

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
LOCAL JOINT PANEL HELD IN THE
COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS,
HERTFORD ON WEDNESDAY 13 JUNE
2012, AT 2.30 PM

PRESENT: **Employer's Side**

Councillor Mike Wood (Chairman)
Councillors M Alexander and L Haysey

Staff Side (UNISON)

Mrs J Sharp and Mr A Stevenson

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors J Ranger and P Farley

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lorraine Blackburn	- Democratic Services Officer
Emma Freeman	- Head of People, ICT and Property Services
Alan Madin	- Director of Internal Services
Jaleh Nahvi	- Human Resources Officer
George A Robertson	- Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services

1 **REDUNDANCY AND APPEALS POLICIES**

The Secretary to the Employer's Side submitted a report setting out revisions to the Redundancy and Appeal Policies. The Staff Side expressed concern that they had not had sufficient time to review these policies and the

Bullying and Harassment Policy elsewhere on the agenda. The Secretary to the Employer's Side explained that deadlines in their submission for comment had been observed. Staff Side disagreed adding that there had been very little time – only four working days, to review four difficult and detailed policies in order to give them the time they deserved.

To facilitate debate, the Director of Internal Services suggested that these policies be submitted to Human Resources Committee subject to both sides resolving any anomalies in advance of the meeting. In the event that issues cannot be resolved, then the Policies would be referred back to Local Joint Panel for further consideration.

Staff Side expressed concern regarding proposed changes in the Redundancy Policy to the Multiplier (of 2.6). Concerns were also expressed in relation to paragraph 1.3 of the report now submitted whereby the proposed revised policy would "... not form part of employees' terms and condition of employment".

A Member referred to the statutory minimum and that the Council had improved upon this, adding that East Herts Council was more generous than other Councils. The Secretary to the Employer's Side stated that with shared services, there was a need to review and harmonise policies.

Staff Side expressed concern that the Redundancy and Appeals Policies were more about organisational change and that redundancy issues were given secondary consideration. They urged the Panel to provide UNISON with more time to review the Policies adding that any suggestion to review the multiplier would not be supported, as there was no reason to reduce this. Paul Farley (UNISON Regional Organiser) stated that the multiplier was not too generous as thought by the Employer's Side and that any change would be detrimental to those who might be made redundant.

The Director of Internal Services explained that the Council was looking at anomalies between the three Councils and of the need for consistency between the three Councils. He stated that it was not about reducing the 2.6 multiplier rather having three Councils with “common factors”.

The Panel supported a suggestion that the Redundancy and Appeals polices be submitted to Human Resources Committee, subject to both sides resolving any anomalies in advance of the meeting. In the event that issues could not be resolved then the Policies would be referred back to Local Joint Panel for further consideration.

RECOMMENDED – that the Redundancy and Appeals polices be submitted to Human Resources Committee, subject to both sides resolving any anomalies in advance of the meeting. In the event that issues cannot be resolved, then the Policies be referred back to Local Joint Panel for further consideration.

2 **BULLYING AND HARASSMENT POLICY**

The Secretary to Employer’s Side submitted a report outlining revisions to the Bullying and Harassment Policy and Dignity at Work Statement. The Secretary to the Employer’s Side outlined the key changes.

Staff Side stated that they had been given insufficient time to consider the policy or its implications. To facilitate debate, the Director of Internal Services suggested that these polices be submitted to Human Resources Committee, subject to both sides resolving any anomalies in advance of the meeting. In the event that issues cannot be resolved, then the Polices would be referred back to Local Joint Panel for further consideration.

Staff Side sought clarification on when informal as opposed to formal approaches should be used and of the difficulties managers might face in deciding what constituted bullying or harassment. The Employer's Side referred Members to the report where the use of the formal procedures would apply. Members requested that managers be provided with appropriate training. The Panel supported this suggestion.

Staff Side referred to the Dignity At Work Statement commenting that everyone had a right to be treated with dignity and respect and that this should be included in the Statement.

A Member referred to electronic bullying. The Secretary to the Employer's Side stated that a Social Media Policy would be drafted.

Members supported the suggestion that all complaints (including informal) ones, should be logged.

The Panel supported a suggestion that the Bullying and Harassment Policy, as amended, be submitted to Human Resources Committee, subject to both sides resolving any anomalies in advance of the meeting. In the event that issues cannot be resolved, then the Policy would be referred back to Local Joint Panel for further consideration.

RECOMMENDED – that the Bullying and Harassment Policy be submitted to Human Resources Committee subject to both sides resolving any anomalies in advance of the meeting. In the event that issues cannot be resolved, then the Policy be referred back to Local Joint Panel for further consideration.

3 RECRUITMENT POLICY

The Secretary to the Employer's Side submitted a report

detailing revisions to the Recruitment Policy. It was noted that the Policy had last been updated in 2003.

A Member referred to the use of Manpower which had helped the Council reduce its recruitment costs and to the use of Talent Pools by some organisations. The Secretary to the Employer's Side confirmed that the Council was exploring the use of the regional portal and the facilities it had to offer. Officers would also be exploring what processes were used by both North Herts and Stevenage in terms of recruitment approaches.

Paul Farley referred to cross boundary recruitment approaches by the Police in terms of Cambridge and Bedfordshire. In response to a query concerning positive active recruitment in terms of ethnicity and disability, the Secretary to the Employer's Side confirmed that statistics were monitored.

