

**EMPLOYEES' CONSULTATIVE FORUM****10 APRIL 2006**

Chair: \* Councillor Marie-Louise Nolan

Councillors: \* Mrs Bath \* Mrs Joyce Nickolay  
 Janet Cowan \* N Shah  
 \* Currie \* Toms

Representatives of HTCC: (Currently no appointees)

Representatives of UNISON: \* Ms M Cawley Mr K McDonald  
 Ms S Duffell \* Mr M Nolan  
 Ms A Jackson Shankar Sivashankar  
 \* Mr G Martin

\* Denotes Member present/Employee Representative present

**PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS****RECOMMENDATION 1 - Capability Procedure**

The Forum received a report of the Executive Director (Business Development), which advised that the Audit Commission had recommended the introduction of a Capability Procedure in its 2002 Corporate Performance Assessment.

The report detailed objections to the introduction of a Capability Procedure which had been put forward by UNISON. The Branch Secretary of Harrow UNISON, who was in attendance, confirmed that UNISON's position remained unchanged on this issue.

Members of the Forum expressed the view that the Capability Procedure should be introduced. The Forum noted that this matter did not require determination by Cabinet and accordingly agreed to refer it to the Portfolio Holder for decision.

**Resolved to RECOMMEND:** (To the Portfolio Holder for Communications, Partnership and Human Resources)

That the Capability Procedure be agreed.

**[REASON:** To enable the Council to fairly and consistently address individual issues of capability or underperformance.]

[Note: The report relating to the above item incorrectly stated that it involved a Key decision].

**PART II - MINUTES**197. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

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

198. **Declarations of Interest:**

**RESOLVED:** To note that the following interests were declared:

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

199. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

**RESOLVED:** That (1) 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>
12. Capability Procedure	The report was not available at the time that the agenda was printed and circulated, due to the fact that necessary contact persons were not available. Members were requested to consider the report at the April meeting of the Employees' Consultative Forum in order to meet Audit Commission requirements. Members were requested to consider this report as a matter of urgency.

(2) all items be considered with the press and public present.

200. **Minutes:**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2006, having been circulated, be taken as read and signed as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

- (i) Minute 191 – Revenue Budget 2006-2007 and Medium Term Budget Strategy 2006-07 to 2008-09:  
Funding for schools was expected to be 6.0% per pupil in 2006/07
- (ii) Minute 194 – Pay Protection Arrangements – Authority to Exceed Limits:  
In paragraph four, it was agreed that there would be further discussions between officers and UNISON prior to the report coming back to the Forum.
- (iii) Minute 195 – Audit Report:  
A cross-party sub-group would look at this particular issue.

201. **Public Questions:**

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

202. **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).

203. **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).

204. **Business Transformation Partnership:**

The Forum received a report of the Executive Director of Business Development, which provided an update on the performance of the Business Transformation Partnership (BTP) Projects. The Director of Business Transformation stated that, overall, the Programme was on track, with training for First Contact Centre staff already underway, and training for Enterprise Resource Management (ERM) and Management Information due to begin in August/September 2006. It was also confirmed that the 'soft' launch of the First Contact Centre would take place on 22 May 2006, preparing staff for the formal launch on 15 July 2006, and that Phase 2 of First Contact had already begun. The ERP and Management Information projects were reported as progressing to plan, while in terms of Communications, activity was focused on identifying key messages and expressing them in plain English. The Director reported that the decision had been taken to change the term 'First Contact' to 'Access Harrow'.

In response to questions posed by the Forum, officers confirmed that, in addition to the main One-Stop Shop at the Civic Centre, there would eventually be six further access points across the Borough. At the end of the thirty-month period, all services would be provided at First Contact Points, and it was expected that this would release accommodation. The Forum was informed that new IT systems would provide a knowledge base with which staff could answer approximately 80% of queries at First Contact Points, with the remaining 20% referred to back offices. Although in theory the customer relation management system would allow a single view of the queries made by any given customer, in order to retain confidentiality, staff would only be able to access information appropriate to their needs.

Officers confirmed that staff for BTP came from assimilation and ringfencing of existing council posts, as well as external recruitment. Members expressed concern at reports that some staff had been placed under pressure to continue in their normal roles, alongside taking on extra project work for BTP. In addition, UNISON noted that there had been poor communication of information to staff on the part of management. This had led to a number of concerns, including home-working without proper risk assessments having been carried out, and without staff being aware of the need to look into insurance issues. The Forum also noted that the volume of information was such that some managers had experienced difficulty in delivering a clear message to staff, which had resulted in conflicting information from different managers. UNISON was also dissatisfied with the flow of information it received from managers. In response, officers confirmed that there were now fortnightly meetings with staff and managers to communicate information on all aspects of BTP.

The Director of Business Transformation confirmed that where staff were taken from their 'day jobs' and seconded to BTP project work, their salaries were covered by the BTP budget, which meant that managers would be able to backfill posts. Members expressed the view that the working conditions were not suitable for some staff, particularly as the Civic Centre buildings were designed to meet the needs of the 1960s, and not the tasks expected of them today. It was also noted that it was crucial to monitor risk assessment carefully, and that to avoid unnecessary stress, lessons had to be learned from the Middle Management Review process.

