

scrumptious ('skrʌmpʃəs) *adj.* *Inf.* very pleasing; delicious
— 'scrumptiously *adv.*

scrumpy ('skrʌmpɪ) *n.* a rough dry cider, brewed esp. in the West Country of England.

scrunch ('skrʌntʃ) *vb.* 1. to crumple or crunch or to be crumpled or crunched. —*n.* 2. the act or sound of scrunching.

scruple ('skrʌ:pəl) *n.* 1. a doubt or hesitation as to what is morally right in a certain situation. 2. *Arch.* a very small amount. 3. a unit of weight equal to 20 grains (1.296 grams). —*vb.* 4. (*obs.* when *tr.*) to have doubts (about), esp. from a moral compunction.

scrupulous ('skrʌ:pjʊləs) *adj.* 1. characterized by careful observation of what is morally right. 2. very careful or precise. — 'scrupulously *adv.* — 'scrupulousness *n.*

scrutinise or -nize ('skrʌti:naɪz) *vb.* (*tr.*) to examine carefully or in minute detail. — 'scruti:niser or -nizer *n.*

scrutiny ('skrʌ:ti:ni) *n.* 1. close or minute examination. 2. a searching look. 3. official examination of votes [from Latin *scrūtiniūm* and *scrūtārī* to search even to the rags, from *scrūta*, rags, trash.]

scuba ('skju:bə) *n.* an apparatus used in scindiving, consisting of a cylinder or cylinders containing compressed air attached to a breathing apparatus.

scud (skʌd) *vb.* **scudding, scudded.** (*intr.*) 1. (esp. of clouds) to move along swiftly and smoothly. 2. *Naut.* to run before a gale. —*n.* 3. the act of scudding. 4. a. a formation of low ragged clouds driven by a strong wind beneath rain-bearing clouds. b. a sudden shower or gust of wind.

scuff (skʌf) *vb.* 1. to drag (the feet) while walking. 2. to scratch (a surface) or (of a surface) to become scratched. 3. (*tr.*) *U.S.* to poke at (something) with the foot. —*n.* 4. the act or sound of scuffing. 5. a rubbed place caused by scuffing. 6. a backless slipper.

scuffle ('skʌfl) *vb.* (*intr.*) 1. to fight in a disorderly manner. 2. to move by shuffling. —*n.* 3. a disorderly fight. 4. the sound made by scuffling.

scull (skʌl) *n.* 1. a single oar moved from the stern of a boat to propel it. 2. one of a pair of double handed oars, both of which are pulled by the same person. 3. a racing shell propelled by a single oar. 4. an act, instance, period, or distance of rowing with oars. 5. to propel (a boat) with a scull. — 'sculled *adj.*

scullery ('skʌləri) *n., pl. -eries.* *Chiefly Brit.* a small part of a kitchen where kitchen utensils are kept.

scoundrel ('skʌndl) *n.* 1. a mean or despicable person. 2. a person employed to work in a kitchen.

sculpt ('skʌlp) *vb.* 1. variant of sculpture. 2. to carve. — 'sculpted *adj.*

sculptress ('skʌlpres) *n.* (*em.*) sculptress *n.*

sculpture ('skʌljʊə) *n.* 1. the art of making a three-dimensional work and by carving or modelling. 2. a work of art, esp. a statue, etc. 3. work of sculpture. 4. a representation.

by natural processes. —*vb.* (*mainly tr.*) 4. (*also intr.*) to carve, cast, or fashion (stone, bronze etc) three-dimensionally. 5. to portray (a person, etc.) by means of sculpture. 6. to form in the manner of sculpture. 7. to decorate with sculpture. — 'sculptural *adj.*

scumble ('skʌmbəl) *vb.* 1. (in painting and drawing) to soften or blend (an outline or colour) with an upper coat of opaque colour, applied very thinly. 2. to produce an effect of broken colour on doors, panelling, etc. by exposing coats of paint below the top coat. —*n.* 3. the upper layer of colour applied in this way.

scunner ('skʌnə) *Dialect, chiefly Scot.* —*vb.* 1. (*intr.*) to feel aversion. 2. (*tr.*) to produce a feeling of aversion in. —*n.* 3. a strong aversion (often in *take a scunner*). 4. an object of dislike.

scupper ('skʌpə) *n.* *Naut.* a drain or spout allowing water on the deck of a vessel to flow overboard.