The Panel supported the revised report.

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

4 REVISED FLEXIBLE WORKING SCHEME

The Secretary to the Employer's Side submitted a report outlining revisions to the Flexible Working Policy. Staff Side referred to the fact that the flexi-time scheme was contractual and concerns were expressed regarding this specific bullet point, set out in the report now submitted. The Secretary to the Employer's Side stated that she was not aware of the exact wording in the original policy and would need to review this. A Member explained the benefits of the flexi-time scheme from an employee and employer's viewpoint.

The Panel supported the suggestion that bullet point seven, in the report now submitted, referring to the flexitime scheme as not being contractual, be deleted.

RECOMMENDED – that the revised Flexible Working Scheme, as now amended, be approved.

5 STAFF AND MEMBER CAR PARKING - REVIEW

The Head of Customer Services and Parking submitted a report outlining a policy for consideration regarding staff and member car parking, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted.

A Member commented on the difficulties in parking at Wallfields when a bowls match was in progress. It was suggested that the layout of the car park be reviewed in order to make more spaces available. The Secretary to the Employer's Side referred to the use of Bentley House car park. She stated that this building was presently unoccupied but this would impact negatively on the Council when the building was occupied. It was noted that staff could use parking at Grange Paddocks free of charge.

The Chairman agreed that the Bentley House building and the summer holidays was having a positive effect in terms of car parking availability.

The Panel recommended support of Option (1), as detailed in the report now submitted, as a policy to be adopted for staff and member car parking.

RECOMMENDED – that the Council adopt Option (1), as detailed in the report now submitted, as a Policy for staff and Member parking.

6 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A Jackson and Brenda Dodkins.

7 MINUTES

It was noted that Chris Clowes had recently resigned from representing the Staff Side (UNISON).

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2011 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

8 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

It was moved by Jane Sharp and seconded by Councillor M Alexander that Councillor M Wood be appointed Chairman for the Civic Year 2012/13. The appointment of Vice Chairman was deferred to the next meeting of the Local Joint Panel.

RESOLVED – that Councillor M Wood be appointed Chairman for the Civic Year 2012/13.

9 RESTRUCTURE UPDATE

The Secretary to the Employer's Side submitted a report providing a summary of the outcomes of all recent restructures including the total number of voluntary and compulsory redundancies, early retirements / resignations resulting from restructures during the civic year 2010/11. In summary, 43 members of staff had left the Council. Staff Side stated that in relation to voluntary redundancies, these people had left the Council because of the move to Hertford. The redundancies were not strictly speaking voluntary since due to personal circumstances e.g. child care arrangements, it was impossible for some individuals to travel to Hertford.

The Panel received the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

10 SENIOR MANAGEMENT APPOINTMENTS, GRADING AND TERMINATION

The Secretary to the Staff Side submitted a report concerning issues which Unison considered relevant to the efficient operation of the organisation which had arisen when the Chief Executive had left the authority by mutual agreement and of how UNISON might support the selection process in appointing senior managers.

Paul Farley (UNISON, Region) explained that UNISON did not have a Branch Secretary at the moment. He explained that the report questioned whether process had been followed and properly applied, i.e. was someone's employment being terminated correctly? He referred to the need to ensure complete transparency in its dealings in such matters. Paul Farley stated that for UNISON to meet potential Chief Officers prior to being interviewed, might be beneficial to all. He was concerned that the Hay Scheme was used to evaluate some staff, but not all.

A Member felt that meeting potential Chief Officers in advance, might be useful for some candidates and would provide the opportunity for them to evaluate whether the Council was for them.

Staff Side expressed concern that the report author had been asked to revise the report and stressed the need for the Staff Side to be totally independent in its dealings.

Staff Side commented on the lack of communication and keeping staff informed about the absence of the Chief Executive. Staff appeared to be kept up to date via the local press. It was acknowledged that the details of the Chief Executive's absence should be kept personal, but that the matter seemed to be shrouded in secrecy.

The Director of Internal Services confirmed that any comments he had made on the Staff Side's report were only suggestions on style rather than substance and he had stressed that it was a decision for UNISON to accept them or

not. He confirmed that due process had been fully complied with throughout, legal advice had been taken and observed. In terms of the Job Evaluation Scheme, he stated that the Local Government Association (LGA) had a scheme which might be helpful for senior appointments and that the merits of this scheme would be assessed against the Hay Scheme.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services confirmed that due process had been followed at all times when the previous Chief Executive had left the council. He pointed out specific statements in the report that were simply factually incorrect and based on conjecture. He was disappointed with the report which he felt was based on ill founded assumptions, gossip and speculation.

Staff Side agreed to the deletion of the second sentence in paragraph 3.2 of the report now submitted.

A Member suggested that the Panel should look forward rather than reflecting on what had happened.

The Secretary to the Employer's Side confirmed that she would continue to look at the Hay Scheme and the LGA Scheme and evaluate the merits of both. Staff Side confirmed that the integrity of the scheme needed to be observed and applied to the whole of the organisation.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report be noted;

(B) Staff Side's preference for the Hay Scheme be noted and be taken into account in determining future arrangements for the evaluation of Chief Officer and heads of service posts; and

(C) Consideration be given as to how staff might be engaged in Chief Officer appointments to allow candidates to gain a fuller understanding of the Council

The meeting closed at 4.30 pm

Chairman

Date