

**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 March, 2009 at 10.30 a.m.**

**Present**

**Employer's Representatives:**

Mrs C A Wilson  
Mr M Rattray  
Mr A Henderson  
Mr N Donald

Miss J Campbell  
Mrs J Urquhart (substitute)  
Mr J Ford

**Staff Side Representatives:**

Mr G Reynolds (GMB)  
Ms E Johnston (GMB)  
Mr T McCarthy (UNITE)  
Mr A Wemyss (UNITE)

Mr G McDonald (UCATT)  
Mr S Manning (UNISON)  
Mr S Burroughs (UNISON)  
Ms L MacKay (UNISON)

**Officials in attendance:**

Ms M Morris, Assistant Chief Executive  
Mr S Barron, Director of Housing and Property  
Ms E Barrie, Personnel Manager, Chief Executive's Service  
Mr A Williams, Health and Safety Manager, Chief Executive's Service  
Ms C Christie, Employee Development Manager, Chief Executive's Service  
Ms J Spence, Programme Manager (Modernisation and Quality Assurance), Social Work Service  
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Service

**Mrs C Wilson in the Chair**

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Finnie and Mrs P Munro of the Employer's Side and Mr B Crabtree, Mr K Matthews and Mr R Whyte of the Staff Side.

**2. Minutes of Last Meeting**

There had been circulated for confirmation, Minutes of the last meeting of the Group held on 12 December, 2008, which were **APPROVED**.

Arising from the minutes the following matters were raised:

Job Evaluation

The Staff Side expressed concerns over the issue of job evaluation letters to employees. Trade unions had been inundated with queries from their members in connection with these letters. The Staff Side were of the view that the Call Centre

set up to deal with job evaluation queries was under resourced; employees had experienced the non return of calls and employees had complained about the lack of information received. Further, Managers had expressed concerns to trade unions about the job evaluation process; some employees had still not received their letters and it was advised that employees who were based in schools, had less time to complete their appeal, due to the Easter Holiday period. Also employees who had requested their job evaluation individual factor levels would require more time for their appeal, as their individual scores may differ from the generic scores. Therefore for these reasons an extension to the appeal deadline was requested.

The Staff Side also referred to the huge effect that the implementation of job evaluation was having on the workforce, not only in terms of salary but also pensions. They also felt it offensive that the Council used 'spin' to reflect a better picture for staff arising from the introduction of job evaluation by claiming that 88% of the work force would be better off, when this was untrue, and they requested that it stopped. They also felt that an apology by the Council to those staff who had not received their letters should have been given.

In response, the Employer's Side acknowledged that this was a difficult time for employees and trade unions. The Council would continue to work with the trade unions on the scheme until it was completed. Every effort would be made to ensure that that Appeal process would be smooth and undertaken as quickly as possible. In relation to specific points raised it was advised that:-

- the Staff Side's request that the Appeal deadline be extended would be submitted to the Modernising Employment Sub-Committee at their meeting to be held on 19 March, 2009;
- it was acknowledged that around 200 employees had not received their job evaluation letters and this would be rectified shortly. If the trade unions were aware of any other employees who still had not received their letters, then they should inform the Job Evaluation team;
- the results of the outcomes for job holders were that 88% of employees would receive an improved salary, some would see a slight increase and others a significant increase under job evaluation, with 12% of employees seeing a reduction in salary, but their current salary would be protected until March, 2011;
- all Managers had been briefed on the job evaluation process;
- further information on the impact on different Services would be provided.

Thereafter, the Group **NOTED:**

- i that if the Staff Side became aware of any other employees not in receipt of their job evaluation letters, they should advise a member of the Job Evaluation Team;
- ii that the Staff Side's concerns relating to staff not having sufficient time to lodge competent appeals against job evaluation outcomes, would be relayed to the Council's Modernising Employment Sub-Committee, and that consideration would be given to extending the appeal deadline date as a result;
- iii that information on the impact on Services would be forwarded to Members of the Group; and
- iv that Staff Side concerns regarding the job evaluation telephone help line would be considered.

## Budget 2009/10

The Staff Side advised that the budget for 2009/10 would have an effect on staff in terms of job reductions, particularly in the Education, Culture & Sport Service. Employees in this Service had contacted their trade unions expressing concern that they were receiving very little information regarding what the effect of budget decisions would have on their jobs. The Staff Side thereafter asked that staff be fully consulted on this matter.

In response, it was advised that staff affected by the budget proposals in the Education, Culture & Sport Service had been advised of the proposals affecting the Service prior to them being considered by full Council. Following the Council meeting, further consultation would take place once the necessary information was available and when meetings could be arranged with staff and trade unions. This was not an easy or straightforward process as issues such as voluntary severance and redeployment had to be looked at, but the Council would endeavour to keep staff informed when meaningful information was available.

Thereafter, the Group **NOTED** that the Director of Education, Culture and Sport would be advised of Staff Side concerns.

### **3. Fourth Employee Survey – Service Specific Improvements**

The Director of Housing and Property and the Programme Manager (Modernisation and Quality Assurance), Social Work Service were in attendance to give a presentation on Service specific improvements within their respective Services in response to the fourth Employee Survey.

#### Housing and Property

The Director of Housing and Property provided an overview of the Housing and Property Service, its track record, Management Team and staff profile. The Director referred to some specific results from the Employee Survey and compared this with the average for all Services. In particular 55% of staff responding to the survey, were satisfied with their job, 27% were satisfied with morale and 12% believed communications were good between services.

