

Item No. 9.6	Classification: Open	Date: March 28 2007	Meeting Name: Council assembly
Report title:		Motion 6 – Comment from officers	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Director of Legal and Democratic Services	

6. MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR AUBYN GRAHAM (Seconded By Councillor Tayo Situ)

Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Staff

Council assembly note the concerns of BME staff about issues of unfair treatment and discrimination, often brought to the attention of members through their day-to-day links with the BME communities.

Council assembly asks the executive to investigate and report back to council assembly on any formal and or informal reports of unfair treatment of BME staff in the past 18 months, department by department, and the outcome of any action by management to improve this situation, and support to BME staff in promotion and personal development.

Comments from the Strategic Director (Corporate and Customer Services)

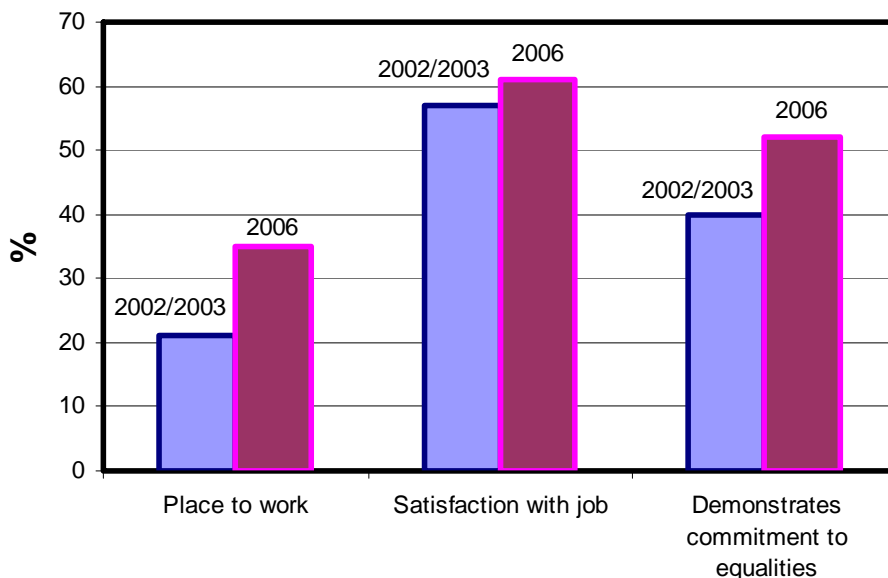
It is important to put into context the opening statement.

Following the Lord Ouseley report (2005) the Member working group explicitly considered findings surrounding employee treatment and implemented an approved action plan to resolve these issues. These actions included close monitoring of disciplinary action at a corporate level to ensure fair treatment.

Annually, the Council compiles and publishes a range of employee statistics covering disciplinaries, grievances (including harassment); these have indicated positive improvement rather than any trends indicating maltreatment.

The Council uses Mori to reliably survey staff every 18 months to 2 years. The recent survey (Oct 2006) showed improved performance across the board in staff perceptions, and notably in areas of equality and diversity. The results in the table below show an increase in the number of BME staff rating Southwark Council as an better or one of the best places to work compared with other organisations; an increase in overall satisfaction among BME staff and; an increase in BME staff who believe that that Southwark Council has improved on equality and diversity in the last 12 months.

Staff Survey - BME Responses



Questions

On the question of fair treatment (discrimination/harassment) the vast majority of staff do not doubt the Council's sincerity in tackling such issues, although a minority remain sceptical of the process. The Council's has continuous dialogue with both the Trade Unions and the BME staff consultative groups on how to improve policy and process, thus increasing confidence and perception.

On the issue of Career Development of BME staff, again this an area where clear improvement has been shown. Through significant dialogue between management and the BME staff consultative group, a successful careers event some 18 months ago, has been followed up by the investment in the fastforward@southwark programme (fast track development for potential managers of the future) and the careers week last October. Current discussions are underway on how the BME staff consultative group may further assist in programmes going forward and how further initiatives may continue to improve opportunities.

The current equality impact assessment for HR and Organisational Development has identified the importance or renewed emphasis on improving treatment (timescales, independence, fairness) in cases of grievance or harassment allegations. Work has begun to improve the processes, for example more universal use of independent mediation. In truth, there are few cases experienced across the Council each year but in practice they are often protracted and rarely have happy outcomes; we need to inspire a culture whereby these cases are handled swiftly and sensitively, and where conflict resolution is at the forefront.

This is not an area where the Council is complacent. Good quality management and leadership development will be crucial to a positive culture change and important steps are being taken to concentrate effort and

resources have been realigned accordingly. It is also noteworthy that the Chief Executive has personally intervened to unblock issues where resolution has become intransigent; this signals an important change in leadership culture from the top of the organisation.

Members should bring issues of discrimination or unfair treatment among staff to the attention of either Bernard Nawrat, the head of Human Resources, or Deborah Collins, the Strategic Director of Legal and Democratic Services under the whistle blowing procedures.

Note: If the motion is agreed, any proposals will be submitted to the executive for consideration.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Member Motions	Town Hall Peckham Road London SE5 8UB	Constitutional Team 020 7525 7228

Lead Officer	Ian Millichap, Constitutional Team Manager
Report Author	Cameron MacLean, Constitutional Officer
Version	Final
Dated	28/03/07