

EMPLOYEES' CONSULTATIVE FORUM

21 OCTOBER 2003

Chair:	* Councillor Dighé	
Councillors:	* Mrs Bath * Janet Cowan * Lavingia (4)	* Mrs Joyce Nickolay * N Shah * Toms
Representatives of HTCC:	(Currently no appointees)	
Representatives of UNISON:	* Mr D Boyle * Ms K Bubbenzer * Ms D Prasad † Mr J Rattray	* Mr B Shewry * Mr R Thornton † Ms W Williams

- * Denotes Member present/Employee Representative present
 (4) Denote category of Reserve Member
 † Denotes apologies received

70. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

RESOLVED: (1) To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Member: -

<u>Ordinary Member</u>	<u>Reserve Member</u>
Councillor Currie	Councillor Lavingia

(2) That UNISON notify the Committee Administrator of the new appointee to the post of UNISON Equalities Officer as soon as the election for this post has been conducted.

71. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no declarations of interests made by Members in relation to the business transacted at this meeting.

72. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

RESOLVED: That all items be considered with the press and public present.

73. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2003, having been circulated, be taken as read and signed as a correct record subject to the following amendments: -

- (i) Annual Equality Monitoring Report: Minute 62: That the last sentence of the second paragraph be amended to read: "The appointment rates of Asian applicants was particularly disproportionately low compared with the numbers securing interviews and *even more so with those applying for posts*". Also, that the second sentence of the third paragraph be amended to read: "It was *also* asked whether the majority of successful *black* appointments had been women to lower-paid jobs within the Social Services Department".
- (ii) Civic Centre Car Parking – Visitors' Car Park: Minute 66: That the last sentence of the third paragraph be amended to read: "The needs of the disabled were also a concern to be taken into account, *as were those needs of employees visiting from outside the Civic Centre*".
- (iii) Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) Proposal: Minute 67: That the first sentence of the sixth paragraph be amended to read: "UNISON made representations on behalf of employees who were likely to be affected by transfer to the ALMO, primarily the Building Works Section (Contract Services) *and some staff in Environmental Services ...*".

74. **Matters Arising:**

The Forum received the report of the Interim Head of Personnel which updated Members on the following matters arising from the meeting held on 8 July 2003: -

- (i) West Lodge Schools: Minute 59 (i): The Interim Head of Personnel advised the Forum that this was the subject of agenda Item 8, which had been placed on the agenda by the Employees' Side.
- (ii) Housing Department Incident and Accident Reporting Procedures: Minute 59 (ii): The Interim Head of Personnel advised the Forum that this was the subject of agenda Item 10, which had been placed on the agenda by the Employees' Side.
- (iii) Annual Equality Monitoring Report - 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003: Minute 62: The Interim Head of Personnel reported that the first meeting of the review group to consider the disproportionate adverse impact on Asian applicants had been held on 11 September 2003.

Members were informed that the objective of the Group is to consider the disproportionate adverse impact on Asian applicants in the recruitment process and to consider what additional monitoring information or further research may be required and what positive action may be taken to improve the success ratio for Asian applicants. Members were asked to note that the Group had agreed that:

- (i) a workshop for unsuccessful applicants (following interview), in particular Asian applicants since January 2003 be held to find out about their experiences during the recruitment and selection process (excluding schools).
- (ii) further analysis be carried out on applicant monitoring information for the previous six months of appointments to include age as a monitoring category and enable more detailed statistical analysis of all the equality categories.
- (iii) The current applicant monitoring system be enhanced from 1 October 2003 to include monitoring by age.

Members were informed that the Interim Head of Personnel and UNISON Branch Chairman had met to discuss specific cases involving management support for employees with mental health and long term illness problems.

