

SOUTH EAST PROVINCIAL COUNCIL FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES

**NOTES FROM REGIONAL JOINT COMMITTEE
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 8 FEBRUARY 2006
AT ABBEY COMMUNITY CENTRE, LONDON**

PRESENT:

Employers' Side

Cllr Robert Hull	Crawley Borough Council
Cllr Michael Tunwell	East Sussex County Council
Cllr Dr Raymond Ellis	Hampshire County Council
Cllr Marjorie Smallcorn	Havant Borough Council
Cllr Bill Dow	New Forest District Council
Cllr Alan Ferrier	Rushmoor Borough Council
Cllr Terry Holden-Brown	Southampton City Council
Cllr Raymond Parsons	Wealden District Council
Cllr Kelsie Learney	Winchester City Council
Cllr Rob Stanton	Wokingham District Council

Trade Union Side (Unison)

Teana Ashley
David Buss
Peter Fryer
Jan Matthews
Amanda Parks
Mary Pearson
Phillip Reynolds
Lind Richards (in the Chair)
Nina Sutton
Ann Newton (Substitute)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Madeleine Sumsion	Regional Director, South East Employers
Oliver Woodman	Head of Employment, Research & Information, South East Employers

1.0 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from:

Employers' Side

Cllr John Rankin	Arun District Council
Cllr Clive Chapman	Mid Sussex District Council
Cllr Reg Edwards	Milton Keynes Council

Trade Union Side (Unison)

Martin Gregory
Diana Leach
Jessie Russell
Tony Watson
Tony House

2.0 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 2 NOVEMBER 2005

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2005 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

3.0 SEPC SEMINAR

Members received a draft programme for the Seminar on 24 May 2006 and it was noted that this had been amended to take into account suggestions from the Trade Union side at the last Regional Joint Committee meeting on 2 November 2005. The Trade Union Side Joint Secretary suggested that the item on the Local Government Pension Scheme be deferred to the next seminar when more progress will have been made. She suggested the programme had sufficient material for this to be feasible. **It was agreed that the Joint Secretaries would discuss this suggestion.** In answer to a query from the Trade Union Side, the Employers' Side Joint Secretary explained that Shared Intelligence, who would be presenting Session One on the agenda, are independent consultants based in London who specialise in providing advice and information on Local Strategic Partnerships. They are currently working jointly with South East Employers on a project researching into the support needs for LSPs and other partnerships.

4.0 LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME

The Committee received a report for information on the current situation regarding the proposed amendments which will take effect from 6 April 2006. A lengthy discussion ensued with the following comments being made by the Trade Union Side:

- Disappointment expressed that the regulations have reached the stage of being placed before Parliament and Unison are campaigning hard against this. The result will be a ballot for industrial action to be held week commencing 21 February;

- Disappointment also expressed regarding the abolishment of the 85 year rule. The regulation regarding commutation will change pension behaviour and it is the view of the Trade Union Side that this will free up funding which will pay for life-time protection of the 85 year rule;
- Other groups such as the NHS, teachers, etc. have reached a settlement that completely protects all those currently in their Pension Scheme, but this is not the same with local government;
- Also disappointment on the emphasis of the age discrimination aspect of the 85 year rule – UNISON continues to say that the rule will **not** breach the age discrimination regulations;
- Unhappy that people who signed up for the LGSP many years ago have now had the rules changed half way through;
- The protection being offered now is no better than 12 months ago. The regulations do not actually mention a date, merely say there will be “protection for older members”. Regulations are never retrospective and you will always have someone falling the wrong side of any deadline;
- Its time to talk about a new pension scheme for the future but it should not be changed by imposition

Oliver Woodman, for the Employers’ Side, said that the protections that will be put in place will certainly need to be carefully considered but there should be an acknowledgement that there has been protection given to some people who might have otherwise been worse off. The Employers’ Side are very conscious of the

employees' contributions, and a correct understanding of the benefits. Figures recently quoted in the Press are acknowledged to be unrepresentative and untypical. The chief concern is that any pension promise that is made can be delivered.

The report was received by the Joint Committee.

5.0 PAY AND WORKFORCE STRATEGY, VERSION 3

Members received a copy of the revised draft Regional Implementation Plan which was mainly for information purposes. The Employers' Side Joint Secretary advised that the amendments had been made to reflect feedback from authorities. One of the positive aspects underpinning capacity building was the feasibility study into the setting up of a Public Sector Academy. It is hoped that more funding will be made available to pilot a planning technician course. In answer to a query regarding the Regional Recruitment Portal, the Employers' Side Secretary explained that in Surrey there is a County-wide recruitment portal under which all public service organisations agree to carry out recruitment by information technology rather than through advertisements in magazines and newspapers. This has driven down recruitment costs and contributes towards efficiency savings and e-targets. Our initiative is to assess the possible interest of authorities across the region for developing a regional portal. A benefit would be that authorities would work together to create a "talent pool". Although it is early days, it is hoped this could be integrated into the South East Employers' website and possibly the Unison website.

