

**EMPLOYEES' CONSULTATIVE FORUM****4 FEBRUARY 2004**

Chair:	* Councillor Dighé	
Councillors:	* Mrs Bath * Currie * Lavingia (4)	* Mrs Joyce Nickolay * Osborn (3) * Toms
Representatives of HTCC:	(Currently no appointees)	
Representatives of UNISON:	Mr D Boyle † Ms K Bubenzer * Ms D Prasad † Mr J Rattray	* Mr B Shewry * Mr R Thornton Ms W Williams

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

**PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS****RECOMMENDATION 1: Revenue Budget 2004-2005 for Consideration**

A UNISON Member clarified that the consultations referred to in section 7.1 of the report, page 64 of the agenda, were taking place shortly between Business Connections. A Member from UNISON drew attention to the London Weighting dispute. The Member queried why no funds had been set aside for when the London Weighting dispute was finally resolved and a settlement agreed upon. The Interim Director of Finance noted that under provision of the Accountancy rules, any amount of money set aside must be a defined sum. It was added that if and when the London Weighting dispute is resolved, any costs would come from the Reserves.

A Member from UNISON raised the issue of the print room. The UNISON Member noted that he was pleased that a working party had been established to look at ways to resolve the problem for the benefit of everyone.

**Resolved To RECOMMEND: (To Cabinet)**

That the concerns and comments raised by UNISON be noted.

(See also Minute 83).

**PART II - MINUTES****81. Attendance by Reserve Members:**

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

<u>Ordinary Member</u>	<u>Reserve Member</u>
Councillor Janet Cowan Councillor N Shah	Councillor Osborn Councillor Lavingia

**82. Mr B Shewry: Harrow UNISON Chairman:**

Members heard that Mr B Shewry, Chairman of the Harrow UNISON branch, was stepping down and that this was to be his last appearance at an Employees' Consultative Forum meeting. The Chair joined Members in thanking Mr Shewry for his valuable contribution to the Forum and wished him well in his new position. It was noted that UNISON would send a letter to the Interim Head of Personnel to confirm that Mr B Shewry is standing down as Chair of the Harrow branch of UNISON.

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

83. **Declarations of Interest:**

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

<u>Member</u>	<u>Declaration of Interest</u>
(i) Councillor Currie	Lifelong Member of UNISON
(ii) Councillor Toms	Lifelong Member of the NUT
(iii)	<u>Agenda Item 12:</u> During the discussion relating to the print room, Councillor Currie declared an interest in the above item and accordingly left the room and took no part in the discussion on this item.

84. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

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

85. **Minutes:**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2003, having been circulated, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

86. **Matters Arising:**

The Forum received a report from the Interim Head of Personnel, which updated Members on the following matters arising from the meeting held on 21 October 2003: -

- (i) New Harrow Project - Protocol for Organisational Change: Minute 74 (iv): The Interim Head of Personnel informed Members that agreement had been reached with UNISON.
- (ii) Civic Centre Car Parking – Visitors Car Park: Minute 74 (v): Members were informed that work had begun on a pilot scheme in the visitors' short stay car park. It was noted that this scheme only accounts for 45 of the 650 car parking spaces at the Civic Centre. The objective of the scheme was to test how it would impact on the provision of parking at the Civic Centre. It was accepted that wider and more in-depth discussions were required on this issue and Members were further advised that a number of open meetings had been arranged, providing an opportunity for the public, staff and UNISON to raise their concerns. A Member of UNISON expressed disappointment that the work on the pilot scheme had begun before staff had had an opportunity to raise their concerns. The Chair emphasised that this was a limited pilot scheme, the purpose of which was to determine the impact upon parking arrangements at the Civic Centre. It was also noted that the pilot scheme was not an inevitable pre-cursor to an extended and permanent scheme. The Chair reiterated that the aim of the scheme was to allow visitors the best possible access to the Civic Centre.
- (iii) Full Year Health & Safety Performance Report: Minute 76: The Interim Head of Personnel noted that details of the Council's agreed policy on stress will be made available in the next Employee Relations staff newsletter.
- (iv) Housing Void (Electrical Near Fatalities): Minute 79: The Interim Head of Personnel advised the Forum that Harrow Council had engaged consultants to undertake a strategic review of the Council's Health and Safety provision, with particular focus on the structure of the service and its role within the organisation. The Forum was also informed that the Council is continuing to give its full co-operation to the ongoing HSE investigation. Members from UNISON noted that they were pleased with both the progress of the Health and Safety review and the consultants that had been engaged.

