

LOCAL JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 7.30 pm on 7 December 2022

Present:

Employer's Side

Councillor Michael Tickner (Chairman)
Councillor David Cartwright QFSM
Councillor Simon Fawthrop
Councillor Andrew Lee
Councillor Colin Smith
Councillor Pauline Tunncliffe
Councillor Rebecca Wiffen

Staff Side and Departmental Representatives

Gill Slater (Vice-Chairman)
Thomas Carver, (ECHS-Children's Social Care)

22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Sara Wright, Cllr Thomas Turrell and Cllr Jessica Arnold. Cllr Pauline Tunncliffe attended virtually.

23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Simon Fawthrop declared an interest in that his wife worked for the authority and that he was a deferred member of the pension scheme.

24 MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF LOCAL JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE HELD ON 12th OCTOBER 2022

The minutes of the meeting that was held on 12th October 2022 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

25 MATTERS OUTSTANDING

CSD21148

The Chairman asked the Director of HR if there had been any progress with negotiations with HMRC concerning the 45p per mile mileage allowance for staff. The Director responded and said that the Council were minded to increase the rate. However, it was the case that any difference would be taxable for the individual and for the employer which may mean that it would not be viable. Bromley Council, along with other councils, had made representations to HMRC and a response was awaited. The Director of HR agreed to update the Committee when a response from HMRC had been received.

The Chairman asked if there had been any follow up concerning the seminar that had been promised to provide advice for staff in financial difficulties. The Assistant Director for HR answered and explained that the Council was still endeavouring to source the correct provider. While this process was ongoing, the Council would be providing a pensions seminar where questions could be asked and 400 staff had indicated an interest in joining the seminar.

Thomas Carver said that the financial advice, (although welcome at any-time) would have been very useful to have been provided before Christmas. The Assistant Director for HR responded and said that the Council were sourcing a number of information items, webinars and fact sheets. The fact sheets would be disseminated the following week.

RESOLVED that the Matters Outstanding report be noted and that the Director of HR update the LJCC regarding the representations made to HMRC concerning the mileage allowance in due course.

26 PAY AWARD 2022/23

The Staff Side had requested that the matter of the Council's pay award for 2022/23 be discussed.

The Vice Chairman stated that the national position with respect to pay increases had been clarified and implemented. The Staff Side was hoping that the Council would acknowledge that the LBB pay award was insufficient and that it would be improved. They were also seeking for the implementation of the London Living Wage.

It was noted that the Council's pay award which had been implemented in April 2022 had been 2.25%. It was further noted that the recent national award was for £2229.00 to be paid as a flat rate for each employee in outer London. The Vice Chairman said that there had been speculation concerning a possible 1.79% top up to the Council's current level of pay. However, even if this was implemented, it would still be insufficient and may not be back dated.

The Vice Chairman stated that for BR3 grades, a 10.89% pay award would be required to align with the national agreement. She said these members of staff were now £1772.00 per annum worse off than if the national award had been applied. Even if the 1.79% was implemented this year (2022/23), then that would still leave them £1400.00 worse off. The Vice Chairman said that even for BR14 grades, there would still be a shortfall and they were £1000.00 worse off. She continued and said that staff sitting on spinal points 9--14 were below the London Living Wage by up to 89p per hour.

The Vice Chairman said that because Bromley's pay awards were based on percentages rather than flat rates, it benefited those at senior and Director levels far more than the average member of staff. The Vice Chairman requested that LBB address the issue of financial deficit for staff and whilst not wishing to revisit in detail the financial challenges which were raised at the last LJCC regarding the cost of living / energy price crises, she highlighted

that food inflation was now 14.3 percent. She said that these details had been passed on to the Human Resources Department. She requested that this matter be addressed and also in year as staff are currently facing the cost of living crisis. The Vice Chairman said that some members of staff were exiting the pension scheme because they could not afford to remain in.

The Chairman thanked the Vice Chairman for providing the statistical information and said that Bromley Council normally allocated pay rises by percentages as this would maintain differentials for seniority. He said that the Council recognised and acknowledged the current shortfall.

The Leader of the Council asked for it to be made clear that the Council did not recognise the London Living Wage. The Council had no desire for external rules to be imposed upon it, particularly if those rules meant forcing the Council to pay for something it was not able to afford.

The Leader said that there had been a recent meeting with Departmental Representatives regarding the pay settlement and in his view the meeting was a positive one. He said that when the 2.25% award was previously agreed from the 1st of April 2022, it had been fair and reasonable, bearing in mind the financial position and market rates at that time. No one could have predicted the subsequent rise in inflation. He said that in the next budget there would be an adjustment for 2022/23 and that the pay increase for 2023/24 would be implemented at the same time. He was confident that these increases would be approved no later than the Executive meeting in January 2023.

