

**PRESENT:** Councillors: Taylor (Chair), Adigun-Harris, Bradnack, Hughes,  
C Rosenstiel, Smart  
Liz Brennan (Unison), Kevin Roberts (GMB).

Councillor Liddle, Executive Councillor, Commercial & Human  
Resources (ex officio)

Acting Head of Human Resources, Head of Customer Support, City  
Services.

**1. MINUTES – 11 January 2005**

One amendment was made to the minutes – under Matters arising the first sentence to read (amendments in bold): Councillor Adigun-Harris said he had not yet received ~~a~~ **satisfactory an** answer to the matter he raised at the November meeting. The minutes were then signed as a correct record by the Chair.

**2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

Update on Single Status: Councillor Hughes checked whether all the recent agreements with the Trades Unions had been signed in January/February 2005 as planned and were the other target dates of March and April 2005 going to be met.

The Acting Head of Human Resources said the January/February date had not been met and there was likely to be slippage on the March and April ones. She confirmed that the Head of Human Resources would give revised deadlines on her return from sick leave.

Matters Arising: Councillor Bradnack asked if Councillor Adigun-Harris had yet received a response.

Councillor Adigun-Harris said he had not yet received an answer to the matter he raised at the November meeting and he wanted to explain the important reasons why he wanted the matter to be clarified:

1. When the original statement had been made in June 2004, not one senior councillor nor one officer had challenged it.
2. The minutes were the official record of the meeting and it was important to ensure that they were factual.
3. The minutes should have said that what was said was inaccurate.
4. He was concerned that the reality of BME issues was not being addressed by the City Council.

Councillor Smart acknowledged that one of the problems was people's perception which was a fact but not the same kind of fact as statistics. It was important that the proportion of the workforce drawn from the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population reflected the local Cambridge community.

Councillor C Rosenstiel said that perception was important as well as statistics but the main issue was about how the Council recruits staff rather than how accurate the statistics were.

Councillor Adigun-Harris agreed with this and added that the outreach work mentioned on page 4 of the minutes related to trying to change people's mind-set (not perception).

Councillor Liddle said there was an Action Plan including ways to address how BME groups were recruited to try and address their under-representation in the workforce.

Councillor Hughes referred to the first point made by Councillor Adigun-Harris and said she regretted that she had not spoken up in the previous meeting. She thought the same issues applied to people with disabilities and to women and that it took years to put such imbalances in a workforce to rights. It was important to monitor the figures with diligence and honesty.

### **3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

### **4. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

The following Councillors declared personal interests: Councillor Smart as a member of ATL, Councillors Adigun-Harris and Bradnack as members of NUT, Councillor C Rosenstiel as a member of Amicus and Councillor Hughes as a member of NATFHE.

### **5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

### **6. STAFF ATTITUDE SURVEY FOCUS GROUPS**

The Acting Head of Human Resources introduced the report. Staff Attitude Surveys had been undertaken in 1997, 1999 and 2003. The results of the 2003 survey showed up some areas which required further investigation. BMG Research were commissioned to carry out some Staff Focus groups. The Focus groups covered 3 main themes – Working Conditions, Leadership and Communication. Corporate Management Team had produced an Action Plan to address the results of the research. This would be monitored.

Councillors made the following points about the Action Plan:

#### **General:**

- A glossary of abbreviations used in the Action Plan would have been helpful (Councillor Hughes).
- The themes outlined in the Action Plan should be included in Directors' annual Performance Review (Councillor Bradnack).

#### **Re Item 2 of the Plan: Communicating**

- The Open Sessions with Corporate Management Team needed to be more frequent than every 6 months in order to make a significant difference (Councillor Liddle).
- Astonishment that Directors did not walk the floor, attend team meetings and hold open door sessions in their departments (Councillor Bradnack).
- These actions from Directors were likely to be more effective than the CMT Open Sessions. (Councillors Bradnack and C Rosenstiel).

- Councillors could also be invited to the Open Sessions (Councillor Taylor).
- Staff were welcome to attend councillors' surgeries including those held at the Guildhall on Fridays (Councillor Taylor).

