



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS NEGOTIATIONS – SECURITY UNIT
Date:	9 th October 2009
Reporting Officer:	G Wright – Head of Facilities Management
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Relevant Background Information

Members will recall that, at its meeting of 21st August 2009, the Committee approved a package of operational changes and an associated financial settlement in respect of both Security Officer and Control Room staff within the Security Unit, and authorised the making of a formal offer to the various trades unions having members in the unit. The total one-off buyout cost associated with this offer is **£248,686** and it was agreed that the Committee be updated on the ballot outcomes.

Following the Committee's decision the offer was set out in a letter to all trades unions dated 28th August 2009 together with a request that they seek their members' views by way of secret ballot after full Council ratification on 1st September 2009. Each of the trades unions involved agreed to this request and the ballots were duly carried out. Notification has now been received that, with regard to the ballots conducted in respect of 29 Security Officer staff by the UNITE(AT&GWU), NIPSA and GMB trades unions, a very significant majority voted in favour of the proposals.

On foot of the authority granted by the Committee the new shift rostering arrangements, job descriptions, 37-hour working week, revised staffing establishment, rotation requirements and 'pool' cover will therefore commence with effect from 4th October 2009, and the long-standing contractual and 'compulsory' overtime arrangements will cease. The new rates and the agreed buyout amounts have also now been processed for this group of staff, and all of this represents a comprehensive and agreed solution to a whole range of long-standing and difficult issues for the unit.

However, NIPSA has also informed us that the separate ballot conducted in respect of the group of 8 Control Room Operatives has resulted in this group of staff rejecting the offer. This is a surprising result, but it was made clear to all staff and their trades union representatives throughout the consultative and negotiating discussions that there could be no 'cherry-picking' of the package nor any partial acceptance of individual elements of it: the proposals formed an integrated package of measures which must be addressed in the round.

This being so, the obvious consequence of the 'no' vote is that the package is removed from the table in its entirety while alternatives are considered.

The Head of Facilities Management informed the Branch Chair of NIPSA of this position in writing on 18th September 2009 and also asked that he liaise with the various staff in the Control Room (all of whom are NIPSA members) in order to “try to summarise for me what elements of the overall package of proposals caused them to reject it in the ballot, as this will help inform our next steps”. To date no acknowledgement or response has been received, and consequently the offer has not been modified.

The overall effect of the two differing ballot results is that the Security Officer staff have received their re-grading and buyout payments while the Control Room Operatives have received neither, and the latter continue to work 40-hr weeks (which are not Single Status-compliant) on the basis of out-dated job descriptions and also to work the un-necessary and expensive contractual and ‘compulsory’ overtime built in to the old rosters.

The principles which underpin the offer rejected by the Control Room Operatives remain valid and will form the basis of any revised offer made by management, however if there are specific issues on which the staff require clarification or assurance – or if minor changes to the practicalities of the proposal are deemed to be helpful and feasible – these will of course be pursued in an attempt to secure agreement. We are aware that there was some initial concern around a very modest (2 mornings per month) lone-working requirement and a fairly minor issue around rostering but these would scarcely be significant enough to cause a rejection of the entire package, and it was made clear to the staff involved that - even after a ‘yes’ vote - we would still be willing to make improvements where these could be mutually agreed, so the rejection is all the more puzzling.

Key Issues

It is essential that this matter be resolved during the current financial year, as no provision has been made in 2010/11. It is also essential that any new package does not involve additional costs over and above the amounts set out in the original proposal and also that it is compliant with the agreement on Single Status reached by management and trades unions in 2007.

It is therefore the intention of the Head of Facilities Management to seek to make one further and final offer in an attempt to deal with any concerns staff may have, however if this does not prove possible or is again rejected in a ballot then the categorization of the posts will take place in line with normal procedures.

Resource Implications

As outlined above, if a resolution to these issues is to be found it must be found during the current financial year, as no provision has been made in the 2010/11 revenue estimates.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:-

- (a) the Committee notes and endorses the agreement made and implemented in respect of Security Officers;
- (b) the Committee authorizes the Head of Facilities Management to make one further offer to Control Room staff on the basis that it will involve no additional cost; *and*
- (c) the Committee authorises the Head of Facilities Management to proceed to categorization if it becomes clear that agreement will not be reached during the current financial year.

Decision Tracking

A report will be presented to the Committee outlining the position in January 2010.