

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
LOCAL JOINT PANEL HELD IN
ROOM 27, WALLFIELDS, PEGS LANE,
HERTFORD ON MONDAY 16 JANUARY
2006 AT 2.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor M G Carver (Chairman).
Councillors H G S Banks, A P Jackson and
M Wood.

Staff Side (UNISON)

Robert Ball, Chris Cooper Jane Sharp,
Andy Stevenson.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Philip Thomas	- Interim Executive Director
Lorraine Blackburn	- Committee Secretary
Rosemary Jones	- Human Resources Officer
Jeff Self	- Interim Human Resources Manager
Georgina Stanton	- Director of Organisational Development

7 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Jeff Self and Rosemary Jones to the meeting.

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Interim Executive Director commented that he was in the process of reviewing the Council's Constitution and would be reporting back. Secondly, that the advertisement for the appointment of Chief Executive had appeared in the Local Government Chronicle. So far the site had received 31 "hits".

ACTIONRECOMMENDED ITEMSACTION**8 HARASSMENT AND BULLYING AT WORK POLICY**

The Secretary to the Employer's side, submitted a report which provided an update on the negotiations on the revised Harassment and Bullying at Work Policy.

It was noted that UNISON and the Employer's Side, had reached agreement, in the main, on the principles of the Policy, but that the wording needed finalising.

Members sought assurances that the necessary "checks and balances" were in place to ensure that the investigating officer could be monitored. The Interim Human Resources Manager commented that the Investigating Officer's Terms of Reference in relation to a complaint, would be very specific. If there was a need to vary the Terms of Reference, then separate permission would need to be sought.

The Interim Executive Director requested that paragraph 2.11 of the report now submitted, be amended so that it was clear that harassment could be perpetrated against people of the opposite or same gender.

The role of the investigator and the investigation process was explained. It was noted that these individuals would be from either internal sources (if there were sufficient volunteers), or sourced externally. Training would be provided.

It was hoped that the report could be presented to the Executive without delay.

The Secretary to the Staff Side commented that the final report should be referred to the Local Joint Panel in order to confirm the final wording. UNISON

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commented that training and implementation were issues which required further consideration. It was suggested that as a way forward, a “Letter of Agreement” could be prepared whereby UNISON and the Employer’s Side would have the opportunity of confirming that they were both in agreement in relation to the final wording of the Policy.

The Panel noted that there was agreement, in principle, with the main document and that the process of implementation and training needed further consideration. The Policy should initially be submitted to the Executive then to Council for approval.

UNISON sought assurances that the Staff Side would be provided with a copy of the final Policy and that if no signatures were obtained in the “Letter of Agreement”, then the matter would be submitted to Local Joint Panel. It was suggested that this could be addressed by the inclusion, in the policy of a further paragraph confirming that UNISON and the Staff Side had agreed the final Policy.

RECOMMENDED – that (A) the report be noted;

(B) the Policy be agreed in principle and that the revised version, when finalised and agreed in writing by both parties, be submitted to the Executive and then to Council; and DOD

(C) the implementation and training aspect of the Policy be agreed by both parties via a Letter of Agreement. In the event that a Letter of Agreement was not signed by either party, then the Local Joint Panel be convened to consider the matter. DOD

ACTION**9 REVIEW OF PROGRESS IN HUMAN RESOURCE (HR) POLICIES AND PROCEDURES AUTUMN 2005**

The Secretary to the Employer's side submitted a report which, following a review of a number of human resources (HR) policies, identified a number of problems, in that a number of statutory and other requirements had not been incorporated into existing policies. In the light of this, the Interim Head of HR had begun a process of redrafting a number of policies to ensure that they were fit for purpose. Additionally, there was uncertainty in relation to which policy was the most current and whether decisions had been taken to adopt a particular version.

