

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

At a meeting of the JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE held on 9th January 2003 at 6.00pm.

PRESENT

Employer Side:

Councillors R.G. Parker, S. Taylor and K. Vale.

Staff Side:

Pam Chapman (UNISON) (Staff Side Chair in the Chair), Jim Brown (UNISON), Courtney Giles (UNISON) and Peter Terry (UNISON).

In attendance:

Bill Welch, Assistant Chief Executive and Alan Durham, Head of Personnel Services (as advisers to the Employer Side) and Ian Gourlay (Committee Administrator).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Employer Side: Councillor R.A. Clark.

Staff Side: Darron Nicholson (T&GWU), Gary Palmer (UCATT/AMICUS) and Mark Roberts (UNISON). Apologies were also given on behalf of UNISON's Staff Side Advisor, Kumar Sandy, who had become unwell earlier that day.

2. MINUTES

It was RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Committee held on 17th December 2002, having been circulated, be taken as read, confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

At this juncture, the Employer Side Chair (Councillor K. Vale) stated that, in a similar fashion to the last meeting, the Employer Side would not be attempting to respond at the meeting to the items raised by the Staff Side. Instead, the Employer Side would provide responses either at the next meeting or in writing before the next meeting. This was noted by the Staff Side.

3. MATTERS ARISING

The Staff Side raised the following matters arising from the Minutes of the meeting held on 17th December 2002 and the Employer's Side response to them dated 19th December 2002:-

5. – Minutes of meeting held on 28th February 2002

The Staff Side reiterated that it sought agreement on the Minutes of the meeting held on 28th February 2003 and was disappointed that this had not been possible. However, as agreement was unlikely to be possible, it was concluded that the only practical course was for each Side to produce their own versions of the Minutes which, whilst obviously not agreed, could be retained on file for reference. The Staff Side Secretary commented that, in such circumstances, the Staff Side would prefer to prepare its own version of the Minutes rather than having to amend the Employer Side's version. Accordingly, it was accepted that both Sides would produce their own version of the Minutes of that meeting for filing.

10. – Single Status, Job Evaluation and the Comprehensive Grading Review

In response to a request from the Staff Side, the Head of Personnel Services advised that he would be writing to the Staff Side Secretary on this matter soon.

13. – NJC Terms and Conditions of Employment

The Staff Side Secretary advised that he was still awaiting a response from the Employer Side on this issue. He clarified that the unions expected the Employer to rectify the local anomalies in NJC Terms and Conditions by 1st April 2003, and that if no commitment was forthcoming then he would be referring the matter to the Regional Joint Secretaries.

4. DISCLOSURE AND PROVISION OF CHIEF OFFICER BOARD AGENDAS, MINUTES AND REPORTS

The Staff Side Secretary stated that one of the Council's values was to keep employees informed of decisions. He added that the Staff Side had encountered difficulty in getting information about issues discussed by Chief Officer Board and decisions made. The Staff Side did not receive the Agendas and Minutes of Chief Officer Board meetings, which the Secretary believed were circulated in some departments of the Council. The Staff Side requested that they be informed of items being considered by Chief Officer Board, preferably by being sent the Agendas for the meetings, and be advised of the decisions made.

5. UNION REQUESTS FOR OFFICERS TO CONVEY COMMENTS AND INFORMATION TO ELECTED MEMBERS

The Staff Side Secretary commented that it was the Unions' understanding that the agreed protocol for making representations to Councillors was for the Staff Side to approach the appropriate Officer and request that their comments be conveyed to the decision-making body prior to a decision being taken.

The Staff Side Secretary maintained that, on more than one occasion, UNISON had asked for a letter to be tabled at a meeting only to be refused by the Lead Officer. He therefore sought an assurance from the Employer Side that on future occasions when UNISON asked for their comments to be conveyed to Councillors then this be done.

6. CONSULTATION ON MATTERS DELEGATED TO EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

The Staff Side Secretary advised that, on matters delegated to Executive Councillors, the Unions were informed of such decisions after they were taken. They were not provided with a copy of reports prepared for approval by Councillors, which therefore denied them the opportunity to raise queries or make written representations on any of the items before decisions were made. Accordingly, the Staff Side Secretary asked for a procedure to be adopted whereby the Unions would be consulted on matters delegated to Executive Councillors before decisions were made. The Assistant Chief Executive undertook to investigate the matter.

