

EMPLOYEES' CONSULTATIVE FORUM: FEBRUARY 2016

HARROW UNISON LG BRANCH REPORT ON APPALLING EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES IN THE 'LIFT AND SHIFT' OF HARROW COUNCIL STAFF

SUMMARY AND DECISION REQUESTED

The Harrow UNISON LG Branch report (UNISON) outlines the appalling and disrespectful treatment of staff that have a combined service period exceeding 90 years in a 'lift and shift' arrangement from one directorate to another. UNISON is extremely disappointed with the approach adopted by officers in relation to compliance with the Council's employment practices, corporate governance arrangements and of the scornful and impudent attitudes demonstrated towards our members who are long serving public servants of Harrow as demonstrated in the financially irresponsible 'lift and shift' debacle occurring in 2015. UNISON is seeking not only accountability for those officers responsible but urgent redeployment for those employees implicated and a vast improvement to the Council's human resources employment function that has been sadly holding back the organisation for many years.

CHRONOLOGY

DATE	ACTION	OUTCOME
23 rd November 2015	Transformation Management Support Team Restructure consultation commences.	Consultation closes 11 th December 2015.
15 th December 2015	UNISON wrote to Head of Customer Services & Business Support requesting an explanation as to why funding of posts did not 'lift and shift' with staff after 1 st April 2015, the background information of the agreement and questioned the lack of financial responsibility on behalf of those officers responsible for the decision/arrangement (see appendix 1)	Head of Customer Services & Business Support responded on 18 th December 2015 and confirmed that posts were transferred to Business Support without any corresponding budget but had no further information to explain why this was the case.
21 st December 2015	UNISON wrote to Corporate Director of Resources requesting the scheduling of a Directorate Joint Committee (DJC) meeting to discuss the matter (appendix 2).	Meeting scheduled for 5 th January 2016.
5 th January 2016	Resources DJC takes place (appendix 3).	UNISON convey concerns regarding the 'lift and shift' arrangement officers made, the lack of financial responsibility, poor treatment of staff

		(combined service of 93 years), pre-selection of redundancy concerns and requested that posts return to point of origin (Peoples directorate) as the work still remains. Management did not agree to slow the process down. Management agreed to attend a special DJC meeting in Peoples directorate (agreed that it would be the Head of Customer Services and Business Support) and would look for alternative employment. Management also agreed to provide a list of agency filled posts in Business Support (NB- this has still not been received) and remained silent on a UNISON request to initiate a 'check and balance' to prevent this appalling situation occurring again.
6 th January 2016	UNISON wrote to Corporate Director of Peoples directorate requesting the scheduling of a Directorate Joint Committee (DJC) meeting to discuss the matter.	Meeting scheduled for 12 th January 2016.
12 th January 2016	Peoples DJC takes place (appendix 4)	UNISON reiterated the points made at the Resources DJC convened on 5 th January 2016. UNISON questioned the nature of the redundancy exercise, why this department was not proactive in notifying Resources that they no longer required the work and the apparent false assumption made in terms of funding posts after 1 st April 2015. The directorate did not provide adequate responses to these concerns and committed to looking at all similar vacancies under redeployment. UNISON referred the matter to ECF on 8 th February 2016.

REPORT

Background – Transformation Management Support Team 'Lift and Shift' – 1st April 2015

The Transformation Management Support Team staffing cohort was part of the former Community Health & Wellbeing directorate (now Peoples directorate) up until 31st March 2015. At some point before the 1st April 2015, officers had made an agreement (the lack of information and governance arrangements surrounding this agreement were effectively offline) that this team would be transferred in a 'lift and

shift' process to the Business Support Service, now part of the Resources directorate. The Community Health & Wellbeing directorate consulted with staff prior to the 'lift and shift' to inform that, as from 1st April 2015, they would be part of the Business Support Service with new reporting arrangements in place.

Some 9 months later in November 2015 the Resources directorate commenced consultation with staff and proposed to delete all posts. The reason for the post deletions, as outlined in the consultation paper and as was consulted with the recognised trade unions, is because the Transformation Management Support Team transferred to Business Support without a budget and that the host department had not been able to fund the team, resulting as a 'cost to the existing service' that could not be sustained. The consultation closed before the end of 2015 and the cohort of staff have been issued notices of redundancy.

'Lift and shift' and Directorate Joint Committee (DJC) 'hand-wringing'

UNISON representatives were rightly shocked to hear from their members about this appalling situation and of the disrespectful treatment that they had received at the hands of officers who have shown no regard for their loyalty, service or of years of devotion to Harrow public service. ECF Members should note that this cohort of staff have a combined service history of 93 years.