A query was raised by the Trade Union Side disputing the statement at the top of Page 3 of the report, i.e. "Union membership overall is not high and in this region much of the briefing to the union comes from the Regional Employers." The Employers' Side Joint Secretary advised that, in the early days of the Pay and Workforce Strategy, it was felt that Unison had not heard much about this particular initiative from any other source. **However, she was happy to change this**

statement. The Trade Union Side also felt that the suggestion of recruiting back those who have retired should also be extended to all grades of staff and not just those at senior level – possibly even on a part-time basis.

The report was received by the Joint Committee.

6.0 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2004 NATIONAL AGREEMENT

The Joint Committee received a report which largely reiterated earlier reports to the Regional Joint Committee on the requirement for a Review and/or an Equal Pay Audit. Oliver Woodman, for the Employers' Side, advised that South East Employers have carried out Equal Pay Audits for a number of authorities across the region and he believed that good progress had been made in the implementation of the agreement. The Employers' Side were not aware of any significant obstacles to making progress.

The Trade Union Side Joint Secretary was aware of a small number of authorities experiencing local problems, namely Hampshire, Hart, Runnymede and Spelthorne. These problems were mainly around the ability to pay and the cost both of job evaluation and the resulting pay changes. However, the relationship between the Employers and the Trade Union through the Provincial Council was working well and she has consulted with Oliver Woodman, and would continue to do so, when the Trade Union encountered a problem.

Cllr Dr Raymond Ellis, Hampshire County Council offered to liaise with Mary Pearson, Unison regarding any problems at Hampshire County Council.

The report was received by the Joint Committee.

7.0 EQUAL PAY DEVELOPMENTS

This report was provided for information and the Employers' Side were not aware of any equal pay litigation in any part of the region so far. The report was discussed with the following comments being made:

From the Trade Unions Side:

- While you can ensure compliance with legal minimum standards by conducting an equal pay audit, it is difficult to make progress without having a policy;
- There should be a policy on equal pay in each local authority – you should not have to write a policy just because there is a problem;
- The issue to be avoided is not just around sex discrimination, it also includes disability, ethnicity and sexuality but the required information was not available;
- Having a policy and having job evaluation does make it easier to do an audit;
- Authorities may wish to ensure there is no discrimination between part time and full time employees.

Oliver Woodman from the Employers' Side said that, in the longer term, the approach to equalities will change. The new Equality and Human Rights commission coming on stream in 2007 and the simultaneous review of the legislation would create a new initiative in equalities enforcement.

The report was received by the Joint Committee.

8.0 THE LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY AS AN EMPLOYER / PROGRESS ON SCHOOL WORKFORCE MODERNISATION

This item has been placed on the agenda at the request of the Trade Union Side and the Trade Unions Side Secretary was looking for some support for the local education authorities remaining the employer of school staff. Their view is that the “privatisation” of schools is not what is wanted. The subject was discussed at length with the following comments being made:

From the Trade Union Side:

- In Oxfordshire the LEA does have an influence on the service and does a lot of work with the HR Department to resolve problems in schools;
- One of the things in the White Paper out for consultation until recently is the intention to allow LEAs to “wither on the vine”, as shown, for example, in the proposal that LEAs would not be allowed to establish new schools and that there would be rebuilding/amalgamation of old schools.
- LEAs have a role in ensuring good employment standards;
- The employer is the LEA and this gives consistency and fairness. If this is taken away, it will lead to the input of money from any source.

From the Employers' Side:

- In Hampshire, the understanding is that it is the governing bodies that are responsible for school staff and not the County Council;
- Primary schools do not have the capacity to deal with issues that arise – this puts pressure on the governors. They value support from the local authority on this;

- Cllr Michael Tunwell, East Sussex County Council: We must not lose sight of the most important people, i.e. the parents and children who are looking for a good education, it must not turn into a “post code lottery”;
- It is certainly important that good schools are developed but more important that not so good schools are brought up to the same higher standard – some schools can be turned around with different head teachers and staff.

The report was received by the Joint Committee.

9.0 RESTRUCTURING THE EMPLOYERS’ ORGANISATION

This report was provided mainly for the information of the Trade Union Side and included the Terms of Reference of the review of Regional Arrangements.

The report was received by the Joint Committee.

10. STANDING ITEMS

10.1 Appeals

It was noted that no appeals had been registered.

10.2 Improvement and Development Report

Members received a report on current key activities and developments in improvement and development.

The report was received by the Joint Committee.

13.0 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Regional Joint Committee is scheduled for 8 November 2006.

Linda Richards, Chairman offered thanks from the Trade Union Side to the Employers' Side Joint Secretary, Madeleine Sumsion, for her guidance, help and (sometimes) support to the Trade Union Side. They will miss her wisdom and offered best wishes for the future. This was echoed by Cllr Michael Tunwell, Vice Chairman for the Employers' Side who advised that they would be saying their official goodbye on 16 March at the next Full Meeting.

Signed:

Date: