

19. STAFF HANDBOOK – VOLUNTEERING POLICY (MINUTE 032/23) – To consider and approve the extension to Cadet Forces, Retained Firefighters, Special Constables and ask Work Nest to draft suitable policies.

Background - The Town Council having recently signed the Armed Forces Covenant. It has also agreed to secure and operate under the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) – Bronze Award level. This is to be armed forces-friendly and being open to employing reservists, armed forces veterans (including the wounded, injured and sick), cadet instructors and military spouses/partners.

The Town Council's Staff Handbook already includes staff participation in: the Reserves, being a Magistrate, a School Governor, a Councillor (not on the same Council).

Work Nest do not have a specific Town or Parish Council Volunteering Policy. Initially, they suggested looking at the Manchester City Council Volunteering Policy. It excludes teaching staff. They include all those volunteering examples given in the current Town Council Staff Handbook. Additionally, they also include:

- Special Constables
- Retained Firefighters

Cornwall Association of Local Councils (C.A.L.C.) – do not have a Town or Parish Council specific Volunteering Policy. They have supplied the Cornwall Council Volunteering Policy. The Cornwall Council policy does not apply to teachers, other staff employed in schools and firefighters. There is no list of possible volunteering options.

Cornwall Association of Local Councils (C.A.L.C.) - have sent out an e-mail to all their members' asking if any Town Council has developed its own Volunteering Policy. None have responded.

Local Authority Volunteering policy details: "This policy enables eligible employees to take up to 2 days paid leave (14.8 hours paid leave) in any leave year, (pro-rata for part-time employees) in order to carry out a relevant community-based volunteering activity during work time.

Volunteering will not be permitted in the following circumstances: -

- If there is a detriment to Service delivery
- In connection with Party political activity
- In connection with religious activities
- Where there is a conflict of interest with the employee's job role or wider objectives of the Council.
- Activity that is likely to bring the employer into disrepute"

Conclusions – The Town Council has a limited number of staff and a flat structure compared with a Local Authority, such as, Manchester City Council and Cornwall Council. It is perhaps not surprising that no Town and Parish Council Volunteering Policy appears to have yet been developed.

If the Town Council is happy with the general concept the Staff Handbook could be modified to add to the current list: serving in the Reserves, being a Magistrate, a School Governor, a Councillor (not on our Town Council). The following:

- Cadet Forces – currently there are Army and Air Cadets – (possibly also Police Cadets)
- Special Constables
- Retained Firefighters
- Trade Union – (ACAS Best Practice -Trade union representatives are entitled to reasonable paid time off to carry out trade union duties, undergo training, and to accompany a worker to a formal grievance or disciplinary hearing. *Hence, this should also be referenced in the Staff Handbook)).

Work Nest Update – would be happy to draft the “Volunteering Policy” including the criterion and suggest the Council might also allow work to be carried out for a registered charity or local community organisation. You might also want to specify that the employee is only entitled to take VITO days after successfully completing their probationary period.”

Recommendation: To consider and approve the extension to Cadet Forces, Retained Firefighters, Special Constables and ask Work Nest to draft suitable policies.

20. CONSULTATION ON THE CLOSURE OF TICKET OFFICES AT RAILWAY STATIONS a). attached details on the use of the Liskeard Ticket Office – b). St Germans and Area Public Transport Users Group) – To consider and respond to the national consultation on the closure of ticket offices at railway stations.

Background – The Council received an e-mail consultation on the closure of ticket offices which was circuited to Councillors. There has been an online meeting involving interested parties. The Council has been contacted by the St Germans and Area Public Transport Users Group whose views are included.

Consultation - “We are consulting on proposals to move ticket office staff into other areas of the station where they can help more customers, as transactions from ticket offices drop below 15%.

The consultations are happening as part of an industry-wide set of proposals that would mean ticket office staff would work on station platforms and concourses where they can be closer to customers. Subject to consultation, ticket offices could be phased out over a number of years.

Ticket office staff would be freed up to work in other areas of the station where they are closer to customers and better placed to help, in line with models already in place at some Great Western Railway stations such as Newbury or Reading Green Park.

Our Passenger Assist programme – which helps disabled and mobility-impaired customers navigate stations and board trains – will not be affected by the changes. The proposals are designed to increase staff trained and available to help customers at stations across the network, including those with additional accessibility needs.

What will happen to ticket offices? - Subject to consultation, ticket office staff would transition to multi-skilled roles – similar to those already in place at GWR since 2007. This would allow staff to help more customers with a wider range of issues, including helping them to buy tickets, wherever they are on the station.

This will, however, mean changes to how our station teams are organised, and some ticket offices will close as the new roles are introduced. GWR is consulting with the public on an individual station-by-station basis. This includes publication of Equality Impact Assessments for each proposal and is independently run by industry watchdogs Transport Focus and London TravelWatch.

Why is this happening? - Digital tickets have made it easier and faster for customers to buy and manage tickets online, which means fewer people than ever are using ticket offices.

The approach would help bring station retailing up-to-date from 1996, when the rules on how to sell tickets were set and before the invention of the smartphone. Back then, 82% of all tickets were sold at ticket offices nationally, compared to less than 15% on average today. Bringing staff out from offices would allow the railway to respond to the generational shift in customer behaviour, in common with many other industries and organisations that have long since done so such as Transport for London, most airlines and many banks and supermarkets.”

