

KENNET DISTRICT COUNCIL

Human Resources Committee – 19th June 2008

HOMEWORKING AND BROADBAND FEES

Report by Head of Human Resources

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval to an amendment to the Homeworking Code of Practice to clarify arrangements for refunding costs in relation to broadband connections.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council approved a Homeworking Policy in 2005 (copies of which are available from the HR team or on the Council's intranet). The take up of this new arrangement was slow, but gradually staff have been applying for it and we now have 6 staff who are permanent homeworkers. We also have a number of staff who work at home on an occasional basis.
- 2.2 At the time the Homeworking Policy and Code of Practice were drawn up we had no idea of the take up or the detailed and practical implications of this arrangement. We now have some knowledge and experience of the scheme and its operation and have ironed out many of the issues. However, a recent audit brought to light an issue around refunding of the cost of broadband connections that are necessary to support Homeworking.

3. FINANCIAL, STAFFING, LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There will be limited financial implications for the Council. There are no staffing or legal implications. There is some risk if the proposal is not approved, of staff being reluctant to take up homeworking.

4. THE CURRENT SITUATION

- 4.1 Employees who have elected to work full time from home are required to have a broadband connection so that they can readily access the Council's servers and systems via the internet. They can access all the same systems as if they were at their desk, and do not need to download any documents onto their own computer at home. With broadband they can be linked to Kennet all day without incurring any further costs, whereas with a dial-up connection there is a cost as there would for any other type of phone call. This makes broadband a cost effective service.
- 4.2 The range of broadband suppliers is many and varied and many include other facilities such as free phone calls for all or part of the week and/or digital

television connections. As a result the costs vary from package to package. The Council is currently paying a range of fees to staff varying from no claim at all, to £37 per month. The costs of broadband vary considerably also. Basic packages can now be had for around £5, but most reputable and reliable companies offer sensible packages for between £12 and £17 per month, furthermore costs are reducing as more people take up broadband.

- 4.3 The current allowance for Members of the Council who are connected to broadband is £15 per month.
- 4.4 Under the terms of the existing policy staff are also eligible to claim up to £2 per week (tax free) as a contribution to the costs of heating and lighting etc.

5. THE PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE POLICY

- 5.1 It is proposed to amend the Homeworking Code of Practice to allow permanently home working staff, working from home whole time, to claim the cost of a broadband connection, up to a maximum of £15 per month. Such staff should produce an invoice showing clearly the cost of the connection to support any claim. This arrangement to be reviewed again after 12 months.
- 5.2 Employees who work from home intermittently are not eligible to make a claim.
- 5.3 It is anticipated that some staff are committed to lengthy contracts and therefore anyone claiming above the £15 limit will be given 3 months notice of the change. Staff who are already claiming less will, of course, continue to claim at the level they are currently claiming.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 This Council has always endeavoured to treat its staff fairly and equitably. It wishes to encourage staff to work from home where it is appropriate, for both environmental and business reasons, and where it is mutually beneficial. Such staff should not be out of pocket, but similarly the Council should not be expected to pay for services it does not require. Setting a maximum claim limit, slightly above the average cost of broadband, therefore seems a fair approach. This issue has been discussed with the Council's Management Team who support the proposals.

7 RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 The Human Resources Committee is recommended to approve the amendment to the existing Homeworking Policy and Code of Practice as set out in paragraph 5 of this report.