

Professional qualification learning loans policy and procedure

Purpose of the report

1. To present a new professional qualification learning loans policy and procedure to enable employees to access an interest-free learning loan to undertake a professional qualification that supports their career aspirations and development.

Background

2. Wiltshire Council provides a learning and development offer which is available to all employees and includes a wide range of learning opportunities via a variety of learning methods. The learning and development budget is predominantly used for the provision of statutory and mandatory training, core skills and management development.
3. Historically there has been some limited use of the learning and development budget to fund professional or other qualifications but we are also aware that some services have funded staff to do complete qualifications. Both routes have led to inconsistent practice and therefore there have been issues about equality and fairness in terms of who can access this financial support.
4. The apprenticeship levy provides an opportunity to address funding of professional qualifications in a number of cases but we recognise that some staff will want to complete qualifications that are not supported by an apprenticeship framework and this policy is intended to provide them with a facility to complete a qualification and seeks commitment from the staff to invest in their own career development.
5. The professional qualification learning loans policy and procedure aims to support employees who will be required to self-fund the cost of a qualification and may not have the means to pay all of the cost of the course upfront.
6. With the current budget constraints placed on service areas this enables employees to invest in their own development with support from the council and still enable them to continue to gain qualifications and develop their career.

Main considerations

7. Professional qualifications are vocational qualifications and are usually linked with a profession and are designed to help you improve and develop relevant skills for a particular career path.
8. If employees wish to undertake a professional qualification the following options will be considered prior to the agreement of a learning loan.
 - Can the qualification be covered by an apprenticeship arrangement?
 - Can the qualification be funded by the service area? (Funding could be available if the service have appointed the employee in a trainee post and the difference in salary budget is then used to fund the qualification).

9. If neither of these options are possible then a professional qualification learning loan can be considered, subject to the loan criteria being met.
10. A professional qualification learning loan will only be provided for completion of a professional qualification which supports career development within the organisation and is relevant to the employee's area of work or which would support a career change to another service within the organisation.
11. Employees applying for a professional qualification learning loan must have at least 26 weeks' continuous service and hold a permanent contract (or a contract which outlasts the duration of the qualification course).
12. Wiltshire Council will pay the course provider direct and recoup the amount paid via the employee's monthly net salary over the duration of the course.
13. The employee will be required to complete a learning loan agreement form stating their commitment to repayment of the loan. If the employee leaves the course, leaves employment with Wiltshire Council, or is made redundant, they are still committed to the repayment.
14. The minimum professional qualification learning loan is £100 and any learning loan must not exceed a quarter of the employee's annual net salary.

Environmental impact

15. None.

Equalities impact

16. None.

Financial implications

17. The policy will require the short term outlay of Wiltshire Council funds to pay course providers. However, this will be recouped from employee salary over the duration of the course.
18. If an employee leaves and the Council is unable to recoup the loan, the outstanding amount will be invoiced to them. If the outstanding amount cannot be recovered, this will be charged to the service area budget.

Recommendations

19. That staffing policy committee approve the proposed professional qualification learning loans policy and procedure as stated above.

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The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:
None