



# **Employees' Consultative Forum**

## **Minutes**

### **19 September 2024**

**Present:**

**Chair:** Mr D Searles

**Councillors:** David Ashton Paul Osborn  
Philip Benjamin Mina Parmar  
Graham Henson Natasha Proctor

**GMB  
Representative:** Ms A Jones

**Apologies  
received:** Sharon Haynes John Royle  
Councillor Ameet Jogia MBE

**Absent:** Councillor Kandy Dolor Anne Lyons  
Monique Lambie

**18. Attendance by Reserve Members**

**RESOLVED:** To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Members:-

Ordinary Member

Reserve Member

Councillor Ameet Jogia MBE

Councillor Philip Benjamin

## 19. Membership

**RESOLVED:** It be noted that Pamela Belgrave, a Union Member of the Employees' Consultative Forum (ECF) had stepped down and that Stella Walker would be an interim Member of the ECF, representing the General and Municipal Workers' Union.

## 20. Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair of the Forum

**RESOLVED:** To appoint Davis Searles as Chair and Councillor Paul Osborn as Vice-Chair of the Employees' Consultative Forum for the 2024/2025 Municipal Year.

## 21. Declarations of Interest

**RESOLVED:** To note that the following interests were declared:

Agenda Item 9 - Annual Health and Safety Report for 2023-2024 and Agenda Item 10 - Annual Workforce Equality Report

Councillor Graham Henson declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he was a member of the GMB. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Natasha Proctor declared a non-pecuniary interest in that she was a member of the GMB. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

## 22. Minutes

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2024, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

## 23. Petitions, Deputations and Public Questions

**RESOLVED:** To note that no petitions, deputations or public questions were received.

## Resolved Items

## 24. Annual Health and Safety Report for 2023-2024

The Forum received a report which provided details on the annual review of Health and Safety performance of the Council for 2023-2024.

An officer briefed the Forum and highlighted the following:

- The health and safety policy had been reviewed, with several policies as well as the Health and Safety Handbook updated.
- 604 officers had received refresher training on the use of the Health and Safety management system.

- Engagement with stakeholders continued through the Corporate Health and Safety Board, with 'safety circle' meetings reintroduced.
- Wellbeing support continued through multiple initiatives. This included Wellbeing Champions that met monthly; return to work assessments; stress risk assessments along with resources and events made available.
- Future plans included a 'don't ignore it, report it' campaign as well as Health and Safety restructure that supported the whole of the Council.
- There had been a 52% increase in reported incidents. With 4 incidents required to be reported to the Health and Safety Executive, no enforcement action was taken from the Health and Safety Executive.
- There were 370 risk assessments, 63% required a review, an action plan was in place for these assessments to reviewed.
- An Employees Assistance Programme was in place, where staff had access to free confidential counselling sessions.
- The implementation of the Council's Health and Safety strategy continued with the strategy due to be reviewed in 2025.
- Future plans included a health and safety audit due to take place in October 2024 and the continued rollout of the new health and safety management software.

The Chair invited members of the Forum to ask questions, with the following raised:

- It was asked how many incidents had resulted in injury and more specifically, recurring injuries. The statistics were also sought for the number of claims taken against the Council, including information on the insurances and how the Council was minimising the risks. An Officer explained that a report was produced and presented to the Health and Safety Board on a quarterly basis and that the information sought was not to hand and would be provided to the Forum once available.
- Asked what training was in place for staff, it was explained that training was locally arranged and that the training was due to be reviewed to ensure it was adequate and to identify if ongoing training was required.
- It was raised that not all staff were able to undertake their training online and that there did not seem to be enough training in place for those who worked within Special Needs Transport. This was because it appeared that this was where a lot of the incidents were occurring. Clarification was also sought over whether there had been an improvement in staff training over the past 6 months within the Special

Needs Transport Team. The officer explained there were intentions for the types of injuries occurring to be reviewed and for the appropriate training to be arranged to combat the areas in need of improvement. In addition, the officer would need to investigate further if there had been an improvement within the Special Needs Transport Team and would report back to the Forum in more detail at the next meeting.

- Accredited training was raised and it was asked what processes had been put in place to improve the take up of accredited training. The officer explained that accredited training for this year had been provided through the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health, with work underway to revitalise the training for managers.
- It was raised that sometimes the nature of particular roles within the Council were exposed to challenging behaviour, however, under the Place directorate, there had been 14 incidents of physical assault, it was asked if this was staff that had been physically assaulted. An officer explained that there had been 14 incidents that were likely to be when staff were out on visits.
- The Forum wanted to know if any of the assaults on Council staff had resulted in prosecution, to which an officer explained that this information would need to be researched for the Forum.
- It was noted that the number of attacks seemed to be high and that any assault needed to be reported to the police. It was unacceptable that any member of staff was assaulted and that a briefing specifically on this this matter would be welcomed, to which officer agreed to provide.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

## **25. Annual Workforce Equality Report**

The report presented to the Forum, provided a detailed breakdown of the council's workforce from April 2023-March 2024.

An Assistant Director of Corporate Strategy briefed the Forum, and the following was highlighted:

- The report provided an insight into makeup of the workforce, broken down into each of the protected characteristics where data was held.
- It was highlighted that the data in the report would help to inform the council's workforce planning and decision-making processes in relation to levelling up the council's offer for under-represented groups.
- The report would also help shape the development of workforce initiatives to further improve the representation of minority groups within the Council, and to ensure more inclusive processes and practices across the organisation.

- 2.1% of staff were below the age of 25, which was below the London mean of 2.4%.
- 5.2% of the workforce disclosed a disability in 2023/24, this had increased from 2% in 2018/19. Within this data it was explained that 68% were female, compared to 32% being male.
- There had been a steady increase in the representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, from 46% in 2017/18 to 54.8% in 2023/24. This was greater than the London Councils average of 46.5%
- 61.4% of staff were female and 38.6% were male.
- Underreported was religion and belief within the Council. Over 37% of the workforce's religious affiliations remained unknown. It was identified that the workforces was made up through 26% Christian; 10% no religion; 9% Hinduism; 7% Islam and other religions made up 3%.
- 0.05% reported to gender reassignment, 1.5% had preferred not to say.
- Circa 3% of the workforce had identified as LGBTQIA+, with 57% disclosed as heterosexual.

The Chair invited members of the Forum to ask questions, with the following raised:

- Information was sought over staff that had left the Council through restructure and not retirement. An officer explained that information on those that left through redundancy could be reported back to the Forum.
- The Forum asked for more detail on the recruitment process and where did the Council usually advertise their job roles. It was explained that various medias were used as well as specialist publications. These included online platforms such as LinkedIn. In addition, roles were also advertised internally. It was highlighted that many agency staff apply for permanent roles within the Council.
- It was asked if an audit of the recruitment processes within the Council had taken place. An officer explained that all roles went through the Recruitment Team and that the Recruitment Team supported, provided feedback to managers when it comes to the process.
- It was noted that this work would shape the workforce strategy and enable the Council to identify any gaps. There was a need to compare the Council's workforce to Harrow's residential demographic to ensure that the workforce was representative.

- The Forum fed back that it would be useful to see the recommendations due to be presented so that they knew what intended actions would be taken.
- It was asked whether the unions had raised any concerns in relation to dismissals of those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. To which, the Chair confirmed that the information had not caused concern from the Union's point of view.
- It was raised that while the report covered the nine protected characteristics, it could also cover those who were carers.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 6.30 pm, closed at 7.20 pm).

(Signed) Davis Searles  
Chair