

Bridgend CC: Backdated Pay Rises Agreed

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LTU has won backdated pay increases of up to £500 for many staff working in Bridgend Contact Centre.

When staff were first recruited during 2001, the Employment Agencies had told them that they would receive automatic pay increases of £500 once they had completed six months service with the Bank.

The Bank had argued, however, that this commitment had been made without its authority and that it only intended that staff receive a £500 increase once they progressed from Entry Level to Effective Level 1. It has been a major concern to LTU that at Bridgend - even by the end of 2002 - very few staff had progressed to Effective Level 1.

LTU had, nevertheless, been able to provide overwhelming evidence to show that staff had been told they would automatically receive the £500 increase.

Under the agreement won by LTU:

- * **The £500 increase will be applied to all Agents who were recruited at Bridgend Contact Centre before the end of 2001.**
- * **All these qualifying staff who have not yet progressed to Effective Level 1 will receive the £500 increase as a lump sum payment when**

they completed six months service.

- * **Those qualifying staff who progressed to Effective Level 1 more than six months after they joined the Bank, will receive the £500 increase for the period they had remained on Entry Level after having completed six months service.**
- * **Lump sum payments will be made with June salaries.**

This is an important success for LTU and its local Senior Representatives at Bridgend Contact Centre who have campaigned tirelessly for the backdated Pay Increases.

Of course, the fact that so few staff at Bridgend Contact Centre have been progressing from Entry Level to Effective Level 1 within six months of joining the Bank remains a serious concern for LTU. The Union has therefore been pressing Senior Management to ensure that progression for Agents through the Effective Levels in accordance with Guidelines. The Bank is now acting upon LTU's concerns.

Inside this Newsletter addresses a number of other important issues of concern to staff working at Bridgend Contact Centre.

Effective Levels Not Working

Over recent months, LTU and the Bank have been discussing the operation of Effective Levels across all Contact Centres.

The Bank has itself recognised that there are serious flaws in the operation of Effective Levels and this is the reason for it deciding to relaunch the scheme.

Slow Progression Between Levels

One of the Union's biggest concerns has been the very slow progression of staff between Effective Levels and the fact that in some of the Contact Centres the existence of Effective Levels 2 and 3 has largely illusory for all but a select few staff.

The Union believes that typically one-third of staff should be at Effective Level 2 and a further 10% at Effective Level 3. The Bank falls substantially short of this expectation.

LTU has presented the Bank with details of its concerns on how Effective Levels operate, and impediments to how staff progress between Effective Levels, which include:

- * **Staff being restricted from progression between Effective Levels for unjustifiably long periods.** Until recently, many staff at Bridgend had been at Entry Level for over 12 months.
- * **Staff having insufficient time to record their 'stats and behaviours' because of heavy workloads.**
- * **Inconsistencies across and within Contact Centres in the measurement of performance against Effective Levels.**
- * **Lack of clarity for staff in determining what is required to progress through the Effective Levels.**
- * **External recruits being appointed straight to Effective Level 2, whilst existing staff with more relevant experience have failed to progress.**

Though the Bank's relaunch addresses some of these concerns, LTU believes that it does not go far enough.

LTU has presented to the Bank a number of proposals to improve the operation of the Effective Levels arrangements, including:

- * **A commitment to move staff through the Effective Levels structure more rapidly, with a member of the management accountable for achieving this.**
- * **A requirement that staff meet performance standards for 'promotion' to the next level for six months out of a rolling eight month period.** This would avoid staff missing out on progression and having to start again following a single month's performance below the required standards.
- * **Staff should automatically qualify as having achieved the required performance standards if they meet all of their statistics.** Behaviours should only be taken into account to compensate where performance has fallen a little short of Statistical requirements.
- * **Full consideration should be given to any factors that might impact upon meeting requirements to progress to the next Effective Level.** This should include where staff have transferred into a new area of activity, and consideration of areas where progression is typically more difficult.

LTU believes that only by adopting these and other Union proposals can the Effective Levels framework regain credibility and move sufficient numbers of staff to the appropriate Effective Levels.

Call Quality Marking

LTU has raised many concerns over the introduction of new Call Quality Marking arrangements.

In particular, LTU has insisted that it is unacceptable that staff can be 'rated zero' for a whole month's performance (and thus wiping out any chance of progression between Effective Levels for 6 months). This is a wholly disproportionate - and unjustified - punishment.

The severity of points lost under the new arrangements is also excessive (sometimes a 40% deduction for a minor slip-up during a call). This is made worse by the fact that many staff have reported being 'marked down' for the most spurious of reasons.

With insufficient numbers of staff as it is progressing through the Effective Levels arrangements, there are hardly grounds for making progression even harder still.

The Bank has committed itself to proposing important changes to the 'Call Quality Marking' arrangements at its next negotiating meeting with LTU, which would both ensure a more sensible interpretation of guidelines and ensure consistency across all Contact Centres.

In the meantime, members should telephone LTU's 24 Hour Advice Line on 01234 262868 if they believe that they have been treated in a heavy-handed or unfair way .

Staff Denied Pay Increases

LTU warned members earlier this year that the Bank planned to withhold pay increases from staff even if their performance justified them being at their Effective Level.

The Bank indicated that one such ground might be absenteeism, even if it did not have sufficient grounds to take formal disciplinary action.

Quite frankly, it is a corruption of the Effective Levels arrangements to deny any member of staff the appropriate Pay Rate for their Effective Level, other than in circumstances where the individual concerned is being disciplined formally and has a full right to state their case with full union representation. Even in these cases, if disciplinary action is dropped without penalty then Pay Increases should be fully backdated.

Any members who have been denied a pay increase to the new pay rate for their Effective Level, should telephone LTU's 24 Hour Advice Line on 01234 262868.

Positive Response From Bank

The Bank has responded positively to many of LTU's concerns, accepting that a wider review is needed of all aspects of Effective Levels.

LTU will be reporting further on the progress of our discussions with the Bank in future Newsletters.

Other LTU Concerns

LTU has raised a number of further concerns on behalf of Contact Centres staff that - like Effective Levels - the Bank has showed a willingness to discuss and attempt to resolve in negotiations with LTU.

Sales Through Service

Though LTU accepts the Bank's right to make changes in priorities to the STS objectives, the Union has been concerned that staff do not always have sufficient training and support to meet these objectives and thereby maximise their STS payments.

LTU also does not accept that staff should be obliged to sign the Procedures Statement until they are certain that they have been provided with sufficient guidance.

Discretionary Bonuses

LTU has also concerned at how payment of Discretionary Bonuses has been handled in some Contact Centres.

Line managers have been unable (or refused) to provide feedback to staff on why some have received payments and others have not.

LTU considers that such a lack of openness and justification is open to abuse and is therefore pressing the Bank for far greater transparency in the payment of Discretionary Bonuses.

LTU expects to make progress on these concerns in our discussions with Senior Management.

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