

## **Joint Staff Employer Forum**

**6 November 2007**

### **Local Trade Union Facilities Agreement**

#### **1. Summary**

- 1.1 The City Council's current Trade Union Facilities Agreement expires on 31 March 2008. JSEF is asked to consider the options as contained in this paper for the continued provision of Trade Union facilities.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1 The City Council's Trade Union Facilities Agreement clarifies the arrangements for recognition of the Branch Secretaries for UNISON and GMB and Union officers/stewards. It also defines the facilities available to them and specifies the provisions regarding time off for duties concerned with industrial relations activities and training. The Branch Secretary posts are accountable to the Joint Staff Employer Forum, and to the Head of Human Resources on a day to day basis.
- 2.2 The Facilities Agreement stipulates that the contractual terms and conditions of employment of individuals elected to the post of Branch Secretary will be protected during their appointment and that they have the right to return to their substantive post if funding is withdrawn or someone else is elected. UNISON re-elect Branch Secretaries on an annual basis to coincide with their Annual Conference in the Spring. GMB re-elect on a 4 year term and the Council's current Branch Secretary was re-elected in June 2007.
- 2.3 A Trade Union Facilities Agreement has been in place since 1988 between Cambridge City Council and the recognised Trade unions; UNISON, GMB and UCATT. Prior to 2005 this Agreement was renewable annually with Member agreement. In November 2004 the Commercial & Human Resources Scrutiny Committee agreed proposals to:
- Increase the level of funding for the Trade Union Branch Secretary posts to 1 FTE each for UNISON and GMB.
  - Extend the length of the Facilities Agreement, and corresponding funding, to 3 years with effect from 1 April 2005.

#### **3. Membership**

- 3.1 Over 60% of City Council staff are members of GMB, UNISON or UCATT and therefore it is appropriate to ensure that the workforce has a voice, via the Trade Unions, across a range of service and employment issues. UNISON represents employees in all departments of the Council, GMB principally represents front line employees and UCATT currently represents a small number of "craft" employees working at City Services.

3.2 Of a workforce of 1280, membership numbers as at October 2007 are:

GMB members:	436
UNISON members:	338
UCATT members	6

Whilst GMB membership has slightly increased and UNISON declined, the overall figures have not changed significantly since 2003.

In view of their small number, UCATT members are represented by a shop steward or by the full-time Regional Officer and the Council provides no specific funding for facility time.

### **3. Consultation/Negotiation**

- 3.1 As well as their involvement in departmental/service specific issues via Departmental Staff Consultative Forums and individual casework, both Branch Secretaries play an important role in consulting/negotiating on corporate organisational employment related matters.
- 3.2 In addition to their attendance at JSEF on a quarterly basis, Joint Trade Union Group meetings are held monthly between the Branch Secretaries, Regional Officers and HR, at which corporate matters are discussed and agreed. Items to be progressed over the next year include a review of the Single Status Agreement, implementing the Equal Pay Action Plan, launching a Flexible Working Policy and strategies to improve the Council's sickness absence rates. Management will also work with the Unions in addressing the findings from the current Staff Survey.
- 3.3 At present the Unions are also heavily involved in implementation of the Customer Access Strategy and management consult/negotiate with the Branch Secretaries on CAS employment related issues through the Customer Access Negotiating Group. A similar approach would be adopted to collectively manage future major organisational change.
- 3.3 The Branch Secretaries are supported by local branch officers and stewards, who work on employee/industrial relations issues in addition to their usual City Council jobs and are given paid time off for some Union duties, e.g. training, representation of individuals and employee support.

### **4. Funding**

- 4.1 The costs of both the UNISON and GMB Branch Secretaries are initially charged to corporate management costs and then recharged to departments.
- 4.2 Costs are recharged to departments on the basis of the number of staff they employ and the Trade Union most likely to represent them. This means that the costs of the UNISON Branch Secretary are recharged to all departments, whereas the costs of the GMB Branch Secretary are met from fewer departments, with City Services paying the majority of the costs.

- 4.2 Funding for both posts is held centrally within the corporate HR budget and managed by the Head of Human Resources on behalf of the Council. The current level of corporate funding available is based on the substantive salaries and relevant allowances of the two individuals currently in post. Should other employees be elected to either Branch Secretary post in the future there may be budget pressures, depending on the level of their substantive salary.

## 5. Options to Renew the Facilities Agreement

- 5.1 It is management's view that it is in the Council's interest to have a recognised Facilities Agreement with the Trade Unions to provide resources for consultation and negotiation on staffing issues. Within the context of the volume of change and challenges facing the Council, many involving employment issues, and assuming it is accepted the current level of Trade Union facilities remains (i.e. 1 FTE Branch Secretary position each for UNISON and GMB), there are three options for JSEF to consider:

- **No change** – i.e. enter into a further 3 year Facilities Agreement, to take effect from 1 April 2008 until 31 March 2011.\*
- **Reduction in length of Agreement** – i.e. revert back to a Facilities Agreement brought to Members for approval to renew on an annual basis.
- **Increase in length of Agreement** – i.e. enter into a permanent Facilities Agreement with effect from 1 April 2008.\*

- 5.2 \*If it is decided to proceed with either a new 3 year or a new permanent Facilities Agreement, it is recommended this be conditional upon:

- 5.2.1 Affordability for the Council, i.e. that existing facilities budgets, held by the Head of Human Resources, remain sufficient to cover the employment costs of the two Branch Secretaries *or that pressures on Council budgets are not so intense as to necessitate budget cuts to a level where the two posts cannot be sustained.*

- 5.2.2 Trade Union membership levels not falling below 50% of the workforce.

- 5.2.3 No significant reduction in size of the Council's workforce (currently 1280 employees).

- 5.3 The Head of Human Resources will assess these factors each year during the budget preparation cycle and will revert to Members should any of the above conditions apply.

- 5.4. JSEF is asked to consider and comment on these options.

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