Motherwell, 20 April 2005 at 2 pm.

A Meeting of the NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL JOINT NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE FOR TEACHING STAFF

PRESENT

Management Side – Councillor Gray, Convener, and Councillors Barrie, Lyle and Morris, Director of Education and Depute Director of Education.


CHAIR

Councillor Gray (Convener) presided.

IN ATTENDANCE

The Committee Services Manager.
Advisers to the Management Side: Head of Personnel Services and H. McCallum.
Adviser to the Joint Union Side: R. Okasha.

APOLOGIES

Management Side – Councillors Cefferty, Holloway and Saunders.
Joint Union Side – W. Cairns, P. Cullen and P. Lavery.

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

1. There was submitted the Minute of the meeting of the North Lanarkshire Council Joint Negotiating Committee for Teaching Staff held on 24 November 2004.

   The Committee agreed (1) that with reference to paragraph 7 of the Minute relating to the salary structure for Quality Improvement Officers and Education Support Officers, the letters “QIO” on line 3 of the second paragraph be deleted and the words “Quarterly Improvement Manager” inserted, and (2) that the terms of the Minute be otherwise approved.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR PHASED OR SUPPORTED RETURN TO WORK

2. There was submitted a paper by the Director of Education detailing therein arrangements for a phased or supported return to work once a teacher, had, following a lengthy period of absence from the service indicated a wish and an ability to return to work, subject to (a) the production of the necessary medical evidence, and (b) the approval of the Depute Director of Education in light of the exigencies of the service. Thereon, the Depute Director of Education advised that the arrangements for phased or supported return to work had been formulated following consultation with representatives from the Joint Union Side.

   C. Lambert, on behalf of the Joint Union Side, welcomed the paper and the early implementation of the arrangements.
The Committee agreed, in terms of Article 11 of the Local Recognition and Procedure Agreement, that the arrangements for phased or supported return to work, as detailed in the paper, be approved and signed by both sides. Thereon, Councillor Gray, H. Glen and the two Joint Secretaries signed the paper.

ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

3. For the Management Side, the Depute Director of Education was heard in relation to absence management and advised (1) that the focus of absence management was now on return to work procedures and the proper recording of absence; (2) that, in association with the teacher unions, leaflets and posters had been produced and disseminated in the workplace with a view to encouraging employees on sick leave to return to work as soon as possible, and (3) that, although the absence statistics for teachers for the first quarter of 2005/06 were slightly better than the statistics in the corresponding quarter of 2004/05, in light of plans to reduce the absence level to 4% of the workforce they were still on the high side.

Thereon, the Head of Personnel Services (1) advised that a much higher profile was being given to absence management at a corporate level; (2) intimated that the Best Value Review Group on Absence Management had recently revised the Council's Absence Management Policy, and that a copy of the document had been passed to the Trade Unions for comments by the end of March 2005; (3) indicated that to date she was not aware of any feedback from the Trade Unions, and (4) urged the representatives of the Joint Union Side to submit their comments on the revised document as soon as possible.

H. Connor, on behalf of the Joint Union Side, referred to the return to work interview following sick leave and intimated that they were anxious that such interviews should be carried out on a supportive basis.

The Depute Director of Education advised that guidance recommending (1) that all information in relation to an employee's absence should be treated in a confidential manner, and (2) that return to work interviews should be conducted on a supportive basis, particularly in respect of employees who were rarely off on sick leave, had been issued to officers responsible for conducting return to work interviews.

Thereon, I. Scott, on behalf of the Joint Union Side, referred to the paper which had been approved earlier in the meeting regarding support for teachers returning to work following lengthy absence from the service and intimated that measures should be in place to raise the awareness of line managers to the Council's Special Leave Policy.

In response, the Head of Personnel Services (1) advised that the Best Value Working Group on Absence Management had acknowledged that the awareness of line managers to terms of the Special Leave Policy could be better; (2) summarised the difficulties being experienced by officers operating the Policy, and (3) indicated, however, that the terms of the Council's Special Leave Policy were generous in comparison to the terms offered by other Councils.

The Committee noted the position.

