

## NFNPA RAPC 256 /15

### NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – 9 MARCH 2015

## SABBATICAL LEAVE

**Report by:** Heleana Aylett, HR Manager

### 1. Summary:

- 1.1 Members will be aware that consideration has recently been given to the introduction of a sabbatical leave policy for Authority staff. This new initiative has been conceived to help enhance the Authority's current package of benefits and in turn, the Authority's ability to attract and retain high calibre employees.
- 1.2 A sabbatical is a voluntary arrangement whereby an employee takes paid or unpaid time off over and above his or her usual leave entitlement. Sabbaticals are often intended to allow individuals to study or undertake other educational opportunities, sometimes through voluntary work, to gain valuable experience and refresh their skills and knowledge.
- 1.3 In September 2014, members were asked to consider whether a sabbatical leave policy, which would permit unpaid time off, should be introduced into the National Park Authority to enable these opportunities for long serving employees.
- 1.4 At that time members asked for more information on what policies other National Parks had in place for sabbaticals or career breaks. This information has now been collated and is now attached as **Annex 2** and **Annex 3** – whilst this information is useful in evaluating the comparative benefits offered by other NPAs, no clear trends can be established from the data on sabbatical leave which might guide the Authority in setting its own policy.
- 1.5 At the RAPC meeting in December 2014 members asked for more information on other benefits which employees are eligible for. This information is attached as **Annex 4**.

### 2. Employee Side Comments

- 2.1 Point 3.1 states application should make clear that the leave benefits both the authority and the employee. Point 4.1 states the leave will be without pay. If the sabbatical leave benefits the employer, why is it without pay?
- 2.2 Why has all accrued annual leave got to be taken if only allowed two months leave?
- 2.3 Why is only two months leave allowed? If member of staff was taking a course then this would not be long enough.

### **3 Recommendation:**

**It is recommended that the Committee:**

- 1) adopt the sabbatical leave policy attached as Annex 1 and**
- 2) resolve that a review of the policy be undertaken once it has been in operation for two years.**

#### **Papers:**

NFNPA RAPC 256/15

NFNPA RAPC 256/15 – Annex 1

NFNPA RAPC 256/15 – Annex 2

NFNPA RAPC 256/15 – Annex 3

NFNPA RAPC 256/15 – Annex 4

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#### **Equality Impact Assessment:**

There are no equality and diversity implications arising directly from this report – it would apply equally to all employees

**POLICY ON SABBATICAL LEAVE**

**1.0 Introduction**

1.1 Long serving employees with four years or more service with the New Forest National Park Authority will be eligible to apply for sabbatical leave to undertake research, further education, work related projects or voluntary work with a view to enhancing their skills and knowledge. Sabbatical leave is open equally to both full time and part time employees with the relevant length of service.

**2.0 Purpose**

2.1 The purpose of sabbatical leave will normally be linked to personal development outside the usual confines of the job, such that the employee will be able to return to work with new ideas, enhanced skills etc.

**3.0 How to Apply**

3.1 Any eligible employee wishing to apply for sabbatical leave should do so in writing to the appropriate member of the Executive Leadership Team. The application must state the proposed objectives, the duration of the sabbatical and the perceived benefits to both the Authority and the employee.

3.2 Any such request will be considered and where granted will be entirely at the discretion of the Authority and with such qualifications, conditions and timings as it sees fit. The request must ensure that the business needs of the Authority are taken into account.

3.3 An employee may apply for a second period of sabbatical leave but this will be granted only in exceptional circumstances and in any event will not be considered unless a period of at least five years has passed since the employee returned to work following the first period of sabbatical leave.

**4 Financial considerations**

4.1 During any agreed period of sabbatical leave the employee will not be paid any salary.

4.2 If the employee is a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme, they will be sent a form to complete from Payroll which confirms whether or not they would like to pay the employee's contribution during the period they are

taking unpaid leave. If they wish to pay the contributions, they must return the form to Payroll within 30 days from receipt. If you do not return it within this time, Payroll will not deduct the contributions and this will constitute a break in pensionable service

## **5.0 Other Considerations**

- 5.1 Any accrued but unused pro rata holiday entitlement for the current holiday year must be taken prior to the start of the employees' sabbatical leave.
- 5.2 The employee will be required to keep in touch with their manager whilst on sabbatical leave on a monthly basis. This may be by telephone, e-mail or post.
- 5.3 During the period of the employees sabbatical, they will remain an employee of the National Park on their normal terms and conditions of employment. Therefore the employee will not be permitted to take up paid employment or provide any consultancy services to any third party and all provisions as to confidential information will continue to apply.
- 5.4 Sabbatical leave will only be granted for periods of up to two months duration.
- 5.5 If the employee fails to return to work from sabbatical leave on the pre-arranged date, then their employment will automatically terminate.
- 5.6 The Authority will re-engage the employee from the agreed return to work date. This will be either in the same job as before or, if that is not reasonably practicable, in a job of equivalent seniority and on terms and conditions not less favourable than those that would have applied to the employee if they had not taken the sabbatical.
- 5.7 Once the employee returns to work, their period of service will be regarded as continuous for all statutory purposes.

