

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

15 May 2014

Report by Director of Corporate & Community Services

RESPONSE TO AUDIT & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE INVESTIGATION
ON PROCEDURAL ISSUES

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to bring forward the Council's response to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee's investigation of procedural issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that the Cabinet notes the Council's response to the various recommendations in the report and approves the planned actions arising.

BACKGROUND

3. On 20 February 2014 Cabinet considered a report prepared by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on its investigation on procedural issues and agreed that a response be prepared. Issues covered included:

- access to Corporate Personnel Circulars (CPCs)
- car mileage and related issues and checks
- declarations of interest
- IT systems access issues
- Council leaver's checklist.

4. The purpose of this report is to provide comment and response to the issues and recommendations raised in the investigation. The report provides some comment and narrative on each of the areas and the detailed actions that will now be taken as a result are listed in Annex 1.

CORPORATE PERSONNEL CIRCULARS

5. The Committee made several recommendations regarding the Council's Corporate Personnel Circulars (CPCs). These included the need for a review of the distribution; development of an electronic library; and version control and updates.

CPCs are written for managers and are not suitable for wider distribution. This is because in some cases, the information they contain may be sensitive and are used to advise managers of significant employment matters. If the information is taken out of context through a general wide distribution, then rumours and concerns can develop amongst the workforce unnecessarily.

There are also occasions when a change is being brought in to all or a specific part of the workforce and to ensure a consistent approach it is far better to allow a manager to communicate and manage the change locally rather than have individual employees make their own interpretation of the change. It must be remembered that only a proportion of Council employees have access to documents on the Intranet so issuing CPC circulars to managers ensures that changes to procedures and policies are communicated and brought in to effect for employees across the Council.

The intranet, Insider magazine, core brief and trade union involvement are used as a more direct method to advise the workforce of new or amended policies and procedures.

6. We have now reviewed the distribution and access permissions and as a result have increased the distribution and access of CPCs to a wider manager listing. All CPCs are available online through the intranet for managers. Longer term there will be a review of the current experience of managers using the circulars via the intranet to further improve accessibility, version control and usability.

CAR MILEAGE & RELATED ISSUES & CHECKS

7. The Audit and Scrutiny Committee's report recommended that a common mechanism be established to ensure that appropriate checks (e.g. MOT and car insurance details) are carried out for any staff member claiming vehicle mileage. It was recommended that timescales for these checks be linked to insurance renewal dates and that the process be co-ordinated through business support teams, with the exception of schools.

8. Each department has confirmed that a process is currently in place to carry out these checks and, where business support teams exist (i.e. Corporate & Community Services; CHCP and Environment) these teams already co-ordinate the arrangements. There is however scope to agree a common process and timeline which would apply across all departments. This would then allow reminders to be communicated throughout the Council through Insider mechanisms. This will now be taken forward and co-ordinated by the Business Support Managers, in liaison with the Education Department.

9. The arrangements currently in place cover both drivers of council owned vehicles and casual car users. The Committee's report highlighted however that there was a risk to the council if employees, who did not submit documents for checks, then used their car for business purposes even without claiming mileage. This has been confirmed as an uninsurable risk. To address this, and reduce the risk, the definition of a 'casual user' will be expanded and this will be communicated to all managers for cascade through a CPC circular as part of a general circular on all aspects of licence and insurance checks.

10. The Committee also made recommendations with regard to strengthening arrangements for declaration of driving convictions. Current procedures are around checking that employees have a current, valid driving licence. It was suggested that liaison with the DVLA would be helpful in strengthening this. Officers have now investigated this further and the employee would require to consent to information being obtained from DVLA. This is a sensitive area regarding data protection and the correctness of obtaining information about an employee's criminal conduct outside of work. In addition there is no impact on the council's insurance if an employee has a speeding conviction. The Code of Conduct requires employees to remember that their actions both at work and elsewhere should not bring the Council into disrepute. When applying for a job with the Council or a change of job within the Council all candidates are required to complete a Criminal Convictions declaration. Depending on the circumstances, it may be a disciplinary offence if an employee in charge of a Council vehicle failed to declare a driving related criminal conviction obtained during their period of employment with us.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

11. It was recommended that a review be undertaken of the adequacy of the current procedures for allowing all declarations of interest to be made and to ensure that all staff are aware of the arrangements. It was suggested that an annual canvass of employees be undertaken to ask if any declarations of interest should be recorded. Each year employees will be sent a direct communication reminding them of their responsibilities to declare any potential interests and this will be reinforced annually to employees through an email and 3 times during the year through the intranet. For certain groups of staff it is considered more appropriate given the nature of their work that they are required to sign, on an annual basis, an assurance statement regarding Code of Conduct and potential conflict of interests. This is relevant for different groups of staff including Revenues and Benefit services, Customer First and Audit.