**RESOLVED:** That the matters arising from the meeting of the Forum held on 21 October 2003 be noted.

87. **Public Questions:**

**RESOLVED:** To note that there were no public questions received at this meeting.

88. **Petitions:**

**RESOLVED:** To note that there were no petitions received at this meeting.

89. **Deputations:**

**RESOLVED:** To note that there were no deputations received at this meeting.

90. **Half Year Equality Monitoring Report for Period 1 April 2003 to 30 September 2003:**

The Forum received a report from the Executive Director (Organisational Development), which detailed the Council's Equality Monitoring statistics from the period 1 April 2003 to 30 September 2003. The Forum was reminded that the findings in the report were based on performance under the old Council structure. The Principal Employee Relations Officer advised the Forum that 36% of all people appointed in the given period, were black and ethnic minority applicants. It was noted that this figure compares unfavourably with last year's performance and is below the Council's target of 42.7%. The Forum went on to hear that the success ratio of 0.4% for the period covered by the report was also lower than that achieved for the previous year and the Council's own target of 0.7%.

The Principal Employee Relations Officer drew Members attention to the continuing discrepancy between the number of ethnic minority and particularly Asian applicants to those selected for short listing and appointment. Members were referred to page 17 of the agenda, which outlined the work of the Asian Applicants Review Group, established by the Forum in January 2003. The Review Group is due to submit a full report to the Employees' Consultative Forum later in 2004. It was added that the percentage of black and ethnic minority employees for the period covered in the report was 28.2% of the total workforce. This figure represented an increase on the previous year's figure and is marginally below the Council's 2003/04 target of 30%.

Members attention was drawn to page 8 of the agenda, which outlined monitoring figures for disabled applicants. It was noted that in the period covered by the report 3% of the total workforce declared a disability. This confirmed that the Council had achieved its 2003/04 target of 3%. The Forum was advised that the Council is continuing work in this area to ensure an increase in the number of disabled applicants. It was reported that HAD had been contacted for this purpose. Members also noted that the Council had performed consistently well in the gender category particularly at senior levels of staff.

Members also heard that a Beacon exhibition was held last July for Councillors from other Local Authorities, which received a positive response. It was further noted that a framework had been developed for working through the RES in order to assist in the effective monitoring of the Council's policies on race equality.

A Member of UNISON expressed disappointment at the findings of the Equality Monitoring Report, particularly the apparent drop in ethnic minority applicants at the short listing and appointment stages. As an example attention was drawn to page 27 of the agenda, which highlighted a drop in success ratio in the former Social Services Department. UNISON members enquired as to what factors could explain the disappointing findings of the report. Whilst recognising that many appointments require specific qualifications, thus eliminating many applicants, it was suggested that the figures could be endemic of wider social trends. It was added that professional bodies could be approached to examine the pool of possible candidates. The Chair noted that part of the work of the Asian Applicants Review Group would be to look into areas of concern and to examine experiences from other organisations.

Attention turned to how the Council might improve performance in this area. A Member from UNISON noted that there was a lack of awareness in schools of the career opportunities offered by Local Government. Members agreed that the Council should endeavour to target young people in schools to galvanise interest among this group. It was suggested that the Council be represented not only at school open days but also Career's Fairs such as the Milk Round. It was also noted that the report has had a positive effect in that it has made the issue a major concern for all involved and has discouraged complacency. The Chair welcomed Members suggestions and highlighted the need to be proactive in their approach to solving the problem. Members also heard of the Bridge Centre, which helped people integrate back into work life and society. It was noted that two people had been placed with the Council through this scheme. A Member from UNISON added that attempts should be made to lower the age profile of the Council workforce. Targeting schools was identified as a crucial tool for achieving this aim. It was added that due to the demographic make-up of Harrow's schools, making strong representations at local schools would not only help lower the age profile of the Council workforce but would also improve the number of ethnic minority applicants, already identified as a major area of concern.

The Interim Head of Personnel was asked whether any themes had emerged from the workshop for people who had failed to get appointed. One finding was that interviewees felt the Council had failed to provide feedback as to why they were unsuccessful in gaining a post after interview. The Interim Head of Personnel advised the Forum that this issue had been raised at a CMT meeting and guidance notes had subsequently been issued to Chairs of appointment panels.

**RESOLVED:** That the Half Year Equality Monitoring Report for 1 April 2003 to 30 September 2003 be noted.

91. **Working Draft Improvement Plan in Response to the Comprehensive Performance Assessment and IDeA Peer Review - Priority 9 (Human Resources Strategy):**

The Forum was advised that the report outlined progress against Priority 9 (Human Resources Strategy) of the Working Draft Improvement Plan, which had been agreed by Cabinet. Members were referred to page 35 of the agenda, which provided an update on the tasks that had been identified and the progress achieved.

