

EMPLOYEES' CONSULTATIVE FORUM

8 APRIL 2008

- Chairman: * Councillor Mrs Camilla Bath
- Councillors: * David Ashton * Julia Merison (3)
 * Bob Currie * Paul Osborn
 * Graham Henson Navin Shah
- Representatives of HTCC: (Currently no appointees)
- Representatives of UNISON: * Ms L Ahmad * Mr G Martin
 * Ms M Cawley Mr R Thomas
 * Ms A Jackson
- Representative of GMB: * Mr J Dunbar

* Denotes Member present/Employee Representative present
 (3) Denotes category of Reserve Member

[Notes: (1) Ms M Irons also attended the meeting as a representative of Harrow Council Black Workers' Group;

(2) See Appendix 1 for list of officers in attendance.]

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL

PART II - MINUTES

101. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

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

<u>Ordinary Member</u>	<u>Reserve Member</u>
Councillor Chris Mote	Councillor Julia Merison.

102. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note the following declarations of interest made by Members present relating to the business to be transacted at this meeting:

- (i) Councillor Graham Henson declared a personal interest in that he was a member of the Communication Workers' Union and his cousin was a Council employee. Accordingly, he would remain in the room and take part in the discussion and decision-making on all items of the agenda.
- (ii) Councillor Bob Currie declared a personal interest in that he was a retired member of UNISON and his son was a Council employee. Accordingly, he would remain in the room and take part in the discussion and decision-making on all items of the agenda.
- (iii) Councillor David Ashton declared a personal interest in that his daughter-in-law was about to become a Council employee. Accordingly, he would remain in the room and take part in the discussion and decision-making on all items of the agenda.

103. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

RESOLVED: That (1) in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the following 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>
9. 'Absence Matters' Improvement Plan 2008	This report was not available at the time the agenda was printed and circulated, because the Improvement Plan was still the subject of consultation. Members were requested to consider this item, as a matter of urgency, in view of the fact that improving staff attendance was one of the Council's priorities.
10. UNISON Report on Facility Time	This report was not available at the time the agenda was printed and circulated, owing to a change in delegated authority as a result of the union's Annual General Meeting. Members were requested to consider this item, as a matter of urgency, in order to help ensure the health and well-being of all staff.
11. Recognition and Procedural Agreement between Harrow Council and UNISON	This report was not available at the time the agenda was printed and circulated, as it was written in response to UNISON's report (see agenda item 10 above). Members were requested to consider this item, as a matter of urgency, in order to be able to take an informed view on agenda item 10.

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

104. **Minutes:**
RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2008 be confirmed as a correct record and the Chairman be authorised to sign them when they were printed in the Bound Minute Volume.
105. **Petitions:**
RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received at this meeting under the provisions of the Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 14 (Part 4E of the Constitution).
106. **Deputations:**
RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 15 (Part 4E of the Constitution).
107. **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 16 (Part 4E of the Constitution).
108. **Equality Monitoring Report for 1 April 2007 to 30 September 2007:**
The Forum received an information report of the Interim Divisional Director, Human Resources and Development, setting out progress made by the Council in achieving its equality performance targets between 1 April 2007 and 30 September 2007, and progress on other equality work. An officer reported that the Council was consistently successful in attracting applicants from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds. The percentage of appointments of BME applicants was 50%, which was higher than the full-year figure for 2006/07 and close to the Council's target of matching the economically active representation of BME residents in Harrow, currently 51.44%. The proportion of BME applicants short-listed and appointed, however, was lower than the proportion of BME applications received, and the overall success of BME internal applicants was lower than the overall success ratio for all appointments. Officers acknowledged that more work needed to be done to improve performance. They thanked the unions for their comments in response to the report, and apologised for not having answered UNISON's concerns more promptly.

Answering a question from a representative of UNISON about the issue of incomplete paperwork provided by appointment panels, officers informed Members of steps taken

to ensure that records would in future be complete, for example, through the use of a recruitment toolkit launched in September 2007.

