

EMPLOYEES' CONSULTATIVE FORUM MINUTES

15 OCTOBER 2012

- Chairman:** * Mr G Martin
- Councillors:** * Mrs Camilla Bath * Jean Lammiman
* Bob Currie * Paul Osborn
* Graham Henson * Bill Stephenson
* Thaya Idaikkadar
- Representatives of HTCC:** Ms L Snowdon
- Representatives of UNISON:** Ms L Ahmad * Mr S Compton
* Mr D Butterfield
- Representatives of GMB:** * Mr S Karia

* Denotes Member present

102. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note the attendance of the following duly appointed Reserve Members:

Ordinary Member

Ms L Ahmad
Vacancy

Reserve Member

Ms D Hatten
Mr D Searles

103. Declarations of Interest

In respect of all agenda items, it was

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

Councillor Bob Currie declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he was a member of Unison, and that his son worked for the Council.

Councillor Graham Henson declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he was a member of the Communication Workers Union and had a cousin who was an employee of the Council.

Councillor Jean Lammiman declared an interest in that she was a trustee of Harrow Equalities Centre.

104. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2012 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

105. Petitions

Staff Petition Supported by Unison

A petition was presented by a Unison official on behalf of staff at the central depot; the following statement was read in support of the petition:

“I have been requested by staff at central depot to submit this petition, in accordance with the executive committee’s procedural rule 49. The staff at central depot find that senior council staff are failing to meet the requirements of the council’s equal opportunities policy, in respect of less favourable treatment. We, the 246 undersigned, are treated appallingly in regards to facilities for both a hot drink and a hot meal. We have to endure the indignity of vending machines that are poorly maintained, expensive, and consistently fail to provide the commodity which was purchased. Unlike our management staff, that have kitchen facilities provided by the council to reduce their expenditure, whilst low paid staff are being charged inflated prices against high street prices. We formally disagree with the HRD Divisional Director’s statement that there is no demand for adequate welfare facilities at central depot.”

A Member observed that the situation did not sound satisfactory, and requested sight of the response.

RESOLVED: To note the receipt of the above named petition which was referred to the Divisional Director, Human Resources, Development and Shared Services, and the Divisional Director, Environmental Services for consideration.

106. Deputations and Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put or deputations received at this meeting.

RESOLVED ITEMS

107. INFORMATION REPORT - Annual Equality in Employment Monitoring From 1 April 2011 - 31 March 2012

The Forum received a report on Annual Equality in Employment Monitoring From 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012.

An officer introduced the report and described its purpose and scope. In respect of equalities information, data was available on only 4 of the 9 'protected characteristics'; information on the remaining 5 would be captured via the Employee Records system and reported in the 2012-13 Annual Equalities Report. In response to a request made by the Employees' Consultative Forum (ECF) in April 2012, the timescales and appeals of employment procedures will be monitored and reported in the 2012-13 report. Information on redeployees was now recorded, although only 22 had been captured on the system thus far. A Member requested that temporary appointments be shown separately in the appointment statistics.

Members considered the statistics and information provided for race, gender, disability and age profiles, and noted that disability status was self-determined by staff. The Divisional Director, HRD and Shared Services acknowledged that this had implications for how 'reasonable adjustments' would be assessed and implemented. He agreed to report back on this and the disproportionate number of disabled employees in the capability process.

Members also noted with concern the low proportion of staff aged between 16 and 24 years, and enquired if strategies were in place to address this. An officer confirmed that some policies, on apprentice and graduate schemes, had been introduced. Members asked for comparative figures across other authorities, information on career grade posts, and analysis on the barriers to recruitment and employment, as clearly some posts, particularly at higher grades or dependent on specific experience, would not be suitable for younger candidates. The Divisional Director, HRD and Shared Services agreed to complete the analysis and report back to the Forum. It was also agreed to provide more information on the Council's graduate scheme.

A Unison representative stated that a target for employment was necessary so that performance could be measured.

Members considered compliance with Harrow Council's equality policies by partner organisations and contractors in respect of their workforce profiles, and noted that Capita staff were 95% male. A Member observed that contractors should be required to demonstrate how they would deliver on equality issues. The Divisional Director, HRD and Shared Services agreed

that this was a continuing issue for the Corporate Equalities Group (CEG), and agreed to provide a half-yearly update on the CEG and its work.

Members also discussed the desirability of staff living in the borough, and the benefit of local knowledge and experience of services, particularly in respect of senior management. The Divisional Director, HRD and Shared Services, commented that appointments should be made on the basis of skills and suitability for the post, and he would not want to be inhibited by a policy to select people who lived in Harrow. A Member responded that he would not want to impose limits, but there was an advantage in senior managers living in the borough as they would have immediate, personal experience of services; he added that all Councillors lived in the borough, and asked for a breakdown on how many senior managers also lived in the borough.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) information and analysis of disability issues affecting staff, and in particular the capability process, be reported to the Employees' Consultative Forum;
- (3) a further report providing information and analysis in relation to the recruitment and employment of 16-24 year olds be brought to the next meeting of the Employees' Consultative Forum;
- (4) a report giving further detail on the Council's graduate scheme be brought to the next Employees' Consultative Forum
- (5) a half-yearly update report on the Corporate Equalities Group be brought to the Employees' Consultative Forum.

108. Employees' Side Report on the Seneca Waste Transfer Station and Management's Response

The Forum received an Employees' Side report on the Seneca Waste Transfer Station, and a Management Response report on the same subject.

A Unison representative presented a list of concerns about Health and Safety issues at the Seneca Waste Transfer Station (SWTS), along with a chronology of correspondence, meetings and actions undertaken to highlight issues and seek a solution.

