



Ref: Agenda/Personnel – 01/11/2022

27<sup>th</sup> October 2022

Dear Sir/Madam

All Members of the Town Council are hereby summoned to the Personnel Committee Meeting of Biggleswade Town Council that will take place on **Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2022** at the **Offices of Biggleswade Town Council, The Old Court House, Saffron Road, Biggleswade** commencing at **7:00pm**, for the purpose of considering and recommending the business to be transacted as specified below.

Yours faithfully

Peter Tarrant  
Town Clerk & Chief Executive

Distribution:                      Committee Members  
   Notice Boards

Committee Members:    Cllr J Woodhead (Chairman)  
   Cllr H Ramsay (Vice Chairman)  
   Cllr M Foster  
   Cllr F Foster  
   Cllr M Knight  
   Cllr M North  
   Cllr R Pullinger  
   Cllr M Russell  
   Cllr D Strachan  
   Cllr C Thomas

## AGENDA

1.    **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**
2.    **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

To receive Statutory Declarations of Interests from Members in relation to:

- a.    Disclosable Pecuniary interests in any agenda item.
- b.    Non-Pecuniary interests in any agenda item

3.    **PUBLIC OPEN SESSION**

To adjourn for a period of up to 15 minutes to allow members of the public to put questions or to address the Council, through the Chairman, pertaining to matters listed on the agenda.

Please register in advance for this webinar.

**[https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_W2klumV1Sc67IICjniuQmA](https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_W2klumV1Sc67IICjniuQmA)**

Each Speaker will give their name to the Chairman, prior to speaking, which will be recorded in the minutes, unless that person requests otherwise. Each Speaker will be allowed **one three-minute slot**.

#### 4. MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS

- a. The Minutes of the Personnel Committee Meeting held on **Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2022** at the Offices of Biggleswade Town Council, The Old Court House, Saffron Road, Biggleswade.

#### 5. MATTERS ARISING

- a. The Minutes of the Personnel Committee Meeting held on **Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2022** at the Office of Biggleswade Town Council, The Old Court House, Saffron Road, Biggleswade.

#### 6. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

##### a. HR Policies

For Members to receive and consider the HR Policies from the Administration & HR Manager:

- Information and Data Protection Policy
- DBS Policy
- Overtime & TOIL
- Travel & Subsistence
- Remote Working Policy
- Unsociable hours
- Employee Code of Conduct
- Gossiping Policy
- Severe Weather Policy
- Managing Personal Relationships at Work

#### 7. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

- a. None.

#### 8. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

To adjourn for a period of up to 15 minutes to allow members of the public to put questions or to address the Council, through the Chairman, in respect of any other business of the Town Council.

Please register in advance for this webinar:

**[https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_W2klumV1Sc67IICjniuQmA](https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_W2klumV1Sc67IICjniuQmA)**

Each Speaker will give their name to the Chairman prior to speaking, which will be recorded in the minutes, unless that person requests otherwise. Each Speaker will be allowed **(one) three-minute slot**.

#### 9. EXEMPT ITEMS

The following resolution will be **moved** that it is advisable in the public interest that the public and press are excluded whilst the following exempt items are discussed.

- (10a. HR Updates)  
(10b. Staff Contracts)

Pursuant to section 1(2) of the public bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 Council **resolve** to exclude the public and press by reason of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted.





**MINUTES OF THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**HELD ON TUESDAY 2<sup>nd</sup> AUGUST 2022**  
**AT 7.00PM AT BIGGLESWADE TOWN COUNCIL OFFICES,**  
**THE OLD COURT HOUSE, 4 SAFFRON ROAD, BIGGLESWADE SG18 8DL**



**PRESENT:**

Cllr H Ramsey (Chair)  
Cllr G Fage  
Cllr F Foster  
Cllr M Knight (via Zoom)  
Cllr M North  
Cllr M Russell  
Cllr D Strachan  
Cllr C Thomas

Mr P Tarrant - Town Clerk & Chief Executive  
Miss H Calvert - Administration & HR Manager

Members of the Public - 0

**Meeting Formalities:**

Following a reminder to meeting attendees, both panel and public, that this is a formal meeting, the Chairman advised that members of the public will be given an opportunity to speak during public open session but not at other times. The meeting is being filmed and by being present attendees are deemed to have agreed be filmed and to the use of those images and sound recordings. The Chairman advised that attendees should not disclose any personal information of individuals as this would infringe the Data Protection Rights of the individual. The Chairman asked everyone to mute their microphones when not speaking.

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Cllr M Foster, Cllr R Pullinger and Cllr J Woodhead.

**ABSENT WITHOUT APOLOGIES**

None.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

To receive Statutory Declarations of Interests from Members in relation to:

- a. Disclosable Pecuniary interests in any agenda item - None.
- b. Disclosable Pecuniary interests in any agenda item - None.

**3. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION**

There were no members of the public present.

**4. MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS**

- a. The Minutes of the Personnel Committee Meeting held on **Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> March 2022** were **APPROVED.**

**5. MATTERS ARISING**

None.

6. **ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION**

None.

7. **ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

None.

8. **PUBLIC OPEN SESSION**

There were no members of the public present.

9. **EXEMPT ITEMS**

Pursuant to section 1(2) of the public bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 Council resolves to exclude the public and press by reason of the confidential nature of the business being transacted.

(10a – HR Updates)

The following resolution was **MOVED** that it is advisable in the public interest that the public and press are excluded whilst the following exempt items are discussed.

10. **EXEMPT ITEMS**

a. **HR Updates**

Members received an oral update from the Town Clerk & Chief Executive on several HR matters.

The Chairman closed the Meeting at 8.30pm





## **Information & Data Protection Policy**

Biggleswade Town Council recognises it must at times, keep and process sensitive and personal information about both employees and the public, it has therefore adopted this policy not only to meet its legal obligations but to ensure high standards. This Policy is linked to its Quality Policy, which will ensure information considerations are central to the ethos of the organisation, and to its ICT Policy.

The Council will be very transparent about its operations and will work closely with public, community and voluntary organisations. Therefore, in the case of all information which is not personal or confidential, it will be prepared to make it available to partners and members of the Town's communities. Details of information which is routinely available is contained in the Council's Publication Scheme which is based on the statutory model publication scheme for local councils.

### **Making Information Available**

The Publication Scheme is a means by which the Council can make a significant amount of information available routinely, without waiting for someone to specifically request it. The scheme is intended to encourage local people to take an interest in the work of the Council and its role within the community.

In accordance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this Scheme specifies the classes of information which the Council publishes or intends to publish. It is supplemented with an Information Guide which will give greater detail of what the Council will make available and hopefully make it easier for people to access it.

All formal meetings of Council and its committees are subject to statutory notice being given on notice boards, the Website and sent to the local media. The Council publishes an annual programme in May each year. All formal meetings are open to the public and press and reports to those meetings and relevant background papers are available for the public to see. The Council welcomes public participation and has a public participation session on each Council and committee meeting. Details can be seen in the Council's Standing Orders, which are available on its website or at its Offices.

Occasionally, Council or committees may need to consider matters in private. Examples of this are matters involving personal details of staff, or a particular member of the public, or where details of commercial/contractual sensitivity are to be discussed. This will only happen after a formal resolution has been passed to exclude the press and public and reasons for the decision are stated. Minutes from all formal meetings, including the confidential parts are public documents.

The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 requires written records to be made of certain decisions taken by officers under delegated powers. These are not routine operational and administrative decisions such as giving instructions to the workforce or paying an invoice approved by Council but would include urgent action taken after consultation with the Chairman, such as responding to a planning application in advance of Council. In other words, decisions which would have been made by Council or committee had the delegation not been in place.

