

NIPSA, UNITE and GMB

attendance at

The Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (AERA)

Thursday 11 March 09:30

Briefing note:

1 Feb 2021

13:45 - Kieran Ellison UNITE Regional Officer, emailed Richard Cromie (Head of HR and OD – MEABC) to make him aware that “it has been brought to my attention via a Senior Officer in Unite that staff whose job it is to carry out the Brexit NI protocol appear to have been threatened via graffiti and potentially other methods for carrying out their role.”

16:37 - A response email was received confirming that council was aware and that it would be discussed at the full council meeting.

16:41 – Kieran requested Joint Trade Union Side (JTUS) be kept updated

It was brought to our attention that Council had made contact with PSNI at 3pm and were advised that no threat existed. In a meeting with the Mayor on 26 February advised that Group Party Leaders met around 3pm to consider these matters. None of this information was conveyed to JTUS by council and the first we were aware of the withdrawal of staff was when the Mayor’s statement to council was played on the BBC late evening news.

Despite our endeavours we have been unable to ascertain who the reported threats arose from or indeed why the police assessment of no threat was ignored.

The Mayor of MEABC read out the following statement at the Council meeting on 1 February confirming the withdrawal of staff:

“Mid and East Antrim Borough Council is immediately withdrawing its staff from inspection duties at Larne Port over concerns for their safety and welfare concerns for their safety and welfare. It follows an upsurge in sinister and menacing behaviour in recent weeks including the appearance of graffiti in the local area referencing increasing tensions around the Northern Ireland protocol and describing port staff as targets and it being ‘time for war’.

“Trade unions on behalf of council members of staff assisting with the checks at the port have raised serious concerns around increasing suspicious activity such as apparent information gathering, including the taking of personal registration plates from their vehicles.

“This has caused extreme distress and worry to our staff and we have no option but to withdraw them from their duties in order to fulfill our duty of care and carry out a full risk assessment with the PSNI, Food Standards Agency and DAERA. Tonight I will be writing to Minister [Edwin] Poots to let him know of this decision and we apologise for any disruption that this may cause. Council will provide further updates on the situation when it is appropriate to do so.”

Trade Union Side – have made it abundantly clear that the remarks attributed to us are inaccurate and must be withdrawn.

Communications with MEABC and Councillors

02 February

09:17 – NIPSA emailed Katrina Morgan – no reply received

10:30 (approx.) – NIPSA spoke to Katrina Morgan and raised concerns about the lack of information and statements by Council suggesting there had been communication with JTUS

04 February

10:00 – 12:00 – Local negotiating forum – Issue raised with Council re Mayor's inaccurate statement

13:44 – JTUS emailed Anne Donaghy – CEO MEABC raising concerns about the decision to withdraw staff and the Mayor's statement

05 February

10:17 – JTUS emailed Mayor and Councillors requesting withdrawal of inaccurate statement and formal amendment of record

08 February

14:56 – JTUS received an email from R Cromie responding to emails dated 4th and 5th Feb

09 February

16:48 – JTUS respond to email from R Cromie

11 Feb

15:48 – R Cromie responds to JTUS request for a meeting

26 February

Letter from Anne Donaghy & Mayor following JTUS meeting

Alan Law

From: Ellison, Kieran <Kieran.Ellison@unitetheunion.org>
Sent: 01 February 2021 16:41
To: Richard Cromie
Cc: Alan Perry; Alan Law
Subject: RE: [EXTERNAL] RE: MEA Larne Port

Hi Richard

I would appreciate if JTUS are kept updated on this issue.

Regards

Kieran

From: Richard Cromie [mailto:Richard.Cromie@midandeastantrim.gov.uk]
Sent: 01 February 2021 16:37
To: Ellison, Kieran <Kieran.Ellison@unitetheunion.org>
Cc: Alan Perry <Alan.Perry@gmb.org.uk>; Alan Law <alaw@nipsa.org.uk>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: MEA Larne Port

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- Helpdesk

Hi Kieran,

Thank you for your email.

I have been advised that Group Party Leaders are meeting in relation to this and Council are also meeting with Minister Poots later today on this matter, and it will also be discussed at Full Council tonight.