Initial Meeting Comments (red text observations) – “I participated in the Great Western Zoom meeting this morning on the plans to close ticket offices across the network. The meeting was opened by MD Mark Hopwood and the plans were described by Richard Rowland. 20 delegates were in attendance from across the GWR network, notably Cheltenham, Stroud, Cookham, Ivybridge, Penzance and, uniquely, two of us from Liskeard.

They made the case for the change by reflecting that in recent years, a significant growth in tickets being held on mobile devices and/or purchased and printed at home, with a corresponding reduction in tickets bought over the counter at stations*. **Unsurprisingly, many stressed that passengers prefer to use the knowledge and experience of the ticket office staff. Many travellers do not have access to digital ticketing, citing phone signals dying, poor broadband in some areas, non-computer literate users, etc..**

*It was stated that in 1996, 82% of overall ticket sales were made at station ticket offices; today, the figure has dropped to 15%. **Liskeard's is above that average at 21.5%**, indeed a higher percentage than many larger stations, including Exeter St Davids, Cheltenham and Gloucester, but the trend is clearly downwards.

The plan is to implement the changes across the railway network within 18 months. GWR reassured us that staff would still be on hand at stations to assist and advise passengers, but they would be on the platforms, rather than behind the ticket office window, I asked **the question about stations like Liskeard with 3 different platforms and the problem of elderly, disabled or partially sighted passengers having to go and search out the staff member to help them with a ticket purchase.** The response was that Liskeard ticket office staff already assist with train

despatch and have to leave the ticket office to do so. In the new arrangements, we were told that the staff would be looking out for passengers who might need assistance on the platforms. Not an entirely satisfactory response, as they would probably need to accompany them back up to the ticket vending machine to get the right ticket.

The question was asked about Liskeard station building, but we were reassured that the facilities there (toilets and waiting area, together with staff accommodation) would remain open for use. Whilst this information exchange was organised by Great Western, our comments were noted. The frequently asked questions, previously circulated can still be found at www.gwr.com/haveyoursay

But it was stressed that the Consultation is being organised nationally by Transport Focus, the passengers' watchdog. If the Council, or individual members wish to submit comments on this consultation, you have until 26th July to send your comments to TicketOffice.GWR@transportfocus.org.uk

The current café is under new ownership and is trading very well. GWR implied that the loss of the ticket areas could provide new retail opportunities such as mini supermarkets, bike hire etc. The stations are more than just functional buildings, they are a source of shelter, a safe visible place to wait and also a warm space I think it is very important that GWR consider this with their review.

Subsequent Observations (same source) - Liskeard is the key local centre, as a staffed station. Apart from Bodmin Parkway, which is staffed, all the neighbouring stations are unstaffed, so passengers have to buy their tickets from the guard/ticket collector, on board the train.

So, this list of unstaffed stations includes Looe and the other 3 stations on the Looe branch, as well as Menheniot, St Germans and even Saltash. That's another good reason for Liskeard's importance as a staffed station, selling tickets through its ticket office window. But I don't think that this adds to our demand for Liskeard, as these passengers from the smaller stations will continue to buy their tickets when they board their trains, so no change there.

Great Western make much of the benefit of 'multi-skilling' their staff, so that they can get out onto the platform to assist passengers. But they will admit that the ticket office staff at Liskeard are already multi-skilled, as they leave the ticket office when trains are due, so as to help to despatch them from the platform, before returning to the ticket office. So, we in Liskeard could justifiably argue that our staff are already doing their passenger assistance duties 'out and about', as well as serving tickets for needy passengers.

St Germans and Area Public Transport Users Group – have contacted the Town Council with the following observations: “I know we use both Liskeard and Plymouth ticket offices for things that aren't easy to do online, **and many people without access to computers use them as a matter of course. Closing ticket offices discriminates against older people, and those with additional needs, as well as anyone who doesn't have a smart phone.**

We assumed that we would be needing to fight to keep small ticket offices such as Liskeard open. We were shocked when we went to Plymouth the other day and discovered this was also due for closure. And then the news came that it is intended that all ticket offices will close, even the ones at Paddington. This is covered in the downloadable Changes to Ticket Retailing pdf document on the GWR ticket office site. Unbelievable.

It's obvious that we need to fight this, and there are a number of well organised campaigns to help us to do so, but we need to complain on-mass if we are to have any hope of success, so please follow the links below and have your say. The consultation period is short - all feedback must be made before the 26th July. Please share this email to anyone you think might be interested.

Please also write to your MP Sheryll Murray and County Councillor Kate Ewert, as the more letters they receive, the greater any influence they might be able to exert will be.

It may be worth saying that the closure of ticket offices would mean MORE staff are needed rather than fewer if potential passengers are to be encouraged and retained. (AND that ticket machines need to be redesigned and foolproof which would mean a huge outlay financially)”.

Way forward – a response to the consultation could be submitted quoting the points raised in the text in red above. The points below might also be relevant.

Property Re-use – it is generally better to see buildings occupied than empty – what if an existing town centre business relocated undermining efforts to retain footfall in the town centre.

Grant Funding Conditions Previous Capital Improvements Liskeard Station – not unusual for grant programmes to be conditional upon the provision and retention for eligible uses (operational railway Infrastructure), not to be used for a specified period going forward for ineligible purposes (retail* and other uses not ancillary to the operation of the eligible activity).

Railcards – with any initial application for an annual railcard proof of residence within the eligible area needs to be presented in person at a ticket office. For those who do not have SMART phones or a computer might an “area” ticket office with above average ticket office sales such as. Liskeard be retained?

RECOMMENDATION: To consider and respond to the national consultation on the closure of ticket offices at railway stations.