

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
LOCAL JOINT PANEL HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
WEDNESDAY 21 MARCH 2018, AT 2.30 PM

PRESENT: **Employer’s Side**

Councillors A Alder and L Radford

Staff Side (UNISON)

Mr A Stevenson (Chairman) and J Francis

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor P Ruffles

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

- | | |
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| Lorraine Blackburn | - Democratic Services Officer |
| Vicki David | - Human Resources Officer |
| Kate Leeke | - Interim Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development |

15 **GRIEVANCE POLICY – UPDATE**

The Interim Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development submitted a report on a

revised Grievance Policy. The Human Resources (HR) Officer provided a summary of the changes which were needed to bring the policy up to date in terms of best practice and statute. She explained that consultation had been undertaken with UNISON and Leadership Team.

Councillor L Radford sought clarification of the removal of the timeframe with the insertion of wording “without unreasonable delay”. The HR Officer explained that the policy had been amended in line with ACAS best practice.

Councillor A Alder asked that the colour of the flow chart (showing the informal and formal grievance process) be reviewed as she felt the colour blue against black was difficult to read.

Councillor A Alder sought further information on how many grievances were lodged last year pro rota of staff. The Interim Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development explained that she did not believe the Council benchmarked the number of grievances lodged against numbers of staff employed, adding there were good informal processes in place to resolve issues at an early stage. She added that the formal process was available for staff if the informal process had not resolved the grievance.

The Interim Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development commented that staff needed to feel that there was a route to be heard if their manager was not hearing them. She undertook to provide the Members with grievance statistics.

The Panel Chairman commented that the role of UNISON in helping staff resolve grievances was vital, especially at the early stages. The Interim Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said it was important to capture issues of concern early. She did not get the impression that there had been an increase in grievances being lodged.

The Panel recommended to Human Resources Committee, approval of the report, as now detailed.

RECOMMENDED – that (A) the Interim Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development provide Members with statistics on the number of grievances lodged; and

(B) the revised Grievance Policy as now submitted, be approved.

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RECRUITMENT, INDUCTION AND PROBATION POLICY

The Interim Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development submitted a report detailing a revised Recruitment, Induction and Probation Policy. The HR Officer explained that the new policy combined three existing policies: the Recruitment Policy, the Probationary Policy and the Employing and Managing Employees with Disabilities Policy. She provided a summary of the key changes to the policy and procedures.

Councillor L Radford referred to the possibility of “slippage” in terms of managing people from the viewpoint of probation reviews. The HR Officer referred to the probation procedure process set out

within Essential Reference Paper “D” of the report submitted.

The Panel recommended to Human Resources Committee, approval of the report, as now detailed.

RECOMMENDED – that the revised Recruitment, Induction and Probation Policy as now submitted, be approved.

17 CLOSURE OF OFFICES ON CHRISTMAS EVE

The Interim Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development submitted a report inviting Members to support approval of a Policy Statement on the closure of the Council’s offices on 24 December where Christmas day fell on a Tuesday and a recommendation that the Council’s offices be closed on 24 December 2018.

The Interim Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development explained that this issue had initially been raised by a member of staff and had been discussed at Leadership Team. She explained that closure of the offices this year, on 24 December 2018 would be an enforced closure and that staff would have to save a day’s leave (or take leave from a number of options suggested in the report) to accommodate the closure.

It was noted that Stevenage Borough Council (and who shared joint services with East Herts in terms of IT and Revenues and Benefits) had taken a decision to close on 24 December 2018, and that staff had been asked to use a half day’s leave.

The Interim Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development outlined the merits of the proposed closure in terms of health and wellbeing and a family friendly approach and the savings that would be achieved by closing the office. She explained that the issue of service delivery and emergency cover had been considered and could continue to be covered for the additional day. The Interim Head of Human resources and Organisational Development stated that by addressing the issue early allowed staff to plan for the closure.

Councillors A Alder and L Radford were concerned that the enforced closure would mean that the offices would be closed this year for five days and the impact this might have on the Emergency Team including the public perception of the five day closure. She queried whether this would also impact on New Year Bank Holiday arrangements.

The Panel Chairman shared Councillor Alder's concerns.

Councillor Alder suggested that staff could be encouraged to work by offering them double time payments. She explained that she felt that the suggestion to take a day's leave was "hard" on staff and the community and left her feeling conflicted.

The Interim Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development explained that staff had confirmed small footfall numbers over Christmas Eve and that, with advance communication notifying the public of the closure, expectations could be managed.

On the issue of a suggested enhanced payment to staff to work on Christmas Eve, she explained that the closure was on a normal working day, rather than on a day when enhanced rates might apply. The proposal being made was cost neutral to the Council in terms of the pay bill.

The Interim Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development assured the Panel that with advance notification, expectations could be managed.

The Panel recommended approval of the report, subject to confirmation by Officers that:

- appropriate and sufficient arrangements be put in place in terms of emergency cover over the five day holiday period; and**
- the public be provided with advance notification of the proposed closure and given assurances in terms of continuity of service, should an emergency arise during the closure of the offices over the Christmas period.**

RECOMMENDED – that subject to:

- confirmation that appropriate and sufficient arrangements be put in place in terms of emergency cover over the five day holiday period; and**
- assurances being provided that the public would receive advance notification of the proposed closure and given assurances in terms of continuity of service should an emergency arise during the closure of the offices over the**

Christmas period;

(A) the Policy Statement on the closure of Council offices on 24 December where Christmas day falls on a Tuesday be approved; and

(B) the Council offices be closed on 24 December 2018 and staff be required to take time off.

18 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors E Buckmaster, L Haysey, and G McAndrew. Councillor A Alder was substituting for Councillor L Haysey. Apologies were also submitted from Ms F Brown, Ms J Bruce and Mr S Ellis. Ms J Francis was substituting for Ms F Brown.

19 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2017 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The meeting closed at 3.15 pm

Chairman
Date