

EMPLOYEES' CONSULTATIVE FORUM

1 FEBRUARY 2006

Chair: * Councillor Marie-Louise Nolan

Councillors: * Mrs Bath * Mrs Joyce Nickolay
 * Janet Cowan * N Shah
 * Currie * Toms

Representatives of HTCC: (Currently no appointees)

Representatives of UNISON: * Ms M Cawley Mr K McDonald
 * Ms S Duffell † Mr M Nolan
 * Ms A Jackson Shankar Sivashankar
 Mr G Martin

* Denotes Member/Employee Representative present

[Note: Councillor Gate also attended this meeting to speak on the item indicated at Minute 194].

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL

PART II - MINUTES

179. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance at this meeting.

180. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note the following declarations of interests made by Members present at the meeting relating to business to be transacted at this meeting:

<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Nature of Interest</u>
16. Pay Protection Arrangements – Authority to Exceed Limits	Councillor Currie	Declared a prejudicial interest in that a close relative was an employee of the Council.
All substantive items (except agenda item 16)	Councillor Currie	Declared a personal interest in that he was a lifelong Member of UNISON. He would remain in the room whilst the matters were considered and voted upon.
All substantive items	Councillor Toms	Declared a personal interest in that he was a lifelong member of the NUT Trade Union. He would remain in the room whilst these matters were considered and voted upon.

181. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

RESOLVED: That (1) agenda item 15 be considered after agenda item 7;

(2) in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the following agenda items be admitted late to the agenda by virtue of the special circumstances and grounds for urgency detailed below:-

<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Special Circumstances/Grounds for Urgency</u>
8. Business Transformation Partnership	This report was not available at the time the agenda was printed and circulated as officers were considering the status which might have excluded the report from consideration in the public domain. Members were requested to consider this item as a matter of urgency at this meeting as the next meeting was not scheduled until April 2006.
9. Competencies	This report was not available at the time the agenda was printed and circulated as officers were considering the status which might have excluded the report from consideration in the public domain. Members were requested to consider this item as a matter of urgency at this meeting as the next meeting was not scheduled until April 2006.
14. Progress Report on Capabilities Procedure	This report was not available at the time the agenda was printed and circulated. Consultation had been delayed due to officer absence. Members were requested to consider this item to allow the Forum to be updated on the Capabilities Procedure.
16. Pay Protection Arrangements – Authority to Exceed Limits	This report was not available at the time the agenda was printed and circulated as negotiations between officers and UNISON were taking place at the time with a view to reaching agreement. Members were requested to consider this item as a matter of urgency at this meeting as the next meeting was not scheduled until April 2006.
17. Audit Report	This report was not available at the time the main agenda was printed as UNISON were considering their response to the Audit Report which they had recently received. Members were requested to consider this report as a matter of urgency at this meeting as the next meeting was not scheduled until April 2006.

(3) all items be considered with the press and public present with the exception of the following item for the reasons set out below:

<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Reason</u>
17. Audit Report	The report contained exempt information under Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) in that it contained information relating to a particular employee, former employee or applicant to become an employee of, or a particular office-holder, former office-holder or applicant to become and office-holder or applicant to become an office-holder under, the authority.
182. <u>Minutes:</u>	
	RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2005, having been circulated, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.
183. <u>Deputations:</u>	
	RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received at this meeting under the provisions of the Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 14 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

184. **Public Questions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put at this meeting under the provisions of the Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 15 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

185. **Petitions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received at this meeting under the provisions of the Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 13 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

186. **Progress on the Implementation of the Action Plan at Millman's Resource Centre:**

The Forum received a verbal report detailing the progress made in implementing the Action Plan at Millman's Resource Centre. An officer stated that the majority of the concerns, including the provision of a functioning lift and improved interior and exterior lighting, had been resolved. The outstanding issue was the provision of a welfare room for employees. An additional room had been made available in September 2005, with employees having been given the option to use it as additional office space or as a welfare room. It was noted that the employees had chosen the latter option. Another room was available from 12.30 - 3.30 pm each day, but the request was for a room that could be accessible at all times.

