

EMPLOYEES' CONSULTATIVE FORUM

3 SEPTEMBER 2009

- Chairman: * Councillor Paul Osborn
- Councillors: * David Ashton * Graham Henson
 * Mrs Camilla Bath * Joyce Nickolay (1)
 * Bob Currie * Phillip O'Dell
- Representatives of HTCC: * Ms L Snowdon
- Representatives of UNISON: * Ms L Ahmad * Mr K Halai
 * Mr D Butterfield * Mr G Martin
 Ms M Cawley Mr R Thomas
- Representative of GMB: * Mr J Dunbar
 * Kathleen McDonald

* Denotes Member present/Employee Representative present
 (1) Denotes category of Reserve Member

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL

PART II - MINUTES

157. **Appointment of Chairman:**

RESOLVED: To note the appointment of Councillor Paul Osborn as Chairman of the Forum for the Municipal Year 2009/10.

158. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

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

<u>Ordinary Member</u>	<u>Reserve Member</u>
Councillor Susan Hall	Councillor Joyce Nickolay

159. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Nature of Interest</u>
9. Annual Health and Safety Report	Councillor David Ashton	Personal interest in that his daughter-in-law was a Council employee. Accordingly, he would remain in the room and take part in the discussion and decision-making on these items.
10. Peer Group Review	Councillor Bob Currie	Personal interest in that he was a retired member of UNISON and his son was a Council employee. Accordingly, he would remain in the room and take part in the discussion and decision-making on these items.
11. Feasibility Studies and Peer Review	Councillor Graham Henson	Personal interest in that he was a member of the Communication Workers' Union and his cousin was a Council employee. Accordingly, he would remain in the room and that part in the discussion and decision-making on these items.

160. **Appointment of Vice-Chairman:**

RESOLVED: To appoint Kathleen McDonald as Vice-Chairman of the Employees' Consultative Forum for the 2009/10 Municipal Year.

161. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 April 2009 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

162. **Petitions:**

RESOLVED: To note the receipt of a petition of 45 signatures regarding the condition of pavements, car traffic speed and parking in Stanley Road, South Harrow which would be passed to the Corporate Director of Community and Environment.

163. **Deputations and Public Questions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put or deputations received at this meeting under the provisions of the Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rules 16 and 15 respectively.

164. **Annual Health and Safety Report:**

The Forum received a report of the Corporate Director of Finance which outlined the health and safety work undertaken during 2008/09, provided information on performance measures including training data, audits and accidents and looked ahead to the work planned to support the Council in its change agenda and in response to new legislation.

With regard to table 7 of the report, regarding attendance at the main health and safety training courses, the Forum considered that further information would be helpful, including: a comparison with previous years, the percentage of the workforce that had attended and the numbers that would be expected to attend. It was suggested that some courses should be mandatory. The Chairman stated that he would discuss the matter with the Corporate Director of Finance.

The Employee Side expressed concern that the courses listed did not identify stress issues, which was particularly relevant due to the financial situation and voluntary severance scheme. With regard to stress the following points arose from discussion:

- whilst stress courses would continue to be offered, there was still stigma attached to issues of stress and some staff did not want to publicly attend stress training there had also been workgroup training, discussing issues in focus groups and an administrative questionnaire. The officer undertook to incorporate the statistics from the focus groups into future Health and Safety reports;
- work had been undertaken in Housing Services and Corporate Finance using HSE (Health and Safety Executive) Management Standards;
- the accident tables presented to the Forum included agency staff in the non employee category;
- by interpreting management referrals, accident/incident reporting and other data management could recognise triggers for staff to ensure early intervention;
- it was hoped that the unions would inform Management if they had knowledge of high incidences of stress;
- the Employee Assistance programme was available to staff 24 hours a day;
- information on trends could also result from a question on stress in the staff survey which was every two years; and
- doctors were being asked to be more specific about diagnoses and symptoms rather than just stating someone was suffering from 'stress'.

Concern was expressed by the unions that the Health and Safety Partnership Board had met only once in the previous year. An officer stated that the Assistant Chief Executive had taken over the Chair and would be liaising with departments with regard

to meetings of that body and the departmental safety groups. Information on Health and Safety Groups was submitted to the Improvement Board as part of the Corporate Scorecard.

In response to a question, it was noted that Facilities Management had a programme regarding legionella and water systems. It was suggested that a short report be provided on the programme.

Courses were available to School Governors and specific training was run for schools such as on teacher training days.

