

Email to Chief Executive from Somerset County Unison Branch

Sent 13 October 2010

Since there has been a "failure to agree", following the first round of consultation and negotiation which commenced in June, between the Employer and UNISON, then as soon as the Employer announces the measures referred to in your letter of October 7th and expected at Full Council (10th November 2010), then UNISON will make a dispute resolution referral to the Provincial Employer, as per the Green Book agreement.

UNISON will ask the Provincial Employer to note that:

- a) UNISON negotiated in good faith to a joint agreement covering the year 2010/11 to the end of March 2011; the Employer is potentially applying new measures to a negotiating period already jointly signed and agreed.
- b) The Employer suggested opening Regional negotiations to avoid pay, retention & recruitment disparities across the SW, in large authorities adjoining SCC and within the Local Authority community in Somerset; those negotiations have not completed nor has the CEO formally reported back as promised.
- c) In a letter to all SCC Employees on October 7th by the CEO, the Employer has linked an increment freeze to the unilateral imposition of "spot pay" (a pay reduction for the majority of staff); an increment freeze was never within scope of the 2011/12 negotiations, nor was the linking of these two measures ever explicitly made.
- d) The Employer took spot pay proposals "off the table" ("parked") for two months in response to the modest savings gained against high negative impacts on staff morale, motivation and goodwill; in the closing seconds of the final People Options meeting on September 27th, the Employer re-introduced spot pay as being "back on the table" under Any Other Business and without allowing further time for meaningful consultation.
- e) No specific model of "spot pay" has been formally proposed by the Employer or agreed by UNISON; one model had an assessment where incorrectly the "Winners" statistic was inflated by wrongly including "No Change" staff; UNISON has requested a proper comparison and raised concerns that this may potentially mislead Councillors during the decision making process.
- f) Voluntary Redundancy negotiations have been conducted on the basis of moving downwards, but were unsupported by valid comparisons in the SW, within Somerset and comparable authorities adjoining SCC; no specific model has been formally proposed by the Employer or agreed by UNISON.

g) Voluntary Redundancy negotiations also involve the Teaching Unions and should be jointly negotiated through Joint Secretaries meetings process; UNISON on enquiry was recently told that the Teaching Unions negotiations have been extended; UNISON argues that these are joint negotiations and that UNISON should be afforded the same extension to negotiations as our Teacher colleagues.

h) In the last People Options meeting on September 27th, joint agreement was reached on extending voluntary redundancy arrangements, including a new trawl for volunteers in April 2011; the CEO's letter unilaterally over-rides that joint agreement.

j) If the Cabinet decides on the 10th of November to progress the compulsory redundancies, then the Section 188 notice period will still have six weeks left to run? Does this make meaningful consultation a "sham"?

k) As no specific measures or models on spot pay or redundancy have been agreed, the Employer has not met Equality Impact Assessment requirements and the recognised Trades Unions have been unable to make a legitimate assessment of the Employer's analysis.

UNISON did make clear within a month of the 2011/12 negotiations taking place from April, that as a democratic organisation UNISON would need to conduct an indicative ballot of our Members to gauge their feelings and obtain feedback on these significant measures that will reduce their pay and lower their conditions of service; time for that exercise to be conducted has not been reasonably factored into the negotiating timetable beings used by the Employer.