

# Trade Union Time

Gravesham Borough Council recognises three trade unions, UNISON; UNITE and the GMB. However there are only representatives for UNISON.

The council has had an agreement for time off and facilities in place for many years and recognises the importance of a positive working relationship with both local and regional trade union representatives in order to deliver the services it seeks to provide to the local community.

There are 6 staff members who are union representatives, and all are full time officers. None of these staff spend more than 50% of their working time on trade union duties. The agreement allows the Branch Secretary, UNISON one day per week and other officers' reasonable time on an ad hoc basis for their union duties (attending management meetings, communication with members, handling individual cases). No time is given for trade union activities such as canvassing for additional membership

Estimated trade union spend per annum is equivalent to 52 days per annum £9,489 representing an estimated 0.06% of the total pay bill for 2019-20.

The trade union time off and facilities agreement is at Appendix 1 below.

## Appendix 1 - Time off arrangements and facilities for Trade Union representatives

### 1. Introduction

1. Gravesham Borough Council recognises that in order to deliver the services it seeks to provide to the local community the active support and commitment of its staff is important. Management wish to encourage staff to be actively involved in developing the business and see their active involvement in an independent Trade Union as positive.
2. These arrangements for time off and facilities for representatives only apply to activities, duties and training relating to Gravesham Borough Council and its employees.
3. At a local level Trade Union Representatives, in particular UNISON representatives, undertake a variety of roles working with management, communication with union members, liaising with full time union officials and handling individual disciplinary and grievance matters on behalf of colleagues.
4. The council recognises the positive benefits for all parties in encouraging the efficient performance of union representatives' work. For example their role in aiding the resolution of problems and conflicts at work.
5. Management's responsibility for the services provided by the council underpins all aspects of this agreement.
6. This agreement has been written taking account of the ACAS code of practice 3 and relevant sections of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 and Employment Act 2002 mentioned therein. It

reflects a commitment to ensuring that the representatives of recognised unions have adequate facilities and time off with which to undertake their duties efficiently and effectively on behalf of their members.

## **2. Categories of representatives**

1. The Trade Unions referred to in this agreement are those currently recognised for negotiating purposes and are currently:-
2. UNISON  
GMB  
UNITE [formerly TGWU and AEEU]
3. The use of the term “representative” throughout this document refers to those employees of Gravesham Borough Council who have been accredited and covers other terms in common use, such as Shop Steward, Branch Secretary and Place of Work Accredited representative.
4. Gravesham Borough Council believes it is important for local managers and representatives to establish effective lines of communication. It is expected that a good deal of employee relations business will be between staff representatives and managers or HR.
5. Senior representatives or full time officers may be involved where there is no staff representative for a particular department, or when the employee relation issues concern more than a single department or are of themselves particularly complex.

## **3. Accreditation of representatives**

1. It will be the responsibility of the branch to notify the Human Resources (HR) Business Partner promptly when representatives are appointed and when any changes occur.
2. Annually, the HR Business Partner will send each recognised union a full list of accredited representatives in order to ensure that records are accurate.

## **4. Function of Union Representatives**

The role within the context of employment relations at Gravesham Borough Council, for which representatives will be permitted to take reasonable time off during working hours, is:

- investigate any complaints or difficulty arising out of a member's employment with the appropriate level of management.
- accompany and represent individuals at formal meetings including grievance, disciplinary and capability.
- appearing on behalf of members before an outside official body, such as an employment tribunal, which is dealing with an employment relations matter concerning Gravesham Borough Council
- meeting with other staff representatives or with full time officers on matters concerning the pay and conditions of service of staff
- to act as a communication link between union members and management. Eg: informing members about negotiations or

consultations with management; giving management feedback on staff views on issues such as efficiency savings.

- Meetings with new employees to explain the role of the Union and the employment relations structure with Gravesham Borough Council.

## **5. Time off Agreement**

UNISON regular time off:

- Branch Secretary [UNISON]: one day per week to enable time to be spent on UNISON responses and involvement in corporate issues, e.g. Efficiency measures, Job Evaluation.
- That the UNISON Branch Executive be allowed time off for eight meetings per year commencing at 4.30 p.m.
- Paid leave for one delegate to attend the annual UNISON Conference.

