

(5.00pm-6.15pm)

JOINT STAFF EMPLOYER FORUM

PRESENT: Councillors: Bick (Vice Chair), Dryden, Rosenstiel, Shah, Smart (Chair) and Executive Councillor for Customer Services and Resources, Rod Cantrill
Liz Brennan and Phil Gooden (Unison), Kevin Roberts (GMB)
Deborah Simpson, Head of Human Resources
Toni Ainley, Director of City Services
Chris Fagan, Pay and Reward Manager

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 26 August 2008 were amended to delete the following sentence from paragraph 2 of item 6: *However, they were reviewed in 2004 and it is unlikely that there will be major changes.* They were then confirmed as a correct record.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

None.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Bradnack.

4. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The following Councillors declared personal interests:
Councillors Rosenstiel and Dryden as members of Unite (formerly Amicus)
Councillor Smart as a member of ATL.
Councillor Shah as a member of UCU (University Colleges Union)

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Six members of staff were present and the Chair ruled that their comments would be taken after the officer had presented the report on the essential car user allowance review.

Member of the public, Nick Wilson, asked how removing an allowance from 115 lower paid staff could be justified when the savings this would achieve were equivalent to the salary of one Chief Executive.

6. ESSENTIAL CAR USER ALLOWANCE REVIEW

The Pay and Reward Manager introduced the item and outlined the proposals.

Liz Brennan (Unison) outlined the Unison point of view and highlighted the following problems broadly falling under two headings, the process and unintended consequences:

- Unions were given limited access to data used. Who will be effected and how will the changes impact on their ability to perform their jobs.
- Unions unable to consult members and provide feedback before the decision was made
- Feedback from staff meetings demonstrated the range of employees and tasks performed that need to be taken into consideration
- The review process was not comprehensive enough
- A broader review would have given a better picture and could have highlighted posts where the allowance was not needed.
- No costing of alternative proposals or long term savings are provided
- The views of Heads of Services have not been given sufficient weight.
- Inequalities within teams are likely as some staff will retain the allowance that others will lose.
- Impact on staff goodwill has not been quantified

Kevin Roberts (GMB), also felt that the review should have been broader. It had failed to highlight incentives to save, penalised staff who had made savings and had omitted links to the green agenda.

Members asked for clarity on the proposals and debated the impact of the changes on staff. Cllr Cantrill suggested that staff were not taking up the green options available to them such as use of the Streetcar scheme. This had achieved only 18 staff registrations. Liz Brennan pointed out that this system would not help staff who needed to carry equipment or to make out of hours calls, sometimes at short notice. Kevin Roberts felt that these issues would have been highlighted if the review had been comprehensive.

Deborah Simpson pointed out that staff would still be able to use their own cars for work purposes and would be paid the mileage rate of 47.7 pence per mile. Phil Gooden (Unison) pointed out that staff would be taxed on the difference between the Inland Revenue figure of 40 pence per mile and the 47.7 pence rate of the allowance.

Cllr Bick asked what would happen to the contractual obligations for staff who had previously been required to have a car available for work purposes. Such staff would no longer be required to have a car. Under the Single Status agreement all travel arrangements are subject to review every

2 years. Staff who became ineligible for a car allowance would be given 6 months notice. While there is no right of appeal, staff may request a review at which their circumstances would be considered. A review would also be available if a post changed significantly. Other authorities have made similar changes and staff have adjusted to them. Cllr Cantrill stated that the aim was to achieve a fair scheme.

The following points were made by members of staff present:

- Emergency out of hours call outs may add up to less than 1,000 per year but public transport is not an option.
- Due to paperwork and in order to save the council money, staff have not claimed for all journeys. They are now being removed from the essential car rate due to low mileage claimed.
- Staff need their own vehicles in order to carry (often dirty) equipment.
- Staff goodwill lost
- Staff are unhappy that those who have been prudent and endeavoured to cut costs have been penalised
- Some staff have cars exclusively or have purchased second cars in order to carry out council business.
- Review should have looked at the tasks that had been performed and the circumstances, such as time of day, not just mileage.
- Staff stated that the review was a blunt instrument

Unison representatives stated that the evidence from other authorities, such as Norwich, shows no proven savings from schemes such as this. There are better ways to reduce costs.

Cllr Cantrill stated that he is comfortable with the changes and the safeguards included such as the right to a review. He suggested that, without a measurable criteria, such as mileage, any scheme will be open to subjectivity and allegations of unfairness.

Phil Gooden (Unison) stated that the scheme was not based on agreement and consultation. A scheme based on reviews could result in many more requests than anticipated. He also questioned the lack of Terms of Reference for the review process. He also suggested a fixed mileage target is likely to result in increased car use.

Cllr Cantrill stated that a green travel plan is in place and any suggestions for improvements would be welcomed. However, Liz Brennan pointed out that while the green travel plan has its place but does not take into account out of hours working.

The Chair summed up the points made.

7. CONTRACTORS PENSIONS AND HOLIDAY ENTITLEMENT

Kevin Roberts (GMB) asked for confirmation that all contractors on the approved contractors list and any sub contractors they may use, are signed up to an appropriate pension scheme and have the legal holiday entitlement. It was agreed that this is a procurement issue and will need further investigation in order to provide a comprehensive reply. More information will be provided by the Strategic Procurement Manager at the next meeting.

8 THE NEW COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT INSPECTION

Kevin Roberts (GMB) was concerned that the current high performance against assessment targets could be lost under the new arrangements. Improvements to joint working arrangements are desirable. However, GMB are seeking an assurance that current in house contracts should remain in house.

The meeting ended at 6.15p.m.

Chair