

JOINT STAFF EMPLOYER FORUM

PRESENT: Councillors: Bradnack (Chair), Dryden, C Rosenstiel, Shah, Smart (Vice Chair), Ward
Liz Brennan (Unison). Kevin Roberts (GMB
Executive Councillor for Customer Services & Resources: Cllr Rod Cantrill.

Jackie Foglietta, Head of Human Resources.
Toni Ainley, Director of City Services
Marian Mair, Organisational Development Manager

1. MINUTES – 8 November 2007

The minutes of the meeting of 8 November 2007 were confirmed as a correct record.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Although it was not strictly matters arising, Jackie Foglietta, Head of Human Resources informed the Forum that the Council had won first prize in EERA's 2007 Workforce Development Awards for our assessment/selection process in respect of the Customer Access Strategy.

In response to a question from the Chair, Jackie Foglietta confirmed that her successor was Deborah Simpson who would join the Council on 14 April 2008 from Aylesbury Vale.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

4. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The following Councillors declared personal interests:
Councillor Bradnack as a member of NUT
Councillors C. Rosenstiel and Dryden as members of Unite (formerly Amicus)
Councillor Ward as his wife is a member of Unite (formerly Amicus)
Councillor Smart as a member of ATL.
Councillor Shah as a member of UCU (University Colleges Union)

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

6. ANALYSIS OF NON-APPLICATIONS TO CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE

Jackie Foglietta, Head of Human Resources, said that the majority of non-applicants were based in Parking Services where staff might have thought

there were other options available for that section in the foreseeable future. The other main group of non-applicants are currently employed at City Homes North and it was felt the location and lack of parking at the new Customer Service Centre may have contributed to this group's decision.

Councillor Smart questioned whether this was the real reason with regard to City Homes North.

Jackie Foglietta said that it would have been helpful to have been able to give more precise information about the shift patterns at the time staff were considering their options, but that had not been possible.

The Chair said that pressure needed to be put on transport providers to provide excellent services. Councillor Cantrill acknowledged that getting to work by public transport was a problem for city centre workers generally.

7 UNISON REPORT TO JOINT STAFF EMPLOYER FORUM RE RECRUITMENT TO CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE

The Chair asked Liz Brennan (Unison) if she was happy with the way the Council had responded to the input from the Unions on Customer Access issues.

Liz Brennan said that she was concerned about how communication of the Award announced earlier in the meeting would be handled as there were still sensitive issues around recruitment and development opportunities for staff not yet directly affected by Customer Access.

Jackie Foglietta said that there would continue to be support provided to staff whose jobs were affected through "back-office" restructures, and that this support would be over and above that normally provided through the Council's Organisational Change Procedure, even though it would not be as intensive a process as that undergone for the initial phase of recruitment to the Customer Service Centre.

Councillor Ward raised health and safety concerns in relation to hot desk working (e.g. people needing desk chairs at different heights).

Jackie Foglietta said that the Head of Customer Service would be working with staff to address such issues.

Councillor Cantrill said that he thought the working conditions would be better than those people were currently used to.

8 HEADLINE RESULTS AND ACTIONS FROM STAFF SURVEY

Marian Mair, Organisational Development Manager, reported that the survey showed that the Council was well above the norms for Local Authorities in the items that could be compared. In addition, comparisons with the top 10 employers including the private sector were also very favourable. Some of the responses clearly showed the impact of the re-structuring. While the Council could feel

rightly pleased, it was still important to focus on those areas where improvement was needed.

Marian Mair acknowledged that the questions concerning staff experiences of discrimination showed that of those who had reported problems many were dissatisfied with the outcome. So there was considerable work to be done in this area.

The main additional areas to focus on were management development (staff perception of managers was less good than in 2003); the need to ensure that personal developments plans were prepared as part of the Appraisal process; the fact that staff were looking for more opportunities to work sustainably and more opportunities for flexible working.

An Action Plan would be put in place which would be monitored by the Corporate Management Team.

Members of the Forum commented as follows:

Kevin Roberts (GMB) said that there was a huge range in the severity of the discrimination/bullying incidents reported and that it would have been helpful to have been able to distinguish these more.

Councillor Bradnack asked if it would be possible to determine in which departments bullying occurred.

Liz Brennan (Unison) was pleased that the Dignity at Work policy was to be re-drafted.

Marian Mair said that discrimination, harassment and bullying were always a matter of individual perception and all incidences had to be addressed. She said she would investigate whether it was possible to break down the analysis further if that were wished.

The Chair highlighted the 22% who were dissatisfied with job security and Jackie Fogletta, the Head of Human Resources, confirmed that this figure was affected by the changes due to customer access. The Chair also said that the 18% who were dissatisfied with the opportunity to show initiative was notable in a council rated as excellent.

Marian Mair said that this had been noted and more work needed to be done with managers.

The Chair was interested that more staff preferred to be informed about the Council through a departmental newsletter than those who currently received most of their information via that medium.

Marian Mair said that this had been noted at Departmental Teams for action.

The Chair noted that the majority of statements about line managers on pages 32 and 33 of the agenda were less than the scores in 2003 and wondered what explained this. Marian Mair said this was likely to be due to uncertainty and also that staff expectations were higher.

Councillor Ward said that it was important to have refresher training for managers and Councillor Cantrill said that there were issues around succession amongst middle managers.

The Chair highlighted that 54% of respondents said they had been refused training due to it being too expensive or not enough in the budget.

Marian Mair said that there were a lot of requests for training and so the council could not meet them all in any given year. But there was the option to defer to the next year.

In response to two questions from Councillor Shah, officers said that there was a need for one corporate communication source and City Scene had been given to the corporate marketing team to progress this. There was a new policy being put in place to provide more facilities for staff to be able to work even more flexibly. The capital funding would come via the ICT Steering Group and a revenue budget of £21,000 per year was required. Compressed work schedules such as a 9-day fortnight were already in place and this could be promoted more to staff.

Councillor Ward noted that 7% of staff thought they could do more work in the time available and wondered whether there was more scope for equalising work loads.

The Chair asked what was being done to reduce the figure of 48% of staff travelling to work on their own in their cars. Jackie Foglietta said that was a key issue it was hoped would be addressed by the new Employee Travel Plan, to be launched on 29 February.

The meeting agreed to Councillor Smart's request that the Action Plan come to the next meeting.

The meeting ended at 5.45p.m.

Chair