

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
Joint Consultation Group (Administrative Etc, Manual and Crafts Staffing)

Minutes of Meeting of the Joint Consultation Group (Administrative Etc, Manual and Crafts Staffing) held in Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Friday, 6 September, 2013 at 10.30 a.m.

Present

Employer's Representatives:

Mr D Fallows
Mr A MacKinnon
Mr D MacKay
Miss J Campbell

Mr H Morrison
Mr R Laird
Dr I Cockburn
Mr F Parr

Staff Side Representatives:

Mr R Selkirk, GMB
Mr M Haymer, GMB
Mr J Rosie, UNITE (by video conference)
Mr M Robison-Murphy, UCATT(substitute)
Mr C Cameron, UCATT (observer)

Ms P Kennedy, UNISON (substitute) (by video conference)
Ms M Macrae, RCN
Ms S Arch, CSP

Officials in attendance:

Ms M Morris, Assistant Chief Executive
Mr J Batchelor, Head of Human Resources, Chief Executive's Service
Mr R Whyte, Regional Officer, UNITE
Mr J Robertson, Programme Manager, Corporate Improvement Programme
Ms E Barrie, Human Resources Manager, Chief Executive's Service
Mr S Lorimer, Assistant Payroll Manager, Finance Service
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Service

1. Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair

The Group had been advised that, in terms of the Constitution, following an election of councillors, and annually thereafter, it was required to appoint a Chair and Vice Chair from amongst its members. If the Chair appointed was one of the Employer's representatives, the Vice-Chair should be one of the Staff Side representatives, and vice versa.

Mr D Fallows seconded by Miss J Campbell moved that Mr R Laird be appointed as Chair. There being no other nominations, Mr Laird was duly appointed.

It was **AGREED** that the Staff Side would advise of their nomination for Vice-Chair in due course.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Dr D Alston from the Employer's Side and Mr J Gibson, Unison, Ms L MacKay, Unison, Mr A Wemyss, Unite and Mr G Pirie, BDA from the Staff Side.

3. Declarations of Interest

Mr A MacKinnon and Mr F Parr declared a non-financial interest on the items to be discussed at the meeting on the grounds that family members were employees of the Council but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interest did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

4. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated for confirmation, Minutes of the last meeting of the Group held on 28 June, 2013 the terms of which were **APPROVED**, subject to the following amendment:-

Item 3 - Evaluation of Posts – be amended to read: - the Staff Side sought an assurance that agenda for change jobs would not be re-evaluated.

In response to a related matter, it was advised that following the last meeting of the Group, the Head of Human Resources met with trade unions to discuss their concerns and an agreement had now been reached on a way forward, with Trade Union representatives now being represented on the Scrutiny Panel for the evaluation of posts.

Arising from the Minutes the following matters were raised:-

Item 8 – External Advertisement of Post – Clerk (Children's Hearing Scotland) – the Staff Side sought feedback on whether or not there had been an agreement between the Highland Council and NHS Highland to monitor vacancies against the Redeployment Registers of both organisations.

In response, the Head of Human Resources advised that there was an informal arrangement to monitor vacancies against the Redeployment Register of both organisations which was working well and there were examples of staff being redeployed between the Council and NHS Highland.

Item 9 – Permanent Contracts for Apprentices – it was noted that the Staff Side had provided details of one case where an apprentice in Housing and Property Service was not being paid the correct amount for the job. This was being investigated by the Maintenance and Service Support Manager, Housing and Property Service who would report back to the Staff Side.

The Staff Side reported that they had been informed of further instances of apprentices in the Housing and Property Service that were not being paid the correct amount for the job and they would investigate further and pass the specific details onto the Maintenance and Service Support Manager.

Item 10 – Overuse of Outside Contractors – it was noted that information on the use of external contractors by the Housing and Property Service was to be

submitted to the Staff Side. It was advised that some members of the Staff Side had received this information, but others had not, so it was requested that the information be re-circulated.

Item 13 – Blacklisting – the Staff Side welcomed the fact that the Highland Council had passed a motion against the practice of Blacklisting. The strength of this message could not be underestimated and was a good example to other employers in the Highland area.

Item 13 – Community Challenge Fund – The Staff Side had concerns in terms of the Fort Augustus application and in respect of how future Community Challenge Fund applications were considered. They sought more discussion on applications before they were put forward for approval.

In response, it was advised that the staffing impact of applications was considered by both Officer and Member Panels and insofar as the Fort Augustus application was concerned, there had been consultation with the Staff Side on this as it had a staffing implication. There would be a review of the Community Challenge Fund process by the year end and trade unions would be involved in this.

5. Corporate Improvement Programme 2

There was circulated Report No. JCG/9/13 by the Assistant Chief Executive which provided an update on the Corporate Improvement Programme 2 (CIP2). It was reported that CIP2 projects had started with projects progressing satisfactorily, targets of £6m had been set.

Progress was provided on the following projects:- Asset Management; Business Support; Customer Contact Transformation; Income Generation; Integrated Transport Provision; Mobile and Flexible Working and Managing Information. An assessment of the projects that would most likely affect staff was also provided.

