

Appendix A

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Date: 28th April 2011.
Ref: MK/vs

Dear Deb

Outcome Joint Secretarial visit 18th April 2011

Further to our meeting in your office on 18th April 2011, I am writing to formally notify you of the outcome of the Joint Secretaries visit.

Present:

Michelle Bradley Staff Side Secretary and Michelle Kirk Employer Side Secretary

Deb Clarke (HR), Vicky Oates (HR) Gary Anderson (Director)

Legal representative from Wragg and Co.

Lesley Gilson and Paul Farley (UNISON)

Richard O'Leary and Martin Foster (GMB)

Background

The request for a joint secretarial visit was received from UNISON, a number of meetings had taken place, initially with local trade union representatives and subsequently with Regional trade union representatives and Managers from central Bedfordshire.

A number of proposals had been discussed but no agreement had been reached and therefore the Joint Secretaries were asked to visit to seek to promote an agreement between the parties.

Both sides indicated a desire to reach agreement over the matters at hand and reiterated a continuing commitment to local bargaining.

Management position

Gary Anderson gave an overview of the council's position including details of the proposal established to find the savings required by the council. Negotiations on terms and conditions changes were positive until negotiations had started on the proposal that staff be asked to accept a 2% pay cut if they earned more than £21,519 per annum.

It became clear that the staff side felt unable to enter into negotiations on this part of the proposal.

The management were unable to agree any further reduction in staff numbers as this would affect their ability to deliver services and therefore the cost of employing staff needed to be reduced.

Union position

The union accepted that the Council needed to make savings but felt that there were alternatives to a pay cut for staff, the union remained unconvinced about the method being suggested to make the savings and asked the management to look again at alternative ways of saving the estimated £2m which management said that they needed to save from the staffing budget.

The Trade Union side had asked that an additional number of voluntary redundancies could be considered along side reductions in hours and the removal of essential car user allowances from all staff.

The Trade union side also reiterated their commitment to achieving "harmonisation" for all staff as there were currently a number of anomalous situations where staff undertaking the same roles were paid different salaries or had differing terms and conditions.

Conclusion of joint secretaries

Both parties acknowledge that the local authority needs to make financial savings of approximately £20m. This in the context of a budget of £180m about £90m of which is staff costs. The savings from the staffing budget were expected to total £2m over two years.

Both parties were very candid about their positions and the management side willingly shared considerable financial data with the Joint secretaries.

The Trade union side shared their concerns about the impact on workforce morale and productivity should the proposal to cut basic pay be pursued

There was a measure of agreement already in place about some of the proposals, namely; voluntary additional annual leave, removal of PDAs where these did not impact on personal safety and the reduction of pay protection from 3 years to one year.

There was however an irresolvable issue around other ways in which savings could or should be made.

The joint secretaries recognised that both parties had the express intention of reaching a local collective agreement on changes to terms and conditions designed to contribute to the required budget savings of Central Bedfordshire Council. However no agreement could be reached about the manner of savings delivery.

In these circumstances the Regional joint secretaries are obliged to register a "failure to agree".

Both parties have agreed to continue a dialogue at local level about how savings may be achieved.

The joint secretaries agreed to resume the visit at a future date in the event that the prospect of progress improves or if circumstances change which will enable local agreement to be reached.

Yours faithfully



Michelle Kirk and Michelle Bradley
Joint Secretaries East of England Regional Council

cc Lesley Gilson, UNISON Branch Secretary.
Martin Foster GMB Branch secretary