The Forum noted that the move of the Family Centre to Millman's Resource Centre had created significant disruption for employees. Members were satisfied that the majority of issues had been resolved with the active cooperation of UNISON and requested that a welfare room be provided by 10 April 2006.

RESOLVED: That the above be noted.

187. **Business Transformation Partnership (BTP):**

A UNISON representative introduced the report expressing concern at the pace of change caused by the Business Transformation Project (BTP). She felt that this process had been rushed, particularly when matching jobs. She was concerned that mistakes had been made in the job evaluation process due to the speed at which it had been carried out and that they were now being re-evaluated. Additionally, UNISON stated that some employees had had to wait up to 20 days to be told whether they were would be employed in the new First Contact centre. A UNISON representative enquired whether the expected launch of the First Contact Centre on 22 May 2006 could be delayed. An officer clarified that job evaluations were not going to be re-evaluated but would be validated by the Association of London Government. The delay in informing employees whether they would be offered employment in the new First Contact Centre had been due to the need to agree the number of staff required, which was in turn dependant on the number of telephone enquiries normally received by the Council.

Members of the Forum stated that they did not feel that delaying the launch of BTP would be desirable, as it would lead to severe financial penalties for breach of the contract. A UNISON representative disputed this, stating that any costs incurred by the delay of the launch would be recouped through the improvements made by the BTP.

Further clarification on the BTP was required and it was resolved that:

RESOLVED: That the Director of Business Transformation and a representative of Capita be invited to give an update on the BTP to the next meeting of the Forum.

188. **Competencies:**

A UNISON representative introduced a report and detailed their concerns about the extension of a competencies system to employees below the H11 grade. She stated that the GLPC job evaluation scheme required consistency in job evaluation and expressed concern that competencies did not form part of the GLPC guidelines and that their use had led to potential inconsistency. She stressed that job evaluations should be carried out using specific and measurable job descriptions and person specifications. UNISON added that they agreed with the Interim Director of Human Resources' recommendation that competencies should be incorporated into existing person specifications.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

189. **Full Year Health and Safety Performance Report for the Period 1 April 2004 to 31 March 2005:**

The Forum received a report of the Executive Director (Business Development), which outlined the Council's health and safety performance from April 2004 to March 2005. An officer stated that there had been a year-on-year decrease in incidents and that a strategy for health and safety had been developed that could be used throughout the Council.

In response to a question from a UNISON representative, an officer stated that while the report showed low numbers of employees attending health and safety training events the figure had increased since the end of the period covered by the report. Additionally, departmentally organised training was not included in the report and was subject to an evaluation to be carried out by September 2006. UNISON were thanked for their provision of further health and safety training.

A Member noted and welcomed the fact that the report stated that elected Members were ultimately responsible for health and safety. They noted that health and safety requirements were increasingly being built in to managerial role profiles.

Members requested that future reports contain a glossary of specialist terms and also included health and safety statistics for all groups of employees. Following questions from Members, an officer stated that the Council had supported a policy of prosecuting those who assaulted Council staff although the prevention of such assaults remained a priority. Members requested that a representative from the Urban Living Directorate be invited to attend the next meeting of the Forum to report on the action taken with regard to assaults on parking attendants. Members also requested a report on the incidence of assaults on staff and preventative measures in other occupational groups including support staff in schools.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

190. **Stress Strategy: Update:**

The Forum received a report of the Executive Director (Business Development) which detailed the progress made by the Stress Strategy Group. UNISON representatives and Members noted that the initiative had been successful and thanked Library Services for assistance with the pilot of the Strategy.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

191. **Revenue Budget 2006-2007 and Medium Term Budget Strategy 2006-07 to 2008-09:**

The Forum received a report of the Director of Financial and Business Strategy. An officer stated that the grant awarded to the Council was expected to increase by 2% in 2006/07 and 2.7% in 2007/08. These rises were below the national average but comparable to those in boroughs similar to Harrow. The low rises combined with an intended Council Tax increase of 2.95% meant that there would be limited provision for any growth in services. Funding for schools was now ring-fenced and was expected to be 6.6% per pupil in 2006/07.

