

EMPLOYEES' CONSULTATIVE FORUM

19 APRIL 2005

- Chair: * S Sivashankar
- Councillors: * Mrs Bath * Marie-Louise Nolan
 * Janet Cowan * N Shah
 * Currie * Toms
 * Mrs Joyce Nickolay
- Representatives of HTCC: (Currently no appointees)
- Representatives of UNISON: * Ms M Cawley * Mr K McDonald
 * Ms A Jackson * Ms D Prasad
 Mr G Martin

* Denotes Member/Employee Representative present

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL

PART II - MINUTES

127. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

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

128. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

<u>Member</u>	<u>Nature of Interest</u>
Councillor Currie	Declared a personal interest in that he was a lifelong Member of UNISON.
Councillor Toms	Declared a personal interest in that he was a lifelong Member of the NUT.

129. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

RESOLVED: That (1) agenda item 11 be considered in two parts, under the headings Middle Management Review and Recruitment and Selection;

(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>
11. Middle Management Review – Recruitment and Selection) The reports relating to these items were not available at the time the agenda was printed and circulated. Members were requested to receive the reports in order to discuss issues raised by UNISON.
12. Freedom of Information	
13. Stress Audit	
14. Occupational Health	
15. Attacks on the Integrity of the Branch and its Officers	

(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>Special Circumstances/Grounds for Urgency</u>
11. Middle Management Review – Recruitment and Selection	The tabled documents relating to the Recruitment and Selection part of the item contained exempt information under Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) in that they referred to a particular employee and former employee.

130. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2005, having been circulated, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

131. **Matters Arising from the Last Meeting:**

Joint Consultation/Negotiating Machinery: Minute 126: The Forum was advised that regular meetings were held between UNISON and the Portfolio Holder.

RESOLVED: That the matters arising from the last meeting be noted.

132. **Public Questions:**

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

133. **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).

134. **Deputations:**

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 14 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

135. **Individual Performance Appraisal and Development Process:**

The Forum received a report of the Director of Human Resources and Organisational Effectiveness, which informed Members of the work undertaken in the implementation of the corporate performance appraisal and development scheme. In addition to the information provided in the published report, an officer explained that extending the consultation period could accommodate further discussions with the Black Workers Group. It was hoped that the successful implementation of the scheme would help contribute to the ongoing development of the Council's staff.

The Forum was advised that in order to publicise the implementation of the scheme, posters had been displayed throughout the Council's buildings and Managers had also been asked to publicise the scheme.

RESOLVED: That the progress against actions in relation to the Individual Performance Appraisal and Development (IPAD) process be noted.

136. **Staff Survey and Strategy for People Progress Report:**

The Forum received a report of the Director of Human Resources and Organisational Effectiveness, detailing progress against actions in relation to the Strategy for People and the development of the 2005 Staff Survey. Having been advised that planning for the second staff survey was underway, UNISON expressed a wish to assist in writing the survey.

The Forum proceeded to discuss a range of subjects, including the possibility of introducing a set of guidelines to govern the relationship between officers and Members. Discussion also centred on the verbal and physical abuse of frontline staff by members of the public. The Forum heard of several examples of such abuse, including abuse suffered by parking attendants and refuse collection workers. UNISON expressed grave concern that the Council had appeared not to pursue a number of

assaults on staff. Whilst not being in a position to comment on individual cases, an officer confirmed support for a policy whereby staff subjected to verbal or physical assault would receive support from the Council and the assurance that any such cases would be pursued by the authority in the appropriate way. A UNISON representative noted that the incidence of assaults had reached such levels in the Waste Management Service that industrial action had been threatened. UNISON felt that information and reports of assaults were not being taken forward in the appropriate manner. It was added that staff were often encouraged not to report all incidents of abuse and were told that it was 'part of the job.' The Forum agreed that if there were confidence in the Council's procedures for dealing with such matters, staff would feel more inclined to report similar incidents. It was therefore suggested that all staff should be sent a clear message that any incidents of assault would result in action being taken against the offending individual.

The Forum was referred to page 26 of the agenda, which detailed the Strategy for Managing and Developing People Action Plan. In response to a query, it was noted that partner organisations were required to adhere to the Council's standards in terms of equal opportunities. Members were referred to page 35 of the agenda, which outlined the Council's plans to develop more flexible HR policies and procedures. Following a discussion on this area, a Member wished to be recorded in noting his desire that the Forum refrain from raising ongoing individual cases.

RESOLVED: That (1) the progress towards actions outlined in the Strategy for People and the associated Staff Survey actions and performance measures be noted; and

(2) the Forum issue a joint statement endorsing the comments relating to the abuse of staff by members of the public.

137. **Middle Management Review:**

The Forum heard that UNISON would not be discussing the item at this meeting following the recent receipt of information on the Middle Management Review. It was noted that the item would be put on the agenda for the next meeting of the Forum.

RESOLVED: That the above be noted.

138. **Freedom of Information:**

The Forum was advised that the document submitted by UNISON contained several references to an individual case that was subject to an ongoing investigation by the authority. It was therefore felt to be inappropriate for the document to be considered in the form that it was submitted. UNISON requested a written explanation of the reasons why the document was being withdrawn.

RESOLVED: That (1) the document submitted by UNISON be withdrawn; and

(2) a written response be provided to UNISON explaining the reasons for the withdrawal of the document.

139. **Stress Audit:**

A UNISON representative introduced a report and provided details of a recent case where an employee was contacted to establish when they would be returning to work, whilst undergoing treatment for a serious illness. UNISON felt that there was little scope within the sickness absence procedure for discretion to be applied where appropriate. An officer clarified that 'trigger points' were built into the procedure at certain stages in the process, although the procedure did accord flexibility in its application. A UNISON representative requested that some clear action be taken on the issue of ensuring that appropriate consideration and discretion was given to staff absence. It was noted that a report would be submitted to the Forum meeting in July 2005 outlining the work undertaken by the Health and Safety division. It was further agreed that discussions between UNISON and the Portfolio Holder would take place outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the above be noted.

140. **Occupational Health:**

The Forum received a verbal statement from a UNISON representative. UNISON were not in a position to make a full report on issues surrounding the Occupational Health Service (OHS), although it was expected that a report would be submitted to the next Forum meeting. UNISON also urged the formal launch of the OHS and stressed that it should be regarded as separate from the sickness absence procedure.

RESOLVED: That the above be noted.

141. **Attacks on the Integrity of the Branch and its Officers:**

A UNISON representative explained that the branch had been under considerable strain to participate and contribute to the many projects being undertaken by the Council. UNISON officers had invested considerable resources to ensure that they fulfilled their role. However as a result of this burden, the branch had received a number of resignations. It was also reported that UNISON had received criticism for being unable to send a representative to meetings. A number of UNISON members had also had to work outside of normal working hours.

In response to these concerns it was suggested that the facilities agreement could be reviewed given that the challenges and workload had changed since the original agreement was made.

RESOLVED: That the facilities agreement be reviewed in light of concerns surrounding UNISON's resources.

142. **Recruitment and Selection:**

The Forum considered a tabled confidential submission from the Employers' and Employees' side. Further to Members' requests, officers were directed to start an investigation immediately and were asked to advise the Forum of the findings. Following discussion of the issues raised in the documents, it was

RESOLVED: That the Forum receive a report at its next meeting on the Council's general recruitment and selection practices.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.32 pm, closed at 9.55 pm)

(Signed) SHANKAR SIVASHANKAR
Chair