

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
LOCAL JOINT PANEL HELD IN THE
COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS,
HERTFORD ON TUESDAY 3 DECEMBER
2013, AT 2.30 PM

PRESENT: **Employer's Side**

Councillors M Alexander, L Haysey, A Jackson
and J Thornton

Staff Side (UNISON)

Andy Stevenson (Chairman)
Mr S Ellis and J Francis

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors J Ranger

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Glenda Bennett	- Interim Head of People and Property
Lorraine Blackburn	- Democratic Services Officer
Adele Taylor	- Director of Finance and Support Services

14 **RESPONSE TO UNISON ON LOCAL AWARD**

The Secretary to the Employer's Side submitted a report setting out possible options following a request by UNISON to permanently suspend further planned reductions in the local award and its impact on staff, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted.

The Secretary to the Employer's Side explained that she had reviewed the arrangements in a number of other Council across Hertfordshire. She explained that

Hertsmere staff had benefited from a 2% pay increase and that staff in Broxbourne earning less than £35,000 had been paid £300.

Councillor A Jackson stated that there was a need to show empathy during challenging times but reminded the Panel of the need to also take account of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). He commented that the Panel should not be making any decision which would impact negatively on the Council's need to manage its finances.

Councillor Jackson added that there was merit in recognising that in the medium term, option 5.2 (amending the reduction in the local award to 0.5%) and 5.4 (changes in terms and conditions), the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted, could be explored further and that savings might be achieved by a review of Terms and Conditions but that this needed to be balanced against the requirements of the MTFP.

The background to the loyalty / retention bonus was discussed. Councillor J Ranger reminded the Panel that the bonus was not part of employees' contractual pay and that this should be mentioned in any future offer letter of employment. The Director of Finance and Support Services stated that this was current practice.

In reviewing the options further, Councillor A Jackson reminded the Panel that it could recommend the removal of the discretionary award. UNISON reminded the Panel of the impact this would have on morale. Councillor Jackson stated that he was trying to find a way which was manageable.

UNISON referred to the inequity of arrangements in terms of working with new people who were benefitting from the recent 1% pay increase. The Director of Finance and Support Services reminded the Panel that everyone received a 1% pay rise but that those who were eligible for the local award were paid a 4% discretionary bonus instead of 5%.

Councillor A Jackson reiterated the need to show empathy during challenging times but reminded the Panel of the need to also take account of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). He recognised the merit of exploring options 5.2 and 5.4, and that savings might be achieved by a review of Terms and Conditions but that this needed to be balanced against the requirements of the MTFP. The Panel supported a decision to recommend this approach to Human Resources Committee.

RECOMMENDED - that (A) in the medium term, option 5.2 (amending the reduction in the local award to 0.5%) be explored further; and

(B) the impact of the above be explored via a review of terms of conditions (option 5.4) in order to address the need to make savings of £46,000 each year in the MTFP.

15 MINUTES

Councillor J Thornton apologised for not submitting his apologies for the meeting.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

16 EXPENSES POLICY REVIEW

The Secretary to the Employer's Side submitted a report setting out the key changes on the revised Expenses Policy, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted and supporting Essential Reference Papers. The Secretary to the Employer's Side reminded the Panel that a review of the policy had been requested by Human Resources Committee (HR) at its last meeting, to ensure that all employees were in line with other Councils and were paid at HM Revenues and Customs rates.

The Chairman expressed concern that UNISON had not had

an opportunity to fully consider the content of the report nor the chance to discuss the revisions with UNISON's Executive. He suggested that the report be deferred so that UNISON could review the implications of the report. The Chairman also suggested that Officers review the timetable for the submission of reports to both the Panel and HR Committee.

Councillor A Jackson stated that if the Panel could not consider and recommend approval of the report, then this would delay its submission to HR Committee. He referred to the need for the Council to ensure that it functioned in an efficient manner.

To facilitate debate, the Director of Finance and Support Services referred to a previous precedent used by the Panel. She suggested that the policy be considered by the Panel then submitted to Human Resources Committee subject to both sides resolving any anomalies in advance of the meeting. In the event that issues could not be resolved, then the policy would be referred back to Local Joint Panel for further consideration.

The Chairman acknowledged the way forward and stated that UNISON would like the opportunity to discuss the matter with their Regional Advisor. He reminded Members that his role on UNISON was as a volunteer and that he had other roles to fulfil and reiterated his concerns about the Panel's timetable for the consideration of reports. Councillor A Jackson reiterated the need for the Council's business to be moved along efficiently.

After being put to the meeting, there being an equality of votes, a recommendation by the Chairman to defer the report remained on the table. The Chairman requested a short adjournment so that he could consider the suggested precedent with other UNISON Members. This was supported.

The meeting reconvened and the Chairman, on behalf of UNISON, reiterated his concerns on having insufficient time to consider the content of the report and asked that in future, Officers ensure that sufficient time was allowed between the submission of reports to the Panel and Human Resources

Committee. The Director of Finance and Support Services reminded the Panel that HR Committee had asked for the report and were keen to have a rigorous review of policies.

