



## Union Supporters Stage Protest Outside County Hall

Wiltshire Council's staffing committee will consider whether to insist its contractors recognise trade unions after a heated debate today.

Independent councillor Jeff Osborn proposed at today's full council meeting that the council should only deal with organisations which commit to trade union rights for their employees.

This came after highways contractor Balfour Beatty sparked union anger by saying it would negotiate with staff internally, not with the unions.

When the company took over the £25million highways contract last June it also took over the employment of 200 highways staff but it is refusing to recognise an existing agreement the staff had with the GMB union.

Members of the union's leadership staged a protest outside County Hall before the meeting. Regional organiser Carole Vallely said: "We are here to urge councillors to support the motion, as they are supporting ex-council employees' rights.

"They have announced redundancies in road sweeping, which will result in five road sweepers in Salisbury and another five spread around the county, and we would like to try and influence Balfour Beatty to try and change their mind and reaffirm their relationship with the unions."

The proposal, which would see any future council contracts only offered to firms publically committed to recognising trade union rights, was passed to the staffing committee for further legal analysis.

Liberal Democrat leader Jon Hubbard said: "I find it very regretful that these members of staff who did have their union recognised are no longer able to do so.

"But clearly we need to do that within the law, through a little hard work and research, rather than trying to seek headlines."

Cllr Osborn accused the council of setting a 'trap' by responding to his motion with a four-page document setting out the legal restrictions on accepting his plan.

He said: "I wish to leave this motion on the table so I can take legal advice myself, so I can take a rational decision.

"I will seek legal opinion and I may have a discussion with my lawyers."

Councillor Stuart Wheeler, cabinet member for support services, which includes HR and legal issues, denied the council's response was overly complicated.

He said: "I do not think this is a particularly difficult paper.

"If you go through the sections it is absolutely clear that this will be an inappropriate condition for us to put on our tendering material, and if placed in our tendering material would be illegal."

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