

**Amendments to Eyecare Policy**

**Purpose**

1. To seek approval on proposed changes to the corporate eyecare policy, with the intention to implement this with effect from 1 April 2021

**Background**

2. In accordance with relevant health and safety regulations, employers must pay for an eye test for DSE users, if requested, and provide suitable eyewear if an employee needs them only for DSE use. If an ordinary prescription is suitable, employers do not have to pay for eyewear
3. The corporate eyecare policy explains how and when employees can claim reimbursement for eyecare expenses. In our current policy, employees are entitled to claim reimbursement for eye test expenses up to £19.95 and up to £55 for eyewear, once every two years. In 2019, we received 219 claims: 162 for eye tests costing £2,845 and 158 for eyewear costing £8,550. The total claims under this policy in 2019 were £11,394.

**Main Considerations**

4. Health and Safety legislation outlines that the Council must cover the full cost of the eye test for DSE users. The average eye test (based on a survey of four major providers across Wiltshire) costs between £20-£25 and therefore our maximum claim amount of £19.95 does not cover the full eye test cost from regional providers. To ensure the Council meets its statutory requirements we would need to increase our maximum claim amount to £25.
5. Where an employee does require special corrective vision lenses for DSE work, the requirement is to pay for basic spectacles; for example, the Council is not expected to pay for designer frames or scratch free lenses, and only for single vision lenses for DSE work. As above, information obtained from a survey of providers across Wiltshire shows that basic spectacles with single vision lenses could be obtained for £40 from any of these providers (lower in some cases). These costs are all under the maximum claim cost of £55 in the current policy and therefore it is recommended to reduce the maximum claim cost to £40 for eyewear. This measure complies with statutory requirements and off-sets the impact of increasing eye test payment.
6. The changes to payment levels in the policy will better align with other Local Authorities in the region

## **Amendments proposed**

7. In line with the main considerations identified above, the updated policy will:
  - a) increase the maximum claim amount for eye tests to £25;
  - b) reduce the maximum claim cost to £40 for eyewear specifically required for VDU use.

## **Reasons for changes to the policy**

8. The payment for eye tests needs to be increased to ensure it covers the full cost. The Council only has a legal obligation to pay for basic spectacles and therefore the eyewear payments can be reduced to align with the current costs of basic frames and single vision lenses
9. Feedback from staff suggested that our eye test reimbursement does not cover the full cost of an eye test. This was verified through a review of providers and costs. Further information was collected from South West Councils, which identified Wiltshire Council eye test payment is lower than the average; however, our eyewear payment is higher than average
10. Although the Eyecare Policy is designed to meet a Health and Safety requirement, reviewing and revising the amounts that can be claimed ensures we are supporting the wellbeing of DSE users
11. There is an opportunity to promote this wellbeing aspect as part of the communication of the revised policy.
12. The recognised trades unions have agreed in principle with the changes to the policy; we will work with them to finalise the policy wording and communications to staff.
13. We intend to give staff reasonable notice of the change to the policy, with an aim to implement in May 2021.

## **Environmental impact of the proposal**

14. It is anticipated that this policy will have a neutral environmental impact, unchanged from the current policy

## **Equalities impact of the proposal**

15. An Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out on the new policy once it has been drafted. Trade union representatives will be invited to attend and contribute to this assessment.

## **Risk Assessment**

16. If the Council fails to cover the full cost of eye tests, then we will not be fulfilling our legal obligation as an employer.
17. Occupational Health and Safety advice is to meet the requirement to cover the eye test and eyewear costs as set out above.

## **Financial Implications of the proposal**

18. Increasing the level of reimbursement of eye test payments whilst reducing the amount for eyewear payments would result in a financial saving. For example, if the proposed amounts are applied to the claims in 2019 the total cost would be £10,370 which is a reduction of £1,024.
19. It may be that promotion of the revised policy will increase take up, which could result in a small increase in overall costs.

## **Recommendations**

20. It is recommended that Staffing Policy Committee confirm their agreement to the proposed changes to the Council's Eyecare policy

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