UNISON requested that tracked changes to future policies would help the review process.

The Secretary to the Employer's Side provided a summary of the changes which had been made in order to comply with HMRC rates. She stated that the proposed change of 45p per mile would apply to all East Herts employees claiming business mileage and had been revised to remove the separation of "in District" and "out of District" mileage. In response to a query from UNISON regarding what savings the Council would achieve, the Secretary to the Employer's Side explained that this would depend on how tax returns were completed and on the individual's personal circumstances.

Councillor A Jackson suggested that the Petty Cash Claim form be amended with the inclusion of words and numerals. This was supported.

In response to a query from Councillor M Alexander regarding how this would affect the joint working arrangements, the Director of Finance and Support Services provided an update. The Secretary to the Employer's Side confirmed that there was no change to the subsistence rates and that this was set by the National Joint Council.

The Panel supported the suggestion that the Expenses Policy review policy be submitted to Human Resources Committee, subject to both sides resolving any anomalies in advance of the meeting. In the event that issues could not be resolved then the policy would be referred back to Local Joint Panel for further consideration.

RESOLVED – that the Expenses Policy be submitted to Human Resources Committee, subject to both sides resolving any anomalies in advance of the meeting. In the event that issues could not be resolved, then the policy be referred back to the Local Joint Panel for further consideration.

17 HOME WORKING POLICY

The Secretary to the Employer's Side submitted a report recommending a minor amendment to the Home Working Policy to ensure that home workers provided a phone number to their line manager so they could be contacted. The revised Home Working Policy was set out in the supporting Essential Reference Paper.

The Chairman reiterated his concerns that UNISON had not had an opportunity to fully consider the content of the report nor the chance to discuss the revisions with UNISON's Executive.

To facilitate debate, the Director of Finance and Support Services suggested, that the policy as before, be considered by the Panel then submitted to Human Resources Committee subject to both sides resolving any anomalies in advance of the meeting. In the event that issues could not be resolved, then the policy would be referred back to Local Joint Panel for further consideration. This was supported.

In response to a query from Councillor M Alexander regarding the accuracy of paragraph 15.3 (tax free allowances), the Secretary to the Employer's Side undertook to double check this. Councillor J Ranger suggested that paragraph 12.0 (page 26) be amended by the deletion of the word "ideally" so that the paragraph read:-

"The requirement for the home worker to visit the office for meetings, staff briefings, training, Performance Development Reviews or any other face to face contact. These should be at least monthly". This was supported.

In response to a query from Councillor L Haysey, the Director of Finance and Support Services explained what steps were currently taken regarding counteracting stress, including the need for managers to contact their staff regularly, to keep up to date.

RESOLVED – that that the Home Working Policy, as

amended, be submitted to Human Resources Committee, subject to both sides resolving any anomalies in advance of the meeting. In the event that issues could not be resolved, then the policy be referred back to the Local Joint Panel for further consideration.

18 ABSENCE MANAGEMENT POLICY

The Secretary to the Employer's Side submitted a report setting out a number of revisions following changes in legislation and best practice, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted and within the Essential Reference Papers.

The Chairman reiterated his concern that UNISON had not had an opportunity to fully consider the content of the report nor discuss the revisions with UNISON's Executive.

The Secretary to the Employer's Side referred to a rise in short term sickness levels and provided a summary of the key changes proposed, including the need to monitor levels of sickness and the inclusion of "trigger" points so that Managers could take action on sickness absence.

In response to a query from UNISON regarding who would take action should a Manager fall ill, the Secretary to the Employer's Side explained that the referral would be sent to the Line Manager's Manager.

Concerns were expressed generally by the Panel regarding the need to ring in each day (even when on long term sick) and report to the Line Manager. The Panel suggested that this requirement should be subject to the Line Manager's discretion including the need to allow a relative or suitable representative to report a sickness.

In response to a query from Councillor M Alexander regarding the need to ring the office if sick, when on holiday abroad, the Secretary to the Employer's Side explained the need for this, the impact this could have on the employee's holiday pay entitlement should they leave the Council and referred to

recent cases which had been considered at employment tribunals.

The Panel supported a suggestion that the paragraph on sickness absence be amended by the inclusion of a sentence stating that “the Council would take very seriously any actions which were later to be found untruthful”.

The Panel supported a suggestion that a paragraph on “Planned Absence” be included in the Policy.

The Panel supported a suggestion that the Absence Management Policy, as amended, be submitted to Human Resources Committee, subject to both sides resolving any anomalies in advance of the meeting. In the event that issues could not be resolved then the policy would be referred back to Local Joint Panel for further consideration.

RESOLVED – that the Absence Management Policy, as amended, be submitted to Human Resources Committee, subject to both sides resolving any anomalies in advance of the meeting. In the event that issues could not be resolved, then the policy be referred back to the Local Joint Panel for further consideration

The meeting closed at 4.35 pm

Chairman
Date