensure managers are aware of the process to follow when dealing with same.
- 3.2 Following a period of research and consideration of good practice, the policy was developed in accordance with the Council's Policy Framework and subsequently agreed by the relevant trade unions.
- 3.3 This policy does not apply to teachers and other associated professionals covered by SNCT terms and conditions, as a separate LNCT agreement for career breaks in those professional areas exists– reference LNCT agreement No 8.

**4. Main Issues**

- 4.1 West Dunbartonshire Council is committed to providing the opportunity for employees to achieve a positive work life balance through effective and productive ways of working that meet both business and employee needs. The attached career break policy has been developed as a beneficial addition to the Council's suite of flexible working supports. This policy provides an opportunity to retain skills and knowledge, when an employee's personal circumstances require consideration of a break from work.

**4.2** A career break is a period of approved unpaid leave, which provides an extended break from work, for example to:

- Undertake educational activities, a relevant course of study or other skills development activity;
- Extended periods of travel;
- Undertake voluntary work;
- Undertake personal development activity;
- Care for or support family members; and/or
- Manage their own wellbeing and health.

**4.3** Through discussions with relevant managers and trade union colleagues, it was acknowledged that there was a need for an agreed career break policy to support a consistent approach to the management of career breaks across the Council. Additionally, those taking a career break should be clear of the impact on pay, pension and service.

**4.4** The attached policy outlines the key principles of career breaks within West Dunbartonshire Council and the arrangements in place to support them. It sets out the process to be followed when considering an application for a career break and details the terms and conditions associated with a career break agreement to ensure that all parties are clear as to the terms of the agreement. In general terms this extended period of leave without pay does not count as service while ensuring continuity of service, i.e. the period before and after the leave are considered joined. Pay and benefits are suspended during the career break and resume on return to work.

**4.5** Managers also have additional considerations relating to the resulting vacancy and how this might be filled. While an employee is on career break they remain an employee of the council and it is essential that the employee is kept informed of changes and developments within the work place. This agreed communication also helps to maintain an employee's confidence, skills and knowledge and eases the return to work process.

## **5. People Implications**

**5.1** The Career Break policy provides employees and managers with a comprehensive procedure to follow when making or considering a request for a career break. A transparent process will promote openness and employee engagement to support a culture where employees understand that the Council is fully committed to promoting good employment practice and improving the working lives of employees.

**5.2** The aim of the policy is to retain existing employees whose personal circumstances deem it necessary for them to take a break from work. This retains valuable skills and experience while also avoiding unnecessary recruitment. It may also facilitate temporary development opportunities for existing employees.

## **6. Financial and Procurement Implications**

- 6.1** There are no financial implications associated with this report.
- 6.2** Adherence to the attached policy is intended to mitigate against any unintended costs associated with the approval of a career break, by clarifying all contractual entitlements during and on return from the break. The policy clearly details the management considerations and all aspects of the career break that must be considered.

## **7. Risk Analysis**

- 7.1** A clear and transparent process for managing and making applications for career breaks will assist in the retention of employees, skills and knowledge within the Council.

## **8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)**

- 8.1** An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and identified no negative impact. The policy promotes equality of opportunity across all equality strands and protected characteristics and encourages employees to report any potential unlawful practice which would include any breach of the Equality Act 2010.

## **9. Consultation**

- 9.1** In line with the policy development framework, a range of key stakeholders were consulted during the development exercise, including: HR, Legal, line managers and Trades Unions.
- 9.2** The need to ensure an effective framework for career breaks was recognised by all parties. The final draft of 'The Career Break Policy' was discussed and agreed at the Convenors meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2019.

## **10. Strategic Assessment**

- 10.1** The Career Break Policy contributes to Council's strategic priorities ensuring better asset management by retaining the skills and knowledge of employees.

**Geraldine Lyden**

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Date: 9<sup>th</sup> January 2020

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**Appendices:** Appendix 1 – Career Break Policy

**Background Papers:** N/A

**Wards Affected:** All