

EMPLOYEES' CONSULTATIVE FORUM

MINUTES

9 OCTOBER 2013

Chairman:	* Councillor Paul Osborn	
Councillors:	* Mrs Camilla Bath	* Thaya Idaikkadar
	* Bob Currie	* Barry Macleod-Cullinane
	* Graham Henson	* David Perry
Representatives of HTCC:	Ms L Snowdon	
Representatives of UNISON:	Ms L Ahmad	† Mr S Compton
	Mr D Butterfield	* Mr G Martin
Representatives of GMB:	Mr S Karia	

- * Denotes Member present
- Denote category of Reserve Members
- † Denotes apologies received

128. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

L Ahmed
D Butterfield

Reserve Member

Davis Searles
Bill Beardon

129. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared for all agenda items:

Councillor Bob Currie declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he was a member of Unison, and that his son works for the Council. He would remain in the room whilst all matters were considered and voted upon.

Councillor Graham Henson declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he was an honorary member of the Communication Workers Union, and that his cousin was an employee of the Council. He had also served as the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for health and safety matters. He would remain in the room whilst all matters were considered and voted upon.

RESOLVED ITEMS

130. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

RESOLVED: That Gary Martin be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Employees' Consultative Forum for the 2013-2014 Municipal Year.

131. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2013 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

132. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received, questions put or deputations received.

133. Annual Equality in Employment Monitoring Report - Part 1

The Committee received the report of the Corporate Director of Resources which set out equality monitoring data on a range of employment matters. A further report analysing the data and addressing the issues would be brought to the ECF meeting on 28 January 2014.

An officer introduced the report and explained that the Council had a statutory duty to publish equalities data, which was presented to the Employees' Consultative Forum in this report. Officers sought comments from Members on the data to be analysed, which, together with actions proposed to address issues of concern, would form the second part of the report, to be brought to the Forum in January 2014.

The officer explained that a number of errors had been identified in the data, and a corrected version of the report would be circulated with the minutes of the meeting.

She commented that the new style of presentation made it easier to identify areas of concern and track any trends. She then noted a number of issues:

- the requirement to publish 'protected characteristics' had increased from four categories to eight. As a consequence there was no historical data for comparison of the new categories: religion or belief; sexual orientation; pregnancy or maternity; and gender reassignment;
- the need to publish more data required greater resources than for previous reports;
- the 2011 census data for Harrow had been used as a comparator where appropriate;
- the proportion of BAME staff employed by the Council was lower than that of the Harrow community, and had not changed significantly over the last few years;
- the representation of BAME staff at senior level in the Council was very low;
- the number of women at senior level in the Council was very low and the proportion of women applying for and being promoted internally was lower than their representation in the workforce;
- concerns about the low proportion of employees under the age of 24.

The officer explained that Directorate Equality Task Groups (ETGs) would consider data relating to their own workforce and report any major issues for inclusion in the January ECF report. The Corporate Equalities Group would review any actions proposed to address issues and these would also be included in the report.

Members considered the data provided, and discussed the following points:

- errors and transpositions in the data provided;
- the lack of senior management response in providing protected characteristic data, and the message this conveyed;
- addressing low response rates by Directorate and / or rank;
- the mismatch between declared and known levels of disability;
- the ability to make meaningful comparisons across Directorates from the data provided and its style of presentation.

Members agreed that it was difficult to draw reliable conclusions from the report, where there were errors and transpositions. They also noted with serious concern that where figures were low in any particular category, it was possible to determine the identity of those involved. Officers agreed to remedy this in future reports.

Members then considered the following:

- the breakdown of figures for disciplinary procedures, and over-representation among certain groups at different stages in employment procedures;
- the length of time taken to respond to requests for reasonable adjustments and the need to record and address delays;
- the number of BAME applicants progressing from application to shortlist stage, and appointment;
- the diminishing proportion of BAME staff as pay grades progress;
- the absence of applications from individuals aged over 65 years.

An officer explained that panels reviewing applications for shortlisting were not given any personal or equalities information on applicants prior to interview.

In response to a query from Unison in respect of timescales for implementation of reasonable adjustments, an officer explained that this could not be monitored as cases were submitted on an individual case-by-case basis, and records were kept locally.

