

JOINT STAFF EMPLOYER FORUM

PRESENT: Councillors: Ward (Chair), Bradnack, C Rosenstiel and Smart
Liz Brennan (Unison), Kevin Roberts (GMB).
Executive Councillor Rod Cantrill.

Jackie Condon, Head of Human Resources, Graham Watts,
Director of City Services.

1. MINUTES – 21 March 2006

The minutes of the meeting of 21 March 2006 were confirmed as a correct record.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

There were no matters arising from the previous minutes.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received.

4. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The following Councillors declared personal interests:
Councillor Smart as a member of ATL.
Councillor C. Rosenstiel as a member of Amicus
Councillor Ward as his wife is a member of Amicus

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

The Forum agreed to the Chair's suggestion that item 10 be considered first.

10 JOINT STAFF EMPLOYER FORUM TERMS OF REFERENCE

Liz Brennan introduced this item and asked all members of the Forum to say whether they would welcome a more open debate format and to suggest ways in which the work of the Forum could be improved.

Kevin Roberts proposed that more of a workshop format would be more productive to help councillors learn what was going on at the grass roots level. For example, he was conscious that many councillors did not know about the initiatives to do with the Learning & Development groups. On the other side, many staff did not know who the councillors responsible for their area of work were. He was proud of being part of bringing staff on and he hoped there would be more 2-way contact between the councillors and the staff.

Councillor Bradnack said that while things were going well at the moment between unions and management there might be times in the future when there

would be a need for the more formal forum. But he also agreed that there were other things the Forum could do. He asked the Director of City Services to clarify the origins of the Forum.

Graham Watts said that the origins lay with a central government initiative - Compulsive Competitive Tendering (CCT). Nowadays the requirement was for a workforce that represented the community it served. This took time and a lot of work to achieve. Considering such a theme and having member input would be valuable.

Councillor Smart spoke as a long-standing member of the Forum and agreed that the formal safety net was needed. She emphasised that it was not the role of councillors to manage or negotiate.

Councillor Bradnack said that recruitment and training had been key elements of what the Forum had considered.

Councillor Cantrill welcomed the idea of a flexible forum where issues arising from future challenges such as the Customer Access Strategy and its consequences could be discussed. He thought that the more formal forum might become more important in the next eighteen months.

The Forum then discussed the timing and frequency of meetings and possible themes and activities.

The following was agreed

1. That the usual 5pm time be kept unless there was no formal business.
2. In that case, the Forum would convene at 4pm and visit a section or department to gather and share information with staff.
3. The agenda would be put together by the Executive Councillor and the Spokes in consultation with the Head of Human Resources and the union convenors. Future meetings would focus on the top three employment issues at the time.

6. HUMAN RESOURCES BEST VALUE REVIEW

Jackie Condon introduced the report. Recruitment to the posts in the new structure would begin in January for internal candidates. There were potentially 3 redundant posts but there was no need for individuals to leave the Council unless they wished to go.

Councillor Bradnack asked what the risks of the new structure were and how members would know that the risks had been addressed and things were working.

The officers identified that departments continuing as before was the biggest risk. Any gaps left by the new structure needed to be identified and managers and supervisors would need briefing and training. Employee policies such as the Management of Attendance needed review and there was a new Policy Officer post in place to do that. A reduction in sickness absence should result and performance management information could be shared.

Rod Cantrill said he was concerned that the old habits of work would creep back into the departments. He asked that statistics and analysis be brought to the Forum. He said the issue was one of being honest and open at the Audit stage.

Jackie Condon said that no HR-related work should stay in departments.

Graham Watts said that having Business Partners in departments was a good initiative.

7 CUSTOMER ACCESS NEGOTIATING GROUP

Jackie Condon introduced the paper and said that because the Customer Access Strategy affected the whole organisation, it needed its own management/union forum. Employees would need access to training in the new jobs to help them apply for them. The Organisational Change & Redundancy Policy had been negotiated in June 2006.

Liz Brennan and Kevin Roberts expressed some concerns about the tight timetable for the work of this Group such that there was a risk it might slip. They emphasised the importance of keeping staff informed.

Councillors made the following comments:

- The biggest risk in the Customer Access Strategy was the loss of good staff and this Group was fundamental to stopping that. (Catherine Smart)
- The training needed to be right. (Tim Ward)
- There was a risk that during the transition period, staff might take their eye of their current job so it was important to keep an eye on performance indicators to ensure they did not slip. (Rod Cantrill)

Jackie Condon said that a key aspect of managing this whole change was that managers keep staff informed and that the message is a positive one.

8 INVESTORS IN PEOPLE ASSESSMENT

Jackie Condon introduced the report and highlighted two new requirements against which the Council would be assessed in November:

- Focus on the organisation's effectiveness in involving employees in decision making
- The responsibilities of leaders and managers

A 'health check' prior to the full re-assessment indicated two areas for improvement:

1. A more robust process for involving the unions in regular service planning
2. A need to communicate the management competencies to all staff to improve people's understanding of the capabilities required by managers to lead, manage and develop people effectively.

9 PROPOSED CHANGES TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME

Liz Brennan expressed the concerns the unions had about the proposed changes:

- To increase employee contributions
- Two-tier ill health retirement

The unions welcomed the granting of observer status on the investment panel to the unions by the Cambridgeshire LGPS.

Jackie Condon responded to a request from Liz Brennan and said that the City Council had not responded separately because its view was similar to the regional view. She had some sympathy with the unions' views but said that the scheme had to be affordable for employers.

Liz Brennan responded with the view of the unions' actuaries which is that the removal of the 85 year rule and the commuted sum make the scheme affordable.

During discussion of the ill-health retirement provision, it was stated that stress was one of the major contributing factors to sickness absence in the Council.

The meeting ended at 6.25 p.m.

Chair