



ANNUAL MEETING : THURSDAY 10 JULY 2008

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES UPDATE YEAR 2007 / 2008 REVIEW

1. **Summary**

This report sets out some of the key achievements of the Employment Services Team during the financial year 2007-2008.

2. **Advice**

Our demand for an advisory service appears to remain constant with various requests for advice and support. In particular we were asked for support in areas concerning flexible retirement under the Local Government Pension Scheme; redundancy and continuous service; maternity; and contract changes, including different types of employees, variations, and where the Modification Order applies.

3. **Equal Pay**

There has been a significant interest over the year, particularly generated by the No Win No Fee lawyers, often commencing with a Freedom of Information request seeking information on which to base their campaigns. To date, the South East has been relatively untouched. However, recently, we are aware of Statutory Grievances arriving at a growing number of our councils. SEE has continued to provide a highly valued service of job evaluation and equal pay auditing and this has, we believe, assisted our councils in preparing their defence in the event of a challenge.

4. **Legislative change**

Employment Bill 2007-2008

The overall effect of the Employment Bill is to strengthen and clarify key aspects of employment law. It was introduced and had its first reading on 6 December 2007 with the aim of receiving Royal Assent in 2008.

The Employment Bill is intended to improve the effectiveness of employment law to the benefit of employers, trade unions, individuals and the public sector. It will also bring together both elements of the Government's employment relations strategy: increasing protection for vulnerable workers and lightening the load for law-abiding business.

The Bill includes provisions on the following policy areas:

Dispute resolution – to make changes to the law relating to resolving disputes in the workplace and, amongst other things, it repeals the existing statutory dispute resolution procedures and related provisions about procedural unfairness in cases of dismissal.

The Working Time (Amendment) Regulations 2007 (SI 2007/2079)

Came into force on 1 October 2007. This increased the statutory holiday entitlement from four weeks to 5.6 weeks (maximum 28 days). This is to implement its commitment to make paid time off for bank holidays additional to the current holiday entitlement. The holiday entitlement will increase to 4.8 weeks (24 days for those working full-time) from 1 October 2007 and to 5.6 weeks (28 days for those working full-time) from 1 April 2009, pro-rata for those working part-time. This will not affect local authority staff in most cases as our leave entitlement is already more generous (i.e. Green Book minimum is 22 days plus 8 bank holidays).

Another change being implemented during the year was to the statutory framework for maternity leave and pay, and associated provisions, altered in April 2007.

5. Web site

The successful development of the www.seemp.co.uk web site has continued to be a very significant area of the work in 2007-08, managed by Juliet Thomas, our Business Communications Adviser. Juliet is hoping to expand this service to our councils over the next year.

6. Surveys

Our mini-survey facility continued to expand as it is popular with our councils and provides a fast and efficient means to compare practices with colleagues around the region. Juliet is hoping to expand this by introducing a region-wide pay and benefits survey which we hope will reduce the need for some of these queries and the need to conduct so many mini surveys.

7. Liaison with customers

We continue to attend the county-wide Personnel officer groups and normally have a standing SEE agenda item where we can update our colleague HR professionals about what is happening across the region and nationally, and gain feedback from them about what they would like from SEE.

We continued to organise the Education Personnel Officers Group (which focuses on Childrens Services HR) to which DfES and NEOST contributed, and from which the Region's LEAs continued to benefit.

8. Staff Side

We continued in contact with UNISON at its Regional office, both formally through our joint meetings, but also behind the scenes with a dialogue around issues that have arisen locally.

9. Consultancy

In the 2007-08 financial year, we assisted councils with a range of consultancy exercises including mediation, restructures, setting up shared services, review of services etc., chief officer terminations of contract and recruitment.

10. Criminal Records Bureau

This remains an important feature of what SEE offered our Associate membership and it continues to expand. We acted as an Umbrella under which they obtained Disclosures from the CRB.

11. Staffing

Oliver Woodman retired in March 2007 and Shella Smith left to join Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council in May 2008. We are currently recruiting two new HR Business Partners, but with the delay of having to give 3 months notice, we are hoping they will join us in August and September 2008.

12. Business Support to Employment Services

Ruth Walker is leaving SEE in June 2008 and we are recruiting to fill that vacancy.

**Jennifer McNeill
Regional Director**

June 2008