scupper ('skʌpə) *vb.* (*tr.*) *Brit. id.* to overwhelm, ruin, or disable.

scurry ('skʌri) *vb.* -rying, -ried. 1. to move about hurriedly. 2. (*intr.*) to whirl about. *n., pl. -ries.* 3. the act or sound of scurrying. 4. a light, quick whirling movement, as of snow.

scut (skʌt) *n.* a small animal such as the deer or rabbit.

scuttle ('skʌtl) *vb.* -tling, -tled. 1. to scurry. 2. *Dialect chiefly Brit.* to scurry. 3. to move quickly. 4. to run or move at a hurried pace or to cause to do so. 5. to cause to scurry.

Human Resources Strategies Member Review Group - Final Report

TG No.

June 2007

If you would like additional copies of the report or further information, please contact:

Scrutiny
LB Richmond upon Thames
York House
Richmond Road
Twickenham
Middlesex TW1 3AA
T: 020 8891 7191
F: 020 8891 7701
E: scrutiny@richmond.gov.uk
W: www.richmond.gov.uk/scrutiny



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FOREWORD

As Chair of the Finance and Strategy Overview and Scrutiny Committee, I welcome this report on Human Resources Strategies.

Employees are the backbone of every organisation and it is therefore important that they are offered the best possible support. The Member Review Group heard a significant amount of evidence and, as a result, has highlighted some areas where a different approach could be considered. It has also made some suggestions in this regard.

I would like to thank members of this review group for their efforts in undertaking this work.

Councillor Geoffrey Samuel
Chair of the Finance and Strategy O&S Committee





INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to introduce this report, which presents the findings and recommendations of what has proved to be an interesting scrutiny review. We began this review because we feel strongly that our staff will only be able to provide excellent services if we have the right Human Resources policies in place to support them, which is already true in the majority of cases. This review has been limited in scope, but outlined below are findings and recommendations that the Review Group feels address the areas that we believe could be strengthened.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the work of this Review Group for the commitment, effort and expertise that we have been offered. I am particularly grateful to the two other authorities, as well as senior management and union representatives at Richmond Council, for giving up their time to meet us and share their experience and knowledge. I would also like to thank Alastair Round from Democratic Services for the support he has offered.

Cllr Brian Miller

Chair of the Human Resources Strategies Scrutiny Task Group



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Review Group set out to examine employees' concerns/grievances and internal communications. Having heard evidence from the various parties and having visited other local authorities, the Review Group came to the conclusions set out below.

EMPLOYEE CONCERNS/GRIEVANCES

2. The Review Group felt that a central point of contact within Human Resources might encourage employees to discuss grievances they might not raise at present and would be able to offer employees informal advice. The Group felt that the current HR advice line could fulfil this function, but thought that it or a future central point of contact needed to be publicised better than it was currently. The Group thought that employees should be encouraged to speak to this contact point before embarking on a formal grievance. (**Recommendations 1 a, b and c – page 7**).

MEDIATION

3. The Review Group believed that a peer mediation system could assist employees and managers to settle grievances without resorting to the somewhat daunting prospect of a formal complaint. (**Recommendation 2 – page 8**).

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

4. The Review Group identified concerns that staff did not feel listened to and that responses to feedback had not been forthcoming. It felt that a system needed to be put in place to ensure more junior employees' views were fed through to senior management and responses were sent back, so that more junior staff saw this happening. (**Recommendation 3 – page 9**).
5. The Review Group identified concerns that there was a "leadership deficit" across the organisation, particularly concerning middle managers, which could lead to patchy performance in putting messages across to employees. The Review



Group thought that the Executive needed a strategy to combat these concerns.
(**Recommendation 4 – page 9**).

PART I – ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE TASK GROUP

BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW GROUP

6. The Finance and Strategy Overview and Scrutiny Committee decided to make Human Resources Strategies a priority topic for the 2006/2007 Municipal Year and established the Task Group at its meeting on 31 October 2006. The Group established the following terms of reference:
 - i) To examine communications between management and employees, specifically relating to: consultations with staff; change management; the manner in which information is disseminated; and employment conditions.
 - ii) To review grievance procedures and mediation.
7. The Review Group accepted at the end of the review process that it had in fact undertaken a more general review of communications than was outlined in the first term of reference.

