

Joint Consultative Forum

Minutes

24 January 2005 at 10.00am
The Council Offices
Bourne Hill, Salisbury

**THIS REPORT SHOULD BE KEPT FOR USE AT THE CABINET MEETING TO BE HELD
ON 2 MARCH 2005**

SALISBURY DISTRICT COUNCIL

Meeting of the **Joint Consultative Forum** held in Committee Room 1, The Council House,
Bourne Hill, Salisbury on Monday, 24TH January 2005 commencing at 10:00 am

P R E S E N T

Rick Wells (UNISON) – Chairman
Councillor A Brown-Hovelt - Vice-Chairman

Councillors

Miss M A Tomlinson and Mrs S A Warrander

Staff Side

Trevor Kay (UNISON), Jenny Marshall (T&G)
and Joan Smith (UNISON).

Officers in Attendance

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

MINUTES NOT REQUIRING COUNCIL APPROVAL

97. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Fear.

98. Minutes

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting held on 11th October 2004 be approved
as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

99. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

I 00. Customer Services Update

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

- Customer Services staff are now bedding down with their changed roles.
- There has been a lot of training provided.
- Last week, a new CRM (Customer Relationship Manager) system was installed called “Frontline” and there will be training in the very near future for Service Units.
- A CRM Project Officer has been appointed and will meet with all of the necessary people over the coming months.
- The next stage is approaching for tasks to transfer to the Customer Services Unit from the various units.
- As a result of this there are some secondment opportunities within the BPR (Business Process Re-engineering) Team available.
- The next stage for the Customer Services Unit is the operation of the Call Centre which is anticipated for opening in April/May this year.

Following the officers comments, those present were invited to ask questions. They were as follows:

- Where will the Call Centre be based?

Pennyfarthing House

- Will all telephone calls go directly to the Call Centre?

Only for those units which have transferred their customer service functions to the Customer Services Unit.

I 01. Office Centralisation Update

The Policy Director present provided the Forum with a verbal update on the Project to date:

- In the last few months a lot of work has been undertaken to move closer to the construction phase of the project.
- Architects and Quantity Surveyors have undertaken a costings exercise.
- The architects and officers met with Members last week to advise of the expected costs, which is likely to be around £11.5 million
- The project team believe that there are sufficient capital resources to fund the scheme.
- Revenue costs will broadly be met by lower staff numbers (through combination of amalgamation of customer services functions and also Business Process Re-engineering) and a decrease in maintenance costs. The capital budget is to be updated to reflect this by the February Cabinet.
- The budget is to be voted on by Council in February, and if approved, this will be a significant step towards the construction phase.
- We anticipate some difficulties with English Heritage as they may have some issues with the design strategy.
- A firm of conservation architects have been appointed who will assess the cost of conversion of the listed part of Bourne Hill.
- When the Victorian extension has been demolished we are required to undertake another archaeological survey in the grounds of Bourne Hill.
- We are looking at entering the planning permission stage about 3-4 months after consent by English Heritage.

Following this update, those present were invited to ask questions. They were as follows with (any subsequent answer):

- There has been a suggestion that Churchfields will be retained for use as office accommodation.

It is intended to operate all office based functions from the single facility at Bourne Hill. All non-office functions will be operated out of Churchfields with just a number of managers located there. The only significant relocation to Churchfields will be CCTV and the Control Centre.

- Is it intended to dispose of the Council's surplus buildings?

Yes, and should an agreement not be reached with the County Council the old swimming pool site will also be disposed of.

- How will the possibility of unitary local government effect the project?

Local government reorganisation is a constant possibility. It is very unlikely that any authority, even if not based in Salisbury, would not require a Salisbury presence. At the very worst, the building would be prime office space which can be sold or leased.

I 02. Injury Allowances Payment Scheme

The Forum considered the policy (previously circulated).

The Employee Relations Manager presented the policy, and made the following comments:

- This policy is required under the regulations of the Local Government Pension Scheme.
- This policy aims to create equality of treatment.
- The regulations do not give any guidance regarding the amount of payment that should be made.