IT SYSTEMS ACCESS ISSUES

12. The Committee made recommendations that the procedures for reviewing IT systems access should be revisited, clarified and made known to all staff. It was recommended that access to the Council's IT system be reviewed annually to ensure accounts unused for significant periods of time were managed appropriately and that a full list of all IT systems used and related administrators would be beneficial.

13. In response it is necessary to clarify that the ICT Service is responsible for provisioning access to the underlying network, but not individual department business applications. The ICT Service is however undertaking an annual exercise to ask each Director to review and verify network account access for each individual and generic account(s) allocated to the Department with corrective action taken as appropriate. Responsibility for administering access to individual departmental business applications (e.g. LAGAN, ORBIS, Resource Link, Uniform etc) is the responsibility of departmental system administrators. The ICT Service can provide an updated list of all business applications and it is agreed that owners of these applications will then be asked to carry out required checks annually.

COUNCIL LEAVER'S CHECKLIST

14. Recommendations were also made that the Council's Leaver's Checklist (form 'Exit 2/11') be reviewed to ensure sufficient clarity on what needs checked, by whom and when. It was suggested that this would include ICT system access and that systems administrators should be advised in writing of changes. In addition, it was proposed that Human Resources should ensure that a fully completed exit form is received for each employee who leaves or changes jobs.

15. When an employee leaves the Council the Exit 2/11 form is currently emailed to the manager by HR requesting that the completed form should be returned. The form documents all the checks the manager of the exiting employee should complete. For employee transfers within department or to another department HR have explored the possibility of setting up automatic triggers however this is not possible as the system is not sophisticated enough to complete this task. An annual email reminder will be issued to managers reminding them of the requirement for exit procedures.

FINANCE & EFFICIENCY

16. There are no financial implications arising. It is in the Council's interests to amend working practices to ensure maximum efficiency. The Audit and Scrutiny Committee's recommendations will therefore be taken forward in a way that achieves the best balance of the need for due controls and governance with principles of modernising the way we work and minimising bureaucracy.

CONSULTATION

17. There are no implications arising.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

18. There are no implications arising.

CONCLUSION

19. The input from the Audit and Scrutiny Committee has been reviewed and implemented as appropriate.

RECOMMENDATION

20. It is recommended that the Cabinet notes the Council's response to the various recommendations in the report and approves the planned actions arising.

REPORT AUTHOR

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15 April 2014

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Audit & Scrutiny Investigation on Procedural Issues, Cabinet 20 February 2014; Audit Committee 16 January 2014

KEYWORDS

This report sets out the Council's response to an Audit & Scrutiny Investigation on Procedural Issues.

AUDIT & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PROCEDURAL ISSUES INVESTIGATIONACTIONS ARISINGApril 2014

AUDIT & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATION	RECOMMENDATION	ACTION	OFFICER RESPONSIBLE	TIMESCALE
1	<p><u>Access to Corporate Personnel Circulars</u></p> <p>CPC distribution arrangements, including all cascade arrangements, should be reviewed to ensure that all circulars are actually reaching every intended recipient and that every officer who requires to see a copy of any is notified, possibly through an e-mail alert, whenever a new CPC is issued.</p>	<p>The managers' listing for CPC circulars is being extended to improve the communication of circulars.</p> <p>The CPC library on the intranet will be reviewed longer term to review the current experience of managers using circulars.</p>	Sharon Beattie	May 2014
2	<p>Consideration should be given to making a widely accessible, electronic CPC library accessible on the intranet to all those who need to see circulars preferably featuring an electronic index with links to every current circular.</p>			
3	<p>For the avoidance of doubt, when any CPC completely supersedes another, this should be highlighted clearly.</p>			
4	<p>Rather than issuing several CPCs on a matter that are intended to complement each other, consideration should always be given to simply amending the original and highlighting changes within it.</p>			

