

THE MORAY COUNCIL
MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
TUESDAY 9 MARCH 2010
COUNCIL OFFICE, ELGIN

PRESENT

Councillors J.S. Cree, J. Hogg, M.Shand, D. Ross, D. Stewart (substitute for P. Paul) and A. Wright. Ms I Sinclair, Unison, Mr D McPhee, Unison and Mr J Boardman, GMB.

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr D O'Connor, Unison, Ms J Adams, GMB and Mr S Dillon, UCATT.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Chief Legal Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Head of Personnel Services, Principal Personnel Adviser, Mrs C Carswell, Committee Services Officer as Clerk to the Meeting.

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Mr Andrew Drinkwater and the Chief Executive, The Moray Council.

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

On the invitation of the Chief Legal Officer, Ms Sinclair nominated Mr McPhee to Chair the meeting. There being no one otherwise minded Mr McPhee was appointed unanimously.

2. CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Members and Representatives of the Trade Unions to the meeting of the Joint Consultative Committee and advised that the purpose of the meeting was to allow Trade Unions to put their point of view across and enter into discussion with Members.

3. DECLARATION OF GROUP DECISIONS AND MEMBERS INTERESTS

In terms of Standing Order 20 and the Councillors' Code of Conduct, the meeting noted that there were no declarations from group leaders or spokespersons in regard to any prior decisions taken on how members will

vote on any item on the agenda nor any declarations of member interest in respect of any item on the agenda.

4. EXEMPT INFORMATION

The meeting resolved that in terms of Section 50A(4) and (5) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended, the public and media representatives be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the items of business appearing at the relevant paragraphs of this minute as specified below, so as to avoid disclosure of exempt information of the class described in the appropriate paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

<u>Para. No. of Minute</u>	<u>Para. No. of Schedule 7A</u>
5	1

5. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION AND RESPONSES THERETO

- (i) Designing Better Services (“DBS”)
 - a) Documentation

Ms Sinclair stated that much of the consultation which took place was very last minute and some of the jargon was difficult to understand. She also stated that the unions were of the view that they were not made aware of what was going to happen, until after the decision had been made.
 - b) Consultation at Grass Roots Level

Ms Sinclair stated that there appeared to be a lack of involvement by staff and the information was filtered down from managers too late. She was of the opinion that the input of staff required to be more valued and there appeared to be assumptions on staff’s workload and not enough background work had been done.
 - c) Staff/Trade Union Involvement in DBS

Ms Sinclair stated that Unison had retired from the DBS Board as she felt that she had little or no influence. She further stated that the unions were not opposed to the modernisation of the service as there was an awareness of the financial crisis in which the Council finds itself. However she was of the view that decisions were being made as to how people should work without input from those at the ‘coalface’, ie car pool sharing, home working, hot desking, etc. Staff have questions on how these would work but answers were not being given.
 - d) Staff Morale

Ms Sinclair advised that staff morale was low due to the uncertainty over staff positions. She stated that it should be understood that staff whilst

providers of the service, they were also consumers. If morale is low then this was not good for delivery of services.

e) Communication via electronic presentation, videos, "Connect"

Ms Sinclair advised that staff were of the view that the DBS films came across as patronising and there were concerns on how much these had cost. She further stated that there appeared to be no desire to listen or answer questions which staff had.

In response to the issues raised above, the meeting noted that there was an awareness that due to timescales paperwork was issued close to meeting dates but that there was always the opportunity for trade unions to put back a response or request further discussions. Information was always provided to the trade unions for consultation before the matter was submitted to the Policy & Resources Committee so that they could influence before final decisions were made.

DBS work had involved staff at all levels of the organisation including surveys, workshops and meetings. While this may be a new experience for some employees, everything had been done to ensure that staff felt comfortable at these meetings.

Reference was made to the Transitional Arrangements that had been agreed by the Council and the trade unions to help manage the reduction in the workforce. It was emphasised that there was a need to consider how the Council and the Committee was invited to consider how the trade unions could work together to manage workforce change over the coming months and years.

Councillor Wright noted that he had also been aware of the jargon being used by DBS but had experienced no difficulty in asking for explanations and that he did try to ensure that this was addressed in reports. As a member of the DBS Board, he also stated that the Unison representative had input to the meetings and had been listened to and that he had never felt the constraint referred to by Ms Sinclair. In contrast to the trade union view, Councillor Wright commented that he had felt that there were on occasion too many meetings with staff and he had not come across the poor morale referred to in his dealings with the workforce. He also noted that the feedback on the video showed a huge response and, therefore, it has not been a waste of money. The evidence was that around 30% of people opposed it but the main point was that it had stimulated a response not stimulated by other forms of communication.

The DBS films had been undertaken in partnership with four other Councils and the aim was to use all mediums which were available to try and help people understand the process and in the future all films would be taken in-house.

Ms Adams stated that staff were not differentiating between DBS and budget savings and whilst there was an acceptance that change was required, there was also a fear among staff for their jobs.

Following discussion the meeting noted that there would be job losses as a result of reduction in workforce but to date the Council had not identified where these would come from. It was not clear as yet whether the losses would be whole jobs or reduction in hours and that natural wastage would also be looked at as a means of managing reductions in the workforce in the future.

Mr O'Connor advised that the message going out to staff needs to be clear and that the unions were happy to work with the Council to move forward.

(ii) Budget Cuts

Mr O'Connor stated that he was of the view that there was confusion as to information which was being passed to trade unions and it would be useful if that could be done earlier on in the process. Although he also noted that the end point had produced a reasonable outcome.

In response the meeting noted that if budgets were clearer earlier on then it would be easier to manage staff wastage and the process could be done differently. It was also the first time when there had been the need to make such substantial savings. In future the Council may look at the priorities of Council during the year and thereby take action within larger areas and unions would be involved in discussions. It would also be easier to work in longer timescales as this would help, in particular, with staffing.

Ms Adams welcomed the idea of looking at the larger plan for the future and Mr O'Connor accepted the opportunity to meet with the Chief Financial Officer to discuss the budget.

(iii) Budget Savings

Ms Sinclair stated that the view was that front line service staff would be the most affected with many of them being female. It was also the view that all responses on the consultation regarding the original budget should have been put on the website, although it was understood that some could not go on due to confidentiality.

The meeting noted that a report was being written by the Chief Executive on the broader priorities and large time scale. It was agreed that there should be consultations with staff with openness on both sides at the earliest opportunities.

Ms Sinclair stated that she of the opinion that there was a lot of bad press about staff within the Council but the Council should be proud of their workforce and what has been achieved. Mr Dillon advised that Local

Authorities should be promoting their staff to the public to show the essential services undertaken by the staff.

Councillor Ross entered the meeting at this juncture.

Thereafter the meeting agreed that:-

- (iv) a report would be submitted to Full Council regarding membership of the Joint Consultative Committee as some trades unions had merged
- (v) two meetings of the Joint Consultative Committee a year be held and that the next meeting would be held in September/October.