Thomas Carver said that the feedback from staff received by the Departmental Representatives was that they were disappointed with the amount being offered and that there would be no pay award until April 2023. This would not help staff during the difficult winter months. He pointed out that within Children's Social Care, there had been an in-year increase in the budget of £2.3m to cope with increased pressures. Resultantly, staff had found it difficult to accept that an in- year adjustment to the budget with respect to pay was not possible.

The Chairman commented that he hoped staff would be patient until the April pay award which he was confident would be generous and would compensate for the difference between Bromley's last pay award and the delayed national settlement. A Member pointed out that LBB always paid its staff promptly, whereas in other local authorities there was a delay in payment while the pay award was being negotiated.

A Member expressed concern because of comments from the Staff Side saying that members of staff were dropping out of the pension scheme. He wondered if reliable data was available to clarify the current position. The Director of Human Resources said that he had not seen data to indicate staff were opting out of the pension scheme. Thomas Carver responded and said that he personally knew people who had dropped out of the pension scheme. Mr Carver also referenced agency staff and expressed the view that many of

them stayed as locum or agency staff due to financial pressures and so could not afford to pay into the pension scheme;

A Member who also served on the Pensions Committee stated that the Pensions Committee received a report on scheme numbers and as far as he was aware the report had not indicated a drop in the figures. It was suggested that the relevant page from the Pensions Committee report be circulated to Members for information.

The Director of Human Resources said that whilst there were challenges in recruitment and retention of staff, these had nothing to do with the current pay situation. The information that he was aware of indicated that there was no decline in the number of staff participating in the pension scheme. He further commented that agency staff had been employed for many years. Mr Carver responded and said that it was factually incorrect to assume that the current economic climate was not having an impact.

Cllr Fawthrop said that staff should seek help if required and queried whether they could ask for an 'advance payment' from their salaries.

RESOLVED that the update on the Council's Pay Award be noted.

27 UPDATE ON THE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY

The Head of Corporate Programmes and Projects, together with the Director for Environment and Public Protection attended to update the LJCC regarding the Accommodation Strategy. It was explained that separate meetings had been arranged with the Trade Unions and with the Departmental Representatives with a view to providing advice and engagement. It was clarified that the new site for the location of the Council would be the Direct Line building in Bromley South. The purchase of the new site had to be finalised and then plans for the disposal of the existing site would need to be implemented. This was being dealt with by the Director of Housing, Planning and Regeneration together with the Assistant Director: Property.

It was hoped that the sale of the building would be finalised by the end of January 2023 and that vacant possession could be achieved around June 2023. Work would need to be undertaken to create a new Council Chamber, new meeting rooms and offices. The project would still go through the normal reports and committee scrutiny process. Different workstreams were being developed. The aim of the Council was to develop an agile, flexible workforce and to make better use of technology in an open plan environment. It was felt that the new location would be a good flagship location for the Council and had excellent transport links. It was anticipated that a video-drone would be used to go around the building and relay pictures back to staff. There would be a process of constant engagement and Directors had already met. Retained architects would deal with space planning and desk allocation; the details of which would be finalised in March. There would be different architects and contractors involved in the building work. It was estimated that in total there were 300 different workstreams.

The Director said it was a very exciting project which would provide a flagship building for the authority. The Chairman asked if there was a possibility that the purchase could fall through. The Director replied that he estimated that there was a 70% certainty that matters would progress satisfactorily. Emma Pearce headed the Project Board and was responsible for overseeing the vast programme of work that needed to be done. It was suggested that feedback should be provided to the Departmental Representatives' meetings.

The Vice Chairman expressed some concern as to what would happen to staff who serviced existing sites. A brief discussion took place regarding the satellite sites which would be moving into the new building (Youth Offending Service and services currently based on the 3rd Floor of Central Library and 2nd floor of Walnuts Library).

The Director briefed the LJCC that as there would be space that the Council would not occupy, then there would be scope to develop rental income. The CCG had expressed an interest in renting space and Direct Line would retain the first floor. The Princess Royal University Hospital had expressed an interest in renting space for some of their administrative functions.

It was not clear at this stage what would happen with respect to weddings. It was confirmed that the Council still intended to adopt a process of flexible working. It was mentioned by the Director of HR that an employee could legally apply for flexible working.

Thomas Carver said that the feedback from staff received by the Departmental Representatives was almost unanimously positive, but mentioned that the Civic Centre had fulfilled a key corporate parenting function for 'our children looked after' and care leavers which should be taken into account when planning for the move. Thomas Carver raised the benefits of the recently opened 'Our House'. The Director advised that the intention was that the 'Our House' provision would be relocated into an alternative local option.

RESOLVED that the update on the Accommodation Strategy be noted.

28 PENSIONS/LCIV UPDATE

This item was listed on the agenda as it was agreed at the previous meeting that an update on the LCIV would be discussed at the December meeting of the LJCC.