**Re Item 10 of the Plan: Managing**

- Concern that corporate rules and regulations were not being followed by all departments which could create resentment (Councillor Adigun-Harris).
- This could also potentially disadvantage some staff, though it was recognised that corporate culture issues were difficult. This could bring great benefits (Councillor Hughes).
- A suggestion that the item be reworded to make it clearer (Councillor Bradnack).

**Re Items 13 and 14: Accommodation**

- Most members of the Forum acknowledged the problems of old and cramped offices and shortage of kitchen/rest room facilities.
- Should this be part of the Guildhall Working Party's remit? (Councillor Bradnack)
- In the past this would have been part of the Office Accommodation Working Party's remit (Councillor C Rosenstiel).
- Vital not to have a fragmented approach and to include all the Council's buildings in this regard so that there was an overview of the situation (Councillor Hughes).

The Chair suggested that the paper about accommodation being written by the Director of Central Services be brought to the next meeting of the Forum.

The Acting Head of Human Resources undertook to find out whether it was a paper about this particular topic or was part of the Guildhall Working Party's work and to liaise with the Chair about this.

Kevin Roberts (GMB) said the report was a very accurate reflection of what staff felt. Directors walking the floor was very important to staff.

Liz Brennan (Unison) affirmed that issues like workload, change management problems and inequalities between departments were concerns for staff along with concern that councillors did not always support officers and did not fully understand what officers did.

Councillor Bradnack responded to the last point and said he was not sure this issue could be addressed as it might be unavoidable. If councillors were doing their job properly then there would be times when they did not support what officers had proposed.

Councillor Smart agreed and added that if possible any disagreements between officers and councillors should be aired and worked through in private and not in committee meetings.

The Acting Head of Human Resources emphasised that there had been many positive messages in the staff survey and that the points in the Action Plan were to address the not so positive ones.

The Forum noted the Action Plan and asked that the following points be taken back to the Corporate Management Team:

- Item 2: That the actions become part of the Directors' annual performance review.

- Item 10 to be reworded to make it clearer.
- Items 13 and 14: The report from the Director of Central Services to be brought to the next meeting of the Forum if appropriate. The Acting Head of Human Resources will liaise with Chair.

## **7 ORAL UPDATE ON POSSIBLE STRIKE ACTION ON 23 MARCH 2005**

The Acting Head of Human Resources tabled a Briefing Paper about the changes proposed to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) following a review undertaken by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Liz Brennan (Unison) said that, in addition to the changes proposed for 1 April 2005, there were other changes due at a later date and it was not clear at present exactly what those would be. The 1 April 2005 changes were targeted at the Local Government sector and for other public sector workers in 2006. A pre-ballot about the day of action held on 18 February had received support from 82% of Unison members nationally. Currently, a formal ballot about possible strike action on 23 March was being undertaken and the result was expected after the close of the ballot on 9 March. A 'Yes' vote was predicted.

Kevin Roberts (GMB) said that GMB were against the proposals but that it was too late now to act on those scheduled for 1 April 2005. He said that the Government had agreed to hold talks with the unions about any changes proposed for 2006. GMB was not holding a strike ballot.

Councillor C Rosenstiel asked for clarification of the briefing note statement "Ministers have expressed their commitment to retain a defined salary arrangement which is relevant to the local government workforce provided it remains both affordable and sustainable" as this was different to what was being written in the media.

The Acting Head of Human Resources said that was the latest information. The proposal for the National Health Service was to have a career average salary scheme.

Councillor Liddle said that the critical phrase was "affordable and sustainable".

Councillor Adigun-Harris said he could understand why local government staff were wary of believing that local government would continue to be treated differently to other public services.

## **8 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Committee Manager explained that the dates for the municipal year 2005/06 had not yet been set because of the Review of Decision-Making Structures. Members would be consulted about possible dates.

Councillor Liddle requested that a different start time be explored – 6.30pm rather than 4.30pm.

The Forum recognised that whenever the meeting started, there would be some members for whom this was not so convenient.

The meeting ended at 5.56 p.m.

Chair