- (iv) New Harrow Project – Protocol for Organisational Change: Minute 64: The Interim Head of Personnel advised that it was not possible to reach agreement with UNISON on the outstanding issue of protection of pay by the deadline of 31 August 2003 previously agreed by the Forum. Accordingly a report has been prepared for Cabinet recommending implementation without further agreement. However, although UNISON remain implacably opposed to changing the current protection arrangements they have indicated a willingness to continue discussions and there remains a possibility that agreement may be reached.
- (v) Civic Centre Car Parking – Visitors' Car Park: Minute 66: The Interim Head of Personnel advised Members that visitor car parking arrangements were currently being reviewed and further trade union consultation would take place as proposals are developed.
- (vi) Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) Proposal: Minute 67: The Interim Head of Personnel reported that consultation with staff in all relevant areas had been on going and the indicative date for ALMO to go live was now 1 April 2004.
- (vii) Approved Social Workers (ASW) Mental Health Team: Minute 69: The Interim Head of Personnel advised the Forum that this was the subject of agenda Item 9, which had been placed on the agenda by the Employees' Side.

RESOLVED: That the matters arising from the meeting of the Forum held on 8 July 2003 be noted.

75. **Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations:**

RESOLVED: That no public questions, petitions or deputations had been received at this meeting.

76. **Full Year Health and Safety Performance Report: 1st April 2002 to 31st March 2003:**

The Forum received the report of the Executive Director (Organisational Development) which provided Members with an update on health and safety performance for the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003. The report utilised information held in records collated centrally by Health and Safety, Fire and Occupational Health Services and records held by departments.

The Personnel Manager reported that Corporate Safety Group Representatives had met to discuss both the draft and final versions of the report and from these meetings two suggestions had arisen; that future reports would highlight hazard notices issued and that non-employee accident statistics would identify contractors' staff. The Personnel Manager advised Members that although the health and safety of contractors' staff was the responsibility of the contractors, it was important for the Council to be assisting effective health and safety practices.

Members were informed that there were three enclosures to the report: the departmental records, the Occupational Health Service statistics and the accident/incident pie charts; each of which would be discussed in turn at the meeting. The Personnel Manager advised Members that the report was a highly summarised account of all of the information that had been collected in relation to health and safety matters, and that the reason for producing the report in this format was in order to allow all the groups with responsibility for health and safety within the Council to analyse the information and take necessary action.

The Forum was advised that all staff were strongly encouraged to report accidents and incidents to prevent under-reporting. The Personnel Manager reported that the overall health and safety performance for 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003 was slightly better than the previous reporting year. Members were referred to page 18 of the agenda, which outlined this year's performance compared against last year's and national comparisons. The Forum was asked to note that the Council had achieved its target of a 10% decrease in all accidents / incidents involving employees: 826 in 2001/02 to 713 in 2002/03. However, the Council had not managed to achieve its targets of a 10% decrease in RIDDOR accidents / incidents, which are serious accidents and require reports to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE): 60 in 2001/02 to 70 in 2002/03.

The Personnel Manager informed Members that there had been a slight reduction in the number of working days lost due to accidents / incidents; 23 in 2001/02 to 21 in 2002/03; however, these figures were difficult to track and the reliability of the data was not high. The Forum was advised that other options for tracking this data would be explored in the future.

The Health and Safety Manager gave a presentation on the different categories of accidents / incidents using pie charts. Members were referred to page 53 of the agenda, which illustrated reported employee accidents / incidents by department. Members were asked to note that Social Services and Education Services had the highest number of accidents / incidents at 46% and 27% respectively. The Health and Safety Manager advised that this was to be expected as a large majority of staff were employed within these departments. A Member of the Forum queried why there was not a large number of accidents / incidents reported for staff in Environmental Services (2%), as their work involved a large amount of manual labour. Responding, the Health and Safety Manager advised that Contract Services had been separated from Environmental Services for the first time, in preparation for the new departmental structures created by the New Harrow Project, and that the number of accidents / incidents for Contract Services was 19%.

The Forum was referred to page 54, which outlined employee RIDDOR reportable accidents / incidents. Members were advised that, again, Social Services and Education Services had the highest number of reports due to the nature of work carried out by staff which was largely client-based. The Health and Safety Manager informed Members that on page 55 accidents / incidents had been categorised by type.

The Forum was requested to note that, at 54%, violence and aggression against employees remained high but that there had been reductions in both the 'slips, trips and falls' and 'struck by or against' categories. Members were informed that the Council had been recording road traffic accidents for the last three years and would

continue to do so, as many employees travelled to and from locations as part of the terms of their employment. A Member of the Forum queried whether the injuries detailed in the pie chart involved compensation. Responding, the Health and Safety Manager advised that compensation was involved in some cases and that departments worked with the Insurance Section to deal with this. In response to a question from a Member, the Forum was referred to page 21 of the agenda which detailed a breakdown of the types of accidents / incidents by department.

A Member of UNISON advised that there was also a mental / psychological element of the serious accidents / incidents recorded in the RIDDOR reports and questioned whether this was being addressed. Members were advised that sometimes the aforementioned effects do not occur until weeks, even months, after the initial accident / incident and that it was important to monitor the dual effects of accidents / incidents with follow up reports. Responding, the Health and Safety Manager informed members that the RIDDOR report forms contained a section where mental / psychological effects of accidents / incidents could be recorded and that counselling was provided to staff who had recorded these effects.

The Forum was referred to page 56, which set out the Council's position on incidents / accidents by occupation. The Health and Safety Manager reported that the five categories of occupation listed were ones which dealt predominantly with clients. A Member of UNISON requested that in future the report be widened to include the base number of workers, as it was important to obtain a comparison of workers which currently fell outside the scope of the report. The Personnel Manager advised that this matter would be taken up with the Corporate Safety Group.

Page 57 detailed non-employee accidents / incidents by department. A Member of UNISON queried why there had been an overall rise in non-employee accidents / incidents. Responding, the Health and Safety Manager advised that these accidents / incidents mainly related to non-employees visiting premises and many were also playground accidents / incidents involving children and all were now recorded on the table. It was agreed that more analysis needed to be undertaken in this area.

A Member of UNISON informed Members that there were anomalies in the figures for Social Services reported on page 15 of the agenda. The Interim Head of Personnel advised that this matter would be taken up with the Corporate Safety Group. Another Member of UNISON queried whether there were any comparative health and safety data available from neighbouring authorities. The Personnel Manager advised that it was difficult to find similar benchmarking data in order to make direct comparisons with Harrow's data. However, following the last health and safety meeting of the Forum, the Health and Safety Manager has been forming alliances with Health and Safety Services in other local authorities to take this work forward.

In response to a question from a Member, the Health and Safety Manager advised that the meetings had been set up by the Safety Managers' Forum which was connected to the Association of London Government (ALG), and that there had been problems with information sharing, which she outlined.

A Member of UNISON highlighted Section 2.10 on page 44, which stated that 'of the 74 Management OHS referrals, 29 were for mental health or work related stress', which he felt was worrying. The Member queried whether there were plans to devise a strategy to deal with mental health issues and stress in the workplace. Responding, the Personnel Manager noted that the number of mental health and stress cases had been slowly rising. The Forum was requested to note that the Council's new policy on stress in the workplace, which would be launched shortly, after consultation with Trade Union representatives.

In response to a question from a Member of UNISON, the Acting Head of Human Resources (People First) advised that Harrow Unified Mental Health Service (HUMS) had been included in the Council's health and safety statistics. A Member of UNISON queried why, on page 15, Table 7, two reporting years of data from Education Services was incomplete. Responding, the Personnel Manager explained that tracking accurate data was proving difficult. Members were informed that information would then be reported to the next meeting of the Forum.

The Chair thanked both the Personnel Manager and Health and Safety Manager for their presentations on the health and safety report.

RESOLVED: That (1) the Corporate Safety Group discuss the categories listed in the Council's position on accidents / incidents by occupation information with a view to including the base number of workers;

- (2) more analysis be carried out into non-employee accidents / incidents, drawing out contractor staff incidents;
- (3) officers examine the apparent anomalies in the figures for Social Services reported on page 15 of the agenda and report back to the Forum accordingly;
- (4) the missing information from Education Services on page 15, Table 7, be reported to the next meeting of the Forum;
- (5) the health and safety performance report and action plan progress for the reporting year 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003, and actions planned for the reporting year 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004, be noted.