EDUCATION 2010 PROGRAMME - SCHOOL CLOSURES, AMALGAMATIONS AND RELOCATIONS - STAFFING POLICY FOR TEACHING STAFF

4. With reference to paragraph 5 of the Note of the meeting of this Committee held on 20 March 2002, there was submitted a paper by the Director of Education (1) referring to the agreement between the Council and the Teachers' Professional Associations on procedures to deal with staffing issues arising
from school amalgamations and closures under the Education 2010 Programme; (2) advising that, in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003 (Principal Teacher) Order 2003, local authorities had discretion to suspend the requirement to advertise Principal Teacher posts nationally until February 2007, and (3) proposing that, in relation to the Education 2010 Programme, the Council should exercise its discretion and suspend the advertisement of posts of Principal Teacher on a national basis to restrict, in the first instance, the filling of posts of Principal Teacher in new management structures of amalgamating schools.

For the authority, the Depute Director of Education referred to informal consultations with the Trade Union representatives on the issue and also to discussions at meetings of the Working Group on Closures and Amalgamations.

Thereon, the Joint Union Side (1) referred to plans by the Scottish National Committee for Teachers (SNCT) to issue guidance on the subject, and (2) indicated that they were willing to accept the Council’s proposals to suspend the requirement to advertise posts of Principal Teachers nationally in respect of closures and amalgamation of schools under the Education 2010 Programme, (a) on the understanding that where the holder of a promoted post did not obtain a comparable post in the merged school he/she may be transferred to an unpromoted post, and (b) subject to the situation being reviewed in light of guidance from the SNCT on the subject at a future meeting of the Committee.

The Committee agreed that, in relation to the Education 2010 Programme, the requirement to advertise posts of Principal Teacher nationally until February 2007 be suspended, (1) on the understanding that where the holder of a promoted post did not obtain a comparable post in the merged school he/she may be transferred to an unpromoted post, and (2) subject to the issue being reviewed in light of guidance from the SNCT at a future meeting of the Committee.

PERSONAL LEARNING PLANS

5. H. Connor, on behalf of the Joint Union Side, advised that it would be in a position in the near future to issue a letter, in association with the Director of Education, on the Council’s approach to Personal Learning Plans.

The Committee noted the position.

SUPPORT STAFF IN SCHOOLS

6. H. Connor, on behalf of the Joint Union Side, referred to the approval by the Education Committee, at its meeting on 16 March 2005 of proposals by the Director of Education to allocate additional funding from the Scottish Executive for the employment of school support staff by creating 26 posts of part-time Classroom Assistants and purchasing the services of six full-time equivalent posts of Parent Support Worker from the Department of Community Services, and (1) welcomed the action taken by the Council in its utilisation of the Scottish Executive Funds for the provision of additional School Support Staff, and (2) requested that an evaluation of initiatives such as “Better Behaviour, Better Learning” be carried out to assess whether pupil behaviour had improved and exclusion rates had reduced.

For the Management Side, the Director of Education advised (1) that there were a number of similar initiatives containing areas which overlapped, and (2) that they were currently trying to get an overview of the subject area to demonstrate which of the initiatives was making a difference. The Depute Director of Education acknowledged that it would be useful to obtain some quantitative and qualitative measurements, and intimated that, to that end, that they were monitoring the Council’s Inclusion Strategy.
Thereon, I. Scott, on behalf of the Joint Union Side, intimated that they were interested in getting feedback from the initiatives to gage the progress being made and to ensure that best practice was being disseminated to schools. The Director of Education intimated that he would evaluate the progress of the initiatives on pupil behaviour and inclusion and report thereon to a future meeting of the Committee.

The Committee noted that the Director of Education would investigate the effectiveness of initiatives such as "Better Behaviour, Better Learning" and the progress of the Council's Inclusion Strategy.

SCHOOL HOLIDAY ARRANGEMENTS FOR ACADEMIC SESSION 2006/07

7. There was submitted a draft paper by the Director of Education advising of the school holiday arrangements, incorporating local holidays and in-service days, for North Lanarkshire schools for the period from 17 August 2006 to 29 June 2007.

H. Connor, on behalf of the Joint Union Side, intimated that it had no objections to the proposed holiday arrangements.

The Committee noted the position.

COMMENTS BY THE VICE-CONVENER

8. H. Connor, on behalf of the Joint Union Side, congratulated Councillor Gray on his nomination as a Fellow of the Education Institute of Scotland in recognition of the services to Education over a number of years.

The Committee concurred.