

RMBC/TRADES UNIONS JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
Friday, 11th July, 2014

Present:-

Councillor Lakin	Deputy Leader (in the Chair)
Councillor Doyle	Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care
Councillor McNeely	Cabinet Member, Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods
Councillor Rushforth	Cabinet Member for Education and Public Health Services
Councillor Smith	Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways and Street Scene Services
Councillor Stone	Leader of the Council
Councillor Whelbourn	Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Management Board
Emma Ellis	UNISON
Tracy Rhodes	UNISON
Sharon Simcox	UNISON
Robin Symonds	UNISON
Eric Batty	GMB
Lee Simpson	GMB
Simon Cooper	Human Resource Manager
Phil Howe	Director of Human Resources
Martin Kimber	Chief Executive

72. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11TH APRIL, 2014

Agreed:- That the minutes of the previous meeting of this Joint Consultative Committee held on 11th April, 2014 be approved as a correct record.

73. MATTERS ARISING

(a) National Pay Negotiations

The Employer's Side made reference to the progress of the National Pay Negotiations detailing the Trades Unions' requests and the final offer that had been made to the Trades Unions.

The offer was rejected, which resulted in a period of consultation and a one day strike on the 10th July, 2014.

The Trades Unions were commended for the conduct of their members as part of the industrial action outside Riverside House.

The Employees' Side's view was that the negotiations over the pay

award had come to a standstill and little progress was being made. Thanks were offered to those who supported the industrial action and it was hoped this would herald a change of dynamics with a way forward. If no agreement could be reached plans were in hand to take further industrial action in September.

Management was urged, however, to take a stand regarding employees who did not participate in the industrial action to ensure they remained working rather than observing those on the picket line.

The Employer's Side also confirmed that a letter had been received from the Trades Unions regarding the use of the savings from employees on strike and it was agreed that the savings would be used as individual spend on services rather than a means to funding the budget gap.

(b) Council Budget Update

The Employer's Side gave an update on the latest budget estimates with the Council facing a deficit of £15.5m in 2015/16 and an additional £16.5m in 2016/17.

Given the scale of savings required Members have given their approval to open a further window of opportunity for voluntary severance under the terms of the Council's discretionary scheme which offered an additional twelve weeks for those employees able to leave by the end of August 2014. This window would close on 31st July, 2014.

Consideration was to be given to yet more innovative ways to balance the budget. Increasingly the Council would be forced to focus on significantly reconfiguring services, working differently or with partners and outsourcing services.

(c) Rotherham Living Wage

The Employer's Side gave an update on discussions with Trade Unions on the mechanism for implementing a Local Living Wage from 1st October, 2014. A draft collective agreement had been circulated to the Trade Unions and it is hoped that this will shortly be signed by all parties.

It was noted that the implementation of a Local Living Wage at £7.65 per hour would substantially increase rates of pay beyond those proposed by the national pay offer on spinal column points 5 to 10. This would represent a 17% increase for the lowest paid employee in the Council.

The Employees' Side welcomed the proposal for the Local Living

Wage and the benefits this would bring to around 1,500 employees.

Questions were raised about the implementation of the Local Living Wage and the indications that this would only apply up to 37 hours and any additional overtime would revert back to the earlier rate without an enhancement, but then at time and a half.

The Employer's Side took on board the concerns raised and agreed to give it further consideration.

(d) Disabled Parking at Riverside House

The Employer's Side confirmed that those individuals affected by the introduction of charges for blue badge holders have either continued to park at Riverside House and pay the appropriate charge or made alternative arrangements.

(e) Unison Petition on Children's Centres

The Employer's Side confirmed that clarification had been sought on the level of signatures required on a petition in order to trigger a Council debate. The figure at which the Council had to debate a petition (or at least the issue raised by the petition) within the Council's "Scheme for handling petitions" was 5% of the local population. However, it was noted that despite the confusion over the 9,555 and 12,865 population figures the legislation with regards to petitions had changed and there was no legal requirement for a Council debate.

There would, however, be consideration to revising the Policy for adoption at the Annual Council Meeting in 2015.

(f) Travelling Time

The Employees' Side asked if any progress had been made on private home care providers and their non-payment of travelling time.

The Employer's Side confirmed that there was no further information to report on those companies who were commissioned on behalf of the Council. However, should the Trades Unions have examples of malpractice then this should be shared and would be investigated further.

(d) National Pay Negotiations

The Employer's Side made reference to the progress of the National Pay Negotiations detailing the Trades Unions' requests and the final offer that had been made to the Trades Unions.

The offer was rejected, which resulted in a period of consultation and a one day strike on the 10th July, 2014.

The Trade Unions were thanked for their co-operation on reaching agreement on exemptions from strike action for life and limb services.

The Employees' Side's view was that the negotiations over the pay award had come to a standstill and little progress was being made. The Trade Unions have indicated that if no agreement could be reached plans were in hand to take further national industrial action in September.