The 2014 Regulations also amend the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 to allow the public or press to film, photograph or make an audio recording of council and committee meetings normally open to the public. The Council will where possible facilitate such recording unless it is being disruptive. It will also take steps to ensure that children, the vulnerable and members of the public who object to being filmed are protected without undermining the broader purpose of the meeting.

The Council will be pleased to make special arrangements on request for persons who do not have English as their first language or those with hearing or sight difficulties.

### **Protecting Confidential or Sensitive Information**

The Data Protection Act 1998 seeks to strike a balance between the rights of individuals and the sometimes competing interests of those with legitimate reasons for using personal information. The policy is based on these principles:

The Council will make any notification required to the Information Commissioner's Office under the Data Protection Act and periodically update the information.

The Council will comply with the eight principles of good practice for processing sensitive data, by ensuring it is:

- Fairly and lawfully processed.
- Processed for limited purposes.
- Adequate, relevant and not excessive.
- Accurate and up to date.
- Not kept longer than is necessary
- Processed in accordance with the individual's rights.
- Secure.
- Not transferred to countries outside the EU unless the country has adequate protection for the individual.

The Council will ensure that at least one of the following conditions is met for personal information to be considered fairly processed:

- The individual has consented to the processing.
- Processing is necessary for the performance of a contract with the individual.
- Processing is required under a legal obligation.
- Processing is necessary to protect the vital interests of the individual.
- Processing is necessary to carry out public functions.
- Processing is necessary in order to pursue the legitimate interests of the data controller or third parties.

Particular attention is paid to the processing of any sensitive personal information and the Council will ensure that at least one of the following conditions is met:

- Explicit consent of the individual.
- Required by law to process the data for employment purposes.
- A requirement in order to protect the vital interests of the individual or another person.



The Council will always give guidance on personnel data to employees through the Employee handbook.

The Council will ensure that individuals on whom personal information is kept are aware of their rights and have easy access to that information on request.

## **Disclosure Information**

The Council will as necessary undertake checks on both staff and Members with the Disclosure and Barring Service and will comply with their Code of Conduct relating to the secure storage, handling, use, retention and disposal of Disclosures and Disclosure Information. It will include an appropriate operating procedure in its integrated quality management system.

## **Procedures**

The Council has taken the following steps to protect the personal data of relevant individuals, which it holds or to which it has access:

- it appoints or employs employees with specific responsibilities for:
  - the processing and controlling of data.
  - the comprehensive reviewing and auditing of its data protection systems and procedures.
  - over-viewing the effectiveness and integrity of all the data that must be protected.There are clear lines of responsibility and accountability for these different roles.
- it provides information to its employees on their data protection rights, how it uses their personal data, and how it protects it. The information includes the actions relevant individuals can take if they think that their data has been compromised in any way.
- it provides its employees with information and training to make them aware of the importance of protecting personal data, to teach them how to do this, and to understand how to treat information confidentially.
- it can account for all personal data it holds, where it comes from, who it is shared with and also who it might be shared with.
- it carries out risk assessments as part of its reviewing activities to identify any vulnerabilities in its personal data handling and processing, and to take measures to reduce the risks of mishandling and potential breaches of data security. The procedure includes an assessment of the impact of both use and potential misuse of personal data in and by the Council.
- it recognises the importance of seeking individuals' consent for obtaining, recording, using, sharing, storing and retaining their personal data, and regularly reviews its procedures for doing so, including the audit trails that are needed and are followed for all consent decisions. The Council understands that consent must be freely given, specific, informed and unambiguous. The Council will seek consent on a specific and individual basis where appropriate. Full information will be given regarding the activities about which consent is sought. Relevant individuals have the absolute and unimpeded right to withdraw that consent at any time.
- it has the appropriate mechanisms for detecting, reporting and investigating suspected or actual personal data breaches, including security breaches. It is aware of its duty to report significant breaches that cause significant harm to the affected individuals to the Information Commissioner and is aware of the possible consequences.
- it is aware of the implications international transfer of personal data internationally.

## **Access to Information**

Relevant individuals have a right to be informed whether the Council processes personal data relating to them and to access the data that the Council holds about them. Requests for access to this data will be dealt with under the following summary guidelines:

- a form on which to make a subject access request is available from the Administration and HR Manager.
- the Council will not charge for the supply of data unless the request is manifestly unfounded, excessive or repetitive, or unless a request is made for duplicate copies to be provided to parties other than the employee making the request.
- the Council will respond to a request without delay. Access to data will be provided, subject to legally permitted exemptions, within one month as a maximum. This may be extended by a further two months where requests are complex or numerous.

Relevant individuals must inform the Council immediately if they believe that the data is inaccurate, either as a result of a subject access request or otherwise. The Council will take immediate steps to rectify the information.

## **Data Security**

The Council adopts procedures designed to maintain the security of data when it is stored and transported. Employees must:

- ensure that all files or written information of a confidential nature are stored in a secure manner and are only accessed by people who have a need and a right to access them.
- ensure that all files or written information of a confidential nature are not left where they can be read by unauthorised people.
- refrain from sending emails containing sensitive work-related information to their personal email address.
- check regularly on the accuracy of data being entered into computers.
- always use the passwords provided to access the computer system and not abuse them by passing them on to people who should not have them.
- use computer screen blanking to ensure that personal data is not left on screen when not in use.

Personal data should not be kept or transported on laptops, USB sticks, or similar devices, unless authorised by a senior manager. Where personal data is recorded on any such device it should be protected by:

- ensuring that data is recorded on such devices only where absolutely necessary.
- using an encrypted system — a folder should be created to store the files that need extra protection and all files created or moved to this folder should be automatically encrypted.
- ensuring that laptops or USB drives are not left lying around where they can be stolen.

## Data Transparency

The Council has resolved to act in accordance with the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency (September 2011). This sets out the key principles for local authorities in creating greater transparency through the publication of public data and is intended to help them meet obligations of the legislative framework concerning information. "Public data" means the objective, factual data on which policy decisions are based and on which public services are assessed, or which is collected or generated in the course of public service delivery.

The Code will therefore underpin the Council's decisions on the release of public data and ensure it is proactive in pursuing higher standards and responding to best practice as it develops.

The principles of the Code are:

Demand led: new technologies and publication of data should support transparency and accountability.

Open: the provision of public data will be integral to the Council's engagement with residents so that it drives accountability to them.

Timely: data will be published as soon as possible following production.

Government has also issued a further Code of Recommended Practice on Transparency, compliance of which is compulsory for parish councils with turnover (gross income or gross expenditure) not exceeding £25,000 per annum. These councils will be exempt from the requirement to have an external audit from April 2017. Biggleswade Town Council exceeds this turnover but will nevertheless ensure the following information is published on its website for ease of access:

- All transactions above £100.
- End of year accounts.
- Annual Governance Statements.
- Internal Audit Reports.
- List of Councillor or Member responsibilities.
- Details of public land and building assets.
- Draft minutes of Council and committees within one month.
- Agendas and associated papers no later than three clear days before the meeting.

## **Annex**

### **Data Protection Roles**

Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) = Town Clerk & Chief Executive

Senior Information Owner (SIO) = Head of Governance & Strategic Planning

Data Protection Manager (DPM) = Administration & HR Manager

Records Manager (RM) = Deputy Administration & HR Manager





## **Disclosures & Barring Policy**

### **Purpose**

This policy sets out the conditions under which Biggleswade Town Council will require a Disclosures & Barring Service (DBS) Check to be completed and the implications arising from their use for employees and workers. It relates to checks carried out upon recruitment and during the lifetime of employment.

### **Introduction**

A DBS check searches personal details provided by the individual against criminal records and other sources. A basic DBS check will either:

- Confirm that the individual does not have a criminal record; or
- list any current convictions.

