

CHILTERN DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the CHILTERN DISTRICT COUNCIL AND STAFF JOINT COMMITTEE held on 9 JULY 2010

PRESENT:

Councillors: N M Rose - Chairman
Miss P A Appleby
A Dibbo
D W Phillips
J F Warder

UNISON: A Whicelow - Vice Chairman
T Pearce
M Shirley
I Snudden

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were received from E Darvell (UNISON).

13 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2010, copies of which had been circulated previously, were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

15 PERFORMANCE RELATED PAY SCHEME - FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE OPTIONS

Following the decision at the meeting on 23 June 2010 the Committee received a report setting out the estimated savings on the hybrid options c(i) – c(iv) together with details of new options 6 (d), 7 and 1 (b).

Councillor N Rose opened the discussion on the report by saying that the Council's financial position was considerably more bleak than the picture he had described at the previous meeting following a presentation that had been given by Helen Bailey at the Local Government Conference held this week. At the request of Councillor Rose the Chief Executive gave details of this presentation the main message of which was that the coalition government would be reducing the Country's budget deficit at a rate much quicker than had previously been understood. As a result, areas previously thought to be ring-fenced were not so now. The overall picture would not emerge until the announcement on the Comprehensive Spending Review in the autumn but the omens for local government were not good.

On being asked to comment, Ian Snudden said that with the pay freeze imposed for the next two years the increase in VAT and changes to pensions, staff were already aware of the pressures and their effects which was why the

Staff Side was keen to enter into meaningful negotiations to minimise the impact of any changes to the performance related pay scheme.

Councillor Rose referred to the spread sheet that had been circulated indicating the savings of £2m that would be required over the next two years if the Council was to remain a viable entity and said that it was difficult to see how this level of savings could be achieved without reducing staff costs. Whilst the contribution made by staff was appreciated, there were no easy options and if the savings could not be made through the PRP scheme then they would have to be found through other means e.g. redundancies.

The Council was reluctant to pursue the redundancy option and would prefer to find the savings by making changes to the PRP Scheme through, for example, option 6 c(ii) and in particular the option of the revised scheme having a lower maximum average of 1% to produce a saving of £209, 750 as set out in the report. Councillor Rose wished to emphasise that the example he had quoted was not an agreement to anything at this stage but was being put forward as the basis for exploration.

Alan Whichelow, after pointing out that membership of UNISON had increased to 50% since the Council had indicated its intention to scrap the PRP Scheme (which in itself was an indication of the desperation and angst that this decision had created within the workforce) said that he was very pleased to hear that the Council now appeared to be willing to negotiate after three meetings during which the Council had spent a lot of time lecturing instead of entering into negotiations which the Staff Side had always been prepared to do. Alan Whichelow went on to emphasise that the Staff Side would not be brow beaten into submission and expressed the hope that the remainder of the meeting would be used to negotiate in which case the time would be well spent.

Councillor Rose, after accepting that there was no intention to brow beat, said that if agreement could be reached on the 1% option then he would report back to his colleagues. Although he personally recognised the benefits of the PRP Scheme and was keen to retain it in some form as a mechanism, many of his colleagues saw the Scheme as an anachronism. Councillor Rose recognised that the 1% option would represent a significant sacrifice for staff but the quid pro quo was that the saving achieved would make redundancies less likely although this option could never be entirely excluded.

Tina Pearce referred to the decision made at the last meeting (to provide more information on the hybrid options for further discussion at this meeting) and expressed disappointment that on the basis of the discussion so far the Council was telling staff that the only option available was the 1% option illustrated in option c (ii) which was negotiation by diktat. Tina Pearce also felt it was important to dismiss the suggestion that the payments from the PRP Scheme were a “bonus” – they were contractual payments made in recognition of the hard work carried out by staff many of whom were appalled and angry by the action being taken by the Council.

A discussion then ensued on the hybrid options during which the Staff Side indicated their willingness to negotiate on the following options:

c(i), c(ii) but at 2 ½% only, c(iii) , c(iv), 6(d) and new option 1(b).

The Staff Side also confirmed that option 7 was not one they wished to pursue.

In response, Councillor Rose pointed out that none of the options identified by the Staff Side as a basis for negotiation would achieve the level of savings in excess of the £200,000 which the Council was seeking and which could be achieved through c (ii) with an average of 1%. Councillor Rose accepted that new option 7 was a draconian one and best avoided.

Alan Whichelow expressed his disappointment at the response. The Staff Side had set out its negotiating position very clearly and had also made clear the feelings of staff but the Council were refusing to enter into meaningful negotiations on the options, contrary to the principle of collective bargaining. A family relationship had been fostered over the years at Chiltern and staff would be very aggrieved and hurt when he fed back to them the Council's uncaring approach and attitude.

Councillor Rose denied that the Council was taking an unsympathetic approach. Staff were the Council's greatest asset and their contribution was greatly appreciated. However, because of the very difficult financial situation, the Council was required to make some very tough decisions but Councillor Rose denied that these decisions were being made dictatorially.

Councillor Rose concluded by explaining that a meeting of the Personnel Committee would be held shortly (on either 21 or 28 July) to receive feedback on the progress made at this Joint Committee and to make a decision on the PRP Scheme.

After agreeing that a further meeting be held on 2 August at 10 am the Joint Committee also endorsed the suggestion made by Councillor Miss Appleby that future reports should contain only those options on which both sides had indicated a willingness to negotiate.

The meeting ended at 3.35 pm