The Director went onto explain what he aimed to do in terms of Service Development. In relation to the Service Action Plan arising from the Employee Survey, key themes were highlighted, such as, Communication – efforts would be made to improve the way the Service communicated with its teams; Team Performance – the Service would ensure that staff had Personal Development Plan discussions and to ensure that adequate resources were in place to develop a well trained and motivated workforce; and Working Arrangements – to provide a safe and supportive working environment

In discussion, the Staff Side commended the work done by the Director of Housing and Property for his Service and in particular referred to the success of securing more Apprenticeships.

The Chairman advised that the Housing and Property Service and the Highland Housing Alliance recently won a top award at the annual Convention of Scottish Local Authorities Excellence Awards. They won the Service Improvement and Innovation category for their landbanking project, which identified land for affordable housing projects throughout the Highlands.

The Group congratulated the Housing and Property Service for achieving this award.

### Social Work Service

The Programme Manager (Modernisation and Quality Assurance) highlighted positive results from the survey for the Service and improvement actions that were required. In particular reference was made to improvement actions required in Communication and Training and Career Development. In terms of pay and terms and conditions, the Council's Job Evaluation Scheme had positively recognised frontline staff within the Social Work Service. In relation to the Working environment, Social Work staff were enjoying an improved working environment at Dingwall and Drummuie, the Kinmylies Building Users Group had been established and a programme of improvements to this building was being discussed. Further, there was a high level of commitment to improved stress management within the Service.

Following a question and answer session, the Group noted the information contained in the presentation by the Programme Manager, Social Work Service on Service specific improvements arising from the Employee Survey.

#### **4. Shared Services Diagnostic Project – Corporate Improvement Programme**

There had been circulated Report No. JCG/1/09 dated 2 March, 2009 by the Assistant Chief Executive providing an update on the Shared Services Diagnostic Project/Corporate Improvement Programme.

It was advised that the eight projects within the Corporate Improvement Programme had been given approval to proceed. The projects were summarised in the report and progress in terms of project initiation, project plans and the programme plan was reported. Further, the Programme Board had developed an initial Communication Plan which would be developed and updated through the life of the projects and to ensure stakeholders were properly engaged.

The Staff Side advised that in some Local Authorities, Shared Services had been used as a means to privatise Council services, so trade unions were understandably cautious about this Programme.

It was suggested that the Programme Manager should do a presentation on the Corporate Improvement Programme to a future meeting.

It was also advised that the Corporate Improvement Programme was not about changing employees terms of pay and conditions of service, but about changing ways in which the organisation operated in order to make it more efficient. This would mean changes to the way some employees would do their jobs and therefore for some employees, this could address some of the negative results from job evaluation, by way of job redesign. The Council wished to improve services to the public through the Corporate Improvement Programme and the co-operation of staff and trade unions would be welcomed in order to achieve this.

Thereafter, the Group:

- i **NOTED** that planned project activity was now underway and communications would increase with staff affected, which would include regular reporting to this Group; and
- ii **AGREED** that the Programme Manager, Chief Executive's Service be invited to make a presentation to a future meeting of the Group, on the Corporate Improvement Programme.

## 5. **The Highland Council – Annual Health and Safety Report 2007-2008**

There had been circulated Report No. JCG/2/09 by the Assistant Chief Executive which outlined the Highland Council's Health and Safety performance for the period 1 April, 2007 to 31 March, 2008 and included statistical information relating to accidents and incidents reported to the Council's Health and Safety team during that period.

It was advised that there had been a significant reduction in employee accidents compared with previous year's statistics. Work would continue to try and reduce accidents within the Council.

Following consideration, the Group **NOTED** the contents of the Annual Health and Safety Report and details of accident statistics for the period 1 April, 2007 to 31 March, 2008.

## 6. **Mileage Rates**

There had been circulated Report No. JCG/3/09 by the Assistant Chief Executive which further considered the request from Unison for a back dated payment of 6p per mile in respect of the car lease scheme.

It was advised that based on total mileages for 2007/08 the cost of making a backdated payment of 6p per mile for leased car users only would be approximately £79k, and to re-imburse both leased car users and essential users would cost £236k.

While the case from Unison, that the Lease car rate of 11p was below the actual cost of diesel based on average mileages was correct, the headline rate of 11p ignored other elements of the calculation on the car lease scheme. If a backdated payment of an additional 6p per mile was granted to leased car users then they would receive more favourable treatment than essential users. Therefore, it was recommended that the request from Unison for a backdated payment of 6p to leased car users be rejected as essential users not on the leased car scheme would be disadvantaged.

In response, the Staff Side expressed their disappointment with the Management Side's case. They requested that both leased car users and essential users should receive a 6p per mile backdated payment for 2007/2008 given the exorbitant fuel prices staff faced during that period.

Following consideration, the Group **AGREED** that the request from Unison for a backdated payment of 6p per mile in 2007/2008 for leased and essential car users be rejected.

## **7. Any Other Competent Business**

### National Outdoor Events Association Award – Mr Gerry Reynolds

The Group congratulated the Vice-Chairman, Mr Gerry Reynolds who had received the National Outdoor Events Association's prestigious Local Authority Outstanding Practice Tribute Award. The award was in recognition of the outstanding events he had delivered in recent years such as the Inverness Highland Games and the Inverness Winter Festival.

The meeting ended at 12.10p.m.