Best Regards
Richard

Richard Cromie
Head of Human Resources & Organisation Development

Ballymena Office
Ardeevin
80 Galgorm Road
Ballymena, Co Antrim
BT42 1AB



Tel: 028 2563 3147
Ext: 25047
Mobile: 07824 523890



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From: Ellison, Kieran <Kieran.Ellison@unitetheunion.org>
Sent: 01 February 2021 13:45
To: Richard Cromie <Richard.Cromie@midandeantrim.gov.uk>
Cc: Alan Perry <Alan.Perry@gmb.org.uk>; Alan Law <alaw@nipsa.org.uk>
Subject: MEA Larne Port

Hi Richard

I has been brought to my attention via a Senior Officer in Unite that staff whose job it is to carry out the Brexit NI protocol appear to have been threatened via graffiti and potentially other methods for carrying out their role.

I am seeking assurances that MEA is risk assessing the issue and introducing security measures for these staff.

I hope to hear from you soon on how the employer is intending to address these potentially very serious threats.

Regards

Kieran Ellison
Unite the Union

Sent from my iPhone

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Alan Law

From: Alan Law
Sent: 02 February 2021 09:17
To: Katrina Morgan
Cc: nigel.devine@midandeastantrim.gov.uk
Subject: Port of Larne staff

Katrina

Could we please have an urgent zoom call (1pm?) about the decision to withdraw staff, please also share the council's threat assessment and what information the PSNI has shared in relation to the threat you have based the decision on.

Alan

Ref: TC/ab/RC

26 February 2021

PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL

Sent via email to: alaw@nipsa.org.uk

Alan Law
Higher Executive Officer
NIPSA
30 Great James Street
Londonderry
BT48 7DB

Dear Mr Law

Re: Meeting with Mid and East Antrim and Trade Unions - 26th February 2021

We would like to thank you for taking time today to meet with us along with Katrina Morgan (Director of Community) and Richard Cromie (Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development). We are very pleased that the meeting was constructive and positive.

We are delighted that collectively we have found a way forward to continue to build on our positive working relationships for the wellbeing, safety and benefit of our staff.

We take on board the feedback received today from our Trade Union colleagues on how we can learn from this and improve our communications going forward. To that end I, as Chief Executive, will ensure "*communication with Trade Union colleagues*" is added to the agenda to be discussed at the next LCNF meeting.

We appreciate the open, honest and constructive dialogue which has allowed us to move forward and focus on our most important asset, our staff. As Chief Executive I look forward to working with you on key projects such as our Leisure Services review and our Terms and Conditions.

Yours sincerely



Anne Donaghy OBE
Clerk & Chief Executive



Cllr. Peter Johnston
Mayor

cc Alan Perry, GMB
Kieran Ellison, Unite

Please reply to:

■ **Head Office**
The Braid
1-29 Bridge Street
Ballymena BT43 5EJ

□ **Ballymena Office**
Ardeevin
80 Galgorm Road
Ballymena BT42 1AB

□ **Carrickfergus Office**
Museum & Civic Centre
11 Antrim Street
Carrickfergus BT38 7DG

□ **Larne Office**
Smiley Buildings
Victoria Road
Larne BT40 1RU

□ **Planning Office**
Silverwood Business Park
190 Raceview Road
Ballymena
BT42 4HZ

Chief Executive
Anne Donaghy OBE

Tel: 0300 1245 000

www.midandeantrim.gov.uk

Alan Law

From: Alan Law
Sent: 05 February 2021 10:17
To: Cllr.PJohnston@midandeantrim.gov.uk
Subject: Mayor's statement at MEABC Council meeting on 1 February 2021
Attachments: larne port emails.pdf

Importance: High

Dear Mr Johnson, Mayor of MEABC

I refer to your remarks at the MEABC meeting held on Monday 1 February:

I have obtained the following transcript of your remarks:

*“Mid and East Antrim Borough Council is immediately withdrawing its staff from inspection duties at Larne Port over concerns for their safety and welfare concerns for their safety and welfare. It follows an upsurge in sinister and menacing behaviour in recent weeks including the appearance of graffiti in the local area referencing increasing tensions around the Northern Ireland protocol and describing port staff as targets and it being ‘time for war’.
“Trade unions on behalf of council members of staff assisting with the checks at the port have raised serious concerns around increasing suspicious activity such as apparent information gathering, including the taking of personal registration plates from their vehicles.
“This has caused extreme distress and worry to our staff and we have no option but to withdraw them from their duties in order to fulfill our duty of care and carry out a full risk assessment with the PSNI, Food Standards Agency and DAERA. Tonight I will be writing to Minister [Edwin] Poots to let him know of this decision and we apologise for any disruption that this may cause. Council will provide further updates on the situation when it is appropriate to do so.”*

In this statement you attribute remarks to the Trade Unions. As this was an official statement issued on behalf of Council at the Monthly meeting please would you clarify which Trade Union made this claim as neither NIPSA, GMB nor Unite did, and we absolutely distance ourselves from these remarks and request that they are withdrawn and the official record amended. I attach to this email the only communication between TUS and MEABC in relation to this matter prior to the decision to withdraw staff.

