

SPECIAL EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of a special Employment Committee held on 13 September 2011 at 12 noon in Conference Room A, floor 2, Civic Offices, Portsmouth.

(NB These minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting which can viewed at www.portsmouth.gov.uk.)

Present

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson (Chair)
Councillor Leo Madden (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Lynne Stagg
Rob Wood
Donna Jones (deputising for
Councillor Jim Fleming)

Officers

David Williams, Chief Executive
Margaret Geary, Strategic Director and
Director of Adult Social Services
Michael Lawther, City Solicitor and Monitoring Officer
Ama Juss, Employment Lawyer
Sue Page, Financial Services
Kay White, Head of Human Resources
Stephen Todd, Senior Manager Pay & Policy
Shaun Tetley, Payroll and Pensions Manager

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson, the chair of the Employment Committee, explained that he intended to hear the deputations in open forum and that the union representative would be invited to participate in a discussion. The meeting would then continue in closed session and be re-opened to allow members of the public to hear the committee's decision.

31 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Simon Boshier and from Councillor Jim Fleming. Councillor Donna Jones attended in place of Councillor Fleming.

32 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Rob Wood declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in that his son-in-law works at Harbour School.

Councillor Lynne Stagg declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in that her daughter works at a PCC school.

The chair advised that deputation requests had been received from Mr Richard White of Unite the Union, Ms Lindsay Williams of Unison and Ms Natalie Farndell from GMB union. The chair then invited the union representatives to make their deputations.

Mr Richard White of Unite said that PCC staff were over-worked and underpaid and that this had a negative effect on Portsmouth. He gave statistics demonstrating cost of living increases which showed that in real terms staff pay had been cut over many years.

Ms Lindsay Williams of Unison commented on the alternative proposals that the unions had put forward to save money including the parking and bailiff proposals. Ms Williams also mentioned the unions' voluntary redundancy/severance proposals. With regard to pay cuts, if these occurred there would be problems with changes to pay bands and job descriptions and that these would be very disruptive and would have a domino effect. Ms Williams said that the unions felt that an enhanced severance scheme as put forward by the unions would be the best way forward.

Ms Natalie Farndell of GMB union then made her deputation and said that a large number of people would be likely to take the enhanced severance option if this were offered. She said that it would be better to seek a scheme which has the backing of staff especially given that industrial disputes were very expensive.

The chair thanked the unions for their deputations.

During discussion the following points were made:

- Members of the committee had concerns around the affordability of the enhanced severance/redundancy option proposed by the unions but felt that discussions should continue.
- Ms Lindsay Williams said that although car parking changes would not result in a saving of £2 million, nevertheless a significant sum could in her view be saved. Ms Williams accepted that a financial model was very difficult to produce and was unable to give an estimate of what the savings would be. Members of the committee felt that a proposal without a finite figure was not realistic.
- Members of the committee felt that the bailiff option may give the wrong message to members of the public as it could be interpreted as increasing the pressure on the public in order to pay council staff.
- A discussion took place about voluntary redundancies and severance. Real savings would only be made if a post was made redundant. The union representatives felt that a severance scheme which was time-limited would be preferable to making compulsory redundancies next year.

- The unions also said they felt that the transformation programme would result in jobs being lost. It was suggested that the Learning & Development team could be accessed by existing staff to enable them to shadow other jobs within PCC with a view to them being in a position to apply for other jobs if their own jobs were lost. The unions believed that the options they had put forward would come close to making the £2 million worth of savings that were required.

The chair thanked everyone for their contributions and advised that the committee would now move into exempt session.

It was proposed by Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson and seconded by Councillor Leo Madden that in view of the contents of the item on the agenda the committee be recommended to adopt the following motion:

“That under the provisions of section 100A of the Local Government Act, 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the press and public be excluded for the consideration of the following item on the grounds that the report contains information defined as exempt in part 1 of schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972

and this was agreed.

RESOLVED that the motion set out above be adopted.

**33 Exempt Report from the Chief Executive on Terms and Conditions (AI 4)
(TAKE IN REPORT)**

The Chief Executive summarised the contents of the report and the appendices.

The committee discussed the options that had been put forward both in the report and during discussion in open session and unanimously agreed wording for a resolution that could be published.

The committee resumed in open session at 1.10 pm when the union representatives and members of the public were invited back to the meeting. The chair of the committee read out the decision of the Employment Committee which was as follows:

RESOLVED that

The City Council values its staff highly but is faced with reductions of grant from Central Government and a limit on increases in council tax. We appreciate the points made by union representatives today, as in the past, and we do wish to continue discussions in an attempt to reach agreement on changes to pay and conditions.

The Employment Committee agrees to start formal statutory consultation with the trade unions and staff under section 188 of the Trade Union & Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 in regard to freezing incremental pay for all staff earning £21,000 and above (excluding schools), for 2 years.

The Employment Committee is not minded to consider pay cuts but will consider other proposals and suggestions made throughout the consultation period to help bridge the financial gap including, but not limited to, changes to car parking, bailiffs services and voluntary redundancy/severance, but not the voluntary redundancy/severance proposal made by the unions as this is unaffordable.

The meeting concluded at 1.20 pm.

Chair

VJP/DMF
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