RESOLVED - that the Joint Consultative Forum recommends that Cabinet approve this policy without amendment.

I 03. Dignity at Work Policy

The Forum considered the policy (previously circulated).

The Head of Personnel & Training presented the policy, and made the following comments:

- The revision to this policy arose out of a focus group.
- A consultant was hired to provide proposals which have been the focus of consultation with trade unions.
- It is hoped that this policy will allow the council to quickly resolve difficult situations that may occur.
- It puts in place agreements to allow parties to resolve difficulties and creates a framework should formal procedures be required.

Following these comments, those present were invited to make comments, which were as follows:

- This policy provides an overview and guidance to all employees and managers.

- We will need to wait and see how the formal stages of the policy work in practice.
- On page 17 of the policy document, under “Harassment Counsellors”, second paragraph, the fifth word should be “is” and not “in”. This typographical error needs to be corrected.

RESOLVED – that the Joint Consultative Forum recommends that Cabinet approve this policy without amendment.

I 04. Smoking Policy

The Forum considered the policy (previously circulated).

The Employee Relations Manager presented the policy, and made the following comments:

- The need for a smoking policy was a major issue in the staff survey
- Initially it was intended that there would be a total ban on smoking for all employees during working hours. However, there was some resistance to this.
- It was agreed that if any staff member wanted to take a smoking break then they could do so in their own time.
- The ban on smoking on council premises came about because there was a desire by the Management Team that there should not be smoking in or around any of the various buildings owned by the Council.
- The issue of smoking shelters was presented to the Management Team, but, because a complete ban is intended in the future, it was felt that smoking shelters would not be of value, and also, they could be seen as an encouragement to smokers, which is contrary to many intentions of the policy.

Following these comments, the UNISON Branch Organiser responded and made the following points:

- UNISON welcomes a ban inside the buildings of Salisbury District Council.
- There may be an impact relating to stress as this policy could increase the stress suffered by some staff if there were a complete ban on smoking during working hours.
- Allowing employees to take smoking breaks in their own time is welcomed.
- An occupational health consultation would have been welcomed in relation to this policy.
- The ban on smoking on Council property is not something UNISON can agree with. Firstly, is it even enforceable and secondly, this could lead ultimately to some employees having their employment terminated on disciplinary grounds.
- There should be a designated smoking area on council property, preferably with a smoking shelter.
- The question must be asked as to how far we go with such policies, for example, following on from this policy there could be a policy restricting certain unhealthy foods for staff.

The Policy Director present then made the following comments:

- There is some resentment by non-smokers over the amount of time some smokers sometimes take for their smoking breaks.
- Management Team have decided to wait and see what legislative changes are made before implementing a complete ban on smoking.
- This policy is simply about taking the ban on smoking inside buildings a step further.
- Management Team are opposed to smoking shelters as it is difficult to ensure consistency throughout all of the different offices and also, with the advent of a new centralised office, smoking shelters would detract from the visual aspect of the project.

- The policy is about asking people to use common sense in respect of where they smoke and when.

Those present were then invited to make comments or ask questions. They were as follows (with any related answer):

- It is important that new employees are made aware of the restrictions in the smoking policy.
- This will be hard to enforce for those people who mainly work outside.
- A shelter for smokers to use would be a good idea as it does not present a very good image of an organisation when visitors see groups of people standing in various places smoking.

Any designated smoking area would have to be discreet and not effect any other member of staff (such as near doors and windows) and also be away from view by the public. It is going to be very difficult to find such an area. There is also the matter that smoking usually creates a mess when a large number of smokers congregate in one place.

- The policy needs to be reviewed after six months and certainly before a complete ban is implemented.
- Smokers will be given a huge amount of support to help them give up.
- Some of the Council offices don't have any outside areas (such as Rolleston Street), therefore, they would not have access to a designated smoking area which then leads to unfairness for staff working in such locations.
- There are some parts of the policy which need clarity, for example, how does this effect staff when walking between different offices.

