



Salisbury District Branch

Smoking Policy Submission to the Joint Consultative Forum January 2005

UNISON welcomes many aspects of this draft policy however we have wish to state our objection to one major proposal contained within it. In terms of the positive aspects from our perspective we welcome the ban on smoking in all offices and the positive and active support that will be given to employees who do smoke to encourage them to quit. These measures help to safeguard staff against passive smoking and support smokers in their attempts to adjust their lifestyles to improve their personal health and welfare. The union also welcome the commitment to treat smokers and non-smokers equitably with respect to breaks and to allowing smokers to take breaks in their own time to smoke. However UNISON objects to the following clause –

“with effect from (three months from introduction of policy) on site smoking areas will no longer be provided and smoking will be totally banned from all council premises including any surrounding Council owned grounds (initially with the exception of some of the Facilities, see 3.3) and vehicles.”

UNISON admires the aims of the Council in attempts to reduce personal addiction to smoking. The union wishes all employers shared this attention to social responsibility. However the total ban and measures to ‘force’ smokers to quit by making smoking difficult are highly debateable. It is a shame that Occupational Health advice has not been obtained on this matter. They may have a view as to the efficacy of such measures and evidence as to whether they genuinely result in a change in personal habits.

This is a draconian, contradictory, unworkable and un-necessary measure in UNISON’s view. It is draconian because it is very hard-line measure which appears to us to be a measure aimed at forcing changes to personal habits. It is un-necessary because there is plenty of space on Council property to allow for smoking areas without compromising either public access to building, public or fellow employees’s experience of the Council site or the desire to avoid passive smoking risk. Smoking outside will have no impact on fellow workers or the employer’s property itself. It is contradictory because it directly conflicts with the welcome commitment to continue to allow smokers to take unpaid breaks. We welcome the commitment to allow for breaks because it recognises the addictive nature of smoking and the possible negative effects on employees of denying them the ability to smoke for long periods of time. However the total ban is unworkable because it may necessitate longer work breaks for staff to access public areas off of Council property where they can smoke. It also contradicts with any desire to keep smokers out of the public eye because if the Council forces them off site then there may be few areas where they can smoke. It removes an element of reasonable control for the employer in this matter. If any support for this argument is needed then I would suggest one looks at the experience of Southampton Hospital which banned smoking from it’s site. Hospital staff ended up smoking directly outside the hospital.

The total site ban also increase the prospect of disciplinary procedures being used against staff who do not abide by it. This is a pointless waste of the employer's time, an unnecessary stress to place upon staff subjected to such procedures and a waste public resources when there is clearly a compromise available. It also potentially introduces a difficulty for the employer in designating where 'Council employment property' ends and where Council property open the public begins and where employees may be subject to action.

As a compromise UNISON would request that the Council reconsiders introducing a total site ban. UNISON suggests that a general site ban be introduced but that a limited number of designated smoking areas be introduced. These would be one or two designated areas at each of the current sites. Ideally the union would like these areas to be under cover and sheltered. Ideally we would have liked the Council to invest a small amount in proper smoking shelters. However if the employer does not introduce shelters we still request that designated areas be introduced and point to the positive impact these have in managing staff smoking that has occurred at Salisbury District Hospital. This local health care provider agreed to designated areas and invested in staff and provided shelters. Staff generally welcomed the compromise and this helped to maintain good employment relations and morale. These areas are used by staff and have removed the previous problem of staff smoking in different areas on-site by different entrances where the employer had no control. One of the potential problems of designated areas is the mess caused by smokers. Smokers should be made aware of their obligations in this respect, including the requirement to keep the areas clean and tidy.

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