**FAQs for managers– Voluntary Severance/Early Retirement (VS/ER)**

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| **1** | **What is the latest position regarding the VS/ER process?**  | We are currently consulting with the recognised trade unions about the VS/ER proposal. The consultation period is for a minimum of 45 days. We currently envisage the following timetable for the VS/ER process.

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|  **Step** | **Action** |
| **1** | Letter issued inviting employees to ‘express an interest’. **Invitations are open until 24/03/2017.** |
| **2** | Employee expresses an interest in release under the policy (‘Voluntary Severance’ or ‘Early Retirement’) by completing and submitting the expression of interest form. |
| **3** | Employee is issued with an estimate of benefits – week commencing 17th April and invited to make a formal declaration for release under the scheme. The invitation will be open for a defined period between 17th April and 28th April |
| **4** | Aberdeen City Council considers whether they can support the employee’s release using the criteria set out. Decision is confirmed in writing.  |
| UnsuccessfulIf an application is not supported, this is the end of the process and the following steps 5 and 6 do not apply. The employee will be informed of the decision in writing  |
| SuccessfulIf an application is supported by the service, a supporting statement is then signed off by the relevant Director. |
| **5** | Relevant Committee Convenor, Chief Executive and Head of HR & CS to approve applications  |
| **6** | Aberdeen City Council notifies employee of formal approval and issues notice period. |

