

PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION MEETING

3 SEPTEMBER 2009

Chairman: * Councillor Paul Osborn

* Denotes Member present

[Note: Councillors Bill Stephenson and Narinder Singh Mudhar also attended this meeting to speak on the item indicated at Minute 114 below].

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL**PART II - MINUTES**

109. **Declarations of Interest and Declarations of Any Dispensations Granted by the Standards Committee:**

RESOLVED: To note that (1) there were no declarations of interests made by the Member in relation to the business to be transacted at this meeting;

(2) there were no declarations of any dispensations granted by the Standards Committee in relation to the business to be transacted at this meeting.

110. **Petitions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions had been received.

111. **Public Questions:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no public questions to be received at the meeting under the provisions of Executive Procedure Rule 16 (Part 4D of the Constitution).

112. **Matters referred to the Executive Member:**

RESOLVED: To note that no matters had been referred to the Executive Member for reconsideration in accordance with the provisions contained in the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rule 22 (Part 4F of the Council's Constitution).

113. **Reports from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or Sub-Committees:**

RESOLVED: To note that no reports had been received.

114. **Key Decision: Learning and Development:**

The Portfolio Holder for Performance, Communications and Corporate Services considered a report of the Director of Business Transformation and Customer Service, together with a confidential appendix, which summarised the case for outsourcing the provision of the Learning and Development Service.

The Portfolio Holder welcomed Members and Harrow Unison Branch representatives to the meeting and stated that, exceptionally, on this occasion, he would allow representatives from the Harrow Unison Branch to address the meeting. Additionally, in accordance with Executive Procedure Rule 25.5, 'Who may Speak', the Portfolio Holder invited Members present at the meeting to speak.

An officer introduced the report and drew attention to the confidential appendix, which set out the full business case for the outsourcing of the Learning and Development Managed Service. He confirmed that the Business Transformation Project Partnership Board Members had previously approved the proposal, which now needed urgent approval if the timescales and benefits set out in the full business case were to be achieved.

The Divisional Director of Human Resources and Development outlined the reasons for the proposed change in service provision and the benefits that would accrue. He stated that whilst the existing staff provided an efficient service, the benefits of the proposal outweighed current service provision as it allowed for more effective monitoring and online access.

The Divisional Director referred to the letter from Unison appended to the report. He stated that the issues raised by Unison had been addressed, details of which were set out in the report, and that the proposal would provide value for money.

Unison representatives asked questions on the extent of the liability involved. They were of the view that the Council had not met its legal obligation in respect of the equalities impact assessment, which had been undertaken in haste. Moreover, there were no guarantees that the proposal would not lead to redundancies. The report did not provide a fair view of the existing service and how it could be provided in a better way. The option of providing the service in-house had not been considered fully.

In response, the Divisional Director acknowledged that the equalities impact assessment could have been carried out earlier but stated that reasonable time had been given for comments. The comments provided by staff had been incorporated. All statutory requirements had been met and staff had been kept informed and consulted. The Council would welcome joint working with Unison on any issues. Alternative options had been discussed and their viability tested. The Council was of the view that there was not a more cost effective way of accessing the technology that the proposal, if approved, would provide. The issue of liability should be addressed during the implementation stage.

The Portfolio Holder stated that, where possible, the Council would fully examine alternative options. He explained that service delivery had been a key factor as to why the Council had moved towards the proposed option. He suggested that, in future, mechanisms should be put in place to allow for earlier discussions with Unison, the Business Transformation Project Partnership Board, opposition groups and Portfolio Holder assistants with a view to exploring all options including in-house provision of services for other projects.

A Member, who supported the proposal, and considered it to be leading edge, was of the view that the Council ought to have ownership of the contract and market it to other boroughs in the future instead. This element needed to be explored further as part of the business case, as it would provide a better return in the long term. He was also of the view that the 'options review' proposed at the end of the fourth year of the contract should be undertaken earlier. In response, the Divisional Director and the Portfolio Holder stated that it would take significant time and resources for the Council to generate a market as suggested by the Member but that this suggestion had been discussed. The Portfolio Holder added that he was not convinced that the Council had sufficient resources to develop a business case.

Another Member asked questions relating to system integration and enquired about the robustness of the proposal. The Divisional Director stated that all systems were generally tested and parameters set before they went live. The system in question was in working order and tests would be carried out on it once it had been integrated.

The Portfolio Holder stated that he was minded to approve the proposal and gave assurances that the options available on future projects would be explored fully.

RESOLVED: That (1) the Learning and Development Project be approved to proceed in line with its Business Case;

(2) mechanisms be put in place to allow options on future projects to be explored more widely at an earlier stage.

Reasons for Decision: To (1) reduce costs whilst maintaining an excellent service; (2) contribute to an improvement in the use of resources; (3) ensure value for money and appropriate engagement with stakeholders.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 5.03 pm, closed at 6.14 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR PAUL OSBORN
Chairman