The Chair asked that HR look into the process for assessing requests for reasonable adjustments, and at how complaints or failures were recorded and addressed. He also asked that officers look into the over-representation of certain groups in employment procedures as a priority, and for inclusion in the January report to ECF.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

134. Annual Health & Safety Report

The Forum received the report of the Corporate Director of Resources which summarised the Council's health and safety performance for the year 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013.

The Divisional Director of HR, Development and Shared Services explained that as the report author was not present, if he was unable to answer any questions himself, then a written answer would be provided. He also drew the Forum's attention to some errors in the report which would be corrected.

The Chair referred to training statistics which he wanted to explore in depth at the next ECF Employment Sub-Group meeting, in particular the sharp reduction in provision and take-up of training. He asked for additional data to enable Members to look at any correlation between training undertaken and accidents.

The Vice-Chair noted that Appendix 1, which outlined health and safety objectives and targets, gave the responsible officer as a member of staff who had left some time ago, and was a repetition of the previous year's report. He considered this was unacceptable, and a possible illustration of an underlying problem in the service area. The Chair asked for a revised set of objectives with accurate timescales, and reasons given for delay. The Divisional Director responded that some objectives would always be listed as 'ongoing', and that he had asked officers to map out another 2 year plan, which would be included in the next report.

A Member asked for more meaningful comparative data, in particular year-on-year figures, and seasonal variations. He also asked for information on where accidents occurred, as this might be an area in which the Council could exercise some control and better protect its workforce.

In response to a query about the range and provision of courses offered, the Divisional Director said that a blended programme of courses was on offer, and that external provision was commissioned when no in-house expertise was available.

Members considered the impact on the service, and ultimately on the workforce, caused by staffing issues in the section, namely the difficulties in recruiting and retaining suitable staff and the service's ability to draft and deliver long term plans.

Members discussed the following issues in respect of training:

- the sharp reduction in the provision of training;
- the lack of continuity in safety awareness in areas with high staff mobility;
- the need for refresher courses on basic safety matters.

Members then discussed the following issues arising from accident reporting and the data provided:

- the discrepancy between figures provided for schools;
- the confusion caused by figures from two different reporting periods;
- the need for remedial actions to be specified.

The Chair concluded that the Forum had concerns about the quality of reporting in respect of health and safety and the issues and omissions highlighted by the data, which he hoped would be explored in detail at the next Employment Sub-Group meeting, and reported back to the next ECF meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

135. Actions Agreed by the Employee Consultative Forum - Employment Sub Group

The Forum received the report of the Divisional Director, Human Resources, Development and Shared Services which provided information on actions agreed at Employment Sub-Group meetings.

The Divisional Director of HR, Development and Shared Services informed the Forum that, following a recommendation from the Employees' Consultative Forum (ECF), Cabinet had agreed to the establishment of an Employment Sub-Group, and had also agreed to new terms of reference for the ECF and draft terms of reference for the ECF Employment Sub-Group. Among these was the requirement to report all actions agreed at the Employment Sub-Group to ECF for information.

He also informed the Forum that the draft terms of reference required further discussion and would be brought back to the next full meeting of ECF. The Chair commented on the delay, and stated his expectation that officers would provide details on progress at the next Employment Sub-Group meeting, which he would attend.

In respect of the item on Libraries Management Services, the Vice-Chair expressed concern that no response had as yet been received from the Section 151 officer, and he gave his view that without this information it was impractical to begin the 'Lessons Learnt' review.

The Divisional Director explained that the Section 151 officer review would look at costs, which formed a separate line of enquiry, albeit one that would comprise part of the full report. He believed it was, therefore, still valid to embark on the 'Lessons Learnt' review ahead of the Section 151 officer's response. The Chair agreed and added that in his view it was important to undertake the review in two strands – with a specific and discrete task for the Section 151 officer, and a more general review for all stakeholders. A further discussion could take place at the Sub-Group meeting in October.

The Vice-Chair commented that there was a possibility of legal implications, which could further restrict the availability of information and discussion. The Chair was unaware of any such development, and did not think there would be any restriction on the review or report.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.12 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR PAUL OSBORN
Chairman