

JOINT STAFF EMPLOYER FORUM

24 October 2002
(5.30-6.30pm)

PRESENT: Councillors: Smart (Chair), White (Vice Chair), Dryden, Liddle, Stebbings, Graham Cuffley (Unison Branch Secretary) Alistair Wilson (Shop Steward, Unison), Richard O'Leary (GMB Branch Secretary), John McClean (Regional Officer GMB).

Chief Executive, Acting Head of Personnel, and Althea Mejjas (City Services).

Councillor Taylor, Executive Councillor for Commercial & Human Resources

1. MINUTES – 27 JUNE 2002

Councillor Dryden requested that under interests his union be corrected to read 'AEEU'. The minutes of the meeting were confirmed by the Forum and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

There were none.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Smith.

4. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

6. HUMAN RESOURCES SERVICE PLAN

In making some general comments on the Service Plan, both Branch Secretary's commented on the importance of relating actions to the current key issues of recruiting & retaining staff and maintaining an appropriate work/life balance for all staff, the latter being an issue the unions would wish to raise at a future meeting of the Forum.

The following items were noted:

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Job Evaluation Past and Current Performance

The Forum noted that Job Evaluation remained the largest project which corporate personnel was leading on. The unions stated that the process had gone as well as any that they were aware of. Members were concerned at the time the exercise had taken but acknowledged that the outcome needed to be fair and robust and the unions comments indicated that this was the case.

Implementation of New Criminal Records Bureau

The Acting Head of Personnel undertook to supply Councillor Smart with an overview of the effect on recruitment as a result of the delays at the CRB.

Maintaining Good Employee Relations

Graham Cuffley suggested that the Council should consider focussing on suspensions and either list the cost to the Council or the time taken as the critical success factor, rather than that no employment tribunals upheld. The Forum agreed that Personnel should revise the table accordingly.

Capability Procedure

The Acting Head of Personnel commented that this rewrite was in draft and required discussion with trade unions, to progress further. A revised completion date of April 2003 was suggested.

Review of Maternity Policy

The Forum noted that the review was delayed and required discussion with the trade unions. A revised completion date of April 2003 was suggested.

Investors in People

The Forum was advised that the Assessor would review the Council's progress on the areas which required improvement in July 2003.

Corporate Training Programme

Unison highlighted the impact of a reduced corporate training budget when all evidence on recruitment and retention suggested the need for training was higher.

7. TRADE UNION FACILITY AGREEMENT

[NB - Only Cllrs Smart, White, Liddle and Stebbings were present during consideration of this item]

The Forum considered the report of the acting Head of Personnel. The written submissions from the GMB and Unison were also considered.

In highlighting the points made in the GMB submission, Richard O'Leary (GMB) stated that the main issue for the Branch Secretary was the on-going heavy workload expected for 2003/04. An example given was the participation in the 'helicopter overview' part of the job evaluation process which is something only the Branch Secretary is undertaking. The appeals process for the results of the job evaluations was still to be determined, but the GMB anticipated additional demands on the union would result once the results were known. The union involvement in Best Value and continuous improvement had not decreased, (an example being Street Scene which had been inspected three times in the last 18 months) and changes for the staff involved requiring union negotiation.

Graham Cuffley (Unison) apologised for the written submission not being included at the time of agenda despatch and stated that he would hope to have the time analysis data available for Commercial & Human Resources Scrutiny Committee on 29 October. He advised the Forum that there were 442 members of Unison. The

Forum agreed that in future the figures should be gathered by Corporate Personnel from the unions. The Branch Secretary stated that his involvement in Best Value Reviews had reduced because of the part-time arrangement which did not always tie-in with the dates of the meetings. This was unfortunate as the Branch Secretary had been making important contributions. The impact of appeals for Job Evaluation was likely to cause extra work in 2003/04. During the year, the Branch had lost two Stewards because of the knock-on effect of workload being passed to Stewards because of the part-time arrangement. The Branch Secretary had used his annual leave for regional and national training. He concluded by referring members to the comments made by senior management about the impact of the part-time arrangement.

The Chief Executive advised members that the officers undertaking Best Value Reviews would be reminded to make every effort to tie-in meetings with the Unison Branch Secretary's availability.

The Chair advised the unions that the Liberal Democrat Group remained in favour of a Convenor with a part-time Deputy with both covering all union business. The Unison Branch Secretary stated that the Council had much work to do before full single status would be achieved with a unified workforce on the same terms and conditions, with job evaluation being one part of the process. He stated that other local authorities which employed a convenor tended to have one union covering most employees which was not the case for the Council. The GMB Branch Secretary stated that another issue for concern by both unions was liability. It was noted that the GMB Regional Secretary had written to the Head of Personnel and Chief Executive in November 2001 on this matter.

In response to a question from Councillor Taylor, the Unison Branch Secretary stated that it had not been possible to divide his work for Environmental Health and the union across 2 ½ days for each, and that the Unison work was undertaken over 9-10 hour days on Tuesdays and Thursdays. If there was the possibility to do further union work outside of the days this had to be done outside of the core hours of his Environmental Health duties.

In conclusion, of the options available in paragraph 9.4, the Chair proposed that the Forum recommend to Commercial & Human Resources to continue funding as at present.

The Chair thanked the Forum for attending the meeting at a different time to the normally allocated slot.

The meeting ended at 6.30 p.m.

Chair