Members noted a written update from Sarah Wright explaining that the current trade union representative on the LCIV Shareholder Committee was a representative of Unison. She expressed the view that the one member of Unison would have limited influence regarding the decisions of the Shareholder Committee.

A Member expressed the view that the Trade Union representative was not doing enough to express dissatisfaction with the performance of the CIV. The Vice Chairman responded and said it was not appropriate to assume what was and was not being said.

The Chairman asked how much membership of the LCIV was costing the Council and a Member responded and said that it was in the region of £120k per annum.

RESOLVED that the update on the LCIV be noted.

29 RESULTS OF THE STAFF SURVEY

Matthew Hodges (Project and Practice Support Officer: Legal Services) gave a presentation to the Committee regarding the results of the Staff Survey. It was noted that 62.2% of staff had completed the survey. The presentation commenced with an update regarding Demographics, New Starters, Communication and Public Facing Roles. It was noted that 70% of staff were in a role which involved some form of public contact; staff were confident in their engagement with the public but many had encountered hostility. Resultantly, staff felt that they would benefit from de-escalation training and more robust working policies. They felt that the Council should provide clearer information to the public and that there should be more informed communication from Members and managers. Staff also felt that there was a need for safer meeting spaces and better equipment.

The survey showed that staff experience with the BT Helpdesk was positive and that Sharepoint usage was limited. Staff felt that more time was required to attend training sessions.

With respect to Safety, Support and Wellbeing, staff felt generally safe, but 13% reported not receiving the necessary equipment which consisted of mainly alarms and PPE. Staff requested more robust lone working policies and increased security in the Civic Centre. They felt that there should be a greater investment in the office environment. About half the staff surveyed said that they were regularly unable to take breaks. A discussion took place amongst Members and officers as to why staff felt that they were unable to take breaks. It seemed to be the case that there was no one actually preventing staff from taking breaks, but some staff may have felt unable to do so because of pressures from workload. A Member asked how the Staff Survey was conducted and it was reported that it was done through Microsoft Forms.

It was reported that 56% of staff had caring responsibilities, but 12% of those with responsibilities were not able to work flexibly. In terms of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, the majority of staff felt that they were being fairly treated but over 1/3 had reported that no EDI conversations had taken place within their team meetings. Only 41% of staff knew who their Departmental Representatives were and only 18% knew who their Trade Union representatives were.

Some comparisons with the previous survey were undertaken and the data showed that 62% found it hard to connect with teams remotely in 2021, but this had fallen dramatically to 22% in 2022. In 2021, 56% of people had struggled with mental and physical health but this had improved and was now down to 30%. The number of people who had felt lonely or isolated in 2021 had now also decreased.

A summary was provided of the next steps that would be taken in communicating the results of the survey across the Council. The presentation ended with a summary of recommended actions based on the results of the survey which were as follows:

- Review and raise the profile of staff representatives, EDI Champions, Departmental Representatives and Mental Health First Aiders.
- Make sure that staff are made aware of who the EDI Champion is and what their role is and that they're able to talk to them regarding issues of unfair treatment.
- Repromote the 'It's OK' campaign to help encourage people to talk about mental health issues.
- Reintroduce the 'Telephone Lottery'.
- Greater promotion of the expected public contact standards/protocols both to the public and staff--on site and online.
- Continue to share the Flexible Working Policy to managers with a dedicated Managers' Briefing
- Ensure that 'Equality' is on the agenda at individual and departmental meetings, starting with COE and CLT
- Promotion of Departmental Representatives by the new corporate graduates
- Ensure that the cleanliness and hygienic resources at the Civic Centre remain at good levels and that disrepair is addressed to help the site feel welcoming.

Mr Carver said that actions to raise the profile of Departmental Representatives were already underway and progressing positively.

A discussion took place regarding the nature and frequency of staff surveys. The Director of HR expressed the view that staff surveys should be bi-annually and should be thematic. The Chairman felt that short surveys were more popular and the Assistant Director for HR said that it was important to allow plenty of time for a response. A Member commented that 'tick box'

questions should be avoided and that there should be space for comments. The Project and Practice Support Officer pointed out that if the survey used spaces for additional comments the downside of this was that it made analysis more difficult.

RESOLVED that the Results of the Staff Survey be noted.

30 LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE SETTLEMENT

Members noted that the Local Government Finance Settlement had not been finalised.

31 MEETING START TIMES

A discussion took place regarding the start times for the LJCC meetings going forward. At the end of the discussion there was unanimous decision that the previous times should be re-adopted and that the main meeting would commence at 6:30 pm.

RESOLVED that going forward the main LJCC meeting would commence at 6.30pm

32 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting is 19th April 2023.

The meeting ended at 9.15 pm

Chairman