

EMPLOYEES' CONSULTATIVE FORUM**1 NOVEMBER 2006**

Chairman: * Councillor Mrs Camilla Bath

Councillors: * David Ashton * Graham Henson
* Don Billson * Chris Mote
* Bob Currie Navin ShahRepresentatives (Currently no appointees)
of HTCC:Representatives * Ms L Ahmad * Ms K McDonald
of UNISON: * Mr S Compton † Mr M Nolan
* Ms S DuffellRepresentative * Mr S Karia
of GMB:

* Denotes Member present/Employee Representative present

† Denotes apologies received

[Note: Other Attendance: Eddy Coulson, Regional Officer, UNISON and Mary Cawley, UNISON also attended in the absence of Martin Nolan.]

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL**PART II - MINUTES**17. **Appointment of Chairman:**

Further to the deferral of the appointment of a Chairman for the 2006/07 Municipal Year to this meeting due to the absence of a nomination from the Employees' side at the last meeting, and in the absence of a nomination from the Employees' side at this meeting, it was

RESOLVED: To appoint Councillor Mrs Camilla Bath as Chairman of the Employees' Consultative Forum for the 2006/07 Municipal Year.

18. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

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

19. **Deputations:**

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

20. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

- (i) Councillor Bob Currie declared an interest in that he was a retired member of UNISON, and that his son was an employee of Harrow Council;
- (ii) Councillor Graham Henson declared an interest in that he was a CWU member and, that he had a relative who worked at Harrow Council.

21. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

A report on the 'Hazard Notice for Access Harrow' having been offered for tabling at this meeting, the Forum requested that instead a report on the issue be presented at its next meeting, giving a full breakdown on the implementation of the Action Plan.

RESOLVED: That (1) all items be considered with the press and public present;

(2) a report on the 'Hazard Notice for Access Harrow' be submitted to the next meeting.

22. **Minutes:**
RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2006 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.
23. **Public Questions:**
RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put at the meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 16 (Part 4E of the Constitution).
24. **Petitions:**
RESOLVED: To note that no petitions had been received.
25. **Restructuring within Business Development and People First:**
The Forum received a report submitted by Harrow Unison, which expressed concerns that the Protocol for Managing Organisational Change was not being followed in the Business Development and People First Directorates. The report noted that it was good practice to conduct job matching with reference to the unions, but that in both Business Development and People First this had not happened.

The officer confirmed that the Council's Protocol for Managing Organisational Change did not require the use of joint job matching, and for this reason it had not been used in all aspects of the restructuring process. In response, a Unison representative stated that joint job matching was a necessary component of the 'meaningful consultation' laid out in the Protocol.

RESOLVED: That (1) negotiations be held between officers and unions to decide whether all restructures within Harrow should involve joint job matching;

(2) if no agreement was reached, the matter be referred back to the Forum for consideration at its next meeting, to be held on 31 January 2007.
26. **Revised Grievance Procedure:**
The Forum received a report of the Head of Human Resources, which sought agreement to the revised Grievance Procedure in the absence of agreement by the unions.

The officer detailed the main reasons for revising the Grievance Procedure, which included the fact that the current Procedure was outdated and no longer fully complied with legislation and case law, and was unclear in terms of the guidance it gave to both managers and staff. The revised Procedure aimed to resolve grievances as quickly as possible, to pay attention to the ACAS Code of Practice, and to respond to the Audit Commission's requirement that the Council review its key Human Resources policies.

The officer noted that the informal consultation on the Procedure had begun on 12 September 2006, and that the formal consultation period had closed on 24 October 2006. The Disability Awareness and Information Support Group and Harrow Council on Racial Equality had both submitted comments, but UNISON and GMB had not responded to the formal consultation. It was noted that the revised Procedure had fewer stages with longer periods in between. Therefore the timescales would remain the same.

Members expressed concern that they did not have sufficient information on the ACAS Code of Practice to determine whether the revised Procedure was suitable for an organisation of the Council's size. Unison representatives noted that it would also be helpful to examine the Dispute Regulations, and the officer agreed to distribute this document to members of the Forum for their consideration.

RESOLVED: That a report with the additional information requested above be presented to the Forum at its next meeting, to be held on 31 January 2007.
27. **Improving Attendance Procedure:**
The Forum received a report of the Head of Human Resources on the Council's Improving Attendance Procedure. The revised Procedure, which was previously known as the Policy and Procedure for Dealing with Absence, aimed to both comply with the Audit Commission's requirement to review the key Human Resources policies, and to address increasing levels of absence across the Council.

The officer confirmed that the revised Procedure would remove one stage from the existing Policy and Procedure, and that all stages would continue to be officer and not Member level. The Unison representatives expressed concerns about both proposals, and indicated that they wished to see the matter discussed more fully at a future meeting. Unison also expressed the view that a more holistic approach to the issue of absence focusing on its causes was required, and that there was a lack of consistency among managers on how to deal with absence.

The officer stated that in addition to the new Procedure, other steps would also be taken to manage absence, including developing the guidance available for managers in consultation with Organisational Development, and working with Occupational Health and Health and Safety to provide more information to managers and employees on the most frequent causes of absence and support available.

The Forum was in agreement that, in order to make a decision on the revised Procedure, they would need a more detailed report that indicated the number of absences by directorate, and that also distinguished between those departments in which absence required temporary agency staff, and those in which it did not. It was noted that this information should exclude schools as they had different arrangements from the Council.

RESOLVED: That (1) the item be referred for consultation with the unions; and

(2) a report with the information requested above be presented at the Forum's next meeting on 31 January 2007.

28. **Stress Group / Wellbeing Report:**

The Forum received a report of the Director of Finance and Business Strategy, which outlined the widening remit of the Stress Strategy Group.

The officer noted that 80% of absence from work was related to ill health, and that two thirds of this was caused by stress and musculo-skeletal disorders. The Forum was reassured that stress would remain a priority of the Health at Work Group.

Members of the Forum noted that some organisations and companies employed osteopaths to treat employees at work since this represented a cost effective way of reducing absence.

In response to a question from a Member, officers noted that although no statistics were available on the exact causes of stress at work, rising rates of stress and depression at the societal level had been attributed to change and uncertainty. Officers confirmed that through the Employee Assistance Programme counselling was available to all staff to address a range of work related and personal problems. A Unison representative expressed the view that some managers had an oppressive style of management which contributed to stress in certain departments. A Member confirmed that the Administration would support all efforts to identify any such examples of poor management.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 8.00 pm by the general assent of all members of the Forum in attendance, closed at 9.35 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR CAMILLA BATH
Chairman