The officer stated that a risk assessment would be carried out to determine the level of reserves to be held. This would be submitted to Cabinet.

In response to questions from Members, the officer stated that debt restructuring would cut costs and the use of Voice Over Internet Protocol would reduce expenditure on telephone services.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

192. **Annual Equality Report:**

The Forum received a report of the Director of Financial and Business Strategy. Following a question from a Member, an officer explained that improvements to procedures for ensuring documents required for recruitment and selection audits were available would be in place by April 2006.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

193. **Progress Report on Capabilities Procedure:**

The Forum received a report of the Executive Director (Business Development). An officer explained that UNISON had made comments on the report and it was hoped that agreement on the Capabilities Procedure would be reached by 28 February 2006.

The officer stated that if agreement was not reached that a report would be submitted to Cabinet for a decision.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

194. **Pay Protection Arrangements - Authority to Exceed Limits:**

The Forum received a report of the Executive Director (Business Development). An officer reported that the process of seeking alternative employment for displaced staff had identified an issue where employees could be offered posts where the new position had a salary over 20 per cent less than their original post. The existing 20 per cent limit on pay protection meant that the pay of employees in this position could not be protected and they would therefore be unlikely to accept the post as a suitable offer. Officers requested delegated authority to set aside the 20 per cent limit when it was considered to be in the Council's best interests to do so.

A UNISON representative stated that granting discretionary power to officers to set aside this limit would create a system which was neither fair or equitable. She alleged that the reason for removing the limit was to avoid making redundancy payments. Additionally, she stated that the placement of senior staff in junior positions would reduce the opportunities available to existing junior staff. She also stated that as the salary protection decreased by a third each year, it was likely that the majority of employees affected by this would leave within a year. UNISON representatives were of the view that this issue had arisen out of the Middle Management Review and that the Review had not substantially decreased the number of middle managers and had led to unnecessary disruption and distress to individuals.

An officer stated that it was cost effective to protect salaries by more than 20 per cent in these circumstances as it would cost more to replace the employees affected. He added that all decisions would be checked by Directors and the Portfolio Holder for Communications, Partnership and Human Resources and UNISON would be informed.

Members stated that they would defer further discussion of the report until the meeting of the Employees' Consultative Forum scheduled for April 2006 to allow amendments to be made to the report.

RESOLVED: That (1) once the Overview and Scrutiny review of the Middle Management Review has been completed and submitted to Cabinet, the Employees' Consultative Forum requests that the review be placed as an item on the agenda of the next meeting of the Forum so that Members of the Forum can have a full discussion with all relevant parties, including the Chief Executive, on the findings of the Review Group, and;

(2) the item be deferred until the next meeting of the Employees' Consultative Forum.

[Notes: (i) During discussion on the above item it was moved and seconded that "The Employees' Consultative Forum request the presence of the Chief Executive of the London Borough of Harrow to give her views on how she feels the Middle Management Review has been working over the past three years and the benefits gained by it, or otherwise"; having been put to a vote, the motion was not carried;

(ii) subsequently, the motion as set out in Resolution (1) was proposed and seconded and, having been put to a vote, was carried.

195. **Audit Report:**

The Forum received a confidential report in this matter from UNISON. Members requested that, when preparing reports, UNISON avoid naming or identifying any individuals. Members expressed a range of concerns regarding the issues addressed in the report.

RESOLVED: That a summary of the recommendations set out in the officer report and UNISON's concerns be submitted to the next meeting of the Employees' Consultative Forum.

196. **Extension and Termination of the Meeting:**

In accordance with the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 12.1 (Part 4E of the Constitution) it was

RESOLVED: (1) At 10.00 pm to continue until 10.15 pm;

(2) at 10.15 pm to continue until 10.30 pm;

(3) at 10.30 pm to continue until 10.45 pm;

(4) at 10.45 pm to continue until 11.00 pm and;

(5) at 11.00 pm to continue until 11.15 pm.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.50 pm, closed at 11.10 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR MARIE-LOUISE NOLAN
Chair