

JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM

At a Meeting of the Joint Consultative Forum held in Meeting Room 3, Council Offices, Garshake Road, Dumbarton on Thursday, 29 November 2007 at 2.00 p.m.

Present: Councillors George Black, Geoff Calvert, Jim Finn, Jim McElhill and Ronnie McColl; Margaret Ferris, Denise McLafferty, Tom Dick and Isabel Patterson (UNISON); Jackaleen McMonagle (AMICUS); Neil Casey and Brian Courtney (T&GWU); Mick Conroy (GMB); Stewart Patterson (EIS) and Alex McEwan (SSTA)*.

* Arrived later in the meeting

Attending: Ronnie Dinnie, Acting Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development (Land and Environment); Angela Terry, Organisational Development Manager; Linda McAlister, Senior Human Resources Officer; Sally Michael, Principal Solicitor and Shona Barton, Committee and Members' Services Officer.

Apologies: Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Councillors Margaret Bootland and David McBride; David McMillan, Chief Executive, Tricia O'Neill, Head of Human Resources & Organisational Development, Tom Rainey, Charlie McDonald, Duncan Borland, Donald Hamilton and Kath Ryall.

Margaret Ferris in the Chair

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of Meeting of the Joint Consultative Forum (JCF) held on 6 September 2007 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

In relation to a point raised by Mr. Conroy under the heading "St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday – 30th November", the Forum noted that the trades unions would like this recognised as an additional public holiday and added to the current entitlement of 12 days.

In relation to a point raised by Ms. McLafferty under the heading "Sickness Absence", it was noted that the trades unions had as yet received no information on the measures being put in place to manage absence by the Corporate Management Team. It was also noted that the trades unions had concerns over the recruitment process which was currently underway for the new managing absence team and were seeking assurances that the full recruitment process would be followed.

Having heard the Acting Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development (Land and Environment) and the Senior Human Resources Officer in further explanation and in answer to Members' questions, the Forum agreed that further discussion on this issue should take place with the Corporate Management Team which would then be communicated to the trades unions via Corporate HR.

In relation to a point raised by Ms. McLafferty under the heading "Convenors' Job Evaluations", it was noted that no discussions had yet taken place between management and the trades unions convenors to agree their job profiles. Having heard the Senior Human Resources Officer in further explanation, the Forum agreed that a meeting be arranged between the Head of HR & OD, the pay modernisation manager and the trades unions convenors to discuss a way forward.

In relation to a point raised by Ms. McLafferty under the heading "Pension Fund", the Forum noted that there had been no information provided on the proposed seminars. Having heard the Senior Human Resources Officer, the Forum noted:-

- (1) that the consultation on the proposed changes to the pension scheme had ended on 31 October 2007; and
- (2) that it was anticipated that draft regulations would be published in December and that Corporate HR had agreed with the Pension Office that a series of information seminars would be arranged for employees after that time.

In relation to a point raised by Mr. Casey under the heading "Absence", the Forum noted that the investigations into this issue were still ongoing.

In relation to a point raised by Ms. McLafferty under the heading "Future Items for JCF Agenda", the Forum noted that that this item had not yet been progressed. It was further noted that a meeting would be arranged between the trades unions, the Chief Executive, the Corporate Management Team and the Head of HR & OD to progress this issue.

ACTIVITY OF WHISTLEBLOWING HOTLINE

In terms of remit from the Meeting of the Audit and Performance Review Committee held on 18 September 2007 (Page 416 refers), there was submitted the relevant excerpt minute together with a report by the Chief Executive advising on the level of activity on the whistleblowing hotline.

The Forum heard from Mr. Patterson who advised that he had concerns over the application of the policy, particularly in the way that Internal Audit are dealing with calls/notifications.

After discussion, the Forum agreed:-

- (1) to note that the anonymity aspect of the policy was crucial to its success;
- (2) that clear guidelines should be put in place regarding the application of the policy, particularly when deciding which cases require investigation;
- (3) that the policy was not designed to supercede departmental policies for dealing with issues; and
- (4) to note that these comments would be reported back to the Audit & Performance Review Committee.

DISCIPLINE & GRIEVANCE INFORMATION

With reference to the Minutes of Meeting of the Joint Consultative Forum held on 6 September 2007 (Page 389 refers), a report was submitted by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development:-

- (a) providing an update on the number of discipline and grievance appeals held at departmental level (Stage 2) during the period from 1 July 2007 to 30 September 2007; and
- (b) providing further information on the timescales involved during the appeals process and whether these were being met.

After discussion and having heard the Senior Human Resources Officer in further explanation and in answer to Members' questions, the Forum agreed:-

- (1) to note the contents of the report;
- (2) that a report be submitted to the next meeting of the JCF, following consultation with the trades unions and management looking at what would be realistic timescales and best practice to have in place for dealing with grievance appeals at stages one and two; and
- (3) that in future, dismissal appeals to be heard by the Appeals Committee would be scheduled for dates that are outwith the normal cycle of Committee dates, to allow for them to be dealt with more quickly.

REVIEW OF DIGNITY AT WORK POLICY

A report was submitted by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development providing an update on the ongoing review of the Council's Dignity at Work Policy.