REVIEW GROUP MEMBERSHIP



Cllr Brian
Miller
(Chair)



Cllr Ray Ball



Barrie Hatch
(Co-opted
Member)



METHODOLOGY

8. The Review Group held meetings with staff and union representatives at Richmond Council as well as with senior managers at two other Local Authorities. One authority was chosen because it was a comparable size; the other was chosen because it was known to take a different approach to Richmond. The Review Group also reviewed and compared procedures at Richmond and the two other authorities.

PART II – FINDINGS

A. EMPLOYEE CONCERNS/GRIEVANCES

9. Grievance procedure at Richmond is handled through the line management structure. The grievance procedure states that initially, employees should discuss their concerns informally with their manager before make a formal complaint. In cases where an employee wishes to raise a matter involving the actions of their immediate manager, this is to be raised with the next level of management. Informal meetings may be held to discuss the concerns and a mediator may be involved. Formal grievances are also to be made and investigated via the line management structure.
10. The Review Group heard the view that there were a number of employees at the Council with significant concerns who had not used the formal grievance procedure. There were 18 formal grievances at Richmond in the 2005/2006 Municipal Year out of a staff base of approximately 5,000.
11. The Review Group felt that the process could be intimidating for staff, and might dissuade them from airing their concerns. This could partly explain the perception that there are more staff with concerns than have used the formal procedure.
12. One of the other local authorities had a central team within Human Resources (HR), through which all grievances were processed. This team also offered advice to staff about grievances. It had been widely publicised within the organisation and staff saw it as their first point of contact. Its statistics showed that a significant number of employees had held informal discussions with the



team but that only a small number went on to use the grievance procedure. It had significantly fewer formal proceedings (only five formal grievances and five mediation cases in the first year of this team) than Richmond. The authority stated that it had previously handled grievances via line management but had adopted a central approach, because there had been a perception amongst staff that management “closed ranks”.

13. The Review Group was impressed by the idea of a central point of contact within HR for employees’ concerns. It felt that this would give the area a higher profile and could encourage more staff to air and resolve concerns that they might not otherwise raise. There are potential benefits for both staff and the organisation in having a contact with experience of handling employee concerns and of the Grievance procedure. Having a central contact point would also enable the Council to record corporately the number of staff members it has spoken to about their concerns, giving it a greater understanding of employee relations across the organisation. By suggesting that all staff considering a formal grievance speak to this HR contact, the Council can go some way to ensuring that all staff have received appropriate advice and fully understand the Grievance procedure before embarking on it. This could include a discussion about the possibility of using mediation first.
14. The Review Group notes that a Human Resources Advice Line already exists, which could provide this advice. The Task Group feels that there is a real need to ensure that the advice service is well publicised so that all staff know that the service is available.

Recommendation 1a: That a central point of contact be established within HR, which would discuss employees’ concerns and offer them informal advice.

Recommendation 1b: That a programme to improve awareness of the HR Advice Line/future central contact point be implemented.

Recommendation 1c: That all staff considering submitting a formal grievance be encouraged to speak to the above contact point before doing so.



B. MEDIATION

15. Mediation is available in Richmond but currently has a relatively low profile. The use of mediation is suggested as a possible step to consider before formal grievance procedures are instigated. The Review Group was told that although HR often recommended its use, parties tended to reject it.
16. One of the other authorities had a system of peer mediation. Nine volunteers from across the organisation and at varying levels of seniority were trained as mediators. They handled mediation cases in pairs and the Review Group was told it was very rare for a mediator to handle more than two cases in a year. The authority stated that whilst unions had initially been sceptical, the system was now very well received and union representatives often recommended its use to their members.
17. The Review Group could see benefits in adopting a peer mediation system. Peer mediators would be able to view the issues from a fresh and impartial standpoint and could assist employees and managers to settle grievances without resorting to a formal complaint. Peer mediators will have knowledge of the general issues affecting the organisation and could receive an in-depth knowledge of the organisation's procedures. Becoming a mediator would be an excellent development opportunity for staff and after the initial cost of training, peer mediation would probably be cheaper than hiring externally or holding a formal grievance investigation.