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| **2** | **If employee’s application for VS/ER is declined in this VS/ER window, is it possible that they could be released in the future?** | An employee may express an interest in early release under VS/ER only once in any rolling 12 month period (except where they are part of an invited group by the employer). However, if they have expressed an interest but not been approved for release in the short term, management may consider whether they could potentially be released at a later date. There will be opportunity to be considered for VS/ER in budget year 18/19 and 19/20 as per the information on the expression of interest form enclosed in the letter sent to all employees on 28th February 2017. |
| **3** | **Will I have an opportunity to comment on whether it is appropriate to approve one of my team’s applications for VS/ER.**  | The decision making process in relation to who ultimately is allowed to leave will involve both service management and the Chief Executive / CMT to ensure that full consideration has been given as to the criticality of certain skill-sets and experience levels. |
| **4** | **When will I find out if someone in my team has expressed an interest/been approved?** | It is anticipated that financial information on VS/ER applications where an employee has indicated that they still wish to proceed with their application, will be shared with relevant services week commencing 08/05/17.  |
| **5** | **If someone in my team is approved for VS/ER, what will happen to their workload?** | Teams are encouraged to look at future workload requirements based on how they intend doing business in the future. To achieve more with fewer resources, The Strategic Business Plan emphasises the need to reduce demand in order to reduce costs by enabling our staff and customers to self-serve. The VS/ER exercise will give you the opportunity to reduce costs and look at how you can reduce demand through increased digitization, service redesign (alternative delivery models, shared services, collaboration with partners, functional reviews), multiskilling staff to broaden capability and reducing costs across functions by consolidating and standardising.This will help inform 'local' VS/ER decisions although when having discussion with your teams, you will need to be mindful of the need to avoid - disclosing the source(s) of the VS/ER interest and preserving confidentiality at all times. |
| **6** | **Which budget will any VS/ER one – off payments including strain on fund come from?** | The lump sum payments and any strain on the pension fund will be funded from a central corporate budget. |
| **7** | **Can we continue to recruit?** | You will NOT be able to recruit to the post from which an employee has been released under VS/ER, unless in a ‘bumped redundancy’ situation. The rules around bumped redundancy are quite complex so for advice please contact the VS/ER helpline on the number below. For general recruitment, the [Vacancy Management Procedure](file:///O%3A%5CCorpGov%5CHuman%20Resources%5CPERS%5CTeam_Resource%5CVSER%5C2017%5CVacancy%20Management%20Procedure%202017%20-%20HR%20input.docx) (VMP) applies. Certain posts are exempt from the VMP and can be advertised in the normal way. Posts that are not exempt need approval from the appropriate Head of Service (as per VMP). |
| **8** | **If an employee in my team volunteers to leave ACC under VS/ER, what will my role be?** | Employees indicating willingness to proceed with VS/ER will have individual discussions with their manager. These discussions should take place at the earliest possible stage i.e. as soon as you’re aware of individual intention to formally proceed with their application. |
| **9** | **What kinds of conversations should I be having with employees?** | We encourage discussion about the VS/ER programme but you need to approach this sensitively. You should not suggest that employees apply for VS/ER, this is a matter of personal choice. If an employee raises VS/ER with you then please do discuss this with them and, if you are able to, answer any questions they have or refer them to the VS/ER FAQs, VS/ER helpline 01224 522340 or email address: VSER@aberdeencity.gov.uk Remember that expressing an interest does not create any commitment on the employee’s part and they may choose not to proceed with VS/ER.It is important that you do not provide any indications that an individual will be approved for VS/ER. The Council reserves the right to select those employees that will be offered either a Voluntary Severance or Early Retirement option and we will consult with the Trade Unions about the proposed approach to assessment criteria. Whilst we have opened up the programme across the whole of the Council’s employed workforce, the VS/ER policy is clear that VS/ER will only be appropriate if is a clear business case to justify the associated costs is presented. Part of your role will be to manage expectations and ensure that people understand that an application is not guaranteed to be accepted. If an employee expresses an interest in VS/ER, but is not accepted you should reassure them that their applications will not in any way influence or affect future decisions about them.Assessment criteria are described further in question below.The confidentiality of individuals expressing an interest in VS/ER must be preserved and information should only be shared where this is necessary. |
| **10** | **What are the assessment criteria for approving applications?** | In relation to the assessment criteria which will guide managerial consideration of individual VS/ER applications, we are consulting with the Trade Unions about this. The following key parameters were approved by CMT in line with the VS/ER policy: The VS/ER process must not be used as a means to deal with under-performing employees by paying for their exit. There is a specific policy to deal with under-performance and, moreover, successful applications by underperforming employees will contribute to the notion that the Council is somehow 'rewarding' poor performance. In order to achieve the targeted level of savings, the posts of those employees successful in their application will require to be disestablished and funding deleted from the budget. Any attempt by services to circumnavigate these requirements may have significant financial consequences. The costs of supported VS/ER applications will have to be recouped within a period of 5 years. In addition', the following are examples of the type of scenario which would provide a legitimate basis for a positive VS/ER assessment:• Where fewer employees are required in the applicant’s work area as service demands have reduced or are likely to reduce.• Where service transformation proposals will require less staff numbers within the applicant’s area of work (e.g. through the digitisation of some of the tasks concerned)• Where the service can be made more efficient by re-structuring e.g. where there is evidence of duplication of effort or where the Service could be delayered to improve decision making or service delivery• Where there are proposals for sharing services – either within the organisation or with partner organisations.These criteria are not exhaustive and it may be that individual services are able to identify additional criteria specific to their own set of circumstances. |
| **11** | **Are employees at risk of compulsory redundancy?** | No. At this stage we are simply inviting ‘expressions of interest’ in VS/ER. Both of these schemes work on the basis of an employee choosing to leave the Council’s employment early and on a purely voluntary basis. |
| **12** | **How can I support my team?** | Whilst the VS/ER process may lead to some challenges, this is an opportunity for you to lead your team through this process of change and provide the necessary support to make the process as positive as possible. In addition to support from your line manager, you might find these resources helpful:* Helpline for VS/ER queries : email: VSER@aberdeencity.gov.uk, telephone : 01224 522430
* Counselling service “Time for talking”: telephone - **0800 970 3980, intranet page :** [counselling service](http://thezone/AskHR/HealthandSafety/YourHealthSafetyandWellbeing/HS_employee_counselling.asp)
* Change management workshops – please contact Organisational development on: email: OrganisationalDevelopment@aberdeencity.gov.uk, telephone: 01224 523897 to book a workshop.
* Pre-retirement information:
* [Preparing for retirement checklist](https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/articles/checklist-things-to-do-as-retirement-approaches)
* [Preparing emotionally for retirement](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/travel-lifestyle/people/preparing-emotionally-for-retirement/)
* [Preparing your finances for retirement](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/pensions/nearing-retirement/preparing-your-finances-for-retirement/)
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