7. SBC MARKET SUPPLEMENT POLICY

The Staff Side Secretary referred to the Council's policy relating to the payment of market (or scarcity) supplements to certain staff. He contended that the Council was not adhering to this policy and, in some instances, had dealt with the payment of such supplements in an ad-hoc manner. The Staff Side Secretary stated that should the Council be minded to adopt an amended policy then the Staff Side would be willing to enter into negotiations, but until that time he asked the Council to adhere to the current policy. He further asked that, in future, the Staff Side be consulted on any ad-hoc arrangements which departed from the agreed policy.

8. TRADE UNION INVOLVEMENT IN BEST VALUE

The Staff Side Chair expressed concern that the Unions had not had any meaningful involvement in the Council's Best Value Reviews for the past 12 months, other than receiving committee reports and documentation relating to the outcome of work undertaken by officers, and the occasional invitation to sit in on some of the Member Panels at which the reports were being considered.

The Staff Side Secretary reiterated the comments made by the Chair and referred to the NJC guidance/framework agreement for Trade Union involvement in Best Value, which recommended that the Unions should be fully involved in the process. He asked for details of the Council's plans for Union involvement in next year's Best Value Reviews and in the forthcoming Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA).

9. PLAY SERVICE BEST VALUE REVIEW

The Staff Side Chair explained that she and the Staff Side Secretary had attended meetings of the Best Value Panel dealing with a review of the Council's Play Service, but had not been involved in any discussion/consultation on the Review outside of these Panel meetings.

The Staff Side Chair stated that the recommendation made by the Panel in July 2002 was for approval of an option which made pay competitive and increased the hours of playworkers. However, when their recommendation was reported to the Executive for its meeting held in October 2002, it had been changed to include a stipulation that it be for a 12 month period only.

The Staff Side Secretary asked for an explanation from the Employer as to why the

recommendation reported to the Executive was different to that actually made by the Panel. UNISON considered that the implementation of the Executive's decision for a 12 month period only would not address the recruitment problems in the Play Service, and expressed concern that the Staff Side had not been consulted on this matter.

10. NJC PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY

A member of the Staff Side advised that about a year ago the NJC had produced a national (minimum) scheme for Parental Leave. He added that a recent UNISON survey had revealed that a significant number of employees were unaware of their leave entitlement under the Scheme and had been using other forms of leave to cover for "parental" duties.

The member of the Staff Side asked for confirmation of when the Council would be adopting the NJC Scheme; whether greater publicity could be given to the Scheme; and whether the Council would be interested in negotiating any enhancements over and above the minimum NJC Scheme.

11. LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME

A member of the Staff Side referred to the fact that the Council's current Pension Scheme currently operated on an "opt in" basis, whereby upon joining, new employees would be assumed as not wishing to participate in the Scheme unless they agreed to "opt into" it. The Staff Side was concerned that with an increasing number of new employees not joining the Scheme, the overall Pension Fund would suffer as a result.

The Staff Side asked that, in order to sustain the Scheme, the Council gives consideration to the adoption of an "opt out" scheme, so that new employees are in the Scheme when appointed and would have to choose to leave the Scheme.

12. JOINT REVIEW OF TIED ACCOMMODATION POLICY

The Staff Side Chair referred to an agreed Minute of the meeting of the Committee held on 2nd July 2001, which authorised a thorough review, in consultation with the Unions, of the Council's current policy with regard to its tied accommodation and allocations made to SBC tied tenants. That Minute had also resolved that a report be brought back to the Joint Consultative Committee prior to the matter being submitted to the Executive for final decision.

The Staff Side Chair expressed concern that 18 months had elapsed since this decision without any action. However, the Director of Community Services had written to the Staff Side on 7th January 2003 advising that the review of tied accommodation would be incorporated into a wider review of Allocations/Homeless Strategy to be completed in time for submission to the June 2003 meeting of the Executive.

The Staff Side Secretary asked for this issue to be addressed as a matter of urgency, and requested an assurance from the Employer Side that, in accordance with the July 2001 decision, the timescale would be feasible for a report to be brought before the Committee in the next few months, prior to the Executive's final

decision in June 2003.

13. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would take place on Thursday, 27th February 2003 at 6.00 pm.

The meeting ended at 6.50pm.

**P. CHAPMAN
Staff Side Chair**