

AGENDA ITEM 7

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
LOCAL JOINT PANEL HELD IN THE
WAYTEMORE ROOM, THE
CAUSEWAY, BISHOP'S STORTFORD
ON TUESDAY 1 DECEMBER 2009
2.30 PM

PRESENT: Employer's Side

Councillor M R Alexander (Chairman).
Councillors L O Haysey (Substitute for Councillor
A P Jackson), S Rutland-Barsby, M Wood.

Staff Side (UNISON)

Chris Clowes (Vice Chairman), Chris Cooper,
Patrick Newman (Substitute for J Sharp),
Andy Stevenson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors D A A Peek and J O Ranger.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lorraine Blackburn	- Committee Secretary
Claire Burton	- Human Resources Officer
Alan Madin	- Director of Internal Services
Tinu Olowe	- Interim Head of People and Organisational Services

ACTION17 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A P Jackson and Jane Sharp. It was noted that Councillor L O Haysey was substituting for Councillor A P Jackson and Patrick Newman was substituting for Jane Sharp.

18 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman welcomed Tinu Olowe to the meeting as Emma Freeman's replacement as the Interim Head of People and Organisational Services. Emma had recently given birth to "Jessica" and the Chairman requested that the Panel's good wishes on their recent good news be forwarded on.

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The Chairman commented that with the consent of Members he would change the order of the agenda. This was agreed.

RECOMMENDED ITEM19 JOB SHARE POLICY

The Director of Internal Services referred to the need to develop a Job Share Policy to ensure consistency across the Council as a number of directorates had different practices and understanding of the scheme and as part of the Council's smarter ways of working approach. The Policy, as set out in the report now submitted, would replace the old scheme and Job Share section of the current Flexible Working Policy.

The Staff Side expressed concern about the wording in paragraph 6.3 of the Policy "If it is a requirement..." and of the difficulties which might arise in relation to a job share arrangement in term time and the need to apply discretion in its application. Councillor J O Ranger did not support the wording. He referred to the

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benefits which would accrue to the Council in securing more hours from a Job Share arrangement.

The Director of Internal Services suggested that the Policy had been phrased that way to cover a variety of circumstances but that the content of the Policy would be applied with discretion. However, inserting the word “reasonable” before “requirement” would be a useful clarification.

The Staff Side commented on bullet point one “..cover for absence shall be full time..” and referred to the fact that job sharers were usually individuals who had to provide child cover or who were providing care of some description. It was suggested that this wording might stop people from applying for jobs.

The Director of Internal Services stated that he would be happy to review the wording to take on board the Panel’s concerns.

The Local Joint Panel supported the Policy as now amended.

RECOMMENDED – that Job Share Policy as now amended, be approved.

RESOLVED ITEMS20 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2009 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

21 SAFETY COMMITTEE – MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 SEPTEMBER 2009

In relation to Minute 15 - Risk Assessments for Shared and Common Areas, Councillor Wood queried the comment

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that “Wallfields needed to be cleaned up”. Officers undertook to submit a written response to Members.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2009 be received.

22 BUDGET 2010/11 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN TO 2013/14

The Director of Internal Services submitted a report detailing the options in respect of the budget for 2010/11 and the medium term financial plan to 2013/14. He explained that the report would be considered by a Joint Meeting of Scrutiny Committees later that evening. The report had been included on the agenda for the Local Joint Panel in order to give the Staff Side an opportunity to comment prior to the issue being considered at the Joint Meeting of Scrutiny Committees. The Director stated that it was an opportunity to bring to the Council’s attention proposals of concern.

The Staff Side queried the Council’s future provision for pay increases and whether the MTFP took into account savings to be achieved from the Terms and Conditions Review. The Director of Internal Services confirmed that 2% per annum had been budgeted and that the MTFP did not take into account savings to be achieved from the Terms and Conditions Review.

The Staff Side stated that that there was £7M of contractor services in the budget which was affected by the RPI assumptions. The Director of Internal Services confirmed that the Council had taken an estimate of 2% per year for contracts indexed but there were different indices applied according to the nature of the contract.

The Staff Side referred to the fact that the report had not yet been made available to Staff in detail and that they had only had a copy of the budget for the last six days. It was Unison’s view that and that the budget was highly cautious and pessimistic. The Staff Side referred to proposed

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savings next year of £500,000 in reducing staff and reducing hours. The Staff Side could not support such a proposal.

The Director of Internal Services commented that the budget was “realistic” rather than pessimistic. He referred to the fact that there were six individuals affected by the proposal and that informal negotiations had commenced. The majority of savings would be achieved by taking out posts currently vacant and which had been vacant for some time. Savings under C3W were explained in relation to Castle Hall, Planning and Revenues and Benefits.

The Staff Side questioned the projected net savings requirement over a four year period which was shown as £1.7M, but that the ongoing efficiency savings were £2.7M showing an excess saving of £1M. The Staff Side stated that if there were savings to be achieved within the budget, why did the Council need to make savings from a Terms of Conditions review which would affect the majority of staff. The Staff Side stated that it could not see the point of the review at this point in time when that amount of savings had already been identified.