**Staff Survey**

Members noted the Staff Survey, an Executive Summary of which had been tabled at the meeting. The Forum discussed a number of the positive results that emerged from the Staff Survey. Among the positive results that emerged from the survey was that the majority of staff are satisfied in their jobs. Further pleasing results were noted, including the sense of good teamwork among Council employees and that employees received good information on what is expected of them. The standard of line management was shown to be high across the authority. It was also noted that nearly two-thirds of employees thought the Council had demonstrated that it was an effective Equal Opportunities employer and the Staff Development Scheme was seen to be well received. The Interim Head of Personnel outlined areas for improvement identified from the survey. It was noted that the survey was conducted towards the end of a period of considerable change within the organisation and that this was likely to cause concern among employees. One area of concern alluded to in the Executive Summary was the problem staff had with bureaucracy within the authority and the management of the recent restructuring was reported as an area that could be improved upon. Members also noted that senior managers were viewed less well than line managers. The Interim Head of Personnel advised the Forum that the survey highlighted a need for greater communication. It was added that at a recent CMT meeting three areas had been identified to focus upon. These included more two-way communication, regular appraisals for all staff and a greater degree of shared ideas and teamwork. The Interim Head of Personnel informed Members that the full survey would be available on the intranet and hard copies would also be available from 25 February. It was further noted that the Harrow Update Newsletter would highlight the main areas and report on the outcome of the IDeA Review.

Members acknowledged that they had not had an opportunity to take a detailed look at the Staff Survey. A Member from UNISON offered to post the survey on the UNISON website, which was welcomed by the Council side. The Chair confirmed that this item would be on the agenda for a future meeting of the Forum for further consideration. Members were delighted with the 52% response rate from the Staff Survey. It was agreed that the high response rate added genuine validity to the conclusions of the survey.

**Review of Employee Absence**

Members were referred to the review of employee absence on page 41 of the agenda. The Interim Head of Personnel informed Members that consultants had been engaged and produced a report on the Council's employee absence. Members were informed of a Project Group that has been established, Chaired by the Area Director (Urban Living) and also including Trade Union representation. The Project Group's role is to consider the report and implement its recommendations. It has met two times and was reported to be making good progress in the areas of concern. These were noted as return to work interviews and contacting the Occupational Health support service. A Member from UNISON suggested that Occupational Health was not the answer to solving the problem of sickness absence but rather good management was the key. Members discussed the role of Occupational Health within the Organisation and questioned its specific duties. The Interim Head of Personnel noted that the current service is provided by Northwick Park Hospital. The Forum briefly discussed the possibility of considering other service options. Members were asked to consider the financial implications of employing an alternative service. Members balanced this consideration by alluding to the financial benefits of a healthy and efficient workforce. It was felt that there should be a commitment to examine the total benefits of tackling the problem. A Member from UNISON also suggested that staff had increasingly perceived

Occupational Health to be a management tool. The Member added that a change in the perception of Occupational Health was imperative in order to improve its service. It was felt by UNISON that a negative perception of Occupational Health prevented employees coming forward at an early stage when a health problem had been identified.

A Member of UNISON noted that in the attempt to tackle the problem of sickness absence, genuine cases should not be neglected. It was further noted that employees in high-pressure positions should not necessarily be dismissed but rather considered for other positions where their expertise could be utilised. The Chair agreed and added that career paths should be planned for those entering high-pressure jobs. A Member from UNISON noted that the stress incurred in some positions meant that it was appropriate to examine how long it is reasonable to expect a person to remain in that position. A UNISON Member added that it should be the choice of the individual to determine how long they can sustain a position that entails a large degree of stress.

#### Human Resources Strategy

Members discussed the draft Human Resources Strategy. The Interim Head of Personnel welcomed any comments or feedback. A Member from UNISON informed the meeting that UNISON would make a response to the draft strategy in due course.

**RESOLVED:** That (1) the full Staff Survey be included on the agenda for a future meeting of the Forum;

(2) Members notify the Interim Head of Personnel of any comments or feedback on the draft Human Resources Strategy;

(3) the progress made against Priority 9 (Human Resources Strategy) of the Working Draft Improvement Plan be noted.

92. **Revenue Budget 2004-2005 For Consultation:**

See Recommendation 1.

93. **Single Status & Pay and Grading Review Negotiations - Progress Report:**

The Interim Head of Personnel read out a joint statement from the Council and UNISON. The statement read as follows; 'The Council and UNISON are continuing to have positive discussions towards achieving a package of harmonised terms and conditions for former manual, APT&C and Contract Services staff. The discussions are being held on a regular basis in order to ensure that all aspects are thoroughly considered.' The Council side wished to express their gratitude to UNISON's sympathetic and supportive approach to this issue.

**RESOLVED:** That the joint statement by the Council and UNISON be noted.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.40 pm, closed at 8.55 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR SANJAY DIGHÉ  
Chair