

EMPLOYEES' CONSULTATIVE FORUM 27 October 2010

EMPLOYEES' SIDE REPORT ON *Early Engagement*

SUMMARY AND DECISION REQUESTED

UNISON and the GMB would wish to raise concerns regarding a clear breach of the early engagement terms of reference and the agreements that both trade unions received from the chair of the Better Deal for Residents forum (BDfR).

UNISON and the GMB are united in their strength of feeling regarding the format of the forum. It is clearly evident from the following report that there is a lack of trust in the Chair of the BDfR forum to correctly engage with the employees' side.

UNISON and the GMB request that the Chair of the BDfR Forum adheres to the principals and agreements of engagement or steps down from the position.

CHRONOLOGY

Sets out the chronology of the issue including when and with whom the item has previously been raised and what the outcomes were at each stage e.g.

DATE	ACTION	OUTCOME
05.07.2010	Meeting Labour Office: Early engagement and meaningful consultation.	Assurances were given to the trade union side of the sharing of relevant information at the outset of projects.
15.07.2010	One Team Meeting: early engagement raised by unison	Issue noted by Samantha Whittick.
21.07.2010	SNT meeting: engagement raised at outset (agenda Item 2)	Issue noted
26.07.2010	BDfR Meeting; Unison raised the issue of the lack of adherence to early engagement.	No agreement was reached

REPORT

It has been stated on numerous occasions that there is a need for early engagement and meaningful consultation to ensure that both the delivery of the required efficiencies are addressed and that the staff are fully informed of the processes.

UNISON / GMB firmly believe that there has been a clear intent to drive through these projects and in turn mislead the aforementioned Trade Union bodies.

We further support this report by stating that the early engagement should occur at the SBC (Strategic Business Case). This is an essential requirement in order to allow the Unions to have full input into all the options that will eventually lead to the OBC (Outline Business Case), whether this document is progressed as a draft copy or not.

The chair of the BDfR forum has again moved the goal posts on early engagement stating that the Unions will only be engaged at the draft OBC stage which seriously disadvantages the unions by the need to constantly request supporting documentation in the 20 day period that is being applied to all projects. It seems that the chair of the forum is unaware of the need to provide genuine consultation which as you will be aware is firstly providing sufficient timely information to enable employees / Trade Unions to make a contribution. The 'Information and Consultation Directive' clearly states that *'Information shall be given at such time in such fashion and with such content to enable representatives to conduct an adequate study and therefore prepare for consultation'* (ACAS). By production of business cases and stating that consultation starts from the date of distribution of the OBC, fails to meet the aforementioned criteria.

There has now been a substantial output of numerous and in-depth projects many of these projects have redundancy implications to the incumbent workforce of Harrow Council. Circumstances which places employment at risk requires a defined period of genuine consultation, not the overload approach adopted by the Chair of the forum. Harrow wishes to be the best council by 2012 yet it fails dismally in respect of ACAS codes of practice for effective consultation this is based on research literature that clearly identify those organisations that engage properly without the need to overload are high performance organisations.

The unions also feel that the Chair of the forum has failed to meet the requirements' of the recognition agreement between UNISON / GMB and Harrow Council. This was clearly evident from the production of the draft OBC Libraries at 4pm on the 26th July 2010 to be informed that there would be a staff consultation meeting on the next day. Failure to inform the unions was admitted by the Chair of the forum. This therefore fails to meet the basic requirements and objectives of the aforementioned agreement.

UNISON and the GMB are united in their strength of feeling regarding the format of the forum. It is clearly evident from the aforementioned report that there is a lack of trust in the Chair of this forum to correctly engage with the employees' side. The position of the Chair conflicts with the commitment of the new Labour Administration and Chief Executive Officer as they have provided verbal assurances to consult both unions fully in early engagement; therefore providing a situation that does not disadvantage the employee's side, but provides an equal footing at the consultation table. This meeting occurred on the 5 July 2010 at 11 am in the Labour Group Office.

Finally, UNISON/GMB wishes to fully engage in meaningful consultation with Harrow Council at a time of great significance that will dramatically alter the face of this Authority. It is essential that the employees' side have full faith in the substantial challenges ahead. If the trade unions are not consulted correctly then the outcome could have catastrophic consequences for employee relations, which is a situation we wish to avoid.

AUTHOR: Harrow UNISON LG Branch: Harrow GMB Branch

CONTACT DETAILS: CONTACT DETAILS:

*Harrow L.G. Branch
The UNISON Office
Central Depot, Forward Drive
Harrow, Middlesex
HA3 8NT
Tel: 020 8424 1795
Fax: 020 8424 1835
Email: info@harrow-unison.org.uk*

*Harrow GMB Branch
Central Depot, Forward Drive
Harrow Middlesex
HA3 8NT
Tel: 020 8424 1086
Email: john.dunbar@harrow-unison.org.uk*