An Enhanced DBS check will advise of any current and/or relevant convictions, cautions, reprimands, warnings and, if applicable, whether the individual has been barred from working with vulnerable groups. The Police may also include non-conviction information, for example, fixed penalties, that may be relevant.

In order to protect vulnerable individuals, any employee whose role involves working where children or vulnerable adults will be present will be asked to apply for a basic DBS Certificate, before they are eligible to begin work in that area of the business. The cost of that check will be reimbursed to the individual.

### **Post Eligible for Enhanced Checks**

Under the Rehabilitation of Offenders' Act 1974, some offences are considered "spent" after a period of time. Spent convictions and police cautions will not be shown on a basic DBS check but may be relevant considerations in the safeguarding of vulnerable individuals.

In order to ensure the safeguarding of vulnerable individuals, Biggleswade Town Council will apply for an enhanced DBS check for any roles that afford unsupervised access to children or vulnerable adults or roles which afford supervised access to children or vulnerable adults on a regular basis. There may be some other roles that are eligible for an enhanced DBS check. It will be the responsibility of the Administration & HR Manager to check current Government guidance determine which level of DBS check is appropriate in all the circumstances.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/dbs-eligibility-guidance>

## **Recruitment or New Role**

Prior to recruiting for a new role, the Administration & HR Manager, in conjunction with the hiring manager, will consider whether a DBS check is required for the new role.

If a DBS check is required, the job advertisement and job description will state that “the position is subject to a satisfactory DBS check”. Any offer issued to an individual will state that it is “subject to a satisfactory DBS check”.

A basic DBS check will be completed with the assistance of the Administration and HR Manager on the employees first day. Until a basic DBS certificate has been received by the Town Council and is deemed satisfactory, the employee will not work unsupervised.

If an enhanced DBS check is required, the individual will be asked to provide the relevant information.

## **Returned Traces**

Having a conviction will not necessarily bar an individual from working for Biggleswade Town Council. Each individual case will be considered with reference to the sentence, severity and nature of the offence and the potential risk to children or vulnerable adults.

In the event the DBS check shows any charges or convictions, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive and the Administration and HR Manager will carefully consider the following:

- Does the check reveal anything that reasonably impacts upon the individual’s suitability for the position concerned? For example, if it relates to a petty theft many years ago, how relevant is that to the role?
- Does the check reveal anything that would reasonably be considered as detrimental to the business or reputation of the Council?
- If not, details should be retained securely for only as long as is necessary. Allegations or findings of criminal activity that are not relevant should be disregarded for the purposes of the role.
- If the check reveals something that can be reasonably considered to make them unsuitable for the proposed role, the Council must consider if there are any other reasonable opportunities available to the individual. This may include amending the proposed role so that it no longer involves any duties or areas that would be of concern, or the individual being considered for any other suitable roles that may be available.
- If the DBS check is unsatisfactory and no suitable alternative can be offered, the offer of employment may be withdrawn, or disciplinary proceedings instigated. Dependent upon all the circumstances, disciplinary proceedings may lead to termination of employment.

## **Retention of Documents**

Biggleswade Town Council complies fully with its obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998 and other relevant legislation pertaining to the safe handling, use, storage, retention and disposal of certificate information.

## **Storage and access**

Certificate information will be kept securely, in lockable, non-portable, storage containers with access strictly controlled and limited to those who are entitled to see it as part of their duties.

## **Ongoing Employment Checks**

Relevant employees will be required to register for the DBS update service. Biggleswade Town Council will reimburse the charges incurred. Employees will be required to produce an updated DBS check every three years.

## **Referral Procedures**

In the event that any employee is found to have committed a significant breach of the Council's Safeguarding policy, Biggleswade Town Council will notify the appropriate authorities, including the Police and/or Disclosure and Barring Service.







## **Overtime & Time Off In Lieu (TOIL) Policy**

### **Eligibility for TOIL**

All employees of the Council are entitled to claim paid overtime or TOIL.

### **Authorisation of TOIL/Paid Overtime**

Employees must not work any additional hours above their contractual hours without first seeking the advance agreement of their line manager in writing. The only exception to this rule is if the additional hours worked could not have been foreseen but were necessary to meet the business needs of the Council, for example a meeting that overran. An employee's line manager will only approve the overtime or TOIL if there is a business need for additional hours to be worked.

In regard to whether an employee claims paid overtime or TOIL for additional hours worked, this decision will be made jointly in consultation with the employees line manager to decide on what is most appropriate.

TOIL or overtime will not be granted for any period of time which is less than half an hour and will not be authorised for any time that would take the employee over their TOIL limit.

All overtime and TOIL requests must be submitted by the employee, and authorised by the line manager, through the HR software system.

All overtime that has been inputted onto the HR software system, and has been approved by the employee's line manager, will be paid to the employee in the next pay run.

### **TOIL bank and TOIL limit**

Accrued TOIL is added to the employee's TOIL bank.

The amount of TOIL an employee is permitted to accrue is equivalent to no more than one week of their normal contracted hours. The TOIL bank may not exceed this amount during any rolling six-month period. Any TOIL requests that will cause the TOIL bank to exceed that amount will be refused.

TOIL not taken within 12 months of the date upon which it was accrued will be lost. TOIL accrued and not redeemed will be lost with no monetary compensation offered.

### **Duplications or Incorrect Overtime or TOIL entries**

If a duplication or incorrect overtime or TOIL entry is inputted onto the HR system, the employee must notify their line manager and the Administration & HR Manager in writing immediately. Failure to notify may be considered fraudulent and therefore subject to the disciplinary terms of the Council.

## **Redeeming TOIL Hours**

Employees that wish to redeem their TOIL hours as time off work are required to submit their request through the HR software system. TOIL redemption must be for a minimum of half a day.

Requests to redeem TOIL hours will be considered by the employee's line manager in line with the usual holiday requests, with an emphasis on business needs such as workloads, customer service requirements and available staffing.

The line manager that authorised the TOIL request may have specified that the TOIL hours should be taken on a specific day or week or during a specific period and this must be adhered to.

## **Reasonable notice period for redeeming TOIL**

In the normal course of events, employees should look to notify their line manager in any request for TOIL, giving a minimum notice period of five working days. The Council will seek to flexibly apply this policy if any request is deemed an emergency.

## **Paid overtime and TOIL rates**

### **Paid overtime and TOIL rates for Town Council Office staff & Public Realm staff:**

Additional hours worked over 37 hours per week = time and a half

Saturday = time and a half

Sunday = double time

Bank Holidays = double time

Unsociable hours (classed as after 10pm or before 6am) = double time

### **Paid overtime and TOIL rates for Orchard Community Centre staff:**

Additional hours worked over 37 hours per week = time and a half

Unsociable hours (classed as after 10pm or before 6am) = double time

Bank Holidays = double time

Unexpected callouts (defined as a request to work with less than 24 hours' notice) = double time

### **Paid overtime and TOIL rates for Part-time staff:**

Additional hours worked that are above contractual hours but are less than 37 hours per week = time

Additional hours worked over 37 hours per week = time and a half

Bank Holidays = double time

Unsociable hours (classed as after 10pm or before 6am) = double time

## **Termination of employment**

Employees whose employment is terminated with notice will be required to redeem their full TOIL bank prior to their departure.

Untaken TOIL will be lost upon termination and no payment in lieu will be made. If notice is not given or worked for any reason, the accrued but untaken TOIL will be lost.





## **Travel & Subsistence Policy**

### **Introduction**

This policy applies to all employees of Biggleswade Town Council. It is a framework that covers how an employee can claim and be reimbursed for reasonable and authorised expenses that are incurred while completing business for the Council.

### **Town Council Expectations & Policy Compliance**

As an employee, the Council expect you to:

- Behave honestly, responsibly, and within the guidelines of this policy (e.g. keep costs low).
- Submit expenses as soon as possible with a receipt (receipts are not needed for claiming business mileage).
- Ensure all expense claims are accompanied by enough detail to explain the purchase and why you need to be reimbursed.