## Sabbatical Leave

National Park Authority	Northumberland NPA	Brecon Beacons NPA	Yorkshire Dales NPA
Details			
Purpose of Sabbatical	Study Leave, research project relative to NP purposes/strategy	Caring for children, elderly or sick relatives, voluntary work, study, travel	Childcare, study, family responsibilities, personal interest/project, travel, voluntary work
Length of leave allowed	1 day per year of service. Up to blocks of 5 days; more than 1 block allowed per year	Maximum of 12 months Prior to start must discharge obligation to NPA re lease car, training costs, relocation expenses	Between 3 – 12 months
Approved by	Line Manager	Head of Dept followed by Chief Exec	Manager and then Director
Leave – paid or unpaid	Leave is paid but Sabbatical Leave is only for a few days maximum	Unpaid	Unpaid
Paid work during Sabbatical	No information	Need written approval to undertake paid work	Need permission to undertake any other paid work
Qualifying period and eligibility	No information	Minimum 2 years satisfactory service with NPA	Minimum 5 years' service
Returning to Work	Research or project work to be presented within 2 months of returning from sabbatical.	6 months' notice required of intent to return to work. NPA will try to place in same section on return; if not possible officer placed on register until three offers of employment rejected. Induction Training given on return	Must agree to specified return to work date Guaranteed opportunity to return to work at end of sabbatical
Observations	Must benefit team, employee and NPA. No mention of sabbatical for family/personal reasons. Can combine with annual/flexi leave.	If become pregnant leave is suspended and entitled to maternity benefits Continuity of Service not affected except pension payments	No occupational maternity leave Continuity of employment not affected

## Career Breaks

National Park Authority	Cairngorms NPA / Loch Lomond and The Trossachs NPA	Exmoor NPA	Yorkshire Dales NPA	Brecon Beacons NPA
Details				
Purpose of Career Break	Manage work life balance, care for relative, accompany partner working away	Childcare, adoption, elderly care	Study, childcare or family responsibilities, personal interest/project, overseas travel, voluntary work	Caring for young children, elderly or sick relatives, caring for dependants, voluntary work or travel
Length of leave allowed	3 months – 3 years	Flexible with upper limit of 5 years	6 months – 3 years	12 months – 3 years. Can be taken as 2 breaks if each break is at least one year and totals not more than 3 years; must have at least 1 year between breaks
Approved by	Request to Director and cc to HR		Manager and Director	Head of Department and CEO
Leave – paid or unpaid	Unpaid		Unpaid	
Paid work during Sabbatical	Must discuss with HR Manager		No paid work without prior permission	
Qualifying period and eligibility	Must be on permanent contract, 18 months service. Record of good attendance, performance and conduct	Two years employment and satisfactory performance	Two years employment Those on fixed term contracts may be considered dependant on individual circumstances.	Two years satisfactory service with regard to annual performance review
Contact During Absence	Need to maintain contact with Team and HR during absence	Must undertake at least 3 weeks paid work per year at normal place of employment. Formal annual meeting to review training needs		
Returning to Work	Need to give between 1-3 months' notice prior to	Must give minimum 3 months' notice before returning.	Must agree to specified return to work date	Must give 6 months' notice of intention to return to work.

	<p>returning to work.                  No job guaranteed on return                  Return subject to redeployment search, if no job found within 3 months employment is terminated</p>	<p>No job guarantee but try to return to same section.                  Different work patterns will be considered</p>	<p>No guarantee of re-appointment but priority given for posts available at time of return                  If suitable post not available employee placed on register for 2 years and notified of suitable vacancies. Given preference over other candidates unless other potential redundancies.                  Must resign from Authority with effect of commencement of career break</p>	<p>Consideration given to earlier return if in writing need to give 3 months' notice.                  Authority will endeavour to place employee in same section on return but there is no guarantee.                  If there is no current vacancy then placed on register and notified of any suitable vacancies. Remain on register until three suitable offers have been rejected.</p>
<p>Observations</p>	<p>Both National Parks have the same policy.                  No accrual of annual/bh leave.                  No qualification for pension purposes.                  Need to sign Career Break Agreement</p>	<p>If take break due to maternity need to resign formally before taking career break but this should be after the birth.</p>	<p>Need to meet needs of business units                  Continuity of employment is broken and statutory and statutory employment protection rights therefore not maintained.</p>	<p>Career break does not count towards length of service.                  If become pregnant during break employee is not entitled to authority's maternity provision.                  Contract of employment is suspended and must sign a Career Break Contract.                  Lease car terminated at start of career break.</p>

## New Forest National Park

### Employee Benefits

**Free car parking** – for all staff on site at Lymington Town Hall

**Free Health checks** – organised every two years for those who want them – not mandatory.

**Childcare vouchers** – organised through the payroll. They are tax and NI free up to the value of £243 per month.

**Employee Assistance Programme** – available to all employees 24/7. Free advice and support on debt, consumer advice, work/career and your rights.

**Counselling** – up to four free sessions available to those referred through the EAP.

**Contributory Pension Scheme** – Part of the Local Government Pension Scheme.

**Professional Subscriptions** – if deemed to be necessary in their contract of employment then this is paid by the authority.

**Financial Assistance with Eye Sight Tests and Appliances** – grant of £20 towards the sight test and up to £60 towards the appliance.

**Flexi time** – may not apply to all employees

**Flexible Retirement** – The NPA exercises this discretion in their pension scheme through HCC.

**Relocation Expenses** – on appointment, in approved cases only.

**Brand New Forest Card** – issued free to all employees for 2015.

**Extra Statutory Holiday day** – taken around Christmas.

**Occupational Sick Pay** – subject to qualifying periods.

**Occupational Maternity/Paternity** - pay and leave subject to qualifying periods.

**Long Service leave** – a weeks' additional leave after five years' service.