

# **MEMBERS/TRADES UNIONS JOINT CONSULTATION AND SAFETY PANEL**

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 3 September 2013, at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 4.30pm.

## **PRESENT:**

Employers representatives: Councillors Barrott, Copping, Kinson and Kirton.

Trades Unions' representatives: Mr Chapleo, Mr Foster (Chairman) and Mr Lynch.

Also present: Peter Dixon (Civic and Committee Services Officer), Chris Elliott (Chief Executive) and Alan Richardson (Health and Safety Advisor).

An apology for absence was received from Mr Crump.

## **6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **7. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2013 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

In response to a Members' question as to whether Council employees were achieving a living wage, the Chief Executive replied that this would be addressed in a report.

The Chairman was pleased to inform the Panel that a national pay award of 1% for 2013/14 had been awarded to staff since the last meeting, as had the locally agreed Fit for the Future achievement payment for 2012/13. The Panel thanked senior managers and singled out the Deputy Chief Executive (AJ) who had done an excellent job of addressing the concerns of union members at a branch meeting held in June.

## **8. CORPORATE HEALTH AND SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT 2012-13**

The Panel received a report from the Health and Safety Advisor which summarised work activity in relation to corporate health and safety.

The report was also due to be presented to the Employment Committee on 23 September.

The report stated that the Council continued to follow the guidance document HSG65 – "Successful Health & Safety Management" – and that over the past year more emphasis had been placed on the monitoring and auditing of the Council's health and safety management systems. This had led to some considerable improvements being made across the organisation, including a formal chair safety inspection program and measures to address safe working practices for contractors. The report

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also gave details of a significant level of training carried out during the year, audits and inspections, and requests for service which had been received by the Health and Safety Advisor.

The Chairman stated that both Unison and GMB were particularly pleased with this report, which demonstrated that the Council was taking Health and Safety very seriously. As a result of training, staff had become certified in accordance with the BSC standard, knew where to access the Health and Safety policy and who to contact if there was a problem. The Health and Safety Advisor and the Head of Environmental Services were thanked for their efforts and particularly for trying to ensure that lone workers were catered for.

The Panel was pleased to note that no time had been lost through accidents in the first quarter of 2013/14.

**9. MANAGEMENT OF HR TEAM AND SUPPORT FOR PAYROLL STAFF**

The Chief Executive informed the Panel that 14 applications had been received in response to an advertisement for an Interim Human Resources (HR) Manager. He and the Deputy Chief Executive (AJ) would consider the applications shortly. Additionally, a temporary arrangement to cover a vacant Senior HR Officer post had worked well to date and had therefore been extended for a longer period.

In light of pressures on the payroll team, the Chief Executive stated that he was happy to award an honorarium if the team was working long hours. An arrangement to pass some work over to Warwickshire County Council was also being considered.

**10. COUNCIL POLICY ON WORKPLACE STRESS AND ASSISTANCE**

In light of pressures and changes on the workforce, the Panel had requested an update on the Council's policy on workplace stress and assistance.

The Chief Executive responded by saying that there was a continual need to reassess the causes of stress, as there were a wide range of triggers and people all reacted differently. It was acknowledged that in the current circumstances of change, there had been a higher than average incidence of stress.

Efforts were continually undertaken to educate officers on managing stress, through induction, on the intranet, stress workshops, training for managers and so on. The Hotfrog Indicator was an electronic management tool which the Council used to question members of staff and which gave a subjective indicator of levels of stress. Audit would be playing a role too.

Employee Support Officers were trained in basic counselling techniques and were able to refer staff on to professional counsellors. It was suggested that it might be worth carrying out an audit of Employee Support Officers

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to establish their effectiveness in this regard. An anonymous avenue for counselling was also available.

**11. FFF UPDATE AND IMPACT ON RESTRUCTURED BUSINESS UNITS**

The Chief Executive advised the Panel that the organisation had almost reached the end of its interventions programme, with a merger of Health and Community Protection now in progress. Housing and Property Services would be subject to a stage 2 intervention in the near future.

Managers were now looking at the medium term strategy to see what needed to be done. There remained no intention to cut services. One of the biggest decisions facing the Council was likely to concern the move of the Council's headquarters out of Riverside House. There would be significant implications for the whole council. A report would be presented to the Executive in November, as would an update report on Fit for the Future. The County Council's proposal to outsource on-street parking would have an impact. Options for leisure services, housing and the procurement of goods and services were all under consideration.

With regard to on-street parking, the Panel noted that Councillors Barrott, Mrs Blacklock and Mobbs were attending a meeting with the County Council on 4 September at which they would recommend no change.

The Chairman reported his concerns over suggestions that two of the Council's contractors were failing to apply appropriate conditions for their staff, including one failing to pay its staff the minimum wage and employing them for long hours. He felt there was a need to hold these contractors to account and was therefore seeking facts and figures in writing prior to taking this up further with the Council's contract managers.

(The meeting ended at 5.15 pm)