

**Personnel
Advice &
Solutions Ltd**

**COUNCIL NEWSLETTER
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Creating Rewarding Jobs

In some parts of the Country recruitment of qualified Clerks and other skilled staff is becoming a major problem.

Councils appear to have been hit by a perfect storm caused by:

1. Those who worked from home during lockdown deciding that they don't want to come back to work.
2. Increased competition for skilled staff from other; potentially better paid; employment sectors.
3. Internal strife and conflict within Councils, as is frequently publicised on local social media, but also displayed nationally in the "Hanforth incident".

The challenge for many Councils is to attract highly skilled people who are committed to their local community, as well as willing to attend evening/weekend events and put in a lot of hard work.

There are many ways in which a Council can make itself more attractive to potential recruits, and one traditional HR approach is to develop the Employer's Reward Policies. This involves revising the terms and conditions offered to Employees, and optimising what can be offered to potential recruits.

One example that many Councils already have is the National Joint Council (NJC) terms and conditions. These provide benefits that are above and beyond the statutory entitlements including;

1. An annual cost of living pay increase.
2. Full time holiday entitlement of 32 days, increasing to 35 after 5 years continuous public sector employment.

3. Full pay for sick leave for up to 6 months for long serving staff, plus 6 months half pay, compared to the Statutory Sick Pay entitlement of only £96 per week.

Many Councils employ staff on these beneficial terms, but fail to make the most of them when recruiting.

In addition there are more things that a Council can do to attract recruits, that don't break the budget!

1. Provide an annual pay review.

The NALC template Employment Contract states that a Council will provide an annual pay increase by one NJC scale point, based on a successful performance review. Many Councils are confused by this clause. It doesn't guarantee an automatic one point pay scale increase, the Employee's performance has to be assessed and have been judged to be successful.

However, a properly conducted performance review that rewards hard work, commitment and achievements with more money is obviously going to be motivating.

2. Pensions.

The Local Government Pension Scheme is without doubt generous for Employees, and contains a number of benefits, including the opportunity of early retirement, and retirement on medical grounds.

However, it is also costly and some smaller Councils cannot afford it. In response they often go for the other extreme and provide a pension with only a 3% Employer contribution, and limited benefits.

There are other options available which may require a higher contribution from the Council than 3%, but are less expensive than the LGPS, and provide better benefits than the cheapest options.

3. Regular Job Evaluations

A common complaint amongst Council staff is that their pay hasn't been evaluated in many years, if ever, and they believe that they are underpaid. Regular independent pay evaluations every 2-5 years can help allay employee complaints.

4. Flexible Start and Finish Times

The U.K has an ageing workforce, many of whom have caring responsibilities outside of work. Furthermore, having been stuck on the 9-5 treadmill for most of their working lives, people are now looking for more flexible working arrangements.

Many Employers are now measuring staff performance by looking at results; i.e. the amount and quality of work done; as opposed to input; i.e. hours worked and time spent at the desk.

As a result, they are less fixated by rigid working hours, and the need to chain Employees to their desks, and instead are more flexible. Some events have to be attended by Employees at specific times and locations, such as attending Council / Committee meetings and being available to the public. Other activities such as report writing, budget and finance management don't need someone to be confined to the office during standard "office hours". All the Council needs to be interested in is having this work done to a high standard and by a specific deadline.

There are many ways Employment Contracts can be adjusted to provide staff with greater flexibility.

- **Annual Hours**

A contract in which provides the numbers of hours that are to be worked over the reference period of one year, rather than per day or week. This type of contract will normally provide for an uneven distribution of hours throughout the year and is useful to accommodate varying seasonal demand for posts.

- **Compressed/consolidated hours**

This occurs when an employee works the same number of hours as a "standard" employee, e.g. a five day a week worker, but works those hours over fewer than five days. For example, a five day week worker may work 37 hours from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, with a ½ hour break. An employee working compressed hours may perhaps do their 37 hours over four days, from 8 am to 6 pm, with a ½ hour break.

- **Flexitime**

Employees who work flexi time will normally be given a set number of hours that must be worked per week/month but will not normally have any set working times in the working day. There will be a core time period where they must be present, but can arrange their own start and finish times to suit themselves provided that the amount of hours is done by the end of the week/month. Employees may also be able to bank extra hours to take off at a later stage.

- **Self-managed working**

Employees are not provided with a particular working structure but will manage their own times or work whilst ensuring that their performance targets are met.

- **Staggered hours**

Employers operating a staggered hours system will not have a standard start and finish time for all employees, though the number of hours per day for each employee are likely to be the same. Employees will start and finish at different times enabling a business to remain open for longer.

5. Leave entitlement

The NJC terms already provide better leave entitlements compared to the Statutory 5.6 weeks per annum. New staff get 6.4 weeks, and those with 5 or more years public sector employment get 7.

In addition, Councils could provide additional benefits to enable staff to 'buy' more leave. This involves reducing pay for the same working hours, in return for additional leave entitlements.

For example an Employee at the top of NJC Grade 6, at scale point 22 (FTE £27,041) could reduce their pay to the bottom scale point for the Grade SCP 18 (FTE £24,982).

This reduction of £2059 for a full time Employee would be roughly equivalent of 4 weeks pay on their old scale point of 22. Consequently the Employee would reduce their pay from SCP 22 to 18 in exchange for 4 additional weeks leave.

6. Hybrid Working

A concept that has taken off as a result of lockdown. Many staff had to work from home, and many liked it. As stated at point 4 above, there are some activities that need the Employee to be present at, such as meetings and being available to the public. There are also jobs that cannot be done from home, such as litter picking and parks maintenance. However, other jobs can be done from home, as we have seen in the past two years.

Letting staff work from home doesn't mean giving up managerial control. Staff still need to be available during working hours via phone, email or other media. They still need to achieve performance targets. Also confidential information has to be safe when it is taken home, and the Council has to have guaranteed unfettered access to it.

If these criteria can be achieved, hybrid working can be very successful in motivating existing staff as well as attracting new recruits.

PROFILE

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