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To: Secretaries of Local Government Branches in England
(Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland for information only)
Regional Heads of Local Government

18 March 2020

COVID-19 - NJC CIRCULAR ON WORKING FROM HOME

This circular updates branches on a new joint NJC circular on COVID-19, with a focus on working from home.

On 17 March, the NJC Joint Secretaries agreed and issued a joint circular on COVID-19, with a particular focus on provisions for working from home.

The joint circular covers:

- Guidance on ensuring staff well-being is safeguarded during periods of home working
- The potential for flexibility including staff being moved to other duties – but stressing that this must only be done in consultation with unions and without any detriment to staff. It should be done on a volunteer basis as far as possible. Risk assessments will be essential and training must be provided where needed
- Staff who are vulnerable due to health conditions
- Guidance relating to staff who cannot work from home

With regard to the point about staff who cannot work from home, I would draw your attention to this passage from the circular: “Ultimately, in many cases employers will have no option other than to accept that some employees can neither work at home nor be redeployed / seconded etc and will therefore be staying at home on full pay for the duration of this emergency.”

It is vital that branches remain in talks with employers, to ensure that the advice in this circular is followed, and that staff are enabled to help out during the Covid-19 crisis in any way they can, while not being put in a position they don't feel comfortable in, or asked to forgo any pay or conditions.

An example of good practice comes from Salford, where the UNISON branch have reached a positive agreement with the council. Among its key points:

- All Covid19-related absences, whether this be sickness or self-isolation will be recorded. Sickness absence will be recorded as sickness absence but absence days will not be counted for absence management purposes and full pay will be maintained
- Where staff are self-isolating, are well enough to work and have the digital capabilities to work from home they would do so
- Updating workforce data to support possible workforce planning and deployment of staffing resources should this be necessary - members and stewards encouraged to assist
- Service-level discussions involving local managers and UNISON stewards about flexibility to cover essential tasks. Where a person performs a higher-paid role, they will be compensated accordingly. Where a person performs a lower-paid role, they will maintain the level of pay for their substantive post.

This may be helpful to you as you engage with your employers.

We will keep branches and regions fully informed as the situation develops.

With best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jon Richards". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a distinct "R".

Jon Richards
National Secretary
Local Government, Police and Justice Section