

EMPLOYEE SIDE COMMENTS ON RESTRUCTURE OF STREET ENFORCEMENT SERVICE

We have looked at these proposals and spoken to staff and have the following comments.

We recognise that the Council has a reasonable aspiration to extend the operation of its Street Enforcement Service to evenings and weekends. Equally, staff have agreed working patterns around which their lives are built and cannot be required to accept a major change in the pattern of hours they are expected to work. In speaking to staff, we found some who were enthusiastic for the proposed changes and others who said that their personal circumstances were such that they could not work at weekends and during evenings. The proportions were approximately 25% enthusiastic for the change and 75% who said that they could not work to the new arrangements or had other problems with what is proposed. Management has indicated that there would be considerable flexibility with rotas and this has given rise to a concern among those who generally favour the proposal that they might find themselves bearing an unfair share of the evening and weekend work. While everyone concerned is willing to approach any practical suggestions in a positive spirit, it is difficult to see how this circle can be squared. If someone has domestic circumstances that render evening and weekend working impossible then moving the work between different evenings and weekends does not solve the problem. On the other hand, removing the requirement on those officers to work at those times means that either other officers have to do a disproportionate amount of that work or the Service falls short of the level of coverage it wants.

A comment several people made on the rota is that it has no inbuilt flexibility to cope with annual leave and sickness. People are concerned that they may be called upon to work to plug these gaps and their work times will, therefore, become more unpredictable as well as irregular. This is particularly the case because officers have to work in pairs. If gaps are not plugged, when one half of a pair goes sick, the other officer cannot work. One officer told us that there is already a problem of this nature and that he has accumulated 97 hours of TOIL because work demands mean he is unable to take compensatory time off. Another point on time was that it was unclear what the working pattern of a day / evening would be. One member had calculated that four weeks' work on the sample roster came out at 158 hours. When I checked a sample four week period I found that even allowing a one hour meal break in each shift led to a total of 147 hours. How does the rota equate to 144 hours over 4 weeks?

Another comment made was that evening and weekend working would make it more difficult for officers to develop themselves and their skills by taking courses in their own time. Several officers said they would like to do this and stated that they felt this was the only way they were going to get any training. There was a general feeling that the Service is unwilling to release officers for training and tries to rely on in post guidance from more senior officers. This has its place but is no substitute for proper training.

Some of our members wanted to know what the position would be if they refused the posts on the grounds that personal circumstances precluded them from working evenings and weekends. I advised that the change in hours meant that the new posts would not be a reasonable offer of alternative employment and that if they refused them they would be redundant and would be entitled to go into the redeployment pool and, if unsuccessful, to depart the Council with a redundancy payment. In the course of the discussions, the difficulties of redeployment and the drawbacks to becoming redundant in a recession were well aired.

I have commented separately on the job descriptions and on the evaluation of the Street Enforcement Officers' jobs. On the latter point, I will reiterate that when I checked the evaluations I was of the view that some factors had been underscored and that the posts should clearly be at PO2. If this is agreed it will avoid the effective downgrading involved in moving from the old PO1 to the new PO1. A downgrading of this kind is hardly conducive to gaining the staff's good will for the process.

Finally, I wish to point out that the Branch Secretary of Haringey Unite and the Branch Chair of UNISON were present at all of the discussions to which I have referred. I discussed with them what I proposed to write in my comments and they were fully in agreement with my intentions. I am sure they will confirm this if necessary. The GMB has been kept informed of dates of meetings and has been copied into documents. It has had the opportunity to participate in the discussions.

John Snelling
Employee Side Secretary
21st June 2009