

AGENDA ITEM 11

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
LOCAL JOINT PANEL HELD IN THE
COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS,
PEGS LANE, HERTFORD, BISHOP'S
STORTFORD ON WEDNESDAY
17 JUNE 2009 AT 2.30PM

PRESENT: Employer's Side

Councillor M R Alexander (Chairman).
Councillors A P Jackson, S Rutland-Barsby, M
Wood.

Staff Side (UNISON)

Chris Clowes (Vice Chairman), Chris Cooper
Jane Sharp, Andy Stevenson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor D A A Peek.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lorraine Blackburn	- Committee Secretary
Emma Freeman	- Head of People and Organisational Services
Philip Hamberger	- Programme Director of Change
Alan Madin	- Director of Internal Services
Graham Mully	- Risk Assurance Officer
Martin Shrosbree	- Head of Property Services

RECOMMENDED ITEMS

1 REVISED HUMAN RESOURCES POLICIES

The Secretary to the Employer's Side submitted a report updating policies in relation to Absence Management, Managing Performance (Capability), Disciplinary and Grievance Policies and the new Appeals Policy. These were attached to the report now submitted. The policies had been reviewed as a result of the new Employment Act 2008. Arrangements were in place to ensure that the policies would be reviewed every two years or sooner, should there be changes in legislation.

The Disciplinary and Grievance procedures had been updated to reflect best practice and revisions to the ACAS Code of Practice. Absence Management and Managing Performance had been updated to reflect best practice and relevant employment legislation. A new Appeals Policy provided a standardised appeals procedure, including a right of appeal.

The Secretary to the Employer's Side commented that consultation had taken place with Unison and Heads of Service. Overall, the policies were thought to be easier and quicker to use and reflected best practice and legislation. Training would be given to managers. The report would be submitted to Human Resources Committee for approval and adoption.

On the issue of Grievance Hearings, the Staff Side expressed concern that a Head of Service originally involved in an issue at the informal stage, might then be asked to hear a case formally and of the potential for conflict this might create. The Staff Side suggested that asking a Director to hear a case would reassure staff of the fairness of proceedings. The point was made that a Head of Service might be reluctant to

ACTION

“over-rule” another Head of Service’s opinion. The Secretary to the Staff Side commented that ACAS recommended that in such situations, senior members of staff, such as those at Director level, should be used. She commented that the previous process involved Directors and a Panel, but that this process was gradually being referred to a lower level. She commented on the need to ensure independence in coming to a fair decision.

The Secretary to the Employer’s Side commented that Heads of Service would be independent in coming to a fair decision. This process now allowed a grievance to go up another level as necessary. She hoped that the process would be operated in a fair and independent way.

Councillor A P Jackson commented that this would be part of the training and operation processes.

The Panel supported the principle of a Head of Service hearing a grievance, but felt that should a grievance be progressed further, then this should not involve the original Head of Service. The Panel requested that the policies be reviewed in 12 months.

The Panel supported the revised Human Resources Policies and new Appeals Policy as amended, for approval and adoption by Human Resources Committee.

RECOMMENDED – that the revised Human Resources Policies as amended be approved and adopted and that the policies be reviewed in 12 months.

DIS

2 PEOPLE STRATEGY 2009-2012

The Secretary to the Employer’s Side submitted a report on the development of a People Strategy, which would support the Council’s framework for the delivery

ACTION

of people management over the next three years. There were seven key objectives which aimed to ensure that the work of Human Resources is closely aligned to the Council's objectives. The HR Service Plan 09/10 priorities that support the delivery of the People Strategy are:

- Support management action to mitigate pressures;
- Support the success of the C3W Programme;
- Integrate workforce planning;
- Support development of a performance culture;
- To work in partnership;
- To continue to improve the service the Council provides;

Reports would be submitted to Corporate Management Team (CMT) and Human Resources Committee on an annual basis, to demonstrate the difference being made to the Council as a result of implementation of the strategy.

The Secretary to the Employer's side explained that in terms of Equality and Diversity and Health and Safety, other Council strategies and policies addressed these issues, and as such, they had not been detailed within the People Strategy. The Panel supported a request that links and cross referencing to other relevant Council policies be included as necessary.

The Secretary to the Employer's side commented that Unison welcomed the Strategy as detailed in the report now submitted and supported its adoption.

The Panel supported the People Strategy 2009-2012 as

ACTION

now submitted.

RECOMMENDED – that the People Strategy 2009-2012 as now submitted be approved.

DIS

RESOLVED ITEMS

3 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED – that (A) Councillor M R Alexander be appointed Chairman for the Civic Year 2009/10; and

(B) Chris Clowes be appointed Vice Chairman for the Civic Year 2009/10.

4 MINUTES

Councillor S Rutland-Barsby sought clarification on the “All Staff Email” facility. It was noted that this issue, had, in the main, been resolved.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2009 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4 SAFETY COMMITTEE – MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1 APRIL 2009

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 1 April 2009 be received.

