



To: JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES		Subject: UPDATE REPORT
From: DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION		
Date: 4 September 2002	Ref: AB/AM	

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report presents a general update on items of business discussed at previous Joint Consultative Committees (JCCs).

2. Arrestment of Wages/Salaries

- 2.1 A response to the consultation document issued by the Scottish Executive on the Enforcement of Civil Obligations in Scotland contained reference to this issue and was considered by the General Purposes Committee at its meeting last month. There has been no further response to date from the Scottish Executive, nor any indications of the timescale when any changes, which may result as a consequence of the consultation exercise, will in fact be progressed. Accordingly, arrangements are continuing as set out at the last meeting of the JCCs.

3. Employee Counselling Service

- 3.1 A meeting has taken place between representatives of the Employee Counselling Service (ECS) and representatives from the Personnel Services Division, the intent of which was to afford the opportunity for both parties to discuss the service currently being provided and to highlight any areas of difficulty which had been identified. The meeting was very constructive in its tone and a number of issues were raised with ECS, in terms of feedback from Council departments on particular issues which they wished to explore further.
- 3.2 It was established that ECS were surveying their client base to gauge indications of the service provided and the information from these client surveys would be distributed to the affiliated organisations. It was suggested by ECS that the Council may wish to consider the quality of information to be provided through these surveys, in the first instance, prior to proceeding to establish a separate survey process for North Lanarkshire Council employees. This position was agreed as an interim measure, and information is awaited from the surveys, which will be received by the Council in the coming months. ECS also clarified the position in relation to their approach to each case with clients and explained that a plan was discussed, and usually agreed, at the opening meeting between the counsellor and the client. It was apparent that ECS plan for closure of each case, with the full involvement of the client. It was further clarified that in some cases, for example, where the area of concern related to alcohol abuse, if there was evidence that the client was not co-operating in the agreed plan of action, then ultimately the counsellor would take the decision to close the case sooner than planned and to notify the Council that matters were not progressing as expected.

- 3.3 In general terms, the meeting proved to be fruitful to both parties and such meetings are now expected to take place on a regular basis. The Council will be receiving information from the ECS database to enable the Council to manage the delivery of the service and its benefit to employees.

4. Annual Leave

- 4.1 The issue of the annual leave year remains under review and has been the subject of consultation with departments of the Council. Any further proposals in relation to annual leave year arrangements will form part of the future negotiating forum on the wider single status agenda.

5. Whistle Blowing Policy

- 5.1 This item of business remains a continued item on the agenda. The draft policy is part complete and being progressed by the Director of Administration. Proposals will be issued to the trade unions for consultation at the earliest date possible, having regard to other priority commitments.

6. Facilities for Trade Unions

- 6.1 A draft policy on facilities for trade unions was issued some months ago to the trade union side for their comments. The trade union side have rejected the draft policy, principally on the grounds that, whilst seeking to access varying methods of communication in operation within the Council, it is preferred that this would be done on an informal basis as opposed to a formal policy provision. The trade union side has requested a meeting to discuss the matter further. Whilst noting the trade union side's position in terms of a meeting to progress matters, it is the case that, where Council facilities are being utilised, it is not likely that any arrangements which are agreed will be established outwith a formal framework, which ultimately will be considered by the Policy and Resources (Personnel) Sub-Committee. Consequently, the trade union side is asked to review its position on this matter and respond to the Head of Personnel Services.

7. Parental Leave Policy

- 7.1 Subsequent amendments to the parental leave policy were agreed yesterday at the Policy and Resources (Personnel) Sub-Committee and will be considered at the forthcoming Council meeting. The proposals for change to the existing policy have been issued to the trade union side for their information and reflect an improvement on current provisions, arising from the legislative provisions now introduced as well as positive adjustments to the locally agreed elements of the policy.

8. Council Policies

- 8.1 The JCCs in May 2002 noted the efforts being made to bring the existence of Council policies to the attention of employees including utilising North Lanarkshire News Magazine to advertise any personnel circulars issued; advertising new policies within payslips where possible as well as placing all policies on the intranet. Trade union representatives were also advised to raise any issue of concern at the respective departmental JCCs, in terms of the distribution of personnel circulars. No further items of concern have been notified to the Personnel Services Division following the last meetings of the JCCs.

9. New Start Packs

- 9.1 Discussions have taken place with officers in the Housing and Property Services Department regarding information and facilities to assist new employees, with particular reference to the payment of Council housing rent and tax; eligibility for extended payments of housing and council tax benefits and information regarding the availability of housing benefit.
- 9.2 Arrangements are now being put in place to notify employees, through payslip messages, of the facility to pay their rent and Council tax through deductions from wages and information is being forwarded to the Corporate Training Section for inclusion in information being issued to new employees through the induction course. The Housing and Property Services department has also confirmed that its Tenant Information Pack, which is issued to all new tenants, includes a form for application for housing benefit and the details of the process are discussed with each tenant at the point when missives are being completed. In relation to the entitlement to extended income support, the department has confirmed that this information is automatically supplied by the Benefits Agency and, therefore, it is not envisaged that any new employee with the Council would be disadvantaged.

10. Recommendation

- 10.1 The Joint Consultative Committee is requested to note the updated position on the items of business as set out in this report.

Iris Wylie

PP **Director of Administration**

For further information on the content of this report please contact Anne Burns, Chief Personnel Officer on (01698) 302320.