As a manager, the Council expect you to:

- Check that the purchase complies with this policy.
- Approve expenses promptly.

If employees don't comply with policy, the Council can delay reimbursement or reject claims. Persistent or deliberate non-compliance may result in disciplinary action.

All expenses must be submitted within two months of the date on which they are incurred. Any expenses submitted which are more than two months old will be deemed to be out-of-date and will not be refunded.

The submission of a claim which is found to be fraudulent or exaggerated may lead to disciplinary action.

The Council will ensure that all expenses claims are reviewed promptly. Reimbursement will either be made through the petty cash tin for subsistence or rail travel, or through payroll for mileage.

### **Travel Related Expenses**

#### **Environment**

Where reasonable to do so, we encourage you to use the most environmentally sustainable form of transport to get to your destination.

Provided there are no considerations around self-isolation or COVID, please share car journeys where practicable.

## **Mileage**

If you are insured to use your car for business use, you may claim 45p per mile for business travel. This rate may be subject to change, in which case this policy will be update with the new rate and all Town Council employees will be informed.

## **Rail travel**

All bookings must be made in economy/standard class.

## **Road Traffic Fines**

Any road traffic fines incurred by a Council employee while engaged on official and authorised Council business will need to be paid by the employee. If the employee believes there are exceptional circumstances surrounding their particular case, they need to speak to their line Manager in the first instance, who should seek advice from the Administration & HR Manager.

## **Hotel Accommodation**

The reimbursement of costs for bed and breakfast hotel accommodation can be made when an overnight stay is unavoidable. Reimbursement should not exceed £75 per night, but if this rate does not suffice, please obtain the lowest rate and inform HR to confirm approval.

## **Subsistence**

The subsistence allowance applies to staff attending evening meetings that end after 7pm. In these cases, a special evening meeting allowance may be claimed up to the value of £10.

Subsistence reimbursements will be subject to receipts being submitted with the claim.

Staff who are required to make overnight stays in the performance of their official duties will be reimbursed approved expenses. The payment cannot be made where a meal is provided.

Subsistence payments do not apply to one day workshops or training courses. If lunch is not provided you will be required to take provisions with you or purchase your lunch. This cost will be met by the employee.

You will not be reimbursed for the cost of any alcoholic drinks.





## REMOTE WORKING POLICY

### Policy statement

Remote working is understood to mean working from home on an occasional, temporary or permanent basis. It means that employees conduct their job from home with the same contractual obligations, such as core working hours.

There are two main categories of remote working:

- occasional/ad hoc remote working: this arises in relation to specific pieces of work or for specific periods. It does not follow a regular pattern, is combined with working from the employee's normal Council workplace and is subject to the prior approval of a line manager. It may be granted as part of a phased return to work after maternity or sickness absence, or be a temporary arrangement due to family commitments or domestic circumstances
- regular remote working: this is an agreement between the Council and the employee to work the working week from home, or a combination of remote working and attendance at a Council workplace, on a regular and on-going basis.

Whatever the circumstances leading to a situation where Council employees have been granted permission or recruited to work from home, this policy applies and all employees must comply with the requirements set out below.

Please note that this policy should not be taken as forming an employment contract and may be updated at any time.

### Eligibility

Employees are eligible to apply for Remote working in the following circumstances:

- where the employee has successfully completed the probationary period attached to their job role
- where the employee's role does not involve supervisory duties that require undertaking in person alongside the team members involved
- where their home environment is suitable
- no aspect of the employee's recent appraisal was marked as unsatisfactory
- the employee's disciplinary record is clean.

Applications for Remote working will be granted where the employee's line manager is satisfied that the needs of the business can continue to be met while the employee works from home.

Remote working must be cost-effective and ensure that there is no significant increase in workload on colleagues. The work done by the employee must be capable of being done from home.

The line manager may liaise with the Administration & HR Manager in relation to applications for remote working, to confirm the arrangements.



## **Making remote working applications**

Employees that wish to apply for remote working, either permanently or on a temporary basis, should submit an application to their line manager.

Remote working may invalidate an employee's home contents insurance policy. Employees are required to check the policy prior to applying and, if successful, provide a copy of the policy wording and schedule to their line manager if their application is granted.

## **Occasional/ad hoc remote working applications**

The application should set out the reasons for requesting remote working.

Examples may include a project or set of tasks that requires peace and quiet and a lack of interruptions. A backlog of tasks or a major project may also give rise to an employee wishing to request remote working.

There may be family commitments such as the long term illness of a relative or dependant. In this situation, we would also ask that you refer to the Council's policy on time off for dependants.

There could be issues relating to the recovery from mental or physical illnesses which may make a request for remote working conducive to the smooth recovery of the employee.

Various transport considerations may give rise to a request for remote working.

## **Regular remote working applications**

Prior to making an application, employees must discuss their proposed application with their line manager. In such a discussion, the employee should consider the following aspects of the formal application and discuss any issues arising from the points below with their line manager informally.

Once a discussion has been held by the employee's line manager, the employee should submit a formal application, which should address the following points:

- confirmation that the employee meets the eligibility criteria for remote working
- the date from which the arrangements are intended to start (at least two weeks from the date of the application).
- the proposed number of days to work from home - the whole working week, or only certain days
- proposed hours of work
- the proposed organisation of the home working environment - available separate room, security arrangements for Council equipment and Council materials/documentation
- extent of availability to attend the workplace, for meetings, cover colleague absences etc
- how the employee proposes that contact will be maintained with their line manager.

As part of the application, you should demonstrate how you will achieve the following:

- managing workload independently
- self-motivation and working to own initiative
- adapting to the different working practices involved
- problem-solving and different pressures associated with working alone
- adapting to different methods of being line managed and liaising with colleagues.

### **Application decisions**

The Council aims to respond to formal applications for remote working within one week of the application being received by your line manager. Line managers may need to meet with the employee to discuss the issues arising from the application.

### **Accepted applications**

If the line manager accepts the employee's application, written confirmation will be provided. Each request is considered on its own merits. The Council is under no obligation to permit a period of remote working at a present time because it has agreed to it in the past.

### **Rejected applications**

If the line manager is unable to accept the employee's application, the reasons for the rejection will be issued in writing to the employee. The employee may appeal the decision within 5 working days of the decision being issued. The reasons for the appeal should be set out in writing and sent to the senior manager specified on the rejection communication.

### **Remote working agreements and trial period**

Accepted applications will be subject to the successful completion of a trial period. The aim of the trial period is for both the employee and the Council to evaluate whether the new working arrangements for remote working have been successful.

At the end of the trial period, the line manager will meet with the employee to evaluate the success of the trial. The line manager will determine whether the trial has been successful and confirm that the remote working agreement may continue. During the trial period, or at the evaluation meeting, either side may propose reasonable amendments to facilitate a smoother working arrangement. The Council reserves the right to terminate the remote working agreement by declaring the trial has been successful if proposed amendments are unreasonable, unworkable, no amendments can be implemented or the employee's work output, quality, oversight etc suffered to the detriment of the Council.

## **Remote working agreement**

The remote working agreement drawn up during the application process, and bespoke to the employee's circumstances, sets out the terms of the arrangement for the employee to work from home. It will reflect the following points, subject to any modification agreed during the trial, as well as the practical considerations to enable the remote working to operate smoothly:

- the Council reserve the right to terminate the remote working arrangement at any time for any reason on reasonable notice
- employees are required to be available during the core hours specified in their remote working agreement
- if any issue arises that causes an employee to no longer meet the eligibility criteria at the outset of this policy, the Council will review the remote working arrangement and may terminate it on reasonable notice
- the remote working arrangements will be subject to regular review
- employees working from home will be expected to attend meetings and other office-based events as and when required by their line manager
- employees working from home are required to comply with Council policies, including holiday, performance targets, sickness, absence etc.

