

EMPLOYEES' CONSULTATIVE FORUM (25 January 2011)

EMPLOYEES' SIDE REPORT ON TRADE WASTE (AMENDED 11 JANUARY 2011)

SUMMARY AND DECISION REQUESTED

UNISON & GMB is aghast at the significant loss of Trade Waste contracts in recent years following receipt of a 'Trade Contracts' report provided by the Community & Environment – Waste Service department. The unions are also deeply concerned at the considerable loss of revenue this decline has brought about which impacts on the provision and subsidy of frontline services benefiting the local rate payer and which holistically impacts on our member's employment status. We jointly request that this matter be taken seriously and addressed through an investigation or, as is customary practice of this forum, a peer review. The recognised unions cannot and will not accept a situation that has serious consequences for our frontline staff that have no control over this destructive situation.

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
13/10/10	DJC	Was to request further information in writing.
14/10/10	In depth document from UNISON to Divisional Director of Environmental Services	
19/10/10	Response from Divisional Director of Environmental Services	
20/10/10	UNISON letter to Divisional Director of Environmental Services	
26/10/10	Letter from Divisional Director of Environmental Services to UNISON	Ending debate
29/10/10	Email from Legal & Governance regarding report	
29/10/10	Response from Branch Secretary UNISON, to submit as agreed by ECF forum	
01/11/10	Email from Legal & Governance requesting this matter return to DJC	
01/11/10	Email from UNISON Branch Secretary reminding Democratic Services of the consultation framework.	
02/11/10	Email from HRD, requesting report requires returning to DJC	
02/11/10	Email from UNISON Branch Secretary stating this matter should not be suppressed but should be tabled for debate at ECF.	

REPORT

AUTHOR: Harrow UNISON LG Branch & Harrow GMB Branch

This report has been amended in response to ECF panel members concerns regarding the content of the original report submitted at the Special ECF convened Tuesday 21 December 2010. It was the panel's belief that the original contained defamatory remarks and that the report should not be heard. In response to this, UNISON could not understand why, as in previous reports, the Authority did not ask the author to revise the content and resubmit in time for December ECF. Due to the infrequent nature of ECF and much to the dismay of the recognised unions the Chair could not offer an explanation as to why this did not happen on this occasion. However, the content of the report has now been amended to reflect the panel's perceived concerns but the forum should note that the matter before them this evening has been significantly delayed as a result.

The recognised trade unions are extremely concerned by the constant erosion of the Council's Trade Waste Service and the revenue it provides to support the services of the Local Authority. It is our opinion that this erosion constitutes poor management of the service, displays a gross oversight verging on incompetence within the higher echelons of the Community & Environment Department and hinders the Council in its wider struggle to plug the significant central government funding gap. The probable affects of this reduction in contracts is certain job loss for our members and the removal of vital equipment that enhances the service to its residents. It also increases the possibility of Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme (LATS) fines against Harrow Council if service delivery fails.

The unions calculate that the lost revenue from schools alone equates to approximately £94,000 per annum, which to any business would invoke serious concerns. Yet this loss is allowed to go unchallenged by the custodians of the service i.e. senior officers within the Community & Environment Waste Services department.

The unions do not recognise the figures quoted in Table 1 (page 110) of the Special ECF December 2010 agenda. Analysis shows that these figures present a loss of 281 Trade Waste Contracts since January 2008. These figures simply do not reflect the 'Trade Contracts' report provided to UNISON by the Community & Environment Waste Service department. This presents a huge discrepancy as the 'Trade Contracts' report, which emanates from the same department, indicates the loss of trade contracts to be in the region of three times the number quoted above. The unions also believe that there are now 600 remaining contracts, not 738 as displayed in Table 1. We therefore question the accuracy of the figures and also question why management have only provided information until April 2010 and whether or not data can be provided after this period giving ECF a more accurate picture?

The erosion of trade contracts has serious ramifications on the incumbent workforce, without any reflective impact on the senior officers responsible for service delivery within the Community & Environment Waste Service. The

unions refer ECF to the Council's code of conduct section 2.3, which has been tabled at the Departmental Joint Committee meeting, which states it is every employee's duty to raise concerns regarding the service i.e. the "Duty to report Failure in Service Standards". The unions firmly believe that an investigation is required to not only investigate the discrepancy in figures provided by the Waste Services department but also in the perceived failure to deliver and maintain trade contracts by all concerned.

The Waste department has seen a massive reduction in equipment over a 3 year period i.e. a removal of two refuse trucks and a proposal to reduce even further. There was also a substantial reduction in staff from 123 front line to the now 112. These reductions were undertaken on a unilateral decision which was challenged by UNISON. There was an agreement given by management that no effect on staff or service provision would be seen. As you will see from the aforementioned staffing figures, the agreement was breached by management without justification. UNISON believes this matter displays a back door redundancy exercise to protect those that constantly fail to deliver job security.

Trade waste is a vital source of revenue to the local authority and a tool to maintain control of waste generated by local businesses in the borough; this is also supported by DEFRA's position regarding local authority trade waste services.

We have been provided with a letter from the Divisional Director of Environmental Services which includes comments regarding commercially sensitive information and how it is inappropriate for UNISON to disclose this information to a third external party. Firstly, UNISON has only disclosed the number of contracts lost by the department not the names of the customers therefore no breach of information has occurred. Secondly, as a representative of the Department and of the Council UNISON firmly believes that to focus on this matter is an attempt to deflect attention away from the real issue which is the gargantuan loss of Council revenue through the apparent supervised erosion of waste contracts within Community & Environments Waste Service department. This grave matter should embarrass all senior officers within the Community & Environment Directorate and verges on gross incompetency.

Furthermore, if this situation were replicated in the private sector it would have resulted in removal or reform of the management structure at a senior level. Otherwise there would be a foreclosure of the business by the banking community who would oversee administration of a failed private sector company. In the public sector it would be akin to special measure provisions undertaken by Whitehall.

The supporting documentation attached to this report clearly identifies a desire by the management team to avoid this forum at all costs. Therefore, both unions question their reticence to explain why they feel they are not accountable in respect to the staff they are responsible for. UNISON & GMB also request that this forum considers the trust aspect of this situation when security of employment is in the hands of those responsible for this deplorable situation.

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