

Joint Consultative Forum

Minutes

11 October, 2004 at 10.00am
The Council Offices
Bourne Hill, Salisbury

**THIS REPORT SHOULD BE KEPT FOR USE AT THE CABINET MEETING TO BE HELD
ON 24 NOVEMBER 2004**

SALISBURY DISTRICT COUNCIL

Meeting of the **Joint Consultative Forum** held in Committee Room 1, The Council House,
Bourne Hill, Salisbury on Monday, 11th October, 2004 commencing at 10:00 am

P R E S E N T

Councillors

A Brown-Hovelt - Vice-Chairman, D Culver and Ms M Tomlinson,

Staff Side

Rick Wells (UNISON) – Chairman, Trevor Kay (UNISON), Mick Polleck* (T&G) and
Joan Smith (UNISON)

*Due to the departure of Roy Williams from employment at SDC, Mick Polleck (T&G Regional Officer) will
attend meetings of JCF until an SDC representative can be recruited.

Officers in Attendance

Kate Bromfield (Personnel & Training), David Crook (Policy Director),
Carole Davidson (Customer Services), Anne McConkey (Head of Personnel & Training),
Andrew Rose (Democratic Services) and Mark Wareham (UNISON).

MINUTES NOT REQUIRING COUNCIL APPROVAL

85. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Mrs S Warrander.

86. Minutes

Those present were advised that an error had been made on the agenda for this meeting which
stated that the minutes requiring approval were for the meeting of 22nd March 2004. A verbal
correction was provided at the meeting.

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the last meeting held on 28th June 2004 be approved
as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

87. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

88. Customer Services Update

The Forum heard a verbal update from the Workforce Planning Manager regarding Customer
Services. The main points made by the officer were as follows:

- We are nearly at a position to be able to purchase a Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) system. We have reduced the number of competing tenders down to three.
- Officers from the Customer Services Team have been going out to other organisations to look at CRM systems to see how they work in practice.
- Last week was the first week that the cash machine in Pennyfarthing House had been operational. The majority of feedback was positive.
- With regards to recruitment into Customer Services, 15 employees have been recruited from the Opportunity Pool, and also, a further 3 staff from the remainder of the councils' workforce. This equates to 15½ FTE leaving a shortfall of the required 18 FTE. The vacancies would remain unfilled until a review of current manpower had been made.
- Over the next 2 months, the staff in the unit will be undergoing training and will have Personal Development Plans drawn up.
- The unit went operational on 4th October 2004.
- As part of the process, staff from the opportunity pool who were not successful are to be offered interview skills and CV writing training.

There were some concerns raised as to why this training was not provided prior to the recruitment process, but it was pointed out that the management of the Unit had no way of knowing which staff would be applying for a position.

89. Office Centralisation Update

In the absence of any other officer with detailed knowledge of the office centralisation project, David Crook made the following comments:

- The Council is looking to obtain planning permission by July 2005.
- There are some difficulties with English Heritage (who are a statutory consultee).
- If approved, the build period will be somewhere between 12 – 18 months, depending on the type of financing scheme opted for.

90. Terms and Conditions of Employment for staff at Five Rivers

The Forum heard a verbal presentation from the Head of Personnel and Training. The main points made by the officer were as follows:

- Employees at 5 Rivers have been given the opportunity to harmonise their terms and conditions of employment with those of staff in the rest of SDC.
- The timeframe for staff to take this option closed on 5th September 2004.
- Apart from 11 staff, all employees at 5 Rivers agreed to harmonisation and have signed a new contract.
- Now it is necessary to agree with the Job Review Team which of the jobs being carried out at 5 Rivers are comparable with jobs previously evaluated in Leisure Services, so that they can be given a job description that already exists and which roles will be required to undergo the Job Review process.
- It will be necessary to form a Job Review Project Group.

The UNISON Branch organiser thanked SDC for the attitude in response to this situation and for the speed at which they have moved forward to resolve the issue of 2 tier working.

91. Planning Delivery Grant

The Forum considered the previously circulated UNISON statement and reply from the Policy Director. At the meeting the Policy Director gave those present a verbal summary of the situation that has led to the implementation of the Planning Delivery Grant. The comments made by the Policy Director were as follows:

- SDC needs to comply with the targets set by national performance indicator BVPI 109 which covers the speed at which planning applications are completed.
- Last year, we were named and shamed as a failing council with regard to consideration of major planning applications.
- There then took place a follow up inspection after which government intervention could have been a possibility.
- As a result, Development Control has undergone some administration and procedural changes in an effort to turn the situation around and to remove the prospect of government intervention.
- There have also been several measures taken to help relieve the stress upon officers in the unit. For example, more officers have been employed to achieve an acceptable caseload per officer benchmarked against national averages.
- Failure to meet BVPI targets is depriving SDC of considerable income available through the Planning Delivery Grant system.
- The bonus scheme that SDC is putting in place for Development Control is an attempt to incentivise staff to reach these targets.
- The scheme for staff started on 1st October and will be backdated, so that the first awards will be made in January 2005.
- In the last quarter SDC has done very well and it is hoped that for the next year (over which the targets are set) – which starts now – we can reach the government targets and so take advantage of the resources on offer.
- It is becoming increasingly difficult to retain staff in this field because the amount of money that is available to authorities that reach their targets is so high that salaries for experienced planning officers is rising all the time as incentives to move to particular authorities.