## **Remote working practical arrangements**

The Council supplies remote workers with the necessary equipment relevant to their job role. The equipment remains the Council's property and will be installed and removed at the Council's cost. The Council may need to attend the employee's home to update, maintain or repair/replace the equipment and will give the employee reasonable notice of the need for this.

Employees should take reasonable care of the Council equipment and only use it for Council business. IT and telephony equipment may only be used in accordance with the Council's IT, telephony, data protection and monitoring policies.

Personal equipment that an employee uses for work purposes remains their responsibility and the Council is not liable for any loss, damage, repair or replacement of any personal equipment. If an item of equipment is deemed necessary for work, the employee should contact their line manager.

Employees should maintain regular contact with their line manager so that the Council can work towards early resolution of any problems. This applies to problems with Council equipment and also in relation to the ongoing suitability of the remote working arrangement; pressures and stress occur equally to remote workers as they do to those working at the Council's offices and the Council encourages the early reporting of these issues so that practical steps can be considered and implemented to the mutual agreement of both the remote worker and the line manager.

The costs of electricity, water, heating, telephone, broadband and other utilities will not be covered by the Council. These costs will remain the employee's responsibility.

Employees must keep Council data and Council materials safe and secure at all times, ensuring reasonable precautions are being taken to maintain confidentiality in accordance with the Data Protection policy.

Employees should refrain from revealing to customers/clients that they work remotely. Employees must not provide their personal address or personal contact details to customers/clients or third parties associated with the Council. Meetings between customers/clients and employees at home are prohibited. All communications should be routed through the Council workplaces.

### **Health and safety for remote workers**

The Council's health and safety policy applies to remote workers. Employees should refer to the separate health and safety policy for more details.

Remote workers are required to comply with a number of health and safety considerations in respect of the space utilised as their workplace in their home environment. Remote workers are required to attend the office to undergo health and safety training.

### **Risk assessment**

A risk assessment will be undertaken to determine any relevant risks and to prevent harm to the remote worker or anyone else who may be affected by their work, in respect of the workplace itself and the working arrangements. The Council may need to check such workplaces from time to time as the remote working arrangement proceeds. The Council may require self-assessment of some aspects of the workplace and training may be provided as necessary. Any steps necessary from these various risk assessments will be undertaken to ensure the remote worker has a safe workplace.

A specific risk assessment will be done on employees who inform the Council that they are pregnant. In order for this to take place, remote working employees who become pregnant should notify their line manager of their pregnancy immediately. More details about what to do are available in the Council's policy on Pregnancy and Maternity.

### **Moving home**

If employees move home, the Remote working arrangement will be reassessed. If the Council considers that the house move would make, or has made, remote working unsuitable, this may result in the remote working period coming to an end.

### **Electrical equipment**

Remote workers are required to use all equipment supplied by the Council safely and in accordance with best practice and manufacturer's guidelines. The Council will check all Council electrical equipment for safety. Remote workers will be responsible for any other electrical equipment used by them in their work activities and will continue to be responsible for the safety of electrical sockets and wiring in their home.

### **Working hours**

Employees are responsible for ensuring they complete their working hours as defined in their contracts of employment.

### **Working time**

Employees are responsible for ensuring they take their rest breaks as defined in their contracts of employment.

### **Positioning of equipment**

Training on the ergonomic positioning of IT equipment will be provided during the implementation of the remote working arrangement, together with best practice guidance on breaks. The Council will provide checklists for this for the benefit of employees.

### **Employee conduct**

If remote working becomes unsuitable due to employee conduct or performance, the remote working arrangement may be terminated immediately. Further disciplinary action may also be taken in line with Council policy.

### **Remote working abroad**

Employees who want to temporarily work from a different location that is not their usual home address, such as a holiday home abroad, must request the Council's express written permission first, because this may impact on issues such as internet connection, service delivery, the employee's ability to attend the office quickly if needed, data protection, the security of Council property and the employee's health and safety.





## **Unsociable Hours Policy**

### **Purpose**

From time-to-time staff may be required to work unsocial hours.

This policy sets out the Biggleswade Town Council's stance on staff working unsocial hours. It also outlines the Council's commitment towards safeguarding the health and safety of staff carrying out this work, whilst meeting their legal obligations in relation to working time.

### **Definition**

Unsocial working hours are considered to be anytime before 6am and anytime after 10pm.

### **Unsociable hours rate**

All Town Council staff will be paid double time for any unsociable hours worked. Please refer to the Overtime & TOIL Policy.

### **Working time rules and rest breaks**

The Council takes its obligations under the Working Time Regulations seriously and will adhere to the following entitlements for adult workers:

- Individuals cannot work more than an average of 48 hours per week over a reference period of 17 weeks. Employees can agree to opt out of this limit if they choose to by signing a written opt-out notice.
- Individuals are entitled to one uninterrupted rest break of 20 minutes where they work more than 6 hours per shift.
- Workers are entitled to a minimum daily rest period of 11 hours.
- Workers are entitled to a minimum weekly rest period of 24 hours, or 48 hours per fortnight.

Entitlements can differ for young workers and for those who carry out night work (as defined above).

### **Risks of unsocial hours working**

The Council understands that certain employees may be unsuitable for unsocial hours working, and that there are health risks associated with working outside of normal hours. The Council will monitor and remain aware of all risks, in particular, the following risks may be identified:

- Stress and cardiovascular problems.
- Tiredness and fatigue.
- Isolation.
- Exacerbation of mental health conditions.
- Increased risk of injury or accidents.
- Lone working.

## **Risk assessments**

Where applicable, the Council will carry out specific risk assessments related to unsocial hours working. This assessment will be focused on identifying and reducing risks to the health and safety of employees and others.

Where a member of staff who is carrying out unsocial hours becomes pregnant, she has a responsibility to inform her line manager of her pregnancy in a timely manner. This will allow the Council to carry out a specific risk assessment and to take any necessary steps to reduce risks to the pregnant workers' health and safety, and that of her baby.







## **Employee Code of Conduct**

Biggleswade Town Council's code of conduct sets out the standards of behaviour the Council expects from all employees. Rules in relation to the conduct of all employees are set out in this Code of Conduct and there are examples of what Biggleswade Town Council considers to be gross misconduct which could result in summary termination of employment.

### **Employee behaviour**

The following general standards are required by all Council employees:

- employees should behave in a respectful, professional and polite manner and ensure their behaviour does not breach the Equality Act 2010.
- employees should comply with all reasonable management instructions.
- employees should cooperate fully with colleagues and management.
- employees should uphold and further Biggleswade Town Council's positive public image at all times.
- satisfactory standards of performance should be maintained at all times.
- Biggleswade Town Council's policies and procedures should be adhered to at all times.

### **Equality, diversity and inclusion**

An important core value of Biggleswade Town Council is the promotion of inclusivity and diversity. It seeks to ensure that the workplace is supportive of its staff and one where individual respect is shown to all members of staff, regardless of age, (dis)ability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, ethnic background, culture, sexual orientation, religion or belief, sex or any other factor. All staff will be supported and encouraged to perform to their potential.

For further information, employees should refer to the Equal Opportunities policy.

### **Bullying and harassment**

Biggleswade Town Council has zero tolerance to bullying and harassment.

Disciplinary action will be taken against inappropriate behaviour that shows lack of respect or no regard for people's feelings or causes people to feel threatened.

For further information, employees should refer to the Bullying and Harassment policy.