## **6. Conditions relating to Time Off**

1. The principle which will be applied to all representatives is that they should suffer no loss of pay as a consequence of carrying out their Trade Union duties.
2. For time off arrangements to work satisfactorily, the Trade Union should ensure that its officials are fully aware of their role, responsibilities and functions.
3. The Union should inform the HR Business Partner, in writing, as soon as possible after officials are appointed or have resigned, and should ensure that officials receive any appropriate written credentials promptly.
4. Management at all levels should be familiar with agreements and arrangements relating to time off.
5. Accredited representatives will be allowed reasonable time off with pay to take part in training activities approved by the appropriate staff organisation in connection with their employee relations duties.
6. It is anticipated that all new representatives will attend both an induction course and a basic representative's course. Using the UNISON regional course programme as a guide this will normally be agreed to as 5 days initially with time off for further training in subsequent years as appropriate to the individual's role and taking into account the exigencies of the service.

## **7. Requesting time off**

- Management is responsible for maintaining the service provision and for making the operational arrangements for time off. Representatives should bear in mind management's issues with discharging those responsibilities.
- Staff representatives who seek time off should ensure that they make their request to their line manager as far in advance as is reasonable in the circumstances. eg:
  - 5 days in advance for formal meetings or at least
  - ½ a day when dealing with a crisis
  - at least 4 weeks when requesting time off for training.

- These requests should be made by e-mail and should indicate the nature of the business for which time off is required, the intended location and the expected period of absence. This is applicable in all instances other than where the Branch Secretary has a specific agreement in place relating to their 1 day facility time per week.
- Requests for training should be accompanied by details of the course syllabus and copied to the HR Business Partner.
- Management may want time off work for Union duties or activities to be deferred because, for example, problems of safety, provision of service would ensue if time off were taken at a particular time.
- Managers should ensure the grounds for postponement are made clear and both parties should endeavour to agree on alternative time for the Union duty, activity or training. In considering postponement, parties should weigh the urgency of the matter for which time off is required against the seriousness of any problems arising. Eg:
  - Managers may agree to attendance at a disciplinary meeting where all other parties have been confirmed, avoiding unnecessary delay, when they would not usually have allowed further leave requests.
  - Managers may agree to the initial representative training being undertaken 1 day a week over a period of 5 weeks as an alternative to losing an officer for a period of a week.
- Where it is necessary for the union to hold meetings of members during working hours the Branch Secretary should seek to agree the arrangement with management as far in advance as is practicable.
- Where such meetings necessarily involve a large proportion of employees at the work place at any one time, Management and Unions will agree on a convenient time which minimises the effects on services: when a number of members need time off any one time, there should be an agreement to leave at work such members as are essential for safety or operational reasons.
- The Union official and Union member should not unduly or unnecessarily prolong the time they are absent from work on Union duties or activities. Abuse of the Time Off Agreement could lead to disciplinary action, and a grievance in relation to time off for Union duties or activities should be dealt with under the grievance procedure.

## **8. Unsocial Hours workers**

Special arrangements will need to be made to ensure that representatives who work outside of a normal day are treated fairly.

It is accepted that it is unreasonable for workers who work unsocial hours to perform their duties extensively during their periods of time off. It is also agreed that representatives who work unsocial hours should not be expected to compromise their health and safety or the health and safety of other members of staff and service users as a consequence of their involvement in employee relations business.

## **9. Representatives visiting other departments and sites**

A representative, other than the Branch Secretary, who is required to undertake Trade Union duties in a department or on a site other than the one in which he/she is normally employed should, where appropriate, inform the manager before those duties commence.

## **10. Office facilities**

Gravesham Borough Council will make available the following facilities for Union representatives to enable them to undertake their employee relations business:

- access to a telephone to make and receive calls.
- access to a safe comfortable room for the purpose of interviewing members.
- access to equipment for the purpose of copying documents.
- notice boards throughout the work sites, for the use of Union representatives.
- use of the internal mail system.
- access to word processing and/or typing facilities.
- use of fax, electronic mail system and internet access.
- use of a filing cabinet.
- access to a meeting room for steward meetings and/or larger groups.
- access to new starter induction day.