5 PROPOSED WALLFIELDS FLOOR PLANS

The Secretary to the Staff Side submitted a report querying the potential health, safety and amenity implications on the proposed floor plans and sought assurances that the plans would be thoroughly risk assessed before being approved. The Secretary to the Staff Side expressed concern that the space allocation per person, with increased numbers, could lead to risks to the health and safety of employees as well

ACTION

as engendering a negative view of the Council. Further information was requested on the temporary relocation of staff to facilitate the refurbishment work.

An extract from the IPD Occupiers, (Consulting on behalf of the Office of Government Commerce), attached as an appendix to the report now submitted, set out a minimum standard of 10 square metres per person for new or refurbished offices. The proposed plans as per Paragon's space allocation indicated that the space allocation ranged from 4.2 square metres on the second floor to 5.1 on the ground floor and 5.5 square metres on the first floor. Of additional concern to the Staff Side, was the issue of storage and of a proposal to allocate large offices to Heads of Service.

The Secretary to the Staff Side commented that Unison had met with the Programme Director for Change. The Secretary to the Staff Side wished to establish how Paragon had calculated desk space allocation and to establish how much space staff had been allocated. No response had been received from Paragon. She commented that the health and safety approved code of practice associated with the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 recommended that each employee should have 11 cubic metres excluding furniture, and that the document attached to the report now submitted, recommended 12 square metres per person. Reassurances were sought that the space allocated complied with health and safety and that risk assessments would be carried out. The Secretary to the Staff Side commented that no consultation had been carried out on the floor plans as proposed. The issue of accessing reception via revenues was of concern.

ACTION

The Programme Director of Change assured the Staff Side that the plans were not intended to be definitive and that the consultation was an “outline” to establish whether the right people were in the right places. He commented that more consultation would take place and that the anticipated fourth draft of proposals, would include provision for consultation with Unison and Staff before the final draft was prepared. The Health and Safety Officer will also be consulted.

The Programme Director of Change commented that 12 square metres was not a statutory figure and that the document referred to had been commissioned by the Office for Government to highlight the need to reduce the amount of office space per person. He stressed that 10-12 square metres was not a minimum requirement, and includes corridors, meeting rooms etc. The Programme Director of Change commented that British Standard Fire Regulations stated 5 square metres. He commented that Bath Council had implemented a minimum of 8 cubic metres and Leeds University 7.5 cubic metres per person.

Councillor A P Jackson queried why the report had been submitted to the Panel, as there was still a great deal of consultation to undertake. He commented that it was a function of the Panel to consider issues which could not be resolved and at this stage, the Panel should not be involved in the process. He did not support recommendation (B) concerning the submission of the space allocation. Councillor A P Jackson sought assurances that the Council was not breaking the law and that best practice would be observed.

ACTION

The Staff Side commented that according to the timetable referred to by the Programme Director of Change, Unison would not be asked for comments until the fourth draft of proposals had been prepared. The Vice Chairman commented that this might not be the forum for discussion, but was concerned that meaningful and timely consultation should take place with Unison.

The Programme Director of Change commented on a number of user groups established to facilitate discussion on the proposals. He commented that he was happy to continue to have ongoing dialogue with Unison. The Secretary to the Employer's Side supported ongoing discussions.

The Secretary to the Staff Side sought clarification in relation to Paragon's allocation of space per individual and per work station. The Programme Director of Change was unable to provide this. He reiterated that the floor plans were a first draft and that the Council would adhere to all legal requirements. He commented that a set of plans had been produced as a layout to establish how staff and services would fit in and commented that services would have different requirements.

The Head of Property commented that the plans submitted had been produced a year ago and that Paragon had acted as a drafting arrangement to allow the Council to establish a profile. He commented that the Council was reviewing services and their relationship with each other.

Councillor M R Alexander commented that it was difficult to assess the drawings as presented and commented on the useful role of the user groups.

Councillor A P Jackson commented that the role of the Panel was to resolve outstanding issues. He commented that the Panel should not immerse itself in detail.

The Programme Director of Change reiterated that health

ACTION

and safety was an integral part of the process.

RESOLVED – that a full risk assessment of the proposed floor plans for Wallfields be carried out before the plans are finalised.

6 HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK ACT 1974

The Risk Assurance Officer reported that good progress was still being made following the health and safety audit. The Health and Safety Policy was currently under review with the aim of completing in October 2009. Generic risk assessments had been prepared for a comprehensive range of topics, and were being trialled before launching to all services.

RESOLVED – that the update be noted.

7 DATE OF FUTURE MEETING

RESOLVED – that the next meeting of the Local Joint Panel be held on 16 September 2009 at 2.30pm in the Council Chamber, Wallfields, Hertford.

The meeting closed at 3.25 pm.

Chairman
Date