

EMPLOYEES' CONSULTATIVE FORUM MINUTES

12 NOVEMBER 2015

Chair: * Councillor Kiran Ramchandani

Councillors: * Jeff Anderson * Susan Hall (3)
* Keith Ferry (2) * John Hinkley (1)
* Ms Pamela Fitzpatrick (1) * Pritesh Patel

**Representatives
of HTCC:** (3 vacancies)

**Representatives
of UNISON:** * Mr D Butterfield * Mr J Royle
* Mr S Compton * Mr D Searles
† Mr G Martin

**Representatives
of GMB:** Ms P Belgrave

* Denotes Member present
(1), (2), (3) Denote category of Reserve Members
† Denotes apologies received

RECOMMENDED ITEMS

14. Trade Union Bill

The Forum received a report from Harrow Unison LG Branch which set out the Branch's concerns regarding the measures contained in the Trade Union Bill.

A Representative stated that the Bill, which had been widely opposed, would have a detrimental impact on industrial relations both nationally and locally for the following reasons:

- the intention to remove check-off arrangements in the public sector and the control and removal of facility time agreements, which were agreed locally between the Council and its recognised trade unions, would have a negative impact on terms and conditions, productivity, female employees and those on low incomes. It would also undermine civil liberties as it would contravene article 11 of the Human Rights Act;
- the new threshold set for strike ballots would undermine trade unions' collective bargaining ability.

A Member stated that, in her view, the bill would make strike action fairer and that the amount of facility time availed to union representatives should be determined by the Council, be logged and in the interest of transparency and openness, be published because it related to public funds. With regard to check-off arrangements, union subscriptions were currently debited at source by the Council's payroll department. However, online and telephone banking facilities meant that in the future it would be easier for staff to pay their subscriptions direct to the union.

A Representative stated that:

- 75% of Unison members were women, and those on low incomes. The measures contained in the bill would negatively impact the Unions' ability to represent these members;
- unions generally used strike action as a last resort once all other avenues had been exhausted. He added that there had been no strike action at Harrow Council in the past 10 years;
- under the proposed bill, if a union wished to call strike action, this would require an indicative ballot followed by a closed postal ballot process and a yes vote of 80%;
- loss of the current check-off facility would mean loss of income for unions as they would be obliged to devote additional staff and resources to administering this process. The current method was inexpensive, efficient and generated a small amount of additional income for the Council. He added that many other local authorities did not levy a charge for providing this service.

Members stated that:

- the bill would not help industrial relations in this country, which already had the worst trade union rights in Western Europe;
- in recent years there had been a 75% reduction in the number of employees going to employment tribunals due to the high fees involved;

- facility time availed to Unions was already subject to Freedom of Information requests, had been openly discussed at previous meetings of the Forum and was documented in the minutes of those meetings. Local Authorities should be permitted to make local agreements regarding facility time and this should not be imposed nationally by central government;
- employees should continue to have access to check-off facilities because other payments made directly from employees' salaries, for example, the facility to repay season ticket loans, were not being removed.

Following questions from Members, an officer advised that:

- the removal of check-off arrangements would mean a loss of income of approximately £6k to the Council's payroll section. This was because the Council levied an administration charge of 2.5% per subscription and that this process was cost-neutral;
- under current arrangements, union members were asked to confirm that they wished to continue paying their union subscriptions through the check-off facility at commencement of employment.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to Cabinet)

That, Cabinet/Full Council enter into an urgent local agreement with the recognised trade unions to continue Harrow Council's self-determination of facility time agreements and the existing check off arrangements.