The Director of Internal Services explained that there were choices to be made between how much the Council spent and assumptions in relation to Council Tax next year were the 3.8% assumption from last years model remained unadjusted. There was the likelihood that Council Tax would be capped by the Government at 3%. The Director of Internal Services stated the more savings which could be achieved from terms and conditions, the less likely decisions may be made regarding staffing reductions.

The Staff Side stated that six staff had received redundancy letters of intent before the negotiations had been concluded on a Terms and Conditions review. The Director of Internal Services clarified that informal discussions had taken place with the staff who were potentially affected by the budget options under discussion. He stated that the Budget Report could not be distributed to

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Unison before it had been made available to Members.

The Staff Side queried whether any assumptions had been made about changes to Members' allowances. The Director confirmed that none had been made.

The Director of Internal Services confirmed that so far as possible, vacancies would be used to achieve savings. The Staff Side suggested that, if staff put themselves forward in those services where staffing reductions were proposed for voluntary redundancy, then it was within the power of management to see whether a service could be re-structured to accommodate a voluntary redundancy. The Director confirmed that if staff wished to put themselves forward in those services where staffing reductions were proposed, then these would be considered.

Councillor J O Ranger referred to the fact that 15% of staff worked reduced hours or job share. He suggested that job sharing should be explored as this was an area which could achieve savings, e.g. from four day weeks or to consider other proposals which the staff might be happy with.

Councillor M Wood referred to the "unfortunate" timing of events, i.e. a review of terms and conditions and a situation where six jobs were at risk.

The Staff Side commented that the Terms and Conditions Review had started earlier this year before the Staff Side knew what the MTFP would be. Savings had been made during the current financial year, but the process had become protracted.

The Director of Internal Services agreed to take the Staff Side's views and report them to the Joint Meeting of Scrutiny Committees later that evening. In summary, that (A) the assumptions in the budget were overly pessimistic, (B) of concerns about job losses, (C) there was a need to look at voluntary redundancies rather than compulsory

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redundancies; and (D) reduced hours and job sharing initiatives be considered as means of achieving savings.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report be received;

(B) the Director of Internal Services be requested to provide the Joint Meeting of Scrutiny committees with a summary of Unison’s comments as detailed above.

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23 TERMS AND CONDITIONS (REPORTS BY THE SECRETARIES TO THE EMPLOYER’S AND THE STAFF SIDE)

The Chairman suggested that with the consent of the Panel, the reports from both the Employer’s and Staff Side should be considered together. This was supported.

The Director of Internal Services advised that both sides had been unable to reach a collective agreement on the Terms and Conditions Review. He referred to the recommended options set out in the report now submitted to either; (A) proceed on the terms and conditions so far through individual consultation, (B1) refer the matter to Human Resources Committee without recommendation or (B2) refer the matter to the Joint Secretaries of the East of England Regional Council to advise / mediate.

The Staff Side referred to staff involvement in the process. The Staff Side stated that negotiations had been concluded and proposals made about savings for terms and conditions when the budget had not been agreed. The Staff Side referred to the clear mandate by staff to reject proposals from the Terms and Conditions review. The Staff Side stated that this was not the time to be discussing such proposals and referred to the impact this would have generally and especially to people living on their own.

The Staff Side referred to the considerable efforts made to reach an agreement and of the meetings with staff which had taken place at both Hertford and Bishop’s Stortford. A

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substantial number of views had been received from both Unison Members and from non members about the proposal. The Staff Side stated that the matter had not been taken lightly and every effort had been made to come to some agreement.

Councillor J O Ranger outlined the background to the 5% local award and that it had now lost its meaning, i.e. to prevent staff from leaving and taking jobs in London. He stated that staff were no longer leaving but that staff had not taken this on board.

The Staff Side confirmed that the 5% local award was pensionable. The Staff Side stated that there had been recessions in the past but this was an “attack” on the Terms and Conditions. No proposals had been put forward by Management to make proposals look attractive to staff. The Staff Side accepted that savings needed to be made but that the attack on the 5% was “like turkeys voting for Christmas”.

Councillor J O Ranger confirmed that the Joint Secretaries had helped Authorities in reaching an agreement and recommended the use of their services. Councillor M Wood supported this approach.

After being put to the vote, the Panel did not support the Employer’s Side recommendation (A) and this was declared LOST.

After being put to the vote, the Panel did not support the Employer’s Side recommendation (B1) and this was declared LOST.

After being put to the vote, the Panel supported the recommendation to refer the matter to the Joint Secretaries of East of England Regional Council to advise/mediate and this was declared CARRIED.

(Councillor M Wood requested that his abstention from voting in relation to Employer’s Side recommendation A be

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recorded).

RESOLVED – that the matter be referred to the Joint Secretaries of the East of England Regional Council to advise / mediate.

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24 DATE OF FUTURE MEETING

RESOLVED – that the next meeting of the Local Joint Panel be held on 18 March 2010 in the Waytemore Room, The Causeway, Bishop’s Stortford.

The meeting closed at 3.30 pm.

Chairman
Date