

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Employment Committee
Date: 9th March 2015
Report for: Information
Report of: Acting Director of HR

Report Title

Review of Corporate Trade Union Facilities Agreement - Update

Summary

This report provides an update on the review of the corporate trade union facilities agreement, specifically in relation to the number of full-time convenors.

The number of staff working for the Council has reduced in recent years; however, the associated trade union facilities arrangements and budgets have not been reviewed to reflect these staffing reductions.

In light of the on-going Reshaping Trafford programme and the financial challenges being faced, it is important that facility arrangements are reviewed; the purpose of this review is to ensure that arrangements are fit for purpose, providing the Council with an effective employee relations framework, which is also proportionate to the number of members represented.

Recommendations

That the content of this report is noted.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

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Background Papers: Trade Union Facilities Agreement

Relationship to Policy Framework/Corporate Priorities	These proposals align with the council's Corporate Priorities in respect to 'Low Council Tax and Value for Money' and 'Reshaping Trafford Council'.
Financial	This review will ultimately generate savings against the current budget that is allocated to

	trade union staffing costs
Legal Implications:	The revised agreement will be compliant with the legal requirements relating to trade union recognition.
Equality/Diversity Implications	An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken in line with the Equality Framework
Sustainability Implications	None
Staffing/E-Government/Asset Management Implications	There may be an impact on the trade union's responsiveness to staff requests if the number of full-time convenors is reduced; however, any reduction would be mindful of the timing in relation to transformation and consultation activity.
Risk Management Implications	The reduction in facility arrangements may impact on the timeliness of employment processes.
Health & Wellbeing Implications	As above, if there is reduced responsiveness from the trade union, this could impact on staff health and wellbeing; support is available; however, via health management procedures.
Health and Safety Implications	None

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The existing Trade Union Facilities Agreement essentially provides for the following arrangement:

“A total of two full time secondments are currently provided to Unison. The number of secondments will be periodically reviewed based on union membership numbers within the Council. Corporate funding for seconded positions will be up to the maximum of Band 9 (spinal column point 42). The appropriate Trade Union will meet any additional salary costs.”

- 1.2 This corporate arrangement has been in place for a number of years and has not been subject to a review.
- 1.3 The Facilities Agreement for Teaching Unions; however, was reviewed in 2013 and this arrangement is now reviewed on an annual basis, at the end of each academic year. The review essentially assesses the de-delegated budget allocation from schools against the membership numbers for each recognised teaching union and facility time is then proportionately shared between the trade unions.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The current corporate trade union facilities arrangement has worked well in recent years and Trafford Council is proud of the good relationships that exist with its recognised trade unions.

- 2.2 With the significant budget pressures that the Council has faced in recent years, services have been rationalised, which has resulted in a significant reduction in staffing numbers. In 2010, the workforce headcount was 3700; this has reduced to 2945 as at January 2015 and, over the coming financial year, this will reduce further. The current anticipated headcount reduction linked to the 2015/16 budget proposals is in the region of 200 staff, with a further 270 staff aligned to the JVC. This is likely to mean that over the next 12 months, staffing numbers could reduce to an estimated 2500. This represents a workforce reduction of over 30% over a five year period.
- 2.3 During the same period, the number of full-time trade union convenors has remained constant i.e. two full-time equivalent posts.
- 2.3 In light of these significant changes to the workforce, a decision was taken at the end of September 2014 to review the facilities arrangements.

3. UPDATE ON REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS

- 3.1 A number of meetings have been held between Council officers and regional and local Unison representatives, who were also acting for the GMB trade union.
- 3.2 At these meetings, the parties recognised the need for a review and recognised that trade union membership had reduced proportionate to the overall staff reductions. Discussions also took place about how wider savings could be achieved such as savings on Unison office accommodation as well as how third parties might be approached to contribute to the facilities budget; for example, this could include organisations such as schools, academies, Trafford Housing Trust, etc. who currently benefit from Trafford's Facilities Agreement but do not make any financial contribution to support it.
- 3.2 In addition to the meetings, a benchmarking exercise has recently been undertaken to look at facilities arrangements across other local authorities. This exercise highlighted that there is no standard approach to how facility time is calculated, with the majority of authorities responding that their arrangement is out-dated and in need of a fundamental review. Only two authorities stated that they have a specific basis for allocating facility time and this was essentially allocating one full-time convenor per 1000 union members.
- 3.4 This benchmarking exercise was also reflective of the legal position, whereby ACAS provides a Code of Practice on Time off for Trade Union Duties and Activities but does not prescribe any ratios that should be used to calculate such time. The general rule is that it should be reasonable and flexible and be

dependent upon specific activity that is being undertaken within an organisation at any one point in time.

- 3.5 In terms of membership numbers, Unison confirmed that as at the end of 2014, their total Trafford Council membership (schools and non-schools) was in the region of 1700; this figure requires a further breakdown; however, if a more comprehensive assessment is to be undertaken in relation to seeking support from third party organisations. In this respect, Unison has agreed to provide this breakdown and once it is received, this assessment can be conducted.

4. CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The Council has recently concluded a second period of collective consultation within a four month period. This activity comprised fortnightly corporate meetings with management and trade union officials as well as local consultation at a team and individual level, affecting over 500 staff and resulting in around 200 redundancies. This activity has significantly increased the activity of trade union officials, who have been called upon to provide direct support to their members in affected areas.
- 4.2 Furthermore, the Council will shortly make an announcement about whether or not the proposed Joint Venture Contract will be awarded to a preferred bidder; should this proceed, then there will be a period of significant trade union activity to support a three-month mobilisation period between April – June 2015.
- 4.3 Given the on-going review that is being undertaken and the increase in demand on trade union officials during this peak of activity, the number of full-time officials remains at two and it is anticipated that this will remain the position until at least the end of June.
- 4.4 That said, given the change in personnel undertaking these roles, there has been a small in-year budget saving as the current staff who are seconded into the role of convenor are seconded on an overall rate of pay, which is lower than the previous incumbents.

5. TIMELINE

- 5.1 It is estimated that the assessment of membership numbers and other potential savings options will be concluded no later than the end of April 2015 and the levels of employee relations activity that is being undertaken will continue to be monitored, with the new arrangements put in place once there is greater level of stability.

5.2 An update on progress will be communicated to the Employment Committee at its next meeting.

6. RECOMMENDATION

Employment Committee is recommended to note the content of this report.