### **Gross misconduct**

The following offences are examples of gross misconduct:

- Intentional sexual, physical, or verbal harassment or abuse, or bullying.
- Theft or unauthorised possession of property.
- Consumption of alcohol or drugs, or intoxication by reason of alcohol or drugs, which could affect work performance in any way or have an impact on other employees.
- Having illegal drugs in the possession, custody or control of the employee while at work, wearing Council uniform, on Biggleswade Town Council's premises or within its vehicles.

- Defrauding or attempting to defraud Biggleswade Town Council, its customers, suppliers or fellow employees.
- Violent, dangerous or intimidatory conduct.
- Serious abuse of timekeeping and attendance procedures.

This is not an exhaustive list.

### **Conduct outside work**

As a general rule, what employees do after working hours and away from the premises is a personal matter. However, Biggleswade Town Council will become involved in the following circumstances.

- At office parties, drinks events and other work-related social occasions.
- At third-party occasions where the employee is attending in their capacity as an employee and representative of Biggleswade Town Council.
- At work-related conferences and training courses.

Biggleswade Town Council's policies will continue to apply at all these events. An employee should not bring Biggleswade Town Council's name into disrepute. Improper behaviour will lead to investigation and possible disciplinary action, including dismissal and in cases of gross misconduct, a summary dismissal.

For further information, employers should refer to Biggleswade Town Council's Grievance and Disciplinary procedures.

### **Relationships with other members of staff and clients and customers**

Biggleswade Town Council does not concern itself with the private lives of its staff unless they affect its effective operation or its reputation.

- Members of staff who are relatives or who have a close personal relationship should not normally have a supervisory, assessing or authorising relationship with each other.
- Employees must inform their line manager if they have a close personal relationship with another employee or work contact which could be considered by colleagues or other, as impacting on the way they conduct themselves at work.

For more information, please refer to the Council's Managing Personal Relationships at Work Policy.

### **Criminal offences**

For the avoidance of doubt, an employee must inform their manager in writing if they are under investigation for a criminal act (including road traffic offences) or have been arrested in connection with a criminal action. They must also inform their manager in writing if they have been found guilty and convicted of any offence or received a police caution. Failure to disclose this information may be treated as a disciplinary offence.

Furthermore, if an employee commits a criminal offence outside employment, Biggleswade Town Council will investigate the matter to ascertain whether there is any connection between the offence and the individual's employment. If there is an adverse finding in this respect, this could result in the employee's dismissal under the disciplinary procedure.

## **Attendance and timekeeping**

Employees will not be paid if any working time is lost due to lateness or unauthorised absence. Persistent lateness will be dealt with under Biggleswade Town Council's disciplinary policy.

## **Communications**

Discretion should be exercised when using a personal mobile device for personal reasons during working hours, and any use must not cause a distraction from work for the employee themselves or their colleagues. The Council will accept employees making personal calls and text messages during working hours where it is deemed necessary or appropriate. In addition, it is forbidden to take pictures of colleagues, Council premises, customers or other work contacts using personal mobile devices.

Only certain job roles require the provision of a Council mobile phone. Where provided, they are for business use only.

Where provided, employees should ensure they keep Biggleswade Town Council's mobile phone in good working order. The mobile phone should remain charged and connected to the network (as far as coverage permits) during working hours so business calls can be received as necessary.

When visiting on behalf of Biggleswade Town Council, or on other sites, you may be required to turn off your mobile phone. Employees must observe any such requirements and ensure they comply with them.

The cost of line rental and normal business call usage will be covered by Biggleswade Town Council.

## **Email and internet use**

Biggleswade Town Council will not tolerate the use of email and internet for unofficial or inappropriate purposes, including:

- Any messages that could constitute bullying, harassment or other detriment.
- On-line gambling
- Accessing or transmitting pornography
- Accessing other offensive, obscene or otherwise unacceptable material
- Transmitting copyright information and/or any software available to the user
- Posting confidential information about other employees, Biggleswade Town Council or its customers or suppliers.

Although our email facilities are provided for the purposes of our business, we accept that you may occasionally want to use them for your own personal purposes.

Employees are permitted to send personal emails during work time where it is deemed reasonable. Employees' work email addresses should not be used to send personal emails unless it is deemed reasonable.

Employees may access their personal email accounts during break times. This is permitted on condition that all the procedures and rules set out in this policy, and Biggleswade Town Council's code of conduct, are complied with.

Employees are not permitted to use the internet during work time unless in the case of an urgent matter when you should seek the approval of your line manager before use.

Employees may use the internet during break times. This is permitted on condition that all the procedures and rules set out in Biggleswade Town Council's Code of Conduct are complied with.

## **Social media**

When using social media, either in a personal or work capacity, during or outside working hours, employees must adhere to the following guidelines.

Posts on social media must not:

- Compromise Biggleswade Town Council, disclose confidential data or disclose sensitive data.
- Damage Biggleswade Town Council's reputation.
- Breach laws on copyright or data protection.
- Contain content that is of a libellous or defamatory nature.
- Engage in bullying or harassment.
- Be of illegal, inappropriate or offensive content.
- Interfere with your work commitments.
- Use Biggleswade Town Council's name or reputation to promote any other product or any political opinions.

## **Representing Biggleswade Town Council**

Biggleswade Town Council recognises the importance of work life balance. Whilst we do not intend to restrict outside activities, it is important to remember that activities whether during or outside of working hours which result in adverse publicity to Biggleswade Town Council, or which cause us to lose faith in your integrity, may give us grounds for your dismissal.

When attending any work-related social function an appropriate standard of conduct is expected from all employees. This includes but is not limited to any Christmas lunch, nights out, dinners or other social events with suppliers, customers, etc.

Work-related social functions can be a great opportunity to celebrate and get to know your colleagues better. However, it is important to remember that our policies on anti-harassment and bullying, personal harassment, disciplinary and equal opportunities apply fully at these events.

## **Fraternisation**

Whilst you are encouraged to be friendly towards our clients/customers it is important that employees do not cross the professional boundaries. Employees should maintain professionalism at all times and under no circumstances should become overfamiliar or fraternise with clients/customers in a way that may be seen to disrupt the operations or reputation of the business.

Employees who are found to have acted unprofessionally or inappropriately may be liable for disciplinary action in line with Council procedures.

## **Alcohol and drugs**

Use of drugs and alcohol during working hours is not permitted. If an employee is suspected of use during working hours, the employee may be subject to disciplinary action under Biggleswade Town Council's disciplinary policy.

Employees must not be under the influence of drugs or alcohol during working hours and must not support or influence others to the use of alcohol or drugs. Employees suspected of using or dealing drugs in the workplace will be reported to the police.

The Town Council conduct a drugs and alcohol test once every six months.

## **Health and safety**

Any accidents, however minor they may appear, should be recorded in Biggleswade Town Council's accident book as soon as possible.

Employees are responsible for ensuring they are familiar with Biggleswade Town Council's health and safety policies and procedures, including the consequences of breaching these.

If employees are attending the premises of a third party, they are required to familiarise themselves with the applicable policies and procedures.

Employees should ensure they handle any hazardous materials with care.

Breaching any rules surrounding health and safety may lead to disciplinary action. A breach may be considered gross misconduct which can result in summary termination of employment.

## **Smoking**

Biggleswade Town Council does not permit smoking in the workplace, either on Council premises or in Council cars. Biggleswade Town Council promotes a working environment which is smoke-free, pleasant and healthy. This prohibition extends to the use of e-cigarettes or similar devices.

## **Bribery**

Bribery is, in the conduct of Biggleswade Town Council's business, the offering or accepting of any gift, loan, payment, reward or advantage for personal gain as an encouragement to do something which is dishonest, illegal or a breach of trust. Bribery is a criminal offence. No gift should be given, nor hospitality offered by employees to any party in connection with Biggleswade Town Council's business without receiving prior written approval from the employee's line manager.

