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To The Forum of the ECF

UNISON would like to thank the Forum of the ECF, the Administration and the Councillors for bringing this matter to a conclusion. Also thanks to Officers of the Council in taking this matter seriously.

UNISON request that a written statement is provided stating why the previous participants took so long to resolve the issues and for providing conflicting evidence during the investigation.

This was first brought to UNISON attention in June 2006. Initially meetings were held with Access Harrow Managers to seek a solution however confusion arose as they were unable to resolve the problems and then maintained that we should deal with Facilities Management. There was an impasse between the two departments which caused an undue delay of some months. A meeting was then arranged with the Building Services / Facilities Management and an Access Harrow Manager in July 2006. This meeting proved to be non productive. A Hazard Notice was issued by Unison to the Director responsible for Access Harrow in 25th August 2006. Further meetings then took place on the 22nd August 2006 and 29th August 2006.

On 10th October 2006 a meeting with the Director Environment and Community and a Manager from the lead Consultants was followed by a walk around the project site. Once again UNISON requested and was promised that all relevant documentation relating to the asbestos would be provided; once again there was a failure to supply all the relevant documents to the Unions. A briefing Note by the Manager Building Services/ Facilities Management was presented to the ECF on the 1st November 2006.

A Health & Safety Department Audit Protocol carried out on the Access Harrow project in Jan 2006 was handed to UNISON in Oct 2006. This report was also distributed to Managers in Building Services / Facilities Management, Access Harrow and the Manager Health and Safety Department. The report highlighted anomalies which were not subsequently addressed and it was not given sufficient priority or importance. Facilities Management provided a letter from an Officer which raised various points relating to asbestos issues but did not address the fundamental issue of documentation and control of the asbestos removal process.

The HSE was called in by Unison and GMB and after the investigation a letter was submitted by the Inspector of the HSE saying that insufficient evidence was found to justify further action. To this day we have not been informed how this conclusion came about. We submit that the investigation was flawed possibly in part due to evidence or lack of evidence provided by Council Officers / Managers.

This matter was then reported by UNISON to the Health and Safety Partnership Board in Nov 2006, this was chaired by the Director Environment and Community and in attendance was the Manager Health and Safety Department. Once again it was referred to The Manager Building Services /

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Facilities Management for a resolution by Jan 2007. The Manager held a series of meetings on Mondays in the month of Jan 2007. These meetings were attended by UNISON, another Manager from Building Services /Facilities Management and on occasions the Manager Health and Safety Dpt. Once again the meetings proved to be unsuccessful with a management statement (against Unison objections) that all the issues were concluded. The Chair of the HSPB was then informed by Management that the matter was resolved even after Unison had challenged this arbitrary view in writing. Unison referred the matter back to the ECF on 30 Jan 07 however much time had been lost due to the issues having been incorrectly signed off.

There was additional correspondence between Unison and Council Officers / Managers and a report by an Officer from Health and Safety Dep't. was provided with speculation on possible scenarios as conclusive evidence was not available how the asbestos was removed and subsequently dealt with.

Further meetings were held with Members and Council Officers where no proper evidence was provided that the asbestos removal was undertaken under controlled conditions - according to legislation and Council safety procedures.

Unison was dissatisfied with the lack of information provided and the inability or reluctance of Council Officers / Managers to further the investigation. Unison therefore started its own investigation which found evidence that some of the documentation presented did not relate to the asbestos removed from the Civic Centre.

We still do not know whether the asbestos was removed legally due to a deficiency or lack of managerial control by Council Officers/ Managers, Contractors and Consultants. We maintain that Council Officers / Managers have not been proactive in seeking a quick resolution of these safety problems and have contributed to the delay and confusion. The Council safety regulations have not been followed in the management and control of a major project. We expect that accountability and sufficient resources will be pivotal in future contracts.

We await the written response from Council Officers / Managers explaining the causes of the delay and failure to resolve the safety issues. We are concerned about the costs incurred by the extended investigation and wish to see an estimate of these costs.

The Consultancy with the responsibility for control of the project appeared to take little part in the investigation. Failure to involve the Consultancy initially and more fundamentally in the investigation needs to be explained. Future business relationships with the Consultancy Company or Group should depend on answers received about their duty of care in control of the Access Harrow project.

Since Management have failed to verify that safe asbestos removal has taken place all those who could have been affected during the period of the project should be notified that they are possibly at risk.

Harrow Unison Local Government Branch

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