The Forum noted that since change was inevitable, the cooperation and effective partnership of both UNISON and management was to be applauded, as this would be essential in achieving the aims of BTP. The Chair thanked all staff for their hard work and commitment to BTP, without which the project would not have been possible.

**RESOLVED:** That the update on the performance of Business Transformation Partnership Project be noted.

205. **Equality Monitoring Report For 01 April 2005 to 30 September 2005:**

The Forum received a report of the Executive Director of Business Development, which gave feedback on the process of application monitoring. It was noted that the report was incomplete, in that Contact iii, the Council's Response Handling Team, had not provided the data required on applicant monitoring.

The Forum was informed that the Council had now been accredited with the Level 3 Equality Standard. The officer stated that the report had been circulated to various groups for their comments, and that although they had not been given extensive time to

respond, the Harrow Council Black Workers' Group (HCBWG) had produced a detailed set of comments on the report. This document was tabled at the meeting. UNISON highlighted an error in paragraph 20 of the document, which stated that a full-time UNISON Equality Officer post had been removed. It was noted that this was not the case. The officer also tabled a document entitled 'Equal Opportunities Monitoring by Ethnicity – 16 September 2005'. The Forum was informed that there were no comments on BTP recruitment, since this post-dated work on the report.

Members of the Forum expressed the view that the Council should impose penalty clauses on Contact iii to ensure that they provided information on time. It was also noted that groups such as the HCBWG did not normally have a voice at the Forum. UNISON welcomed the attendance at future meetings of the Forum by representatives of work place groups such as the HCBWG for relevant items to them as appropriate. Members stated that they were concerned that some of the required Recruitment Audits had not been carried out and looked to this being rectified in the next report.

**RESOLVED:** That the information available for 1 April 2005 to 30 September 2005 be noted.

206. **Impact of the 2006/07 Budget on Staff:**

UNISON representatives requested an assessment of the impact of the 2006/07 Budget on staff. The Executive Director of Business Development informed the Forum that the impact on staffing of the Budget was laid out in the Budget Book. A number of issues directly affected staff. Some were positive, such as the provision of additional resources, others less so, for example the reduction of posts. It was stressed, however, that there would be no redundancies, since only posts currently vacant would be removed.

The Executive Director also stated that there were on-going discussions within Urban Living, particularly regarding the Depot, which were having an impact on ways of working. It was noted that these talks involved union representatives. The Executive Director confirmed that UNISON would be informed of any developments in conjunction with the Change Management Protocol as they arose.

**RESOLVED:** That the above be noted.

207. **Health and Safety:**

The Forum received a report of the Director of Financial and Business Strategy, which presented data on the incidence of assaults on staff, as well as action being taken to prevent assaults and support victims. The officer drew attention to the fact that violence and aggression constituted the single largest type of incident involving Council staff. The Forum was informed that there had been three successful Police prosecutions following assaults on staff, which had sent out a strong signal to would-be perpetrators. It was noted that proactive measures, such as risk assessments and training, were also key to tackling the problem.

In response to questions from the Forum, the officer confirmed that managers were working in consultation with the Organisational Development team to ascertain what training could support staff involved in refuse collection, particularly in light of the planned change in frequency of collections. The Chair noted that it would be helpful in future to know what the timescales for planned changes were. The Executive Director of Business Development stated that there were measures in place to monitor health and safety issues within the First Contact Centre, but also noted that authorities with similar customer centres had not experienced a rise in violent incidents. Nevertheless, training was vital, and interview rooms would be fitted with panic buttons for safety.

208. **Capability Procedure:**  
(See Recommendation 1 above).

209. **MMR Scrutiny Review:**

The Forum received a report of the Executive Director of Business Development, which included the Scrutiny Review Group's report analysing Phase Two of the Middle Management Review's (MMR) impact on staff. The Executive Director informed the Forum that the report had been fully discussed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, prior to its consideration by Cabinet on 6 April 2006. At the Cabinet meeting, much of the discussion had focused on the lessons to be learned from MMR and how to manage change in the future.

The Branch Secretary of Harrow UNISON expressed the view that MMR had been a "rocky road", but welcomed the report and the decision by Cabinet to implement its

recommendations, which would help alleviate some of the strong concerns felt by UNISON members about the process.

The Leader of the Council paid tribute to both UNISON and the Review Group, who had investigated the issues in painstaking detail, as well as Councillors Dighe and Nolan who had worked hard to engage with UNISON on this matter. The Leader also acknowledged, on behalf of all the Portfolio Holders, the pain and difficulties caused by MMR, and stressed that a mature organisation would learn from the experience.

In response to questions posed by the Forum, the Executive Director noted that MMR had operated according to the same guiding principles throughout the process, and that although there were changes made, these were in response to the first review conducted by Overview and Scrutiny, and did not disadvantage any staff involved.

The Chair of the Forum noted that in order to move forward, continued and strengthened partnership between Members, officers and trade unions was required.

**RESOLVED:** That the above be noted.

210. **Any Other Business:**

Vote of Thanks

The Chair of the Forum thanked UNISON and officers for all their hard work over the course of the past year. This was echoed by all Members of the Forum. The Chair paid tribute to Councillor Toms for his long service to the Council, and UNISON representatives and Members wished the Chair and Councillor Toms well for the future.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 10.00 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR MARIE-LOUISE NOLAN  
Chair