Employees will face disciplinary action if it is discovered that they have accepted, offered or given any bribe, which could include dismissal for gross misconduct. Accepting a bribe also carries separate criminal liabilities for the employee personally and for Biggleswade Town Council.

Biggleswade Town Council's anti-bribery policy contains more information on this area.

## **Flexibility**

Biggleswade Town Council may request, from time to time, that employees work extra hours at short notice, subject to the needs of the business.

Employees may also be requested to perform work which is additional to their usual duties and/or to carry out their role at a workplace other than their usual location of work.

These requests will be made to employees as the need arises through the employee's line manager.

## **Confidentiality**

All information gained during the course of your employment is considered confidential, for the duration of your employment and post-employment. Employees are expected to keep this information confidential, unless required by law not to do so.

## **Competing with Biggleswade Town Council**

Employees who undertake external activities that place them, or could place them, in competition with Biggleswade Town Council may be subject to disciplinary action.

If an employee wishes to undertake other employment while employed by Biggleswade Town Council, permission is required from the employee's line manager.

## **Clothing**

As employees are liable to come into contact with customers and members of the public, it is important that you present a professional image with regard to appearance and standards of dress. Where uniforms are provided, these must be worn at all times whilst at work and laundered on a regular basis. Where uniforms are not provided, you should wear clothes appropriate to your job responsibilities, and they should be kept clean and tidy at all times.

Upon termination of your employment, you will be required to return any uniform which has been provided to you. Failure to return such items will result in Biggleswade Town Council making a deduction for the cost of the uniform from your wages/salary.

## **Property and equipment**

Employees who cause any damage to Council property through misuse, recklessness or carelessness may be required to repay to Biggleswade Town Council the cost of repair or replacement. Biggleswade Town Council reserves the right to recover this cost by way of a deduction from your next salary payment.

When an employee's employment is terminated, employees must return all Council property, including IT equipment, stationery, files, data storage devices, Council mobile phone or tablet and any other items belonging to Biggleswade Town Council. The Council will either make deductions from an employee's final pay, or invoice an employee, for Council property not returned to the Town Council.

## **Personal property**

Biggleswade Town Council is not responsible for the loss, theft or damage to any personal property brought by employees on to Council premises or stored in Council vehicles. Employees are responsible for the security and safety of their personal possessions at all times. Employees should keep these items safe in their lockable desk drawers/lockers where possible.

Lost property should be handed to an employee's line manager if found.

## **Environment**

Biggleswade Town Council aims to keep use of consumables to a minimum by promoting the effective and efficient usage of equipment, facilities, supplies and services.

Employees should make every effort to reduce wastage, turn off excessive lights or heating/cooling equipment, use water resources appropriately and switch off any electronic equipment which is not in use.

## **Breaches**

Breaches of Biggleswade Town Council's code of conduct are likely to be regarded as an act of misconduct to be addressed under Biggleswade Town Council's disciplinary procedure. Some of the above sections indicate the level of offence that could occur if breaches are found.







## **Gossiping Policy**

### **Introduction**

Biggleswade Town Council is dedicated to encouraging and maintaining a productive working environment through which our employees can work together in a professional manner. We understand that staff are going to interact during the working day and conversations may arise that do not relate to ongoing work or projects.

It is not Biggleswade Town Council's intention to prohibit such conversations, as we believe they are necessary for the continued wellbeing of our staff. That said, it is important that general workplace discussions do not develop into unregulated gossip that could cause issues in staff relations, create a hostile working environment or allow false information regarding Council operations to spread.

Gossip can also be a form of bullying and harassment, and, to this end, this policy should be read in tandem with other Company policies on these areas.

The purpose of this policy is to outline what Biggleswade Town Council considers to be gossip and expectations placed on staff to avoid this situation arising.

### **Definition of gossip**

Gossip is:

- Talking negatively about a person or their personal life when that person is not present.
- Negative and unwelcome comments criticising another person or persons.
- Repeating information that can injure a person's credibility or reputation.
- Repeating a rumour about what a person has said or done.
- Repeating information given to you in confidence without that person's permission or knowledge.

### **Gossiping examples**

- Negatively talking about a person's looks, smell, character, dress sense, personal or financial situation, medical or mental health issue, personal property, ethnicity, sexual orientation, cultural or religious differences, disability, age, gender identity or preferred pronouns.
- Conversations or reports about other people's private lives that might be unkind, disapproving or untrue.
- Accusations without sufficient evidence shared more widely than is appropriate.
- Discussing the future direction of the Council based off of gossip alone, scaremongering and potentially causing increasing anxiety levels for members of staff.
- Talking negatively about your thoughts or feelings about a particular staff member or groups of staff members.
- Confidential matters shared with you privately that you decide to share more widely.
- Negatively talking about a person which belittles or undermines.
- Questioning a member of staff's work capabilities or performance more widely than is appropriate.

## **Why do people gossip?**

Gossipers often thrive on the attention and recognition they get from starting and participating in gossip. Sometimes they spread negative things about others to make them feel better about themselves or because they think it somehow makes others think more highly about them (it does not).

In some cases, gossip can be used to derail a disliked colleague, and this would be considered a form of bullying. In this case, the Town Council's Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy would apply.

Gossiping will not be tolerated amongst staff members, Councillors, stakeholders, interviewees and new starters.

If you have a concern about an employee's performance or conduct, this should be raised with the employee's line manager in private, and potentially the Administration & HR Manager if appropriate. The concern should not be shared more widely as speaking negatively about an employee more widely would be considered gossiping.

## **What are the negative consequences of gossiping?**

- It is detrimental to morale.
- It is damaging to productivity.
- It causes mistrust, friction and bad working relationships.
- It creates a hostile working environment.
- It impacts the ability to work well as a team.
- It jeopardises chances for the gossipers' advancement as they are perceived as unprofessional.
- It can create growing divisiveness among staff members as people 'take sides.'

## **How do you know if it is Gossip?**

Questions to ask yourself before talking about another person:

- Do I know what I am saying is true?
- How would I feel if I saw my words quoted in the daily paper tomorrow?
- Would I feel positively about this being said about myself?
- Would I consider it acceptable to say this to the person directly?
- Do I feel that what I am about to say is professional and appropriate?
- Do I feel that what I am about to say paints the person in a positive or negative light?

## **What to do if Gossiping begins at work**

If someone tries to gossip to you, do not participate and remind the person gossiping of the Gossiping Policy. It is encouraged to change the conversation to something more work appropriate. If no reaction is given to the one who starts or engages in gossip, they're more likely to stop.

If you witness an employee gossiping, please raise this with the Administration & HR Manager and/or your line manager.

### **Disciplinary action for gossiping**

Depending on the circumstances, it may be deemed appropriate to address issues of gossiping under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure. Potential outcomes of any disciplinary action may include demotion, reprimand, verbal or written warning, suspension or termination for more serious offences.

### **The future**

Biggleswade Town Council firmly believes that everyone deserves to work in a respectful and professional environment, free from gossip. Every member of the team, in every department, has an important role to play in this. The Council is therefore asking everyone to commit to making changes to achieve this aim.





## **Severe Weather Policy**

The Council recognises that severe weather conditions may present a variety of reasons that lead to difficulties in maintaining normal working arrangements and/or make work or travel unwise or unsafe. Employees may still be able to reach their usual places of work, even if there are severe weather conditions.

### **Aim**

At all times during periods of severe weather, the Council will prioritise the health, safety and wellbeing of our employees. No employee should be placed at risk because of their contractual work obligations or due to the necessity to travel to and from, the place of work.

### **Severe weather**

There is no specific definition of severe weather, however, the Council will implement this policy where instances of severe weather cause significant disruption and/or where amber or red severe weather warnings are issued by the Met Office. Amber weather warnings indicate there is an increased likelihood of impact from severe weather whilst red weather warnings are issued when it is predicted dangerous weather will have a substantial impact.

