

MINUTE

of

JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE (FIRST TIER)**Minute of Virtual Meeting held at 2.00pm on 16 September 2021.****Present:**

Councillor Tony Buchanan
Councillor Caroline Bamforth

Councillor Gordon Wallace

Union Representatives:

Ms Karen Catlow (UNISON)
Mr John Guidi (SSTA)
Mr David James (UNISON)

Mr Steven Larkin (UNISON)
Mr James O'Connell (UNITE)
Mr Des Morris (EIS)

Councillor Buchanan in the Chair

Attending:

Caroline Innes, Deputy Chief Executive; Margaret McCrossan, Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer); Sharon Dick, Head of HR and Corporate Services; Tracy Morton, Education Senior Manager; Jim Murray, Strategy Manager; Linda Hutchison, Senior Committee Services Officer; and Liona Allison, Committee Services Assistant.

Apologies:

Ms Lisa Kennedy (EIS) and Mr Joe Lynch (UNISON).

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

1. The committee considered and approved the Minute of the meeting held on 11 February 2021.

PAY CLAIMS - LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES AND TEACHERS

2. Councillor Buchanan referred to numerous discussions involving COSLA that had been taken forward thus far on the pay claims for both local government employees and teachers, and related action being taken by the Trade Unions which were progressing ballots on industrial action on the offers made.

Mr Larkin acknowledged that discussions on pay were taking place at a national level, but considered it important to raise issues locally also. Having highlighted that the initial offer made to local government employees by COSLA had been rejected and that the subsequent offer had not been a substantial improvement, he confirmed that a ballot on industrial action was in progress which he anticipated would be in favour of action being taken, emphasising

the wish to avoid that. He sought Councillor Buchanan's support to ask COSLA to make an improved offer. Referring to a COSLA briefing on the current offer which had been circulated by management to all employees on 15 September, he expressed the view that the content had been neither as comprehensive nor accurate as it might have been, such as on the exact current status of discussions. He added that although headline information had been provided, the briefing had not commented on other aspects of the claim, such as on seeking a reduction to the working day without detriment in terms of pay. He reported that some local authorities were starting to pay Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) fees for professional staff, but that this was not the case locally.

Mr O'Connell echoed these comments, and confirmed that UNITE was balloting its members and expected the outcome to be in favour of industrial action, expressing disappointment regarding the offer and the current position, especially in the context of some other public sector employees being offered more. He cited examples of other local authorities that were paying SSSC rates and regarded it possible for the Council to do so also.

Mr Morris reported that negotiations on teachers' pay were not at the same stage, clarifying that a pay claim had been submitted in mid-December, in response to which an offer had been made in mid-March. It had been rejected on three grounds which included that the offer was considered to be a cut in real terms and a differentiated approach which offered a 2% rise for 25% of teachers and 1% to the remaining 75%. A very recent offer to increase pay by 1.25% was not regarded as an acceptable improvement or a real increase, taking account of inflation. He referred to the wish to reach a negotiated settlement, confirming that teachers were seeking a better offer and a period of stability.

Councillor Buchanan supported a negotiated settlement being reached and industrial action being avoided if possible which could be detrimental for everyone. He explained that some feedback on the position had been provided at the most recent COSLA Leaders meeting, with a fuller update expected at the forthcoming one, confirming that at present he did not have information on the current position. He reported that the lack of additional funds to meet pay claims had been raised with the Scottish Government, a response from which was awaited, highlighting the cost implications of each half percent pay rise, the potential impact on jobs, and that details of the Council's next budget settlement were awaited.

Regarding aspects of the claims other than pay, Councillor Buchanan acknowledged the pressure being placed on local authorities and others to reduce the working week, but commented on the impact of this if pay remained the same. He confirmed that political parties did consider such issues and held a range of views, stating that the Council would look at professional fees and consider if anything was possible.

In conclusion, Councillor Buchanan emphasised his support for all the work carried out by officers, some of whom worked above and beyond what could reasonably be expected of them both in response to the pandemic and otherwise, which he knew was appreciated by communities also. He stated that the Council would continue to work with others and COSLA on the offer, including on the issue of professional fees.

The position was noted.

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL CORPORATE HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT 2019-2021

3. The committee considered the draft East Renfrewshire Council Corporate Health and Safety Report covering both 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Whilst highlighting key aspects of the report, the Strategy Manager referred to good progress made during the first year covered by the report across all departments in terms of objectives and targeting areas where further compliance was needed to meet health and safety requirements. However, he also referred to the need for resources to be redirected during 2020/21 due to the impact of COVID-19. He explained that, although the Corporate Health and Safety Unit (CHSU) had continued to deliver on some key performance indicators, much less progress had been made than planned that year, with health and safety compliance having actually been set back in some areas requiring a focus to be placed on these moving forward. He itemised various key priorities for 2021/22 which included identifying, prioritising and delivering training for employees where legislative requirements were no longer being met; launching and operating the new health and safety management system; and ensuring that the backlog of occupational health screening requirements was addressed.

Having emphasised that the CHSU team had been a critical resource throughout the pandemic, taking immediate action for example to complete COVID risk assessments for all council buildings and service areas to identify the safest ways to continue to deliver services, the Strategy Manager highlighted that the team continued to be in high demand for help and advice on how to deliver services safely in new ways to support the public, such as at the humanitarian hub and vaccination and test centres. Thereafter he summarised how the report had been structured, referring for example to the various sections within it on progress and future plans, what had gone well and less well, and the focus for the future for each department.

Having confirmed that the report remained to be finalised and discussed by the Corporate Management Team, Councillor Buchanan thanked all those involved in promoting health and safety for carrying out all of the additional work that had been required on COVID-19 related issues, highlighting that the situation was a continually changing one and related work implications.

In response to Mr Morris and Councillor Wallace, the Education Senior Manager confirmed that due to an oversight the Education Department Health and Safety Report for 2020/21 had not been submitted to the Committee as intended, apologising for this and assuring those present that it would be submitted to the next meeting. Councillor Wallace stated that he had not supported the decision made to remove consideration of the report from the Education Committee, emphasising the importance of the Joint Consultative Committee (First Tier) seeing the report as soon as possible. In response, Councillor Buchanan considered there to be no reason why the report could not be circulated to the membership of the Committee prior to it being formally considered at the next meeting.

In response to Mr O'Connell, the Strategy Manager provided further clarification on how areas of non-compliance on health and safety regulations and guidance were being addressed, during which he referred to the service plans developed and ongoing discussions on addressing the backlog of work. He reiterated that there was a lot of demand on those involved in progressing health and safety issues, which included dealing with matters linked to employees returning to their work base. He emphasised that compliance with requirements was considered to be of the utmost importance, confirming that through time the outstanding issues to be taken forward would be completed.

The committee noted:-

- (a) that the Education Department Health and Safety Report 2020/21 would be circulated to the membership of the committee and submitted to the next meeting for formal consideration; and

- (b) otherwise, that the draft East Renfrewshire Council Corporate Health and Safety Report for 2019/20 and 2020/21 would be submitted to the Corporate Management Team and finalised.

COUNCIL HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

4. The committee considered and noted the Minutes of the meetings of the Council's Health and Safety Committee held on 23 February, 25 May and 31 August 2021.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

5. It was noted that the next meeting of the committee was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 10 February 2022.