No policy is ever going to be able to answer every single issue or cover every situation and staff are urged to use common sense.

- If this policy is implemented there is going to be the additional cost of putting up signs and clauses will need to be written into the contracts of sub-contractors.

RESOLVED – that the Joint Consultative Forum recommends that Cabinet approves the Smoking Policy subject to the following:

1. discreet designated smoking areas on Council property that do not impact adversely on other employees are identified;
2. new employees are made aware of the restrictions of the Smoking Policy;
3. this policy be reviewed 6 months following it's implementation.

105. Draft Discretionary Additional Payments Policy

The Forum considered the draft policy (previously circulated).

The Employee Relations Manager introduced this policy by making the following comments:

- This policy replaces the current honoraria scheme

- This policy will reward those employees who have demonstrated sustained effort or achievement over and above their normal duties and also where they have created an increase in income generation for the Council.
- Prior to any payment being made it will need to be authorised by the Head of Financial Services to ensure affordability and also by the Head of Personnel and Training to ensure equality.

Following these comments the UNISON Branch organiser made the point that in some units of the Council where the scheme may operate and also where that unit has a higher proportion of staff of one gender, this could lead to issues relating to equal pay.

RESOLVED – that the Joint Consultative Forum recommends that Cabinet approves the Draft Discretionary Additional Payments Policy without amendment.

I 06. Staffing Establishment List and Equalities Monitoring

The Recruitment and Retention Officer presented the staffing establishment information (previously circulated), and made the following comments:

- Information relating to monitoring by age has been included as a prelude to legislation being introduced.
- In the future, turnover of staff will be shown by quarter.
- Service Unit Heads receive relevant information on a monthly basis.

Those present were then invited to ask questions. They were as follows, with their subsequent response:

- Some units appear to have staff shortages. Is this a seasonal matter or a recruitment problem.

For MED&T, the turnover is due largely to the use of seasonal staff. In Development Services the national demand for planning officers has led to officers moving between authorities to take advantage of competitive salaries that are available.

There has been some difficulty in employing the right calibre of applicant for higher salary positions. However, retention of staff has greatly improved.

The meeting then considered the report of the Head of Personnel & Training relating to “Fairness and Equality in Recruitment – Ethnicity” (previously circulated).

The Head of Personnel & Training presented the report by making the following comments:

- A review has been undertaken to identify any noticeable trends.
- The vast majority of recent recruitment campaigns that have been analysed have been dealt with in an unimpeachable way.
- There is some work needed on ensuring that the reasons for not recruiting an applicant are clearly recorded for transparency reasons.
- All persons involved in the recruitment of staff must have a clear understanding of what expectations are placed upon them by the organisation in respect of fairness and equality.

RESOLVED – that the Joint Consultative Forum note the contents of this report and seek a further report during the Summer of 2005 in respect of progress of actions identified.

I 07. Recruitment and Retention Update

Those present were invited to ask questions on this matter. The question asked, and its reply, was as follows:

- Are we proactively looking at the Market Forces Supplement to ensure that they are up to date?

This is a matter for individual Managers to look at. However, the Council is looking at pay arrangements in relation to our policies to see if any new arrangements are needed. This will, though, be a long term review.

I 08. Date of next meeting

Those present were reminded that the next meeting of the Joint Consultative Forum is scheduled for 10 am on Monday, 25th April 2005. However, due to the need for use of Bourne Hill committee rooms at this time for elections, the meeting will be held in The Meeting Room, City Hall.

It was also agreed that as at the next meeting of the Forum would need to agree dates for the 2005/06 municipal year, a discussion would be held on whether Monday mornings were the best time/day to hold meetings.

I 09. Matters, if any, that the Chairman decides should be considered as a matter of urgency

The UNISON Branch Organiser advised those present that the Union is likely to undertake a strike ballot in relation to changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme by the Government and management organisations. The timetable being provided for local government is much earlier than for many other public sector bodies.

The meeting concluded at 11.47 am