We encourage employees to keep themselves updated with weather conditions to ensure appropriate safety steps are followed. This may include allowing extra time for travel, preparing vehicles for adverse weather conditions and/or changing methods of travel, wearing appropriate clothing, having regular drinks and using sunscreen, if appropriate.

### **Employer responsibilities**

Following the issuing of an amber or red weather warning, the Council will undertake an assessment of the potential impact on the work force, including travelling to and from work and whilst undertaking work.

The Council will take reasonable steps to minimise the risks involved. This may include amending hours of work, postponing or amending normal duties and employees being required to work from home. Line managers will be responsible for disseminating relevant information to their team.

### **Employee responsibilities**

The Council understands that it may not be safe for employees to attempt a during extreme weather and they should not put themselves, or others, at risk by attempting to do so. Where employees try to attend the workplace, but are unable to do so, they are expected to notify their line manager as soon as possible that they are unable to attend work. Advance notification will ensure there is sufficient time to discuss alternative arrangements and/or flexible working.

The Council understands that schools may not open or stay open during severe weather events. Where employees have children that cannot go to school, they should notify their line manager at the earliest opportunity and will be permitted to take unpaid dependant leave to care for their child or work from home.

## **Working from home**

Employees that contact their line manager to confirm they are unable to attend their usual workplace will be, wherever possible, granted permission from their line manager to work from home. This agreement may be to undertake all, partial or alternative duties from home and the line manager will consider whether the employee has appropriate equipment and resources to carry out this work.

## **Making up lost time**

If the workplace continued to operate, the Town Clerk & Chief Executive may decide that any employees that were unable to attend the workplace due to severe weather or work from home will be asked to make up any lost time. The practical arrangements for making up the time will be set by the employee's line manager.

## **Absence and lateness due to severe weather**

Severe weather absences or lateness will be recorded in employee records but will be disregarded for the purposes of internal procedures.

## **Temperature**

Employees will not be required to work in an indoor space that is heated to below 16 degrees centigrade or 13 degrees centigrade if their role requires physical work. Employees that work outdoors will be provided with personal protective equipment to enable them to safely work in low temperatures.

If the temperature exceeds 34 degrees centigrade, employees that work indoors will be encouraged to work in rooms that have air conditioning or to work from home. Council meetings and public use of the Orchard Centre will only go ahead if the temperature of the room does not exceed 34 degrees centigrade.

The Public Realm manager will review the work required of the Public Realm Team, should the temperature exceed 34 degrees centigrade. Where appropriate, employees will only be required to carry out urgent works during cooler parts of the day. More frequent breaks and opportunities to drink will be provided for.







## **Managing personal relationships at work Policy**

### **Introduction**

We recognise that, from time to time, close personal relationships may develop between members of staff and professional contacts of the Council.

Whilst the Council realises that employees have a right to a private life and therefore does not discourage relationships between employees, such relationships can be troublesome where employees are unable to draw an important distinction between private and professional life.

This policy outlines the Council's position on personal relationships between employees in order to ensure the Council's interests are maintained at all times, whilst at the same time balancing the interests of employees. The policy places certain expectations on employees and their managers to ensure that no blurring of judgement or conflict of interest arises.

It also seeks to protect the Council and any employees in order to avoid any allegations of improper professional behaviour.

### **Definitions**

In the context of this policy, a personal relationship is defined as:

- A family connection or
- A romantic/sexual relationship.

This policy applies to all employees of the Council. In relation to romantic/sexual partnerships, it applies to both opposite and same sex relationships.

### **Employees' responsibilities**

In order to ensure potential conflicts of interest are avoided, employees are required to inform their line manager of any relationship which may affect their work or compromise the Council in any way. Any such information will be treated in the strictest confidence. The Council fully acknowledges the right of employees to privacy in their personal affairs.

The following points should be observed:

- where the relationship exists between a member of staff and their line manager, it is the responsibility of both to inform a more senior manager.
- if an employee who is applying for a role in an area of the business in which an individual works with whom they have a personal relationship, this must be declared during the recruitment process to ensure a fair and impartial recruitment exercise.
- professionalism must always be maintained both at the workplace and any work-related events which are attended by employees who have a personal relationship.
- consistency of treatment is paramount and no preferential or unfavourable treatment of those in the relationship or any other person is permitted as a result of the relationship.

## **Managers' responsibilities**

It is the responsibility of the manager of a team within which employees are in a personal relationship to take action to ensure the relationship is not the cause of a conflict of interest. Confidentiality must be maintained at all times if the employees do not wish their relationship to be disclosed. Specifically, the manager should:

- consider alternative roles when an employee applies for a role in the same team as their partner and valid concerns are raised regarding the feasibility of this arrangement. This may include consideration of an equivalent role in a different team.
- take action where complaints are received from other team members if tensions are caused by the relationship, howsoever they may arise. This may include reorganising working patterns, moving one or both employees to another department or area of the Council. Care should be taken in these circumstances not to make a decision on who is to be moved based on any discriminatory grounds. The manager should seek advice from the Administration and HR Manager before confirming any moves.
- report suspicions of fraudulent activity to the Finance Director.
- take advice from the Administration and HR Manager in the event that a personal relationship breaks down in an attempt to avoid allegations of sexual harassment.
- maintain an appropriate confidential record of personal relationships using Appendix 1 below.

## **Restricted activities**

A more senior manager will be responsible for the conduct of operational matters when a personal relationship exists between a line manager and a person for whom the line manager has responsibility. These operational matters are, for example:

- dealing with any disciplinary or performance concerns, whether routine or caused by specific incidents.
- signing off any hours worked above normal working hours.
- authorising leave of any kind.
- confirming any payment arrangements to be made.
- involvement in reorganisation of the area of the business in which the employee works.

## **Annual leave requests**

Annual leave requests from all employees will be dealt with consistently. The authorisation of any requests from partners in personal relationships to take time off at the same time will be made in consideration with the needs of the business at the time, in the same way as requests from other employees.

## Policy breaches

The Council will attempt to deal with any difficulties caused by personal relationships in the workplace in a sensitive manner and an informal method will always be used in the first instance. However, where this does not bring about a satisfactory resolution, recourse to formal procedures, such as the disciplinary or procedure, may be required.

The Council may deem the following to be disciplinary offences:

- the failure of an employee to declare their relationship in accordance with this policy.
- actions of a line manager who is in a personal relationship with an employee which are prohibited by this policy.
- Inappropriate and / or excessive use of the Council's IT or telephony systems, including email and instant messaging, such as (but not limited to) Microsoft Teams, for personal communication between those involved in personal relationships at work.
- The sharing of inappropriate content using the Councils systems.
- Inappropriate physical interactions whilst working or on works premises or client's sites.
- Harassment of any kind related or unrelated to a personal relationship and including but not limited to sexual harassment.

Employees who are subject to disciplinary action may lodge an appeal to any sanction applied that they are dissatisfied with.

Employees who feel they have been treated unfairly in some way in connection with a personal relationship may raise a grievance in line with the Council's grievance procedure if initial attempts at an informal resolution have not produced a satisfactory outcome for them. The Council maintains a Member appeal panel.

Appendix 1

*Strictly Private and Confidential*

Declaration of Personal Relationship at Work

*To be completed by the line Manager*

Name of Employee:	Department:  Job title:
Name of other employee in the personal relationship:	Department/Company:  Job title:
Nature of the relationship:	
<b>Potential or foreseeable conflicts of interest and action taken:</b>	
<b>Potential or foreseeable conflict of interest:</b>	<b>Action taken:</b>

Signed: .....Date.....  
(Employee)

Signed: .....Date.....  
(Manager)