(e) Council Budget Update

The Employer's Side gave an update on the latest budget estimates with the Council now facing a deficit reduced from an initial £23m to a latest estimated 'gap' of £15.5m after financial accounting savings in 2015/16 and an additional £16.5m in 2016/17, before any other national adjustments via the Autumn Statement or other in-year decisions.

Given the scale of savings required Members had given their approval to open a further window of opportunity for voluntary severance under the terms of the Council's discretionary scheme which offered an additional twelve weeks for those employees able to leave by the end of August 2014. A total of 160 employees had so far sought information about their figures. This window would close on 31st July, 2014.

Consideration was to be given to yet more innovative ways to balance the budget. Increasingly the Council would be forced to focus on significantly reconfiguring services, working differently or with partners and outsourcing services.

(f) Rotherham Living Wage

The Employer's Side gave an update on discussions with Trade Unions on the mechanism for implementing a Local Living Wage from 1st October, 2014. A draft collective agreement had been circulated to the Trade Unions and it is hoped that this will shortly be signed by all parties.

It was noted that the implementation of a Local Living Wage supplement to add to substantive grade rates taking minimum Council pay rates up to £7.65 per hour would substantially increase rates of pay beyond those proposed by the national pay offer on spinal column points 5 to 10. This would represent a 17% increase for the lowest paid employee in the Council.

The Employees' Side welcomed the proposal for the Local Living Wage and the benefits this would bring to around 1,500 employees.

Questions were raised about the implementation of the Local Living Wage and the indications that this would only apply up to 37 hours and any additional overtime would revert back to the substantive rate with the appropriate enhancement.

The Employer's Side agreed to give this point further consideration.

74. ORGANISATIONAL UPDATE

The Employer's Side gave an update on the various Directorates drawing particular attention to matters within:-

- Children and Young People's Services.
- Environment and Development Services.
- Neighbourhoods and Adult Services.
- Resources.

The Employees' Side welcomed the proposal that a further three Children's Centres would continue to be run by the Council making twelve in total across the Borough. Questions had been raised regarding 'pre-determination' when it was noted that a press release was issued at the beginning of May about increasing the numbers to a further three when the consultation process only closed on the 30th April, 2014.

The Employer's Side explained the rationale behind the press release and the interim report that was presented to Cabinet for information only, which highlighted the need for some reconsideration around geographical spread and demographic usage.

Attention would now be given to the expressions of interest that had been received from schools and other agencies about running those centres no longer being funded by the Council.

The Employees' Side wished to place on record their thanks to the Council for officer involvement in discussions to seek to resolve the Abbey School dispute.

In terms of Resources the Employees' Side referred to the Single Fraud Investigation Service and the anticipation that six members of staff would be transferring to this new service. The Council was urged to review if any re-engineering of the service might impact on the prospects for people employed by Rotherham and therefore avoid any need to transfer.

The Employer's Side confirmed this would be relayed to service managers for their consideration.

75. MILEAGE RATE

This item was deferred for a second time to enable the representative from Unison who originally submitted the item to be present.

76. SICKNESS ABSENCE QUARTERLY INFORMATION (2013/14 QUARTER 4 INFORMATION TO 31ST MARCH, 2014)

The Employer's Side confirmed that the year-end figure for days lost due to sickness per employee for 2012/13 was 7.51 days. This represented a reduction of 0.45 days compared to 2011/12.

The final year end figure for 2013/14 Quarter 4 ending 31st March, 2014 was now officially reported at 8.3 days.

This year's Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and Simply Health Absence Management Survey had noted an overall increase in absence rates across the country. For organisations of 5000+ the average was reported to be 9.2 days.

Some of the rise in the Council's sickness absence could be attributed to the statistical fact that the Council's workforce 'denominator' had reduced due to the significant number of transfers out of lower absence School-based employees to Academy or Trust status. If those Schools that had converted to Academy status last year were factored back into the Council's absence calculation, the year end outturn would have been 7.75 days, representing only 0.24 days higher than the year before.

The Employees' Side considered the sickness absence information to be positive, but suggested that the increase could probably be attributable to anxiety and stress as a direct result of the impact on staff by the budget cuts.

The Employer's Side took its role as a responsible employer seriously and was continuing to consider how it could the deliver services and manage public expectation realistically without overloading the already hard working staff whilst managing sickness levels.

The Employees' Side also raised some concern about the process of managing sickness absence, the prognosis and options for returning/not returning to work and the termination of employment with compensatory payments.

The Employer's Side listened to the concerns, but pointed out that it was necessary to consider a variety options as part of managing sickness in the workplace. The Council's has an excellent track record of dealing proportionately and sympathetically with sickness absence balanced against a need to take appropriate action where sickness absence had reached levels of concern..

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Agreed:- That the information be noted.

77. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business to report.