

ARRANGEMENTS FOR CHRISTMAS 2007 AND NEW YEAR 2008

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 To seek the Executive Board's view on the Council's arrangements over the forthcoming Christmas and New Year period.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council's policy is one of allowing staff an additional day's leave over the Christmas and New Year period and allowing staff with outstanding leave entitlements to take time off, providing that managers ensure that adequate cover is maintained during Council opening hours. That additional day's leave has been applied flexibly, so that staff can take the day any time over the Christmas and New Year period. Thus, for a number of years, contrary to the practice in many Councils in Essex, the Council has remained open outside of Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day, albeit operating on a lower than normal level of staff cover.
- 2.2 The period between Christmas and New Year is traditionally very quiet, with telephone traffic between a third and a half of normal volume and visitors to reception showing a similar reduction.
- 2.3 Looking at the configuration around the bank holidays for Christmas and New Year this year, it is perhaps opportune to look at whether we should change our current approach or not. Christmas this year is on a Tuesday; Boxing Day is a Wednesday and New Year's Day will be on a Tuesday.
- 2.4 It should also be remembered that since we last looked at this, more of our services are now accessible on-line and our housing management function has now transferred to the Rochford Housing Association; hence key activity areas have changed in both access and responsibility.

3 DETAILED CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 Feedback from other Essex Authorities indicates that the following authorities will be closed over the entire Christmas and New Year period (from 24 December through to 4 January 2008):-

Chelmsford

Maldon

Epping Forest

- 3.2 However, the majority have not as yet confirmed their arrangements and/or provided this Authority with details.
- 3.3 The options for this Council would seem to be:-
- (i) To continue with our current policy – only close the Council on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day and subsequently run with a skeleton staff throughout the period.
 - (ii) To close the Council for the period from 24 December to 2 January (as Chelmsford, Maldon and Epping Forest propose) – an option that would involve the granting of three additional days' leave plus fixing the current additional day's leave.
 - (iii) To close down for the 24, 25, 26 December on Christmas week and then on New Years Day. The current flexible day would need to be fixed for 24 December.
 - (iv) To close down for the 24, 25, 26 December on Christmas week and 31 December and 1 January on New Year week. The current additional flexible day would need to be fixed for the 24 December and an additional day's leave would be required for 31 December.
- 3.4 Diagrammatically, all of these options are attached as Appendix 1.
- 3.5 Clearly, there is a balance between customer service and operational costs associated with whichever option is chosen. If the office was to close for a fixed period over and above the statutory days, negotiations would be required with UNISON as to the relinquishment of the current "flexible" leave day around Christmas and New Year for this year, although options 2 and 4 would represent a bonus to staff. It should be remembered too that whichever option is chosen, "out of hours" services remain and in addition, a significant number of other services, plus information, will continue to be available via the website.
- 3.6 The Chief Executive's view is that an appropriate balance for this year and this year only would be option 3, closure of the offices of 24, 25 and 26 December, plus closure on 1 January. In this way, a level of service is maintained but at the same time, the impact and timing of the statutory holiday period is recognised. However, if this option is chosen, negotiation will be required with UNISON to fix the current "flexible" additional day.
- 3.7 It is also suggested that in future years Christmas and New Year arrangements be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Council's arrangement over the Christmas and New Year period presents both risks to the Council's reputation as a provider of services and information in the District and also as an employer.
- 4.2 To date, an appropriate balance between the two has been possible and it is important that this continues.
- 4.3 If negotiations were required with UNISON over a change in current policy, then clearly these represent some risks to the Council's reputation as an employer, if those negotiations were to be protracted or unsuccessful in any way.
- 4.4 In cost terms, each additional day's leave equates to a staffing cost of £32,000 per day.

5 RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 It is proposed that the Executive Board **RESOLVES** to agree to:-
- (i) the office opening arrangements for Christmas and New Year as outlined in Option 3.
 - (ii) future years' arrangements being delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

Paul Warren
Chief Executive

Background Papers:-

None

For further information please contact Paul Warren on:-

Tel:- 01702 318199

E-Mail:- paul.warren@rochford.gov.uk

If you would like this report in large print, braille or another language please contact 01702 546366.