An Employee Representative informed the Forum that Unison had offered to make available its courses for depot staff to other areas of the Council but had been hampered due to facility time considerations. The officer undertook to ascertain whether any expansion in this area was feasible.

Concern was expressed at the possible under reporting of accidents and near miss incidents, particularly in relation to schools. The officer reported that, in order to overcome any barriers to reporting, consideration could be given to an option for telephone reporting.

RESOLVED: That (1) the Health and Safety Annual Report 2008/9 be noted;

(2) a health and safety training update be submitted in three months to include more detailed information, the feasibility of extending Unison training to other areas of staff, and the consideration of the barriers to the reporting of accidents and near miss incidents together with the option of telephone reporting; and

(3) a report be submitted on the progress of the Health and Safety Partnership Board and departmental safety group meetings in six months to include

165. **Feasibility Studies and Peer Group Review:**

The Forum received a report from Unison requesting a formal response regarding issues raised by Unison at the meeting on 27 April 2009.

The meeting on 27 April 2009 had requested an update with regard to the establishment of a Peer Group Review to review the process for the restructuring of Housing Services and to identify any lessons learnt, to agree any outstanding information requirements, and to consider the impact on the service in the context of the service improvement agenda.

An officer stated that terms of reference had been drafted with the intention of a discussion with the unions at a meeting arranged for the previous week. The officer had understood that the draft terms of reference had been emailed to the unions. Unison stated that it had not received a copy and had notified Housing Services that a representative would not be able to attend the meeting. Two days prior to the meeting the unions had been informed that the Forum items were being added to the agenda.

The Forum was advised that the Corporate Director Place Shaping would be leading the Peer Group Review. In order to move forward he proposed that a meeting be held whereby the unions, management and Human Resources would have the opportunity to put forward issues in order that he could come to a view as to the best way to proceed. He had met with the Interim Director of Housing Services who had had a clear intent to use the pre-planning meeting to have a discussion around the initial proposals for the terms of reference to enable collaborative agreement.

The Chairman advised that the next meeting of the Employees Consultative Forum was scheduled for 28 October 2009 which would provide a reasonable period for progress.

A union representative referred to the statement in the minutes of the last meeting which advised that the Adult and Housing Joint Committee information update reported that the role profiles of Resident Wardens were in the process of evaluation. The update further stated that notification had not been received by the unions or postholders even though the minutes of 9 March 2009 had noted the request for information. The representative stated that this remained outstanding and he needed to inform his members when evaluations would take place.

The Chairman requested that the minutes of the Forum for the last two years be examined and outstanding issues be identified with the unions to enable them to be tracked. It was agreed that a baseline of concerns be established and part of the

response from housing management would be an agreed plan of action to address the points raised in partnership.

It was agreed that feasibility studies and business cases for voluntary severance be included in the outstanding issues considered by the Peer Group Review and be reported back to the meeting on 28 October.

Reference was made by the Employee Representatives to a meeting at which their members had been told by Housing Services management that if a member of staff wanted to contact their union representative they should give 24 hours notice. The officer stated that if he was provided with the details he would investigate the matter. The Chairman stated that this should also be considered by the Peer Review.

In response to a statement by a union representative that staff were not taking annual leave due to the shortage of staff in the Service, an officer confirmed the commitment to the working time regulations and stated that any incidences where this was not complied with should be brought to his attention.

It was agreed that the request that individual staff receive a stress assessment be considered as part of the discussion on the terms of reference of the Peer Group Review. Agency appointments to cover staff shortages would also be part of the discussion.

RESOLVED: That (1) a meeting be held during the week following the Forum whereby the unions, management and Human Resources, if appropriate, would have the opportunity to put forward issues to enable the Corporate Director of Place Shaping, as the Lead Officer of the Peer Group Review, to form a view as to the best way to proceed;

(2) the minutes of the Forum for the previous two years be examined and outstanding issues be identified with the unions to enable them to be tracked. Part of the response from housing management would be an agreed plan of action to address the points raised in partnership;

(3) that the issues to be considered by the Peer Group Review include: stress assessments for staff, the feasibility studies or, if not available, the business cases for voluntary severance; agency cover for staff shortages and contact by staff with union representatives;

(4) that a report be submitted to the next meeting.

166.

Mr R Thomas:

The Forum asked that its best wishes be conveyed to Bob Thomas who was unwell.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.50 pm, closed at 9.10 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR PAUL OSBORN
Chairman