In relation to the Mobile and Flexible Working project, the project board had a vacancy for a trade union representative and nominations for this were sought. The Staff Side advised that they would report back with their nomination.

The Group **NOTED:-**

- i the progress of the Corporate Improvement Programme 2 and the engagement with staff and trade unions; and
- ii that the Staff Side would report back with their nomination for the vacancy for a trade union representative on the Mobile and Flexible Working project board.

6. Support for Apprentices

There was circulated Report No. JCG/10/13 by the Director of Planning and Development which outlined the support which was available to Services to enable modern apprenticeships to be identified and recruited to as part of the Council's wider Youth Employment initiative.

It was advised that the Council was committed to the creation of modern apprenticeships (MAs). The MA approach builds on traditional apprenticeships by having a formal support system in place to enable skills to be developed and achieve a recognised national qualification through an awarding body. A comprehensive guide had been developed to assist Service Managers to identify job roles/posts which may be suitable for MA in the Council. Funding was available for MAs training and the criteria for this was detailed. It was proposed that Service Directors are asked to consider where MAs may be employed within their Service, particularly where no MAs existed at present.

Further, progress of MAs could be reported to the Employability Board which met to monitor the Council's achievement against the current and future commitment level. It was advised that the Staff Side had been invited to nominate a representative to this Board. In this respect, the Staff Side undertook to report back with their nomination to the Employability Board.

It was also reported that the Council was reviewing its Youth Employment Action Plan and there was a Council Programme commitment to extend the Youth Trainee Programme. A total of 72 placements had been made to date which was well ahead of target.

The Group **NOTED**:

- i the support for apprentices and gave their support to the proposal that Services should consider where MAs could be employed in their Service as outlined in section 4 of the report; and
- ii that the Staff Side would report back with their nomination to the Employability Board.

7. Implementation of Monthly Pay

There was circulated Report No. JCG/11/13 by the Head of Human Resources which outlined the successful transition to monthly pay for 2608 staff through consultation with the trade unions on how the change could be achieved during this financial year while minimising the disruption to the staff affected. A budget saving of £47,500 had been identified for 2013/14 by moving staff to monthly pay.

The report detailed the communication and support to affected staff and given the large numbers of employees involved in the changes, the transition from weekly/fortnightly to monthly pay had been smooth.

The Group **NOTED** the successful implementation of monthly pay for 409 staff paid weekly and 2199 staff pay fortnightly.

8. Employee Partnership & Engagement Framework

There was circulated Report No. JCG/12/13 by the Head of Human Resources which sought the support of the Group to instigate a joint working group with the trade unions to define and develop an employee engagement/partnership framework that empowers employees and their representatives to

be involved in decision making at all levels.

The report set out the principles and benefits of a partnership framework and referred to the commitment in the Integrating Care Partnership Agreement where the Council would work with the recognised trade unions to develop a model of partnership working which is compatible with the Staff Governance Standards.

Having heard the Staff Side welcome the proposal to set up a joint working group, the Group:-

- i **NOTED** the benefits of applying a partnership and engagement framework;
- ii **AGREED** to support the establishment of a joint working group to define and develop a partnership and engagement framework that delivers for Highland Council and reflects the democratic nature of the Council.

9. **Kessock Bridge Works – Review of Flexible Working Arrangements**

There was circulated Report No. JCG/13/13 by the Head of Human Resources which invited the Group to support a review of flexible working arrangements in the light of the more flexible approach which was adopted during the recent Kessock Bridge Works.

The first phase of works on the Kessock Bridge had now been completed and the second phase would commence in 2014. Rather than stop the temporary flexible working arrangements introduced to help reduce the volume of vehicles crossing the Bridge, it was proposed that the Flexible Working arrangements/Flexitime changes agreed to accommodate the Kessock Bridge works continue, but individual cases are reviewed by Service Directors to ensure service delivery is not compromised.

It was also proposed that the terms and operation of the flexi system be reviewed to ensure that it supported service delivery and employee work life balance while making the best use of Council resources. This review would be carried out in partnership with the trade unions and would also include an overall review of the Flexible Working Policy.

Having heard the Staff Side welcome the proposals, the Group **AGREED** to support the proposal that the interim Flexible Working arrangements and changes to the Flexitime scheme should continue (but subject to Service Directors reviewing and agreeing individual cases) pending a review of these policies in partnership with the trade unions.

STAFF SIDE ITEM

10. The Highland Council are continually seeking to cut costs and become more efficient. Can the Group be supplied with a report on variations to staffing posts in relation to budget cuts? A report on this year's budget cuts being achieved and how many posts have been cut, so far this year, to achieve these savings.

The Group were also asked to note that the Staff Side were planning to extend their frequency of meetings, both as a Staff Side and with the Employer, to support the development of staff partnership working.

The Group **AGREED** that a report be submitted to the next meeting with the information requested by the Staff Side.

The meeting ended at 11.10 a.m.

Date of Next Meeting – Thursday, 12 December, 2013 commencing at 10.30a.m.