Three of the Policies in question were:

- The Data Protection Policy
- The Grievance Policy and Procedure
- The Ending of Fixed Term Contracts Procedure

The Local Joint Panel noted the previous procedure in relation to the Grievance and Ending of Fixed Term Contracts Procedures and hearing appeals. This was set out in the report, now submitted. It was noted however, that UNISON wished to retain the right for all staff to have an appeal heard by Members, regardless of who took the previous decisions.

Alternative options for hearing appeals were outlined.

The Secretary for the Staff Side commented that there should be a consistent approach to all policies and that all procedures needed to state who would hear an appeal. Concern was expressed that the same person could be hearing the appeal twice. The Secretary to the Staff Side also commented that the appellant needed to be assured that the person hearing the

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appeal, was entirely independent and had no relationship with any managers previously involved. She felt that, having an independent group of people who did not work closely with the appellant was perceived by the appellant to be a fairer and more appropriate process. It was possible to get different views and so the aggrieved felt the process to be more fair.

The Interim Executive Director commented on the Local Government Act 2000 and the involvement of members in the appointment of Directors and Chief Executives. He felt that the appeals process should be brought in line with that of recruitment. It was confirmed however, that there were no legal reasons why Members could not hear appeals.

It was noted that the Interim Executive Director was in the process of reviewing the Council's Constitution and its management.

The Chairman commented that he felt that it was important as Members, to detach themselves from the management process.

A Member commented that at this point in time, many back benchers felt isolated from the decision making process and enjoyed being part of that process.

The Secretary to the Staff Side reminded the Panel that there was a grievance procedure which had been agreed by both sides and that the existing system should be retained.

It was noted that there were some cases outstanding and confusion as to how these cases should be processed. Clarification was sought on this issue from the Interim Head of HR. The Director of Organisational Development suggested that this issue should be debated further with UNISON at one of the regular monthly meetings. DOD

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RECOMMENDED – that (A) the Data Protection Policy attached as Appendix ? to the report now submitted, be approved; and

(B) Members of Human Resources Sub-Committee be consulted as to whether Members wanted to be involved in the Appeals Process and that this issue be reported back to Local Joint Panel.

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RESOLVED ITEMS8 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISINGa) Grange Paddocks Car Park

It was noted that a further report would be presented to Capital Strategy Group. Further information was awaited in terms of the number of staff actually using the car park. It was anticipated that the survey of the car park could be undertaken in relation to the Council's Green Travel Plan.

CCTV had now been installed. Concern was expressed concerning the location of the camera especially in the summer when trees would be in full leaf. The Panel was informed that a report was due to be produced as a result of a training session by officers of the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme, which would include recommendations to improve security and safety in the Grange Paddocks area. The report would be forwarded to Will O'Neill and Peter Dickinson.

With regard to the condition of the riverside footpath and possible opportunities to improve the footpath for recreational uses, the Director of Organisational Development undertook to prepare a letter, in consultation with UNISON, to the Town Council on behalf of the Leader.

ACTIONb) Flexible working – work life balance strategy

The Director of Organisational Development commented that there were issues concerning remote working and working from home which required further consideration from a safety and security viewpoint. This was being investigated further.

Bids for new servers were being made to Capital Strategy Group. It was anticipated that the new structure could be rolled out in the next financial year.

RESOLVED – that (A) the minutes of the meeting held on? be signed as a correct record;

(B) the location of the CCTV camera be reviewed and the report be forwarded to Will O'Neill and Peter Dickenson; and

DOD

(C) a letter be prepared in consultation with UNISON to the Town Council and on behalf of the Leader.

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9 MINUTES OF THE SAFETY COMMITTEE HELD ON 31 OCTOBER AND 19 DECEMBER 2005

The Minutes of the Safety Committee held on 31 October and 19 December 2005 were received.

It was noted that in terms of the “who’s who”, Heads of Service had safety liaison responsibilities built into their Job Descriptions.

10 CAUTIONARY PERSONS REGISTER

The Secretary to the Employer’s Side submitted a report concerning improvements for recording information about cautionary persons and timely access to that information.

