

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

LOCAL JOINT PANEL – 17 SEPTEMBER 2008

REPORT BY SECRETARY TO THE STAFF SIDE

7(A) ALL STAFF EMAIL FACILITY

RECOMMENDATION – that (A) the decision to withdraw the all staff email facility be rescinded: and

(B) no further amendment to the email policy be made without full consultation with the Staff Side.

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1.0 Purpose/Summary of Report

1.1 To discuss the decision by Corporate Management Team (CMT) to withdraw the facility for all members of staff to send 'all staff' or global emails.

2.0 Contribution to the Council's Corporate Objectives

2.1 Deliver customer focused services by maintaining and developing a well managed and publicly accountable organisation.

3.0 Background

3.1 At the Human Resources Committee of 16 July 2008, the Acceptable Use Policy for Emails was approved, following an earlier recommendation for approval by the Local Joint Panel. The policy was subsequently circulated to all staff so that they could read and understand the Policy and ensure compliance with it. There was no reference made in the Policy to staff not being permitted to send global emails.

3.2 On 15 August, an article appeared in UPDATE stating that the Human Resources Committee had decided, in order to 'combat email fatigue' to withdraw the above facility for all staff and to restrict the use of global emails to Heads of Service, IT, HR and Communications. In future, staff would be required to seek permission from their Head of Service to send a global email. It subsequently transpired that it was a CMT decision and not that of the Human Resources Committee to instruct IT to withdraw this

facility, without any prior discussion with staff.

#### 4.0 Report

4.1 The Staff Side would ask that this decision is rescinded for the reasons outlined below.

4.2 The Email Policy has only recently been approved with no mention of withdrawal of this facility and there has been no opportunity to debate the issue.

4.3 The facility was withdrawn in 2005 and reinstated in 2006 by the Interim Chief Executive - Philip Thomas after he had set up 'Challenge Groups' to try to establish what changes staff would like to see introduced at East Herts to improve morale and service delivery after a lengthy period of dysfunction at senior management level resulting in the departure of the two Executive Directors. Withdrawal of the global email facility was one issue which particularly irritated staff since it showed a lack of trust in them and on 30 May 2006 Philip Thomas sent an email to all staff, explaining that he was reinstating the facility. (Appendix A page 7.4).

4.4 There is no real evidence that 'email fatigue' is caused by global emails sent by staff. At most, staff would receive one a week and these would range from notifications of road accidents to warn staff to avoid a particular stretch of road, to emails about lost items or pieces of correspondence. There was no abuse of the facility or evidence of frivolous or unnecessary emails being sent.

4.5 Staff resent being treated like children and resent the suggestion that they cannot be trusted and need to be controlled by senior managers or the Communications Section. Withdrawing the facility may have been done with the best of intentions and it may be a minor inconvenience but it ignores what has happened in the past and sends a negative and damaging message to staff.

#### 5.0 Consultation

5.1 None took place prior to the decision being taken by CMT. UNISON has had the opportunity to discuss the matter since with HR.

#### 6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 None

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 None

8.0 Human Resource Implications

8.1 As detailed in the report.

Background Papers: None

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