



Northumberland County Council

STAFF & APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

22 January 2025

Change to Terms and Conditions of Employees up to Band 13

Report of the Director of People and Culture

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the committee of the recent consultation and agreement that has been reached on changes to the overall terms and conditions of employment for Northumberland County Council.
- 1.2 Currently, staff are covered by the 'Single Status and Job Evaluation Agreement' which was agreed in 2011 and has not been revised since then.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to ask the committee to agree to implement the new terms and conditions effective from 1 February 2025, with some pay elements backdated to 1 April 2024.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To agree the following recommendations:
 - 2.1.1 To note the locally negotiated changes to the terms and condition of employment for Northumberland County Council.
 - 2.1.2 To approve the formal adoption of the new terms from 1 February 2025.
 - 2.1.3 To agree that the financial elements of the new terms that are beneficial to employees are retrospectively applied from 1 April 2024.

3. Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 The terms and conditions of Council employees are applied in accordance with nationally negotiated collective agreements. The collective agreement that applies to the majority of the Council's staff is the 'National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Government Services National Agreement on Pay and Conditions of Service', commonly referred to as 'The Green Book'.

- 3.2 Within 'part 3' of the Green Book, there is scope to allow individual Councils to locally negotiate changes to the Green Book terms, though not to nationally set elements like salary or sick pay entitlement.
- 3.3 Locally negotiated changes were made by the Council in 2011 in response to the need to implement 'Single Status' and to address equal pay claims that were affecting councils nationally at that time. The changes were incorporated into the Job Evaluation scheme and were a wide ranging look at both equal pay for equal work and the terms as a whole. The review also served to remove some of the more generous allowances and terms that been inherited from Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in 2009 and harmonise the terms and conditions of employment for those staff that had TUPE transferred into the organisation as a result of LGR..
- 3.4 The agreement has not been reviewed since its implementation in 2011. Negotiations were attempted with the Joint Trade Unions in 2019, but at that time the Executive team were considering ceasing enhanced rates of pay for overtime working. Negotiations were unproductive and were not pursued further when in 2020 the Covid pandemic occurred and priorities were identified elsewhere.
- 3.5 In autumn 2023, some employees that cover on the 'standby' rota (to cover for when work is expected to occur out of hours) raised concern that they believed the amount being paid was not sufficient to compensate for the inconvenience of giving up evenings/weekends/bank holidays, to be available for work and on occasion, not actually being needed. As standby is a voluntary arrangement there was a concern that if compensation was not considered for uplift, that staff would no longer be prepared to participate in the rota. This could have led to costs as external organisations would need to be contracted to deliver the work that is required, i.e. Housing services are needed to refit locks/repair boilers etc regularly which would have incurred significant cost.
- 3.6 This highlighted the need to revisit the agreement and refresh it, reviewing all aspects as well as ensuring the language used to explain specific provisions was clear and unambiguous.
- 3.7 The most pressing element was the 'standby' amount which had been set as £20 per day in 2011 but had only increased in line with the pay award each year subsequently so was currently being paid at a rate of marginally under £25. This rate is not enhanced at weekends and is only increased for the bank holidays that represent Good Friday, Easter Monday, Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Years Day.
- 3.8 Information was obtained from neighbouring councils that revealed that Northumberland are the lowest payers for 'standby' on weekdays and the only council not enhancing payments at weekends.
- 3.9 It was apparent that in order to continue to make participation on an out of hours rota attractive, and fair, that the standby rate should be increased. A number of options were reviewed and a proposal taken to the Executive Management Team in February 2024 with recommendations of not just the proposed changes to standby, but the other elements that needed to be refreshed and reviewed which included those staff eligible for enhanced rates of pay and how the Council manages Bank Holiday working. The only detrimental change relates to the removal of 'Overall Allowance' (paid at either 43p or 65p per month to kitchen staff for cleaning their work uniforms) which should have ceased in 2011 but did not. (all changes detailed in Appendix 1).
- 3.10 The Executive Management Team agreed to the proposals and supported the commencement of negotiations with the joint trade unions (TUs). It was accepted that the proposals would have a significant impact on the Council's staffing budget and the

total figure is estimated to be in the region of £375k - £400k plus on costs. It was also agreed that the new rates, once agreed, should be implemented from 1 April 2024 irrespective of when the terms and conditions were finally agreed.

- 3.11 The proposal was put to the TUs and after some delays and some adjustments made via the negotiation process, a final proposal was agreed upon. This was shared with EMT in October 2024 (Appendix 2) and agreed as the final proposal that would be put forward for staff consultation.
- 3.12 Consultation with staff took place between 25th November 2024 and 22nd December 2024, with a number of 'roadshows' and virtual sessions jointly held by the People Team and the TUs. The events were sparsely attended, though did expose a number of inconsistencies in how various guidance had been interpreted in different areas and services since 2011. No major issues were raised and the final proposal was shared with all staff on 23rd December 2024 (Appendix 3).
- 3.13 The TUs agreed to ballot members with a recommendation to accept the proposals in January 2025. At the time of publishing, those ballots are still open, though it is anticipated that either not enough members of each Union would vote for any result to count (i.e. meet the 50% threshold), or that if enough members did vote the result would be in favour of accepting the proposal.

4. Process and Next Steps

- 4.1 As moving the affected staff to amended terms and conditions represents a contractual change, consultation was required to be undertaken with all affected employees and Trade Unions. This process has already concluded.
- 4.2 If the committee approves the recommendations and new terms and conditions, then they will become 'live' from 1 February 2025 with the enhanced pay elements being backdated for affected staff to 1 April 2024.
- 4.3 Thereafter, all guidance will be updated with the People team ensuring that services are applying and managing in accordance with the correct guidance.
- 4.4 Existing staff contracts refer to 'Northumberland Council Terms and Conditions of Employment', so there will be no need to reissue contracts to all staff.
- 4.5 A review of all elements of additionally required working (i.e. overtime, standby, agency work etc) is already underway with a view to potentially reduce costs, this may contribute towards the offsetting of the costs of enhanced rates of pay.

Implications

Policy	Oversight of HR policies and procedures
Finance and value for money	Changes to the terms and conditions is deemed to be appropriate. Pay awards will be factored into the Council's budget process in the usual way.
Legal	Any changes to employees' terms and conditions should take place following consultation with staff and trade unions. NCC has complied with this obligation.
Procurement	N/A
Human Resources	All processes referenced in this report will be made in line with appropriate employment policies and relevant legal advice has been sought as required.
Property	N/A
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) YES	This process will be conducted in line with best practice in relation to promoting equality and diversity within the Council's employment processes.
Risk Assessment	N/A
Crime & Disorder	N/A
Customer Consideration	N/A
Carbon reduction	N/A
Health and Wellbeing	The recommendations will support the health and wellbeing of employees
Wards	Not related to any ward but cover the whole of Northumberland

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Briefing Note to Executive Team – Review of Terms and Conditions, 13 February 2024

Appendix 2 - Briefing Note to Executive Team – Review of Terms and Conditions Update 17 October 2024

Appendix 3 - Final NCC Ts&Cs Proposal, 23rd December 2024

Appendix 4 – Equality Impact Assessment, April 2024

Background papers:

N/A

Linked Reports

N/A

Report sign off.

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

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Director of Law and Corporate Governance (Monitoring Officer)	Stephen Gerrard

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