

Somerset County Branch of Unison

Latest

proposals from the Council to erode your terms and conditions

Background

With a new administration elected in June and with a very gloomy economic outlook, we were faced in September with one of the most difficult negotiating rounds for 20 years. In late September, the Trades Unions met with the new Leader, Cabinet Members, Acting CEO and Head of HR. They put in front of us a list of "things they were thinking of carrying out"; these included UNISON de-recognition, removal of our Office and all facility time, redundancy at legal minimum and the Four People Options that were eventually put to us in formal consultation (see below).

UNISON's negotiating position from the outset was to ensure that we did not suffer compulsory redundancies and to work hard to either remove or mitigate the four measures proposed. UNISON formed a small specialist Finance group to ensure (in line with National recommendations) that we fully understood the true financial picture in detail.

There were many rounds of meetings and negotiations, culminating in an all day session held at County Hall in January during the week of heavy snowfalls.

The Four People Options and what has happened

UNISON, with support from our teaching union colleagues, has played a major part in maintaining our service conditions. Negotiation will continue though. Do encourage non-member colleagues to join.

The Council made a final decision on the current 'People Options' when it met on 17th February:

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1. **A temporary suspension of incremental progression for those staff on Green Book Conditions of Service.** This did not affect staff equally so would have conflicted with equalities legislation. The new proposal to develop spot point salaries, which will be considered over the next year, must not leave Somerset as a pay and skills backwater.
2. **A reduction in the level of compensation payment awarded to staff made redundant.** This is the redundancy compensation factor whereby redundant LG staff can be granted a multiple of their statutory redundancy pay. This is entirely at the discretion of a local government employer. SCC has been compensating at three times statutory. This will go down to two times, matching Somerset teachers, but not in this 2010/11 budget round.
3. **A temporary drop in the pay band for those officers in the top three tiers (circa 85).** The current scheme has to be replaced because the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment system, to which it was linked, has been scrapped. No one loses out on ordinary pay scale progression at this stage.
4. **A case by case review of honoraria and market supplement payments.** This suggestion reflected controls already in place but there will be more consistency across Directorates.

Our next challenge: SCC "Employment Strategy"

The Council report talks about a new Corporate Employment strategy. You may think that with these People Option outcomes, the challenges to hard-won service conditions have gone away. Not so – the Council's Corporate Employment Strategy idea is bound to involve a further look as pressure is applied by some to reduce pay and conditions even further. Support the Branch in its campaign to fend off 'Backwater Somerset'.

We face a very tough year ahead: the Employer is talking about "one rate for the job" and we will resist fiercely that rate being less than current top of scale; additionally for 2012/13 the Employer may seek to reduce the redundancy rate again (with Teaching Unions). We may have to call upon our Members in support of our negotiating position, if meaningful consultation and principled negotiation do not produce an agreement.

Our priorities remain:

- Keeping local services public;
- Avoiding compulsory redundancies;
- Retaining national pay, pensions and conditions bargaining;
- Protecting our local members' interests



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