Recommendation 2: *That a peer mediation system, to be provided by trained volunteers with varying levels of seniority across the organisation, is established.*

C. INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

18. Internal Communications within Richmond Council are the responsibility of the Communications Team, delivered as part of the contract with Westminster Council. This differed from the other two organisations, which both gave responsibility for communications to HR.
19. The Review Group heard that the Communications team use a number of "supporting documents" to communicate with employees, such as a quarterly staff newspaper called "Out of the RuT", global e-mails in accordance with



protocols, the intranet (RIO) and a weekly bulletin to senior managers outlining key corporate issues (the LOOP). The Group also saw a very impressive induction video, which gave new starters a flavour of the area, its priorities and the issues affecting it.

20. The Group acknowledged that strong leadership across the organisation was of paramount importance for effectively communicating messages to staff. However, they heard that there were some concerns within the Council about the way in which individual managers engaged with staff, and that a perceived “leadership deficit” in some areas could lead to patchy performance in putting messages across to employees. Engaging with some middle managers was viewed as particularly problematic. The Group heard separate evidence that some managers in Richmond still viewed their role as managing the task, rather than managing people as well, and that this attitude was being challenged as part of a culture change programme being carried out across the organisation.
21. One of the other authorities reported similar concerns about middle managers providing a block to communication. It tried to tackle this by holding weekly middle manager briefings, which small groups of middle managers would attend. There was a different theme to these every month. It was HR’s responsibility to ensure that all managers undertook proper communication and consultation.
22. The last staff survey at Richmond in 2005 showed that only 17% of staff felt the Executive Board was aware of how employees were feeling. This was a concerning result for the organisation and suggested that the way employees’ views were fed through to the management structure needed improvement, with particular focus on ensuring that more junior staff saw this taking place. However, in response to this point, the Group heard evidence that: the culture change workshops and schemes such as work shadowing might help improve this view; the Chief Executive had a programme of visits to meet staff across the organisation; and that the question itself might also be flawed, or at least misleading, because most employees would have so little to do with the Executive Board in the normal course of their day-to-day jobs. Notwithstanding this evidence, the Group noted that the figure for Richmond was 10% below benchmark figures, and therefore felt that the response amounted to a poor perception rating in the 2005 staff survey.



23. The Group heard the view that staff did not feel listened to and that responses to feedback had not been forthcoming. Both of the other authorities stress the importance of holding team meetings. They both stated that communication needed to be two-way and as such had systems in place for more junior employees' views to be fed through to senior management at team meetings. Whilst team meetings are held in Richmond, it seemed to the Group that these occurred in different formats and frequencies and that there was not the same focus on two-way communication.
24. The Group believes a similar two-way system of team meetings should be used at Richmond. It also feels that everyone who expresses an opinion deserves to receive a response. This shows employees that senior managers are aware of their concerns and have given consideration to how to resolve them.

Recommendation 3: *That team meetings be formalised where not already held, with a system put in place for staff views to be relayed to senior managers and for responses to be given.*

Recommendation 4: *That the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources report back to the Finance and Strategy Overview and Scrutiny Committee, by its meeting on the 9 January 2008, with his strategy for ensuring that a uniformly high standard of internal communications penetrate all levels of the organisation.*

CONCLUSION

25. The success of every organisation is dependent on the success of its workforce, and Richmond Council is no different. It is therefore essential that the Council's employees can resolve their differences and are kept well informed about key issues. The Review Group's investigations suggested that some improvements could be made in both areas. The Review Group feels that its recommendations on a central contact point for HR advice, on peer mediation and on the need for a clearer strategy to communicate to and receive feedback from all levels of the organisation should go some way to achieving this.



TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Rec. No.	Recommendation	For action by:
1a	<i>That a central point of contact be established within HR, which would discuss employees' concerns and offer them informal advice.</i>	
1b:	<i>That a programme to improve awareness of the HR Advice Line/future central contact point be implemented.</i>	
1c	<i>That all staff considering submitting a formal grievance be encouraged to speak to the above contact point before doing so.</i>	
2	<i>That a peer mediation system, to be provided by trained volunteers with varying levels of seniority across the organisation, is established.</i>	
3	<i>That team meetings be formalised where not already held, with a system put in place for staff views to be relayed to senior managers and for responses to be given.</i>	
4	<i>That the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources report back to the Finance and Strategy Overview and Scrutiny Committee, by its meeting on the 9 January 2008, with his strategy for ensuring that a uniformly high standard of internal communications penetrate all levels of the organisation.</i>	



SELECTED READING

- Grievance Procedure