In response to a question from the GMB representative about slow progress on the recruitment of disabled people, officers reported that the Council was working closely with Harrow Association of Disabled People (HAD) on training managers, as well as taking all possible practical steps to ensure that staff had every opportunity, both at the point of entry and at later stages during their employment, to be encouraged to declare any disability. Members noted that the Council had retained its "two ticks" status as an employer committed to improving opportunities and its practice regarding disabled people, and that this status needed to be promoted more effectively. An officer reported that the recruitment toolkit would also be one of the ways of ensuring that managers were advised and supported during the process of recruiting disabled people.

Responding to a request from the representative of Harrow Council Black Workers' Group (HCBWG) for facility time during which the group could explore relevant equality issues, the Interim Divisional Director recommended that both HCBWG and the Council's Disability Awareness, Information and Support Group (DAIS) make as much use as possible of the departmental equality task groups, which had been set up precisely to discuss equality issues.

In response to a question from a representative of UNISON, an officer also informed Members that departmental equality task groups and the Corporate Equality Group were the appropriate forums in which to discuss Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs).

RESOLVED: That the Equality Monitoring Report for 1 April 2007 to 30 September 2007 be noted.

109. **'Absence Matters' Improvement Plan 2008:**

The Forum received an information report of the Interim Divisional Director, Human Resources and Development, setting out actions intended to allow the Council better to manage sickness absence and to reduce absence levels.

An officer reported that absence levels had increased in the period since 2003/04, with significant differences between directorates. An improvement plan, on which the unions had been consulted, had been drawn up with a view to providing managers with the tools to reduce overall absence levels and for better management by the Council to manage sickness absence in the context of staff well-being. The plan was based on Harrow's previous experience and the experiences of other organisations.

Asked whether stress had increased as a factor in sickness absence, the officer reported that there was insufficient data on the Council's position on which to draw such a conclusion, although the national picture showed rising levels of stress. In addition, monitoring information from the Council's Occupational Health Service (OHS) indicated that stress was increasing as a reason for referrals. In response to concerns from the unions about the potential for higher levels of staff sickness for those working with ill and vulnerable people and with, it was claimed, the use of unsatisfactory equipment, such as protective clothing, the officer informed Members that managers and health and safety officers needed to deal with these issues. The Interim Divisional Director, Human Resources and Development, reported that the aim of the improvement plan was to improve consistency across the Council in recording data on the causes of absence. Managers' awareness of the support available through the OHS was also being increased. The OHS contract had been reviewed recently and the Health at Work Group had been involved in this.

The officer agreed to a request from a representative of UNISON for union representatives to attend a management induction course and the briefing session for managers on the capability toolkit. The officer also outlined measures being taken in order to communicate information about benefits and well-being to staff who did not have internet access or were based away from the Civic Centre. A Member, speaking in his capacity as Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Business Support Services, undertook to ask the Council's communications team to address this issue.

RESOLVED: That the report and the comments above be noted.

110. **UNISON Report on Facility Time:**

The Forum received a report of UNISON, requesting that facility time, in which elected officers of the union are able to pursue trade union activities, be increased. Representatives of UNISON reported that the time off allowed was insufficient, and that members of staff were sometimes expected to catch up with work after taking time off

for trade union duties. The Interim Divisional Director, Human Resources and Development, explained to the Forum the difference between statutory time off for trade union duties and the non-statutory arrangements for time off for trade union activities, the budget for which had been fixed for the current year. He drew the Forum's attention to the Recognition and Procedural Agreement between Harrow Council and UNISON (Minute 111), and asked to be informed of any instances of employees' having to catch up on work after taking time off for trade union duties. Officers recognised the work that elected trade union officers carried out in a voluntary capacity. A Member, speaking in his capacity as Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Business Support Services, agreed to work towards making the facility time arrangements more flexible, but within the current budget, and proposed that any further changes be considered in time for the next budget round.

RESOLVED: That the report and the comments above be noted.

(See also Minute 111).

111. **Recognition and Procedural Agreement between Harrow Council and UNISON:**
The Forum received an information report of the Interim Divisional Director, Human Resources and Development, setting out information on the provisions for time off for trade union duties and activities agreed under the Council's Recognition and Procedural Agreement with UNISON.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(See also Minute 110).

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.33 pm, closed at 9.00 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR CAMILLA BATH
Chairman

Appendix 1Officers in
attendance:

Jon Turner

Interim Divisional Director, Human
Resources & Development (HRD)

Lesley Clarke

HRD Strategy Manager

Marion Afoakwa

HR Adviser