

Time To Choose

Yesterday staff in Chatham received an intranet message from Scottish Widows setting out details of the transfer terms that will apply to those staff who choose to go to Tonbridge.

Tonbridge and Beyond

Members will recall that in one of our previous Newsletters we described Group Operations as the Bank's 'departure lounge' because of its policy of moving work between sites and offshoring. We asked Group Operations for a guarantee that no Scottish Widows jobs transferred to Tonbridge would be offshored subsequently to India or anywhere else. Group Operations has said "The lease of the Tonbridge office will be in place until September 2014. Group Operations have chosen the office because of the length of the lease, the suitability of the premises and their proximity to the Chatham office. There are no plans to transfer the work from the site."

The statement produced by Group Operations falls short of the guarantee we wanted and doesn't really offer staff any security about the ongoing future of the Tonbridge site. Staff shouldn't forget that up until a few weeks ago the Mountbatten House site was believed to be safe. The ongoing future of the Tonbridge site will be of particular concern for those members of staff with longer service, particularly those who are aged over 50. Staff who transfer to Tonbridge and are subsequently made redundant or take voluntary severance will not have a choice of severance terms. They will be entitled only to the new terms. Staff aged over 50 will lose the right to a non-actuarially reduced pension if they are subsequently made redundant after they move to Tonbridge.

Flexible Working and Car Parking

In response to questions raised by staff, Group Operations has said "requests for work options will be encouraged and accommodated where they fit with operational requirements". Those staff that need to work flexibly for the move to Tonbridge to be viable should make that clear on their preference form. Staff can stipulate that their agreement to work in Tonbridge is subject to their request for flexible working being granted.

Group Operations has provision for 80 car parking spaces in Tonbridge. If more spaces are required, Group Operations has said that they will "investigate other spaces and consider subsidising the cost of further spaces." So far Group Operations has stopped short of giving a clear commitment to subsidise car parking spaces for those staff that don't get one of the 80. If staff transferring to Tonbridge are

not given access to a free car parking space then their costs in getting to work will increase by some £415 per year.

Financial Compensation

One of the biggest stumbling blocks for staff in moving to Tonbridge, apart from actually getting there, is the extra cost of getting to work. Group Operations has listened to our concerns and agreed to put in place an allowance of £6.50 per day for 24 months following the transfer of work to Tonbridge. The allowance will be subject to tax and national insurance and will be paid with salary. Payment is not conditional on the individual's mode of transport. At the end of the 2 years Group Operations has said that they will enter into discussions with LTU over the continuation of the allowance.

Pay 2007 and Beyond

Members will be aware that salaries in Tonbridge are lower than those in Chatham. At Band 8 the market indicator, which drives the salary levels, is £14,624 in Chatham and £13,600 in Tonbridge. There is a similar difference at Band 7. Our concern is that not only will staff have the additional expense of travelling to Tonbridge but also over time their salary levels will be managed downwards to Tonbridge levels.

In 2007 staff in Chatham will continue on their existing pay zones and will be managed to the local Chatham market. In 2008 staff in Bands 2 - 6 will transfer to the Financial Services Market pay zones. Group Operations have said that staff in Bands 7 and 8 will have their pay managed around the Local Market Indicator for either Tonbridge or Chatham, whichever is higher. In 2009 staff in Band 7 and 8 will be managed to the Local Market Indicator for Tonbridge. We have told Group Operations that pay protection arrangements that last for just one year are simply unacceptable.

We would expect staff to have their pay levels protected for 3 years at the very least. It's not acceptable that staff moving to Tonbridge will see their pay stagnate whilst their costs of actually travelling to work have increased. It is also worth pointing out that the extra travelling time to work for those people who live in and around Chatham is equivalent to nearly 300 hours per year.

Before completing the preference form we would urge all staff to consider seriously the implications of working in Tonbridge, taking into account all of the factors we have discussed in this Newsletter. Members with any questions can either email me at Mark.Brown@ltu.co.uk or contact the Union's Bedford Office on 01234 262868.

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