



26th September 2018

Response & Comments to Business Support & Customer service restructure.

Dear Martin, please see questions and comments to the business support restructure. UNISON will be submitting another document with further recommendations prior to the end of the consultation period but hope you take into consideration our concerns.

What service requirements demand a 24-hour contact response? Which workers in which roles would have this demand placed on them in practice, and therefore should they not receive additional contract terms and conditions to accommodate this? If so, they cannot be classed as generic.

Would the 24-hour response services not be more likely to deal with crisis and emergency situations? In that case surely it would be safer for our liabilities and for our residents to provide specialist staff who can respond to and cope with these contacts?

Deliberate misleading of Management Structure

6 PO10 head of service posts are being created, replacing 5 PO7 posts, meaning that we are losing rank and file front line staff in favour of increasing the budget and capacity allocated for management, and decreasing the budget and capacity allocated for staff, which cannot be good news for front line service standards and possible outcomes for residents.

Having reviewed the previous restructure of 2015/16 in the AS is structure there is no PO10. Please can you advise where the funding will come from to promote the PO7 post to PO10? It appears the reduction in essential staff will be subsidising the increase in post. UNISON members call for the restructure to be rejected as there is a lack of transparency and dare we say deliberate misleading information by management.

We would also like answered why does the Director level require 6 PO10 post to report back to her when the PO6/7 are doing exactly the same job. One could also argue that without the expenditure of this role the service would have a significant amount of money to spend on development of staff.

Teams will also no longer be assigned geographically, which may well theoretically increase "flexibility", but at a cost of decreasing specialist support for the services in those locations, and the corresponding service relationships with support staff from those locations. With fewer frontline staff to cover the work, and these smaller numbers of staff stretched across the whole local authority area, how can management support their claim that flexibility will correspondingly increase? Will managers be involved in meetings at the Town Hall while their staff work in offices all across the local authority? How will this affect the ability of managers and staff to form working relationships built on camaraderie and trust? How will

this affect a manager's ability to understand and take care of the needs of their staff regarding reasonable adjustments and other staffing decisions required of leadership?

The approach of planning for fewer staff spread over a wider area, and at the same time planning for an increased income through internal charging it seems that the service planning is expecting less work for Business Support - and this would stand up to common sense. But what are the calculations that have been made about prospective take up of chargeable services? And to what extent will services who are struggling with their own budgets be willing to do without crucial Business Support services in favour of placing the burden on their own existing service staff?

Given that services across the authority are having to make more and more cuts themselves, what is the rationale for expecting and relying more and more on income from an internal market with a reducing pool of resource? For a service to increase its reliance on other services whose budgets are decreasing, UNIONS Believes it defies common sense that a financial plan based on this calculus will remain afloat for very long.

Please respond...

To what extent also are we looking at the savings projected here being "actual" savings, and not ending up being spent elsewhere on the consequences of this approach. Our IT infrastructure future plan has not yet been decided upon, there are known issues with our recording software and databases, data quality, and use of data. Digital solutions require a robust, trustworthy infrastructure and at the moment we are overly reliant on certain systems which we know will need more investment to build upon recent developments.

Digital solutions and IT products will require subscriptions, setup, training and monitoring, as well as a robust and future-proofed infrastructure on top of this. Initiating a restructure with a stated goal of becoming more reliant on these solutions before they're operational reduces the service's ability to support the setting up of these systems by supplying the benefit of experience, operational learning, testing, absorbing early system failures and downtime while development and deployment takes place. Business Support service & Customer service staff are vital in IT deployment by absorbing the extra work in running concurrent working practices during early deployment and embedding good practice for the success of future systems.

Business Support staff gain experience and knowledge very quickly, and it is to the benefit of the Business Support Service and the services they work with to maintain the working habits and relationships as is current. Losing expertise, trusting relationships and the ability to trade favours during a time of change and uncertainty can pull the rug from under frontline professional practice. It is beholden on management to consider all of the change happening at once, and ensure change is managed in an orderly fashion as it may mean that service users are put at risk, or service standards rapidly slip in the face of delayed responses, data losses, and confusion over practice.

UNIONS strongly believe that the current proposal in its existing form should be withdrawn for the aforementioned reasons. No assurance can be given that the new structure that relies heavily on not only staff but a health infrastructure will ensure WF

staff are not put at risk of negative outcomes trying to achieve the unachievable leading to yet another restructure in the name of saving monies.