Acting on members concerns, UNISON requested a Resources DJC in a letter addressed to the Corporate Director of Resources, dated 21st December 2015 (appendix 2). In this meeting (see minutes appendix 3) UNISON representatives questioned how a team could be 'lifted and shifted' without any budget, the lack of financial accountability by officers responsible for the agreement (an agreement which occurred outside of financial governance arrangements as no documentation exists to confirm what was agreed), and why staff had not been informed earlier that their posts were effectively time limited and were at risk of redundancy.

The Resources DJC could offer no answers in respect of how this situation was allowed to occur and were quick to 'hand-wring' the issue stating that the questions UNISON were raising had been raised by Resources officers previously but remained unanswered. This was in the presence of the Human Resources Divisional Director. Members will note from the minutes of the meeting (appendix 3) that UNISON requested a check and balance to prevent similar situations occurring when officers undertake other 'lift and shift' processes in future. Disappointingly, the Corporate Director did not feel the issue warranted any action and so the minutes remain silent. ECF members should also note that, at time of writing and after requesting a list of agency filled posts in the Business Support Service to support the identification of suitable roles, the information and list has still not been provided.

Without a reasonable resolution, the matter was referred (with the agreement of the Resources DJC in which they agreed to send the Head of Business Support) to the Peoples DJC. The meeting took place on the 12th January 2016 (see minutes appendix 4) and again UNISON reiterated their concerns about the lack of sufficient governance arrangements in respect of the 'lift and shift' and questioned the original host departments' decision to move staff without a budget and their belated acknowledgement, after being prompted by officers in Resources, that the work that had been undertaken by post holders on their behalf, was no longer required. Here

again officers of the Peoples directorate could offer no reasonable explanation as to why this situation was allowed to occur or provide answers surrounding what we believe to be a sham redundancy when the directorate was, up until consultation commenced in November 2015, relying on staff to undertake work in their service area effectively free of charge.

Furthermore, at Peoples DJC UNISON representatives were informed that the team were funded by the 'transformation budget'. This is in direct contradiction to the information provided by officers in the Resources directorate and during consultation because UNISON were informed that the team were not funded prior to 'lift and shift', illustrating an omnishambles and a situation of one hand not knowing what the other is doing.

Where was corporate governance and HRD?

The 'lift and shift' debacle of moving staff without any funding whatsoever further demonstrates a lack or existence of any corporate governance or indeed any adequate compliance of Harrow Councils' employment practices by officers. The situation identifies an ineffectual Human Resources and Development (HRD) function with no reasonable checks or balances in place or overview to prevent and risk assess such issues occurring. A manager with delegated authority was allowed to conduct this 'lift and shift' operation knowing that the employees transferring were not covered by any financial support or budget reallocation; UNISON questions why this was allowed to occur? When we sought HRD support, the most senior HRD officer of the Council could provide no real defence or resolution of these actions but adopted an approach that UNISON believes sadly symbolises not only the impotent approach of the HRD department but also in officers attitudes to this issue i.e. "Its not me Guv, pass it on".

The HRD employment practices were written to protect both the employer and employee and provide the ruling governing practices that affect the lives of all Council staff regardless of position. UNISON questions the varying application of these rules as it appears the application of rules is spasmodic when outcomes favour the employer and of those employees at a certain level within an organisation which openly declares a commitment to equality.

UNISON has time and again drawn this to the attention of the Members governing this Council, who time and again ignore or dismiss a vast array of factual evidence. This we can support in relation to the report UNISON submitted at the recent ECF Sub-Group meeting which demonstrated golden handshakes for incompetence, yes, restructures and payments to remove wrong-doers. These types of antiquated practices always without fail provides a trail of inadequate poor practice and indicates the problems arising from the HRD function, who consistently support, without reservation, these disrespectful practices and non-compliance of equality of staff.

The HRD function in respect of employment procedures that have a serious effect on employees employment status within this Council is only ever applied to frontline low paid staff, with a promise land employment status preserved for those staff at the council remunerated at the MG Grade upwards; or the 'Elliot Ness' syndrome of the untouchables, yes, those that do wrong are never held to account.

CONCLUSION & DECISION REQUIRED

UNISON is extremely disappointed with the approach adopted by officers in relation to compliance with the Council's employment practices, corporate governance arrangements and of the scornful and impudent attitudes demonstrated towards our members who are long serving public servants of Harrow as demonstrated in the financially irresponsible 'lift and shift' debacle occurring in 2015. UNISON is seeking not only accountability for those officers responsible but urgent redeployment for those employees implicated and a vast improvement to the Council's human resources employment function that has been sadly holding back the organisation for many years.

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