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It was noted that the system had been improved, that designated officers had a secure password access to the register and that procedures were now in place to minimise any delay in accessing the information.

RESOLVED - that the report be noted.

11 ON LINE DISPLAY SCREEN AND WORKSTATION ASSESSMENT

The Secretary to the Employer's Side submitted a report providing an update in relation to assessing the safety of all users of display screen equipment and the use of trained assessors, to ensure that health and safety requirements were adhered to.

It was noted that assessments needed to be carried out annually and that additional assessors needed to be identified to support the continued programme of improvement.

The Panel sought assurance that the health and safety requirements could extend to Members as well as staff. The Director of Organisational Development undertook to extend the brief to Members.

RESOLVED – (A) that the report be noted;

(B) the health and safety requirements for assessing the safety of all users of display screen equipment be extended to Members.

DOD

12 EVACUATION CHAIR

The Secretary to the Employer's Side submitted a report advising that the Evacuation Chairs, purchased in the early 1980s, were no longer viable to use and should be replaced. Capital Bids were being prepared to upgrade the equipment at both Wallfields and Bishop's Stortford.

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RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

13 HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELFARE TEAM

The Secretary to the Employer’s Side submitted a report concerning the work of the Health, Safety and Welfare Team which was established to provide a comprehensive safety service to all sections of the Council. It was noted that the Director of Organisational Development had undertaken the responsibility for restructuring the team, its direction and function.

The Membership, made up entirely of officers was noted. It was suggested that an Executive Member could be invited to act as “Champion”. The Chairman undertook to progress this matter

RESOLVED – that (A) the report be noted; and

(B) the Chairman be requested to seek comments from Executive Members who might wish to act as a “Champion”.

Cllr M G
Carver

14 REVIEW OF CATERING ARRANGEMENTS

The Secretary to the Staff Side submitted a report concerning the current catering arrangements and requesting that the Directors Board recommendation be put on hold for a minimum of six months.

The Secretary to the Staff Side commented that following extensive consultation, 60% of Bishops Stortford staff requested that the existing arrangements continue. Despite this, a decision had been taken to withdraw the trolley service and vending machine at Bishop’s Stortford and the filter coffee making facilities at Wallfields.

The Secretary to the Staff Side commented that changes to withdraw the trolley service and vending machine at Bishop’s Stortford would affect already low morale,

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particularly by Bishop's Stortford staff.

The Secretary to the Staff Side requested that the trolley service remain until the full implications and risk assessments had been conducted. She commented on the refreshment arrangements at both sites and the absence of parity. The suggestion of tea points / vending machines on all floors at Bishop's Stortford was discussed.

Panel Members felt that Directors Board had already debated this issue and that there was no reason to defer this further.

RESOLVED – that (A) the recommendations made at Directors Board be progressed; and

(B) the possibility of installing tea points and vending machines on every floor at Bishop's Stortford be investigated further.

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15 FUTURE SITE OF COUNCIL OFFICES

The Secretary to the Staff Side submitted a report seeking clarification on the future siting of East Herts Council Offices given that the relocation of the Offices had been raised a number of times and more recently mentioned at a number of Team Brief meetings.

The Interim Executive Director assured the Staff Side that no decision had been made regarding the relocation of the offices, but that a feasibility study was due to be completed this month, the results of which would be made available to staff. He commented that a feasibility study might identify several options but could also conclude that relocation to one site may not be viable. As soon as the study was concluded, a decision would be made on how to progress the matter.

It was agreed that staff would be kept informed of any new developments in respect of this matter.

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Concern was expressed regarding the level of the reception desk at Bishop's Stortford. Members sought clarification that the requisite health and safety issues had been observed . The Director of Organisational Development confirmed that the plans had been drawn up and widely circulated and conformed to all health, safety and audit requirements including the recent Disability and Discrimination Act.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 3.45 pm.