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Chairman and Members of the Local
Joint Panel

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Joint Panel agenda

Our ref:
Date: 8July 2011

Dear Councillor

LOCAL JOINT PANEL - 13 JULY 2011

Please find attached the following reports which were marked "to follow" on the agenda for the above meeting:

6. Report by the Secretary to the Staff Side - Staff Car Parking (Pages 3 - 6)

Please bring these papers with you to the meeting next Wednesday

Yours faithfully

Lorraine Blackburn
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MEETING : LOCAL JOINT PANEL
VENUE : COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD
DATE : WEDNESDAY 13 JULY 2011
TIME : 2.00 PM

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REPORT BY SECRETARY TO THE STAFF SIDE:

UNISON Response to Report on Staff Car Parking Arrangements

UNISON, although welcoming the chance to comment about the options on staff car parking arrangement would question why this matter is only being discussed at this eleventh hour. The Council has been aware that car parking was probably the most emotive and common concern raised by staff as soon as relocation to Hertford was proposed and yet here we are trying to resolve the matter one month before staff will be moving from Bishop's Stortford to Hertford.

There is only one viable option outlined in the report as far as UNISON is concerned and that is that staff should be able to park free of charge in long stay car parks in Hertford or Bishop's Stortford (Gascoyne Way car park in Hertford would cause the least disruption for staff), for all the reasons outlined in the report. Anything short of this is likely to lead to huge resentment on the part of staff at a time when less favourable terms and conditions have been imposed, staffing levels are at an all time low and staffs are unlikely to see any sort of pay rise for the foreseeable future. Inflation is currently at 5% and pensions are under attack yet again. A charge for car parking would be the final straw and lead to a huge loss in morale and motivation which would negatively impact on service delivery and potentially could lead to industrial action. UNISON would argue strongly that free car parking is a contractual right and any imposition of a charge would be in breach of contract.

A reduced charge is a half way house which both impacts negatively on staff and would do nothing to counteract the misguided argument that council employees would still be getting free car parking spaces. Although UNISON can see the benefit in having a fund that supports transportation improvements, in reality this is unlikely to lead to any significant improvements and would be extremely difficult to administer in an equitable and non-discriminatory way.

Parity for staff in Bishop's Stortford

There will be approximately 40 staff working in Bishop's Stortford and only seven spaces at Charringtons House. This immediately raises problems for these staff since even if the Council decides to retain the existing contractual benefit of free parking, there are unlikely to be any spaces from April 2010 when Grange Paddocks becomes a charging long stay car park, along with Elm Road. With only a total of 280 long stay places in the whole of Bishop's Stortford, this woefully inadequate provision will leave many town centre employees with no parking. Only those who arrive before 8:00am are likely to obtain spaces. UNISON would ask the Council to reconsider the decision to re-designate Northgate End and the Causeway as short stay, when there is clearly a demand for more long stay car parking.

Expecting Bishop's Stortford staff to pay for the privilege of a 10 minute walk into town is adding insult to injury, particularly given the history of car parking issues in Stortford. Those employees whose time is pressing due to child care arrangements or other reasons will not even have the option to pay for convenient parking.

Council Members

UNISON believes that council members should be treated in exactly the same way as staff. The seven spaces at Charringtons should not be designated for their use unless members are disabled or dropping off heavy loads. In Hertford, members should be expected to use public car parks for long stay, unless spaces are available in the designated area of the main Wallfields car park.

Green Travel

UNISON fully supports any green travel initiatives and believes that more could be done to encourage local employees to walk or cycle to work. Incentives should be given to employees to leave their cars at home if employees have viable alternative travel options. However, at the same time it is necessary to recognise the limitations of public transport in the East Herts area and to accept that many employees have no alternative but to use their cars to travel to work. Car sharing has been put forward as way for staff to get to work. Car sharing is a good idea in principle. However flexible working means many staff will not work comparable hours, thus reducing the opportunities for car sharing. Car sharing also operates on mutual trust, something no one should have to rely on as a means of travel to work. Public transport travel has also been put forward as a way of reducing car dependence. We live in an area devoid of a reliable public transport system; many bus routes are being scaled down or removed altogether. Even if a reliable alternative was available, the disturbance allowance prohibits the buying of an annual pass. The disturbance allowance will only pay for days worked, this means the annual pass would become a charge to staff members on non working days.

Comments

UNISON appreciates the validity of many of the comments from the user group and recognises that there is always a case to be made by virtually every group of employees. It must not be forgotten that many employees do not have a choice but to drive to work, even if they do not require a vehicle for council business. Public transport or car sharing is not an option for most employees and for many staff previously based at Bishop's Stortford, they will be doubling their journey, doubling the cost of travel and commuter time and increasing their stress levels.

Conclusions

Some of the above problems cannot be alleviated but UNISON would ask the Council to at least help employees by enabling them to retain their existing contractual right to free car parking, whether this is in Hertford or in Bishop's Stortford. There will be no cost to council tax payers for all the reasons outlined in the report if employees use the public car parks for overspill parking. There will however be a cost to employee morale and good will if the current benefit ends.

Should the free parking that has been available to staff for many years be withdrawn, Unison will have no choice but to consider pursuing an ET claim for breach of contract. Free parking is a contractual right as determined by custom and practice.

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