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Voluntary severance scheme

1 Scope of policy

- 1.1 This policy applies to all council employees, including those protected on other terms and conditions of employment following TUPE transfer to Central Bedfordshire Council, with the exception of employees based in schools.
- 1.2 This policy comes into force on 19th January 2010 and remains in force until otherwise rescinded.

2 Voluntary severance

- 2.1 If the measures outlined in Section 7 of the Council's Change Management Policy are insufficient to achieve any necessary reduction in the workforce, expressions of interest in voluntary severance may be invited from selected groups of employees as a way of attempting to avoid compulsory redundancies.
- 2.2 Voluntary severance may not always be considered for financial and operational reasons and the Council will aim to find suitable alternative employment for all redundant employees, even if they have stated a preference for voluntary severance.
- 2.3 However, as a last resort before implementing compulsory redundancy, employees' preferences for voluntary severance and/or retirement may be taken into account in conjunction with the business requirements. For example, preferences for voluntary severance may be considered along with other selection criteria if candidates for new positions have equal skills and relevant experience, and redundancy costs are similar.
- 2.4 For voluntary severance, the steps are:
 - (a) inviting expressions of interest; and
 - (b) confirming eligibility for voluntary severance against published eligibility criteria; and
 - (c) obtaining approval for voluntary severance.

3 Inviting applications for voluntary severance

- 3.1 Initially applications for voluntary severance will be sought only from employees whose position has been determined as "at-risk" i.e. those employed in the area(s) affected. However it will be open to the Council to widen the criteria to include employees in other areas of the Council.
- 3.2 In such circumstances some positions may be excluded from consideration due to the Council's need to retain specific skills, knowledge, and/or relevant experience within a Service.
- 3.3 Applications are invited without commitment on either side. A time limit will be set for voluntary severance applications to be made.
- 3.4 Applications will be considered in the light of the need to maintain a balance in the workforce relating to skills, knowledge, and/or relevant experience to meet the future needs of the Service(s) concerned, as well as the cost to the Council of agreeing to a request for voluntary

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severance. The final decision to accept/reject an application for voluntary severance rests with the Chief Executive in conjunction with the relevant Director and their Portfolio Holder.

- 3.5 Employees who plan to volunteer for voluntary severance should be aware of the possible implications of voluntary severance upon mortgage protection policies and should speak to their insurance company before making any decisions.

4 Deciding who can be accepted for voluntary severance

- 4.1 Voluntary severance occurs where the Director is able to:
- (a) let the employee leave; and
 - (b) delete that employee's post from the establishment or another post that is clearly dependent on that employee's redundancy.
- 4.2 There must be:
- (a) good justification for deletion in terms of 'value for money'; and
 - (b) an 'audit trail' clearly linking the person to be granted voluntary severance and the post that is going to be deleted; and
 - (c) the retention of skills, knowledge, and relevant experience necessary to carry out the work remaining.

5 Volunteers from areas unaffected by redundancy proposals

- 5.1 If a wider invitation for applications for voluntary severance is made available, volunteers may come from areas unaffected by redundancy proposals. The relevant Director may decide that the employee can be made redundant if an employee who is 'at risk' can then be moved into the post left vacant. This is only appropriate when the jobs within the two service areas require the same skills, knowledge and experience and the jobs are the same level.

6 Employees who qualify for immediate payment of their Local Government Pension

- 6.1 Employees who are over 55 years of age (or over 50 before 1 April 2010) and in the pension scheme may be able to access their pension benefits early if their application for voluntary severance is approved.
- 6.2 Further information is available from HR.

7 Obtaining approval for voluntary severance

- 7.1 In order that the decision making process is efficient, robust and timely, a fully costed business case in support of each application will be submitted.
- 7.2 Approval will be sought from the Chief Executive in conjunction with the relevant Director and their Portfolio Holder.

8 The process if voluntary severance is approved

- 8.1 In cases where an application for voluntary severance is approved, the manager will write to the employee setting out the circumstances that will result in their redundancy and invite the employee to a meeting to discuss the matter. Although this is a voluntary process, employees

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still have the right to appeal in line with the Council's appeal procedures.

- 8.2 At the meeting, the manager should talk through the process with the employee, answer any queries and ensure that they are aware of the procedure being followed. The employee may be accompanied if they wish by either a work colleague or a trade union representative. The outcome of the meeting should be confirmed in writing. On receipt of that confirmation in writing, the employee will be given five days within which to confirm in writing after the meeting whether or not they wish to continue with their application for voluntary severance.

9 The process if voluntary severance is declined

- 9.1 There is no right to appeal if voluntary severance is refused. The scheme is at the sole discretion of the Council. Employees whose applications are refused will be notified in writing and the reason for the decision (please refer to paragraph 4 above "Deciding who can be accepted for voluntary severance") will be outlined.
- 9.2 Employees who remain with the Council and whose applications are declined should suffer no detriment to future employment opportunities.

10 Notice periods for employees who are taking voluntary severance

- 10.1 An employee who leaves under the voluntary severance scheme will normally be required to work their contractual period of notice.

11 Support for managers dealing with voluntary severance requests

- 11.1 Managers can contact their HR Business Partner who will be able to offer further assistance.