

Feedback from UNISON Members

1. Financial Case

"I just don't think that all the information is being laid on the table and the economic climate is being used by the Council to collect on something it's had its eye for some time ie the 5% award and the car lease scheme."

"I would like to raise the strongest objection to them as possible, as I believe that this proposal is trying to take advantage of the current economic situation to force changes upon the staff and I think this is the thin end of the wedge that they have planned."

"In the letter to staff dated 15th October the council says "collective agreement" is their "preferred position as this would shorten the uncertainty for all of us..." As a member of staff, I did not feel uncertain until this aggressive move was made by management. I would feel better if we had a longer period of consultation with better considered proposals that show true savings. I would like to see what other savings have been achieved or are being considered – surely cutting staff benefits should be a final option for making savings not a starting point. I have not heard anything that convinces me that rushing through these proposals will end any sense of uncertainty."

"Like most staff I do not feel motivated or valued by 'the management'..... I agree that there has been no information/evidence given to staff as to the critical financial situation of the council, and therefore we are being asked to take a pay cut without knowing the real facts."

"I was at the meeting but I just wanted clarified that when the proposal is rejected, would it be mentioned that we are disappointed that the employer has not given really told us how exactly these budget cuts will help the council in the long term etc. I think some of us may be a little more open to compromise if we could see exactly how the council would benefit."

"The media have hyped the current economic climate considerably and whilst there is no doubt that there have been some serious implications to some businesses, it is not clear to me that the Council is currently in such serious financial trouble that it should take such drastic action to reduce wages and conditions for its employees."

I would accept that it is better to act responsibly and prepare for proposed cut backs in central funding that have been predicted but the Council has not demonstrated to Unison that there are no other viable alternatives to cutting wages.

Staff at East Herts Council work hard and provide an excellent service to residents. I have seen no evidence that our customers will "expect" to see cuts in wages for Council staff as Anne suggested just because there are companies that are currently doing so. There is a stronger argument I think for emphasising how hard staff work and that they often receive lower wages already than their counterparts in private industry. Some of the companies that have been letting staff go and cutting wages may well have already been performing poorly and may have no alternative for their ultimate survival. East Herts Council is not in that position. It has in fact been performing well according to government indicators."

"Firstly, I fully appreciate the financial position of the Council and understand they have to make savings."

I'd rather see the 5% suspended for a year or two then re-instated than lost all together. However, if it has to be lost, I think their proposal is the least painful option, although could go on for more than the 3-4 years mentioned in the report you sent."

I would like to see clearer definitions for those getting essential users allowance."

"I can't understand why the Council is incurring all this expense moving at this point in time if the budget is so tight and in deficit. I know that a clever play with figures can present whatever situation you want it to present, but I really cannot understand why now, after so many years of prevarication this has been steamed rolled forward like there is no tomorrow."

"If a ballot was not possible and I had to make a decision I would accept (the) proposals as negotiated."

2. **No offers forthcoming in compensation for the proposed changes, in terms of future job or salary protection**

“There appears to be no give, only take. An offer to increase the flexi days to 2 days per month or a guarantee of no redundancies may give the staff some motivation to accept a cut.”

“In light of our move to Wallfields (which most of us located in B/S are not happy about) you would have thought that instead of trying to alienate staff members at this crucial stage they would have wanted to keep us on side so that the transition goes as smoothly as possible, then further down the line if the finances are going to be an issue then look at various options to help reduce the debt.

With the extra driving time each day most people will loose out on approx. 5 hrs, let alone the parking problems..... Which could result in people having to pay to park therefore we loose out financially again!!!

This process should surely be ‘give and take’ NOT TAKE.”

“There are no guarantees of job security or phasing the awards back in when inflation and interest rates rise and we all feel the pinch while the council enjoys better interest rates on the monies squirreled away years ago.”

3. **No incentive for collective agreement**

“I’m very concerned with a proposal to implement changes “with or without staff agreement”. I am also very concerned that if staff don’t agree to new contracts, then effectively staff will have effectively dismissed themselves.”

“Perhaps we could all take a pay freeze as per our directors if we are all given their salaries!”

“**Seems to me like bullying tactics** – We’re in a catch 22 we either go along with their proposals or else!”

“I would like to reiterate that we should not accept any degradation of our terms and conditions.”

4. **Lack of affordability/ pension implications**

“Losing 5% may not be a lot when you’re on a Chief Officer grade or have two incomes, but the loss of 5% over a period of time is effectively a pay freeze especially when you consider the substantial increases utility companies impose at will etc.”

“The (reduction of the) 5% is bad news for me and as it would be included in last final salary it impacts on my pension – but my main gripe - ‘is it fair’ ?”

“I feel very strongly about effectively taking a pay cut of any sort, especially from ‘discounting’ the Local Award. Personally I am effectively losing money every year as I am at the top of my scale and percentage pay rises over the past years has not kept up with inflation or other cost of living rises. It is a shame the 5% was not incorporated into our wages as it was with CE and Directors.

5. **Fear for future terms and conditions**

“I feel that if we accept these changes they will see the staff as a soft target and will impose other changes onto the staff without any regard to their well being or welfare. I therefore feel we must object to this proposal unless we can have some sort of assurances for the future.”

“If staff agree to these proposals where does it stop? I very much doubt that Staff would be able to stop the bus once the inertia of change has been established and its charging along in 5th gear accommodating all of management’s wishes!!!”

6. Failure to award loyalty and demonstrate recognition of staff worth

“The economic climate places everyone in a precarious situation and especially those on one income. I have to say that I cannot help feel that management briefings are making me feel “grateful to have a job” – management approach is almost Dickensian in that approach and its making me feel very uncomfortable.”

“It’s not only de-motivating and demoralising it’s like a slap in the face for being loyal and professional..... It’s all one way – staff are expendable and that message is being made clear.”

“I am angry at the way this whole issue has been handled by senior management, from the wide-sweeping choice of cost-cutting measures that seems to be ineffective at addressing the deficit; the poorly worded letter from HR and the complete and utter lack of respect for staff. We are constantly told that this council is service-orientated but the quality of service being provided by the vast majority of staff is being rewarded with a slap in the face. The whole lease car fiasco may actually cost the council more money. It just doesn’t add up.”

“Like most staff I do not feel motivated or valued by ‘the management’..... I agree that there has been no information/evidence given to staff as to the critical financial situation of the council, and therefore we are being asked to take a pay cut without knowing the real facts.”

“Staff at East Herts Council work hard and provide an excellent service to residents. I have seen no evidence that our customers will "expect" to see cuts in wages for Council staff as Anne suggested just because there are companies that are currently doing so. There is a stronger argument I think for emphasising how hard staff work and that they often receive lower wages already than their counterparts in private industry. Some of the companies that have been letting staff go and cutting wages may well have already been performing poorly and may have no alternative for their ultimate survival. East Herts Council is not in that position. It has in fact been performing well according to government indicators.”

“.....The reason we do this though (work over our contracted hours) is through commitment to the service that we provide and because we gain satisfaction from doing a good job. Not only would it go against the grain to do only half a job, there would be a real fear that we would be simply making our lives harder in the long run. The work never goes away! I'm not sure whether anybody else counts up their lost hours after they carry over the maximum 8 hours, perhaps it would be worth researching this and presenting the info to our employers?”

”we should send a clear message that it is not acceptable to find savings from salaries budgets when there are still other alternatives. If the time ever comes when the Council is in serious difficulties, then it should look at services overall and discuss voluntary redundancies with the Union. Wage cuts should only ever be a last resort!”