After discussion and having heard the Senior Human Resources Officer in further explanation and in answer to Members' questions, the Forum agreed:-

- (1) to note the contents of the report;
- (2) that further progress would be reported to the next meeting of the JCF;
- (3) to note that the initial draft policy had been submitted to the CMT for comment; and
- (4) to note that the CMT support the development of the policy and recognise that the policy requires to be underpinned by a robust training policy.

SICKNESS ABSENCE STATISTICS – QUARTER 2 (JULY – SEPTEMBER 2007/2008)

A report was submitted by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development advising on the levels of employee absence for Quarter 2 which covers the 3 month period from 1 July 2007 to 30 September 2007.

After discussion, the Forum agreed:-

- (1) to note that the trades unions had concerns over the use of sickness absence statistics for political point scoring;
- (2) to note that the trades unions were committed to targeting the reasons behind sickness absence;
- (3) to note that there were concerns that the use of multiple contracts by the Council could lead to a discrepancy when recording sickness absence;
- (4) that management would undertake to look at the issue of multiple contracts and how these were used within the Council;
- (5) to note that the new HR system which was being developed should address some of the issues in relation to recording of absence levels and types of illness;
- (6) to note that when an employee submits a medical certificate which states "work related stress" that this should be the trigger for management to send out the appropriate forms; and
- (7) that a meeting be arranged between the two Group leaders to discuss the issues of political point scoring and treating staff with more care.

In relation to a question raised by Mr. Casey regarding the number of days lost for industrial injuries, the Forum noted that an update on this would be provided at the next meeting of the Corporate Safety Committee.

MINUTES OF DEPARTMENTAL JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES AND DEPARTMENTAL HEALTH & SAFETY MEETINGS

A report was submitted by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development providing the minutes from Departmental Joint Consultative Committees (JCC's) and Health and Safety meetings for the period from 1 July until 30 September 2007.

The Forum agreed to note the contents of the report.

In relation to a point raised by Mr. Conroy regarding the provision of immunisations for Council employees, the Forum agreed that this item should be raised at the next meeting of the Corporate Safety Committee to allow the Health & Safety Representatives to comment. Following which a report would be prepared for submission to a future meeting of the JCF for consideration.

In relation to a point raised by Ms. McLafferty regarding the absence of a Corporate Services JCC, the Forum noted that it would be the intention to recommence this meeting once the new Executive Director had taken up post.

TRADES UNION ISSUES

Compromise Agreements

Having heard Ms. McLafferty, the Forum noted that there were concerns over the introduction and use of compromise agreements for staff who were given voluntary severance packages.

Having heard the Acting Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development (Land and Environment), the Forum agreed:-

- (1) that this issue would be discussed by the Corporate Management Team; and
- (2) that a report be submitted by Legal Services to the next meeting of the JCF on this issue.

Change to holiday entitlements

In relation to a point raised by Mr. Casey and having heard the Senior Human Resources Officer, the Forum noted that the recent change to the minimum holiday entitlement (which had increased from 20 to 24 days inclusive of bank holidays, from October 2007), would not have a direct effect on Council employees as the current minimum leave entitlement within the Council was 20 days leave and 12 public holidays which was above the new statutory entitlement.

Having heard Ms. McLafferty, the Forum noted that the trades unions had already requested a meeting with the Head of HR & OD to discuss this issue.

STANDING ITEMS OF BUSINESS

The Forum agreed to note the current position on the following:-

- (i) Appeals Committee Hearings;
- (ii) Best Value;
- (iii) McCrone Recommendations;
- (iv) Absence; and
- (v) Health and Safety.

Budget Planning

Having heard Ms. McLafferty, the Forum noted that discussions were ongoing between the trades unions, management and Councillors over the budget savings proposals.

Single Status

Having heard Ms. McLafferty, the Forum agreed to note:-

- (1) that there was a great deal of unhappiness about the whole single status process;
- (2) that UNISON had submitted a Freedom of Information request to the Council seeking copies of the factor levels and scores for all Primary Benchmark, Secondary Benchmark and Unique posts;
- (3) that UNISON had now received notification from the Council stating that this information would not be supplied because it is intended for future publication, and that it would be available for general viewing as from 14 February 2008;

- (4) that in the notification letter, the Council had advised that the information would be made available to the trades unions for the purposes of facilitating a collective agreement under the terms of the local negotiating protocol as outlined in SJC 22, with the understanding that it would not be disclosed to individuals or groups of employees;
- (5) that the trades unions would be pursuing this matter using appropriate legal measures.

Having heard Councillor McElhill, it was agreed that a copy of the correspondence from the Council be sent to the Leader of the Council for his information.

Training and Development

The Senior Human Resources Officer introduced Ms. Angela Terry, the recently appointed Organisational Development Manager to the Forum.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Forum would be held on Thursday, 20 March 2008 in Meeting Room 3, Council Offices, Garshake Road, Dumbarton with a pre-meeting involving the trades unions representatives only, taking place at 11.00 a.m. the same day.

CHAIR'S REMARKS

The Chair, Margaret Ferris, wished all those present a happy Christmas.

The meeting closed at 3.38 p.m.