



Dear Councillor

### **Staff Appeals Panel**

We are taking the unusual step of writing to you jointly because we share concerns about the possibility for changes to be made to Staff Appeals Panel that would have undesirable consequences for both staff and West Sussex County Council.

We understand that you, in your role as a Councillor who serves on the Panel, are due to meet with WSCC management to discuss how the Staff Appeals Panel might change in the future, and what the role of Councillors should be within that process.

Both our trade unions believe that the Staff Appeals Panel provides a crucial and beneficial role to WSCC. We believe that the Panel should remain unchanged for the most part – with elected Councillors continuing to fulfil this essential function for staff. We believe the benefits of the current approach are these:

- A lay point of view is included, bringing to bear wider experiences and knowledge, which really helps to test the reasonableness of the case and process used under discussion;
- This helps protect the principle of voluntarism in public life, as councillors' input is unpaid;
- Any replacement of the councillors' role by the Executive Leadership Team would leave the ELT with less time in the working week to deal with the many challenges the authority faces and to manage high-class public services;
- Without councillors, the widespread staff perception is that the Executive Leadership Team would be able to use the Appeals Panel to keep 'dirty laundry' under wraps. There will be less staff faith in the process. Staff do have faith in councillors, your independence, and the responsibility you take in this regard;
- The Staff Appeals Panel as a councillor-led panel has existed in this way for a very long time at West Sussex. It plays a legitimate and useful role, and helps in a significant way to protect the organisation's reputation and purse by reinstating staff before matters are escalated to external tribunal or the press.

Our unions do not have any issue with proposals to reduce the number of councillors involved over time, for example from 18 to 14 or 12, and for a more detailed programme of training to be developed. We do however feel it is of the utmost importance that the Staff Appeals Panel continues to be wholly councillor-led.

We are happy to discuss this further if it will be of help.

Dan Sartin  
Branch Secretary  
UNISON West Sussex

Joe Weir  
Regional Secretary  
Fire Brigades Union