77. **West Lodge Schools:**

The Forum received a verbal update from the UNISON Health and Safety Officer in relation to the West Lodge Schools situation. Members were informed that following agreement at the last meeting of the Forum to hold a meeting, which had yet to place. The Personnel Manager advised the Forum that a meeting has now been scheduled to take place after the school half term.

The UNISON Health and Safety Officer stated that she was disappointed that the matter had not been resolved and that if the matter was not resolved following the meeting scheduled for after the school half term, it might be referred to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to resolve. A Member of the Forum wished to note her disappointment in the length of time it has taken to resolve the matter and that she would be unhappy if the matter were to be referred to the HSE.

A Member of UNISON commented that he was surprised that there was no-one present at the meeting of the Forum to represent the West Lodge Schools. The Chair advised that as this was meant to be an update item, it was understandable that the schools were not represented, as their attendance was not necessary.

RESOLVED: That the verbal update from the UNISON Health and Safety Officer be noted.

78. **Approved Social Workers Mental Health Team - Health and Safety Hazard:**

The Forum received a verbal update from the UNISON Health and Safety Officer in relation to the Approved Social Workers (ASW) Mental Health Team's health and safety hazard issues. Members were informed that a meeting had taken place between UNISON and officers within the new People First Directorate. The UNISON Health and Safety Officer commented that the meeting had a very positive outcome and that she had been impressed with officers in People First and was hopeful that the matter could be promptly resolved.

The Chair seconded this statement and commented that he wished for the matter to be closed at the next meeting of the Forum.

RESOLVED: That the verbal update from the UNISON Health and Safety Officer be noted.

79. **Housing Void (Electrical Near Fatalities):**

The Forum received the report of the UNISON Health and Safety Officer which discussed the final housing void report received from an independent officer at Reading Borough Council. Members were informed that the final report had been unsuccessful in answering all of UNISON's concerns.

The UNISON Health and Safety Officer advised that it was important to install mechanisms in place to prevent the reoccurrence of the health and safety accidents and incidents detailed in the report. The Forum was advised that it was imperative that risk assessment mechanisms were in place and that these were adhered to. The Area Director (Urban Living) informed Members that the risk assessment process was currently the method being utilised for identifying health and safety risks and that in all future cases hazards such as electricity would be identified and removed prior to the commencement of work on site.

In response to a question from a Member, the Area Director (Urban Living) advised that the same practice would be applied if the hazard was gas and not electricity; the officer would need to vent the initial insulation and would then be working safe as the hazard (gas) would have been removed. The UNISON Health and Safety Officer recommended that the risk assessment process described by the Area Director (Urban

Living) be applied and adhered to throughout the Borough. The Chair seconded this proposal.

The Forum was also asked to consider a number of recommendations relating to the structure and resourcing of health and safety, occupational health services and the monitoring of contractors. The Chair responded that it was appropriate for the structure to be considered as part of the current restructuring and that the Council was considering a growth bid in relation to the resourcing of health and safety, particularly training initiatives, as part of the budgetary process. Members were additionally informed that the Council was developing its risk assessment and risk awareness approach.

A Member of the Council commented that the action plan contained within the Annual Health and Safety report accommodates many of the outcomes identified in the report and that the Council was considering a growth bid in terms of funding for health and safety initiatives. The Member wished to clarify that the growth bid could not be looked at in isolation, however, and that it would be considered in conjunction with the whole budgetary process.

In response to a question from a Member, the Interim Head of Personnel reported that approximately 1,800 staff and about two thirds of teachers belonged to unions. A Member of UNISON advised that UNISON represented all employees regardless of whether they were members of UNISON and that all staff would benefit from an effective approach to health and safety issues.

RESOLVED: That the report of the UNISON Health and Safety Officer be noted.

80.

Current Health and Safety Matters:

The Forum received the summary report of the Interim Head of Personnel which provided Members with an update on ongoing health and safety matters and action to resolve them. In particular, Members were informed that the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) was investigating the fatality of the electrical contractor and that the Forum would be informed of the outcome of the investigation and reviews including progress on any actions arising.

RESOLVED: That the report of the Interim Head of Personnel be noted.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.38 pm, closed at 8.42 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR SANJAY DIGHÉ
Chair