He stated that there had been a lack of transparency on the part of management in respect of information and actions taken; and that a request for specific information had not been answered. In the union's view the premises remained unsafe until evidence was provided that measures were in place to address poor air quality; ensure non-hazardous working surfaces, and to conduct extensive monitoring of Health and Safety issues.

He drew the Forum's attention to the fact that the SWTS had been closed, temporarily, by the Environment Agency, and Harrow Council had suspended

deliveries to SWTS. He added that although SWTS was operational again, a Health & Safety Executive Inspector had refused to enter the site because of high levels of carbon monoxide.

In response to a Member's query as to why the issue had not already been resolved and had come before the Forum, the Unison representative explained that unresolved Health and Safety issues were escalated to the Employees' Consultative Forum.

A Member observed that the SWTS was used by a number of authorities, none of whom had suspended deliveries. He also expressed his displeasure at the tone of some of the written correspondence from Unison officials, which he considered to be aggressive and discourteous, and which would not be acceptable from officers. He expected that the same standards of mutual respect should apply, and suggested that an apology was due.

The Unison representative stated that it was reasonable for the union to demand evidence to substantiate management's claims that the working environment was safe for their members, and repeated their request for answers to specific questions. The Divisional Director, Environmental Services agreed to provide these after the meeting.

The Divisional Director, Environmental Services clarified the status of the various agencies involved and informed the Forum that the SWTS was a private concern, and had its own direct dealings with the Environment Agency. The West London Waste Authority (WLWA) was an umbrella organisation which acted on behalf of 6 west London boroughs, including Harrow.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) Unison's concerns re Health and Safety at the Seneca Waste Disposal Plant be noted;
- (2) actions instigated and undertaken by Environmental Services staff be noted;
- (3) written answers be provided in response to the Unison questions submitted to the Divisional Director, Environmental Services.

109. Employees' Side Report on Matters Referred from Corporate Joint Committee and Management's Response

The Forum received an Employees' Side report on Matters referred from Corporate Joint Committee, and the Management Response report on the same subject.

Four outstanding issues were presented to the Forum for consideration. The Divisional Director informed Members that the first of these could not be considered, as it contained reference to an individual appeal and therefore fell outside the remit of the Forum. However, this was one of the five appeals that had been chosen for review by Members, to determine if decisions relating to

Dignity at Work complaints were made in a fair and consistent manner; the issues referred to therein would therefore be looked at elsewhere.

The remaining three issues had all been resolved prior to the Forum meeting.

RESOLVED: That both reports be noted.

110. Employees' Side Report on Cuts to Trade Union Facility Budget and Management's Response

The Forum received an Employees' Side report on Cuts to Trade Union Facility Budget, and the Management Response report on the same subject.

A Unison representative outlined the union's case for reconsidering the proposed £30k cut to the Facility Budget, and compared costs incurred by trade unions to costs incurred by the Human Resources Department. He stated that independent research suggested that every £1 spent on trade union facility time returned between £2 and £5 in accrued benefits, which represented a very good return on investment. He added that many trade union officials were from lower grades and regularly worked more hours on behalf of members than were allowed for in facility time. He identified unused funds which could be transferred to cover facility time.

A Member pointed out that the administration fully supported unions and their work, but that with a number of schools converting to Academy status, union membership had decreased by approximately one fifth, and in the current economic climate, when all services were expected to take their share of cuts, it was reasonable to expect that funding for unions would reduce in line with other areas, and in line with their reduced membership.

An officer agreed that the presence and involvement of trade unions within the organisation was beneficial to staff and management, and that facility time would continue to be supported within available budgets. She outlined the various funding streams that had been used to enable defined projects, which had now ended, and she explained that the funds described by the Unison representative were no longer available.

The Chair suggested the discussion and debate should continue outside the meeting.

RESOLVED: That both the reports be noted.

111. INFORMATION REPORT - Follow-Up Actions

The Forum received an information report on Follow-Up Actions agreed by the Forum since January 2012.

The Divisional Director, HRD and Shared Services, informed Members that of the 7 follow-up actions detailed within the report, 5 had been completed.

He updated Members on the remaining 2 actions:

- a working group set up to consider the Forum's Terms of Reference was due to meet on 5 November 2012;
- a Councillor working group had been set up to review five Dignity At Work cases and report back to the Forum – papers had been sent to members and their report was awaited.

A Member queried the provision of information on asbestos management, as he understood that all members would receive this but he had not. The Divisional Director, HRD and Shared Services explained that the action point had stipulated that information would be sent to those who requested it, but he was happy to provide it to all members of the Forum.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

112. Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED: That in accordance with Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items for the reasons set out below:

<u>Item</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Reason</u>
16	Employees' Side Report on Insurance for Council drivers	Information under paragraph 1 (contains information relating to any individual).
17	Information Report – Management's response to Employees' Side Report on Insurance for Council drivers	Information under paragraph 1 (contains information relating to any individual).

113. Employees' Side Report on Insurance for Council Drivers and Management's Response

The Forum received an Employees' Side report on Insurance for Council Drivers, and the Management Response report on the same subject.

A Unison representative spoke to the report, and the Divisional Director, Environmental Services, responded on a number of points.

Members commented on the lack of detail in the report, particularly in respect of equalities issues and financial implications, as they felt that both these areas would be impacted on by any change in policy or process.

A Member requested that a further report be brought to the forum with the additional detail required. Another member suggested that the report should go in the first instance to the Corporate Joint Committee, and if the issue was not resolved there, then to the Employees' Consultative Forum. A member asked that the report come back to the Employees' Consultative Forum in any event.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the reports be noted;
- (2) a further report on the minimum age for drivers of Council vehicles be taken to the Council Joint Committee and reported to the Employees' Consultative Forum.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.35 pm, closed at 9.50 pm).

(Signed) GARY MARTIN
Chairman