The plan also sets out the intention to bring in 24 apprentices at this time as well. Digital changes mean changes in practice, combined with a restructure where all staff roles are subject to deletion places risks on the future learning and development of apprentices. Changing practice and structures adds to uncertainty and means for the apprentices that staff will be learning alongside them, rather than teaching and imparting their experience. The practice knowledge and good habits and the relationships staff could pass on to apprentices will be in a state of uncertainty and change, and this potentially reduces the value of the learning and experience these apprentices receive.

With fewer staff working across a wider area, the temptation is there to utilise apprentices as though they were staff, meaning that posts are potentially being deleted in favour of employing apprentices at cheaper rates.

Current close working relationships can become strained if services who are used to having skilled and experienced Business Support Officer help are instead forced to accept generic staff. Generic staff provided on a case by case, chargeable basis may mean services end up finding they are allocated support staff with little experience in their specialist area, or staff allocated from a pool instead of staff whose trust has been earned.

With regards to this relationship as well, to what extent will there be **DBS checks** on support staff workers who may need to support services who work with sensitive case data and /or young or vulnerable clients. If there are such DBS checks and measures in place, surely this therefore implies a level of specialism. **Specialist workers are not generic workers.**

Even across the service areas encompassed by this restructure document we have a diversity of necessary skills and experience. For instance, directing someone to library resources and supporting the person through their use is very different from working in a fast moving, single issue based contact centre and both roles require a different personal toolbox. Just as curating library collections is very different from organising executive calendars and taking minutes of meetings. How a generic job description fits this wide diversity of roles and skills is concerning.

Where job descriptions do not mention particular expertise, it becomes ever more difficult for staff to justify how those skills and expertise are required for their roles, they become devalued as workers, as public servants, and ultimately as people. We need to acknowledge the diversity of skills as much to be able to appreciate the efforts and contribution of the people who work for us as much as setting a framework for that to be rewarded.

Generic job descriptions can weaken a service by requiring no specific skills for the role, meaning that appointees can lack the necessary but unacknowledged skillset required for the post. In the interests of finding savings, key skills may be lost from the service, making it costlier, increasing staff turnover, and decreasing the satisfaction for members of the public.

The proposed structure itself is unclear with regards to management reporting. Some Heads of Service will have a Team Leader report directly to them for one team, but others may be managed by Team Leaders at PO4, or a manager at PO6. The varying degrees of skills and experience required in the management structure imply that there are varying expectations on the roles, since these calculations do not purely seem to be based on the number of staff beneath leaders in the structure. In the Families area the proposed PO4 posts are called on to manage PO1 posts as well as a number of SC and SO posts, while some PO6 managers directly manage their own SC grade teams. In the Corporate Hub, a PO4 manager post in one service manages an almost identical structure to a PO6. And the Face to Face Customer Service Head of Service is responsible alone for a much larger team than the 2 Heads of Service have in the Customer Resolution Centre. The implication here is that there is more than simply the numbers and grades of staff beneath these managers in the structure that are part of the calculation, thus meaning that there needs to be a degree of specialist knowledge and skills involved even just at the managers level, if not throughout the branch.

IF IMPLEMENTATION OF Current proposal.

Members have asked for relevant questions to be up forward on their behalf

There is no Equality impact assessment. UNIONS were advised today 26th September 2018 by HR and LD divisional director that there is no requirement to provide one and that it is considered within the restructure, although the HR representative present was unable to provide a response, management had to request this by email.

This point will be raised with our regional office as we believe it is a potentially neglectful of those staff that are already at a disadvantage.

Business support and Customer service is the largest directorate within the borough which underpins the day to day working of the council, if accepted in its current form UNIONS believe there will be a negative impact on the Council as a whole.

Therefore, the UNISON reject the proposal in its current form.

UNIONS believe that the idea put forward that all staff are on a same JD is a bad proposal and is not consistent with the management structure itself.

It is unrealistic to assume staff from the libraries services “which is enjoyed by a cross section of all residents who are potentially at risk of not receiving a consistent service”, can be sustainable without the current pool of quality and knowledgeable staff, Management state, the aim is to ensure all services can be covered by staff with the same JD, sustainable in the long run, it is very apparent that a staff member who has responsibilities in a HR role cannot undertake either short term or long term the role of a business support librarian and vice versa unless the LA’s plans are to move from offering a Gold service to a wooden service.

When ask for the total number of staffs protected under the Equality act 2019

JW Question

Q/Total number of staffs with protected characteristics that have reasonable adjustments? (I'm assuming you have made appropriate provision/consideration for