Following these comments, the Forum was invited to ask questions or make additional comments. They were as follows:

- UNISON is concerned that the incentive scheme is something new and it could run foul of equal pay claims. Those people who do not receive an award may become upset. In Development Services at present the gender split is almost exactly equal so there should not be an issue. However, if this were to change, there is a risk of equal pay claims if staff who receive the award are more heavily of one gender than another.

It has been agreed that the honoraria policy will be amended in order to provide a framework within which opportunities to develop and implement incentive schemes may be considered. This process will ensure that any potential equalities issues are taken into account.

- Do all staff in Development Control know about the scheme and does it apply to them?

The scheme will apply to all Development Control staff plus a few others who are involved in the planning process, for example, lawyers. In total the scheme applies to approximately 40 people.

- Surely this is an issue not just for SDC but for every authority nationwide?

It is a nationwide problem. One effect has been that planning officers are finding they are able to switch to a new employer for substantial pay increases after just 12 months whereas the normal procedure was that staff would gain their experience in one authority over the course of 2 or 3 years. The whole industry has heated up with salaries rising to reflect this.

- Does the Market Forces Supplement not apply in this case?

The use of the Market Forces Supplement was considered but it was felt that it could not be utilised in this case.

- We are also not just relying on this scheme but our new recruitment and retention officers are working closely with the Head of Development Services.
- Would it not be an idea to think about alternative ideas for recruiting planning officers. For example, we could locate A-level students who plan to undertake a planning degree at university and then provide financial assistance. Part of the arrangement would be that they commit to working a set time with SDC upon finishing university.

There are many ideas that will be discussed with the Head of Development Services and this suggestion can be included. SDC is currently paying for 5 bursaries for existing staff so that they can become qualified. The government is seeking to expand the supply of qualified officers with a move towards greater quality rather than just quantity.

92. Special Leave Policy

The Forum considered the previously circulated draft policy.

RESOLVED – that the JCF supports the Special Leave Policy but does not wish to make any further comments or recommendations.

93. Local Government Pension Scheme

The UNISON Branch Organiser advised those present that UNISON is involved in national discussions on this matter. The NHS pension scheme is also under consideration on a national basis.

The T&G Regional Officer added that the 4 big trades unions are setting out targets to ensure that the government puts into place schemes to protect pensions.

94. Staffing Establishment List and Equalities Monitoring

Those present were invited to ask questions relating to the previously circulated statistical information. The questions, and their subsequent answers, were as follows:

- How do the figures relating to staff turnover and recruitment of staff from ethnic minority groups compare with our benchmarking partners?

The figures for North Wiltshire authority are available and whilst the figure for staff turnover at SDC is 13.94%, that of North Wilts. is 16.75%. We are at the beginning of the benchmarking process so there is not much comparable data available at present. Unfortunately, we do not have any comparison data for recruitment of people from ethnic minority groups. The information we have for SDC does indicate that a more detailed analysis of what lies behind the figures is required in order to ensure that equality and diversity issues are being dealt with appropriately. The recruitment procedure makes provision for an audit trail of recruitment to be identified. There have been some recent changes to this process in order to ensure that it is more user friendly and, therefore, more likely to be completed. An analysis of a sample of campaigns over the last few months will be undertaken in order to assess why particular applicants were either successful or unsuccessful and measure these reasons against our Equalities and Diversity in Employment Policy. We aim to report on the results of this analysis in December.

- Now that we have detailed information we can undertake analysis to examine any issues that become obvious. Personnel & Training should be in a position to produce answers to some questions raised by these figures at the next meeting of JCF.

It was agreed that Personnel and Training would, at a future meeting of the JCF, provide information on the geographical areas from which applicants for positions at SDC were from and then to break these down into ethnic groupings so that it can be determined how many applicants from any given group are applying for employment as compared to the percentage of the local population made up by that particular grouping. However, the detail to which this analysis can be undertaken will depend on the current system's ability which will be investigated.

95. Recruitment and Retention Update

Those present received a verbal briefing from the Recruitment and Retention Officer. The main points made by the officer were as follows:

- There has been a new recruitment and retention procedure launched which should make the whole process more streamlined. So far there has been positive feedback.
- SDC has linked up with the Wiltshire Recruitment and Retention Group so that ideas and issues can be shared.
- There are currently approximately 14-15 live vacancies in SDC.
- We have been working for some time on the issues around the Customer Services unit.
- There is still some further work that needs to be undertaken on the subject of retention.
- We are very keen to develop online application forms so that applicants can complete them electronically via the council's website.

The Head of Personnel and Training advised that there have been a lot of positive comments regarding the new Recruitment and Retention Team which has worked well with other units. The Head of Personnel and Training also gave her personal thanks to the team members, Kate Bromfield, Jane Whittingham and Michelle Spencer.

Following these comments, those present were invited to ask questions or make additional comments. They were as follows:

- Do we still provide exit interviews to leavers?

Yes we do, but there is no obligation for people to take up the offer.

96. Matters, if any, that the Chairman decides should be considered as a matter of urgency

A request was made that the list of future meetings of the JCF be included onto the minutes on an ongoing basis.

The dates of meetings for JCF in 2004/05 are as follows:

- Monday, 24th January 2005
- Monday, 25th April 2005

Both commencing at 10am in Committee Room 1, Bourne Hill.

The meeting concluded at 11.40am