



Service conditions maintained

Somerset County Council “disappointed”

You should have received a letter from the Chief Executive dated 23rd December 2010. Here are some quotes.

“ the Council has been consulting with the trade unions over many months through the collective bargaining process.”

This means:-

The Council has been looking to:-

- scrap increments (but now off the table)
- set ‘spot pay’ below top of grade (but now off the table)
- scrap pay protection (but now off the table)
- review senior management pay (but now consolidated)
- review market supplements (but now consolidated)
- review honoraria (but now consolidated)
- reduce redundancy compensation to statutory minimum (imposed from 1.4.10 because we would not agree to the cuts above) (see p2 footnote)

‘Off the table’ means wouldn’t work (eg for legal equalities reasons), or only small saving in context of likely to cause too much trouble with staff.

“It is extremely disappointing that after months of negotiation and consultation with the trade unions over these issues no agreement has been reached.”

Here’s the background:-

- There has only ever been consultation; negotiation has simply meant the Council drawing back once a proposal’s weakness emerged
- Politically unpopular service cuts might be avoided by pressurising staff
- ‘Need’ for pay/ conditions cuts was speculation until the government grant announcements in December
- Budget ‘gap’ is now £4m and closing after setting service cuts
- Redundancy compensation already dropped from x3 salary calculation to x2 last year
- Full x1 redundancy compensation from 1.4.11, instead of lower statutory minimum, only for volunteers (appeal options lost)
- Redundant staff face very poor employment prospects for some years
- Government planning further 2 year public sector pay freeze
- Falling historic value of gross and take home pay
- Rising inflation, eroded car use reimbursements, work intensification
- Council needs staff support to deal with major change in services

And another quote from the Chief Executive's letter of 23rd December 2010:-

“It is also disappointing to have to tell you that Unison – the largest of the trade unions - wishes to challenge some of the decision making taken in November. These were decisions to take savings to help us to bridge the huge spending gap we all face.”

- The challenge is because UNISON believes that equalities impact assessments, required by law before formal decisions are taken, on the Council's November decisions on the service cuts, have not been done properly. If there is no case then UNISON will withdraw this challenge.
- “Decisions to take savings” means decisions to cut services.
- The initial huge spending gap could have been reduced by pacing cuts in line with the government's 4 year programme.

Somerset UNISON is looking to the future

- Your Branch is committed to maintaining the best services possible to Somerset people.
- Your Branch is doing a lot to maintain your pay and conditions.
- The letters and e-mails you have seen from the Council are not the whole story by a long way.
- Staff need to be treated well, ready for the Council of the future.

On the Branch Web site at:-

<http://www.somersetcountyunison.org/>

- Chief Executive's letter of 23rd December with UNISON commentary
- UNISON overall account of the last few months
- Several other background documents

Handy contacts

- Speak to your Steward if you can (ring Branch Office if unsure who)
- Lots on our website - **<http://www.somersetcountyunison.org>**
- Email: **unisonoffice@somerset.gov.uk**

Branch Office – 3rd floor County Hall A Block (B Block end) – 01823 355567

Footnote about redundancy compensation

Redundancy compensation is not a local government term and condition so it is not formalised in our contracts. The Council can pay the level it likes subject to paying the national statutory minimum. We have argued strongly that, for most people, local government pay is very modest and that compensation levels, prior to the Council's decision to reduce them to x1 or statutory minimum, were needed to avert the threat of destitution for families caught by redundancy at this time of recession. Now the threat is very real. To quote one former employee:-

"I cannot begin to express my feelings about the intentional assault the administration is making on redundancy conditions, which are a slender lifeline for modestly-earning, vulnerable and conscientious employees who are being loaded with the cost and blame for the Iceland fiasco, the South West One fiasco, and the doctrinaire quest for a 'balanced budget'."