

Public Services Forum
19th Meeting: 11 November 2009
9.30am – 10.45am, Cabinet Office

The meeting was chaired by Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP, Minister for the Cabinet Office.

1. Chair's welcome and introductory remarks

1.1. The Chair welcomed attendees to the forum. She congratulated the Cabinet Office's Deputy Director, Public Services Workforce, on being made a CBE in the Queen's birthday honours and on her investiture on the 5 November.

2. Improving public services through innovation

2.1. The Cabinet Office's Public Services Unit gave a presentation on how spreading innovation can improve public services. It set out that in the future, enabling the spread of innovation will be a key driver of public services reform and that the workforce will be central to this.

2.2. One approach the government is taking is in setting up the Innovators Council, but the next step is to listen to the front line's experience to identify the barriers to the spread of innovation and how to overcome them. Trade unions and employers were therefore asked for their views on what freedoms and flexibilities staff need in order to spread their innovative practice.

2.3. Trade unions welcomed the offer of further dialogue on this subject and asked that the work acknowledges the improvements that have already been made, and the contribution that non-front line staff can make.

2.4. The forum agreed that work on innovation, involving both the trade unions and employer organisations, would take place between now and the next meeting, and that specific proposals should be discussed at the next meeting.

3. Equality and Diversity Task Group

3.1. The co-chair of the Equality and Diversity Task Group updated the forum on its work. The group has published a guide on best practice in implementing and complying with the Public Sector Equality Duties, which was circulated to attendees.

3.2. The chair asked for the forum's help in ensuring the report gets the widest possible audience and suggested that a more formal launch at a later date would help to achieve this.

3.3. The forum recognised that embedding the equality and diversity agenda is even more important in the current economic climate.

4. Public service workforce reform and the current economic climate
 - 4.1. The chair introduced the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and Minister for Public Services Reform who joined the forum for this item. The chair summarised the context of this item: the economic downturn, and the growing pressure on public services.
 - a) Overview
 - 4.2. The Chief Secretary stated that there are reasons for optimism in looking towards economic recovery including a good starting platform of employment levels and positive relationships between public services and local society. The front line public service workforce is itself a strength, with higher numbers than ever and more capacity for innovation.
 - 4.3. There are also challenges, and discussions about pay in particular will be difficult over the next few years.
 - 4.4. Trade unions responded that although they are conscious of the pressures on the economy, cuts in public expenditure may damage public services and the economy. They were keen that public sector organisations did not make cuts in anticipation of tough times ahead and observed that although inflation is currently low there may be issues with pay levels when it begins to rise again.
 - 4.5. Public sector employers stated that there are already cost pressures on public services. They reiterated the value of defending public sector pensions which could be seen as part of the total reward package.
 - a) Principles of good employment practice
 - 4.6. The TUC introduced its paper setting out some core principles of good practice for how employers could support the workforce during a recession. Public sector employers agreed with the approach and stated the importance of including actions and responsibilities from both the staff side and employer side.
 - 4.7. The forum agreed that a small group, co-chaired by a trade union representative and an employer representative, would take forward work to agree a set of principles between now and the next PSF meeting in January.
5. Any other business
 - 5.1. Trade unions asked if time could be dedicated to discussing the implications of the Pre-Budget Report in the next meeting.
 - 5.2. On the roll-out of the Joint Statement, Local Government Employers informed the forum that there are meetings set up designed to encourage the roll-out of the Joint Statement across the local government sector. The Department of Health added that there was

also some progress with taking this forward within the NHS and that discussions were ongoing.

5.3. HM Treasury asked that the sub-group taking forward work on principles of good employment practice should have clear and agreed terms of reference to frame its work.

The following organisations were represented at the meeting:

Chair

Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP, Minister for the Cabinet Office

In attendance:

Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury (recession item only)

Government and employers

Cabinet Office

HM Treasury

Number 10

Department for Communities and Local Government

Department of Health

Local Government Employers

London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

NHS Employers

Trade unions

Association of Teachers and Lecturers

National Union of Teachers

Prospect

Society of Radiographers

Trades Union Congress

UNISON

Unite

Apologies

Department for Children, Schools and Families

National Offender Management Service

GMB

FDA

NASUWT

Public and Commercial Services Union

University and College Union