AUDIT & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATION	RECOMMENDATION	ACTION	OFFICER RESPONSIBLE	TIMESCALE
5	<p><u>Car Mileage & Related Checks</u></p> <p>Further steps should be taken to remind officers, including through CPCs and vehicles such the <i>insider</i>, of the importance and requirement to complete all required vehicle and expenses related document checks both timeously and fully and to emphasise that claims must not be approved in the absence of checks being incomplete.</p>	<p>The three Departmental Business Support Managers (in liaison with the Education Department) will develop a common process for car mileage and related checks and liaise with Communications to ensure timely reminders are issued via My Insider.</p>	<p>Caroline Innes</p>	<p>August 2014</p>
6	<p>Within each department, a common mechanism must be established which is clear to all those claiming and authorising expenses, that ensures that all required checks are undertaken as often as required (possibly linked to the date on which an individual's insurance is renewed) and logged adequately and consistently.</p>			
7	<p>With the exception of schools which, from a pragmatic point of view, probably need to establish their own mechanisms for ensuring that required document checks are completed fully and adequately subject to these meeting the Council's requirements, those departments which have not done so already, should consider placing responsibility for ensuring that all checks are completed and logged with their departmental Business Support Team which should play a coordinating role; maintain a departmental record confirming that all checks have been completed; and alert appropriate Heads of Service when this has not been done.</p>			
8	<p>To ensure that the Council is sufficiently protected against liabilities that may, potentially fall to it, consideration should be given to the extent which documentary checks would be appropriate for employees who use their own vehicles for business purposes, but opt not to seek reimbursement for doing so as it appears that checks are not being carried out at present.</p>	<p>The definition of a casual user will be expanded to reduce the risk and this will be communicated to all managers for cascade through a CPC circular as part of a general circular on all aspects of licence and insurance checks.</p>	<p>Sharon Beattie</p>	<p>May 2014</p>

AUDIT & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATION	RECOMMENDATION	ACTION	OFFICER RESPONSIBLE	TIMESCALE
9	More generally, officers should be reminded that when responding to questions posed by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee, every effort should always be made to ensure that feedback on issues is direct, clear and unambiguous and that adequate answers are provided in response to specific questions posed.	The Corporate Management Team is supportive of this recommendation and will make this clear whenever relevant work is being undertaken.	CMT	Ongoing
10 Declaration of Driving Convictions	<u>Declarations</u> Arrangements for declaration of driving convictions should be reviewed to ascertain if they could be strengthened as suggested, including liaison with DVLA.	DVLA checks not applicable – see para 10 of covering report.	N/A	N/A
11 Declarations of Interest	A review should be undertaken of the adequacy of the current arrangements and procedures in place to allow all interests to be declared and to ensure that all employees and managers are fully clear of requirements.	An annual email reminder will be issued to employees and managers about declarations of interest. An intranet rotator reminder will also be uploaded 3 times a year.	Sharon Beattie	April 2014
12	For the avoidance of doubt, canvassing all employees should be carried out on an annual basis as a minimum, to ascertain if they have any interests which should be declared.			
13	<u>IT Systems Access</u> The procedures for reviewing systems access should be revisited and clarified further and made known to all officers.	ICT will provide an annual updated list of all business applications within the Council. Systems administrators for these applications will then be prompted to carry out annual checks regarding system access and accounts.	Caroline Innes	June 2014
14	As a minimum, systems administrators should review access to the Council's IT system on an annual basis and ensure that accounts unused for significant periods of time are identified, reviewed and deactivated as appropriate, in respect of which the preparation for each department and distribution of a full list of all IT systems used and related administrators could be beneficial.			

AUDIT & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATION	<u>RECOMMENDATION</u>	ACTION	OFFICER RESPONSIBLE	TIMESCALE
15	<p><u>Leaver's Checklist</u></p> <p>The title, format, use and awareness of form Exit 2/11 should be reviewed to ensure that it is sufficiently clear what should be checked, by whom and when in terms of system access whenever an employee leaves or changes job, including to prompt those completing the form to advise all relevant systems administrators in writing of required changes.</p>	<p>An annual reminder will be issued to managers indicating the requirement for completion of the leaver's checklist for employees leaving the council and also changes within departments.</p>	<p>Sharon Beattie</p>	<p>June 2014</p>
16	<p>Human resources should check that a fully completed Exit form is received by them each time a person leaves the Council or changes job.</p>			