I have written separately to the CEO requesting clarification on a range of matters relating to the decision to withdraw staff.

Alan Law
TUS Secretary on behalf of NIPSA, UNITE and GMB

Alan Law

From: Alan Law
Sent: 09 February 2021 16:48
To: Richard Cromie; Alan Perry; Ellison, Kieran
Cc: Katrina Morgan; Anne Donaghy; Cllr Peter Johnston
Subject: RE: MEABC decision to withdraw staff from Larne Port

Importance: High

Dear Richard

Many thanks for your email below.

It regretfully does not cover the points raised by TUS in our emails to the Chief Executive or the Mayor. In particular, but not exclusively, the remarks as follows: *“Trade unions on behalf of council members of staff assisting with the checks at the port have raised serious concerns around increasing suspicious activity such as apparent information gathering, including the taking of personal registration plates from their vehicles”*

We are formally requesting an urgent meeting with the Chief Executive and Mayor to address our concerns.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Alan

From: Richard Cromie [mailto:Richard.Cromie@midandeantrim.gov.uk]
Sent: 08 February 2021 14:56
To: Alan Law <alaw@nipsa.org.uk>; Alan Perry <Alan.Perry@gmb.org.uk>; Ellison, Kieran <Kieran.Ellison@unitetheunion.org>
Cc: Katrina Morgan <Katrina.Morgan@midandeantrim.gov.uk>; Anne Donaghy <Anne.Donaghy@midandeantrim.gov.uk>; Cllr Peter Johnston <Cllr.PJohnston@midandeantrim.gov.uk>
Subject: MEABC decision to withdraw staff from Larne Port

Dear Alan,

I acknowledge receipt of your emails on the 4th and 5th of February to the Chief Executive and the Mayor and the concerns raised within same and I am responding on behalf of them as The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development.

The Council considers threats and any risk to the safety of its staff with utmost seriousness. The decision to temporarily withdraw staff pending receipt of the PSNI risk assessment and review of Councils Risk Assessment was taken, following consideration of information from a number stakeholders, including the email from Kieran Ellison, referenced, which acknowledged the potentially very serious threats to staff. This was a totally appropriate and necessary precautionary measure to safeguard any potential risk to staff safety which is Councils number one priority.

Following receipt of the PSNI threat assessment and completion of Council’s risk assessment, staff returned to work at the Border Control Post in Larne on Friday last. The risk assessment will remain under continuous review and the situation will continue to be monitored carefully, in consultation with key stakeholders including staff and Trade Unions.

Best Regards
Richard

Richard Cromie
Head of Human Resources & Organisation Development

Ballymena Office
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Ballymena, Co Antrim
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Alan Law

From: Richard Cromie <Richard.Cromie@midandeantrim.gov.uk>
Sent: 11 February 2021 15:48
To: Alan Law; Alan Perry; Ellison, Kieran
Cc: Katrina Morgan; Anne Donaghy; Cllr Peter Johnston
Subject: Meeting

Dear Alan,

Thank you for your email.

I have spoken to the Chief Executive and the Mayor and they are content for a meeting to take place as requested to discuss this matter.

I will now organise a suitable date and time for this meeting to take place.

Best Regards
Richard

Richard Cromie
Head of Human Resources & Organisation Development

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Cc: Katrina Morgan <Katrina.Morgan@midandeantrim.gov.uk>; Anne Donaghy <Anne.Donaghy@midandeantrim.gov.uk>; Cllr Peter Johnston <Cllr.PJohnston@midandeantrim.gov.uk>

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Ref: TC/ab/RC

26 February 2021

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Alan Law
Higher Executive Officer
NIPSA
30 Great James Street
Londonderry
BT48 7DB

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Yours sincerely



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Clerk & Chief Executive



Cllr. Peter Johnston
Mayor

cc Alan Perry, GMB
Kieran Ellison, Unite

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