

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
LOCAL JOINT PANEL HELD IN THE
COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS,
HERTFORD ON TUESDAY 6 DECEMBER
2011, AT 2.30 PM

PRESENT: **Employer's Side**

Councillor M Wood (Chairman)
Councillors M Alexander, L Haysey and
J Ranger

Staff Side (UNISON)

Mr C Clowes, Mrs B Dodkins, Mrs J Sharp
and Mr A Stevenson

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Valdis Belinis	- Community Planning Officer
Lorraine Blackburn	- Committee Secretary
Emma Freeman	- Head of People and Organisational Services
Alan Madin	- Director of Internal Services

15 **VOLUNTEERING POLICY**

The Secretary to the Employer's Side submitted a report introducing a volunteering policy. The report set out the legal status of volunteers and the benefits to both the Council and the volunteer, in contributing to the local community. The report provided feedback on a

volunteering pilot at Hertford Theatre where volunteers were asked to “meet and greet”, steward shows and sell merchandise. The Secretary to the Employer’s Side assured Members that appropriate CRB checks would be made on the volunteers as necessary.

A Member hoped that the policy would have a “light touch” so that the approach was not encumbered by Local Government Policy. It was also hoped that jobs which could “benefit the Council” could be defined more specifically. The Chairman stated that running the Rhodes Complex in Bishop’s Stortford relied on some 35 volunteers.

The Secretary to the Staff Side agreed that there was a place for volunteers, but would not wish to see them substituted for employees and that the Council should not become reliant on them. The Panel considered instances where and how volunteers could be used.

Members supported the recommendation that the Volunteering Policy be approved.

RECOMMENDED - that the new Volunteering Policy, as now submitted, be approved.

16 **RETIREMENT POLICY - UPDATE**

The Secretary to the Employer’s Side submitted a revised Retirement Policy report which had been updated to reflect key changes which were set out in the report now submitted. Following a query by a Member, concerning “benefits” for those under 55, it was agreed that the draft report should be amended to clarify this point.

The Secretary to the Staff Side expressed concern regarding paragraph 4.4 set out in the report now submitted and preferred to see the wording “does not generally” added. The Director of Internal Services stated that the retirement policy was a general policy and that there may be special reasons which may, from time

to time, need be taken into account and that the Council should retain discretion to look at individual cases. The issue of “added years” was discussed. The Director stated that in 99.9% of cases the general policy would apply.

The Panel supported the suggestion that paragraph 4.4 be removed and that the content of paragraph 6.4 be clarified.

RECOMMENDED – that the revised Retirement Policy, as now amended, be approved.

17 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor A Jackson. It was noted that Councillor J Ranger was substituting for Councillor A Jackson.

18 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2011 be approved and signed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

19 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman commented that with the consent of Members, the report by the Secretary to the Employer's Side concerning recruitment be deferred as all supporting papers had not been provided for circulation with the agenda. This was agreed.

It was noted that Valdis Belinis had been co-opted to the Staff Side to speak on the report “Impact on Restructures on Staff and Services” from a Community Projects Team perspective.

20 IMPACT OF RESTRUCTURES ON STAFF AND SERVICES

The Secretary to the Staff Side submitted a report which considered the impact of restructures on staff and Council Services and referred to two examples affecting Community Projects and Democratic Services Sections. She referred to the fact that all services had been affected by the proposed restructures and that this was not only stressful, but affected staff in terms of morale, energy and goodwill. She referred to the possibility of changing terms of conditions under the guise of a restructure, the promotion of redundancies to delete certain posts, of the impact on service delivery of reduced staffing levels and how this will impact on talent retention.

The Secretary to the Staff Side stated that following consultation, CMT had decided that they would not delete the post of Senior Democratic Services Officer and one staff member had agreed to redundancy. She referred to the fact that reducing staffing would affect the service in that statutory committees would continue to be staffed, but non-statutory would not.

The Secretary to the Staff Side stated that in accordance with the Panel's Constitution an Officer had been co-opted onto the Panel to put forward the perspective of the Community Projects Team in relation to the suggested restructures.

Valdis Belinis referred to the role of the Community Projects Team in supporting the Council's corporate priorities and of the fact that 2.5 staff were being asked to carry out a disproportionate amount of work and questioned how three part time officers could deliver seven corporate short/medium term outcomes by 2013. He referred to the significant partnership role to be played by the team in terms of the Local Strategic Partnership, the demands of the Localism Bill and working with the community, the role of the team in relation to projects allocated under the New Homes Bonus, and their responsibility for implementing a transport strategy.

A Member stated that 3.5 staff to 2.5 was not a 50% reduction in staff adding that one FTE member of staff would be lost. He emphasised the role of the Council as an "enabler" and of the need to find other partners to undertake the work which the Council could not undertake. The Secretary to the Staff

Side reminded the Member that all organisations appeared to be cutting jobs and of the difficulties in getting partners to take on functions which the Council could no longer undertake. The Staff Side stated that the Council had ploughed money into certain areas at the expense of more vulnerable areas of the community.

Validis Belinis referred to the fact that the team had been reduced from six to three and half FTE and stated that a further reduction in the light of aforementioned demands would be unrealistic. He stated that under previous proposals, 7.5 staff were identified as being responsible for delivering priorities. He stated that the role of “enabler” was not a function mentioned in the Job Description.

A Member acknowledged the good work of the team having worked closely with them in the past. She hoped that the Council would continue with its good progress and find ways of working with partners to achieve its aspirations better than the Council might provide itself. She said that the team should be congratulated for its innovative ways of working and achieving its outcomes.

The Director of Internal Services emphasised the need for the Council to work within its means and sought feedback in terms of possible alternatives to the restructure. The Secretary to the Employer’s Side acknowledged that restructures were stressful but that the Council consistently applied its policies, e.g. in relation to recruitment, redeployment and selection and that jobs were ring-fenced or “slotted in” wherever possible.

The Staff Side stated that Members needed to understand what could be delivered with limited resources and of the incorrect expectation on the part of Members, that things would carry on the same but with reduced staff. Officers stated that Job Descriptions needed to be realistic.

A Member referred to a survey which revealed that 1/6 of staff were prepared to work less hours to make savings. The Secretary to the Staff Side reminded the Member that there had been considerable negative changes recently on

employees' pay and pensions since that survey had been taken.

The Panel debated the suggestion by the Staff Side that there should be an Equalities Impact Assessment carried out on areas where restructuring was taking place. The Secretary to the Employer's Side stated that the Council carried out an equalities impact assessment on staff. The Staff Side suggested that one should be carried out to measure the impact of its policies on services provided by the Council. A majority vote in favour of this recommendation was not supported.

The Local Joint Panel received the report and agreed that the Secretary to the Employer's Side should report back to the next meeting providing details of the outcomes of all recent restructures including the total number of voluntary and compulsory redundancies, early retirements / resignations resulting from the restructures during the civic year 2010/11.

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

(B) the Secretary to the Employer's Side provide details of the outcomes of all recent restructures including the total number of voluntary and compulsory redundancies and early retirements / resignations resulting from restructures during the 2010/11 civic year to the next Local Joint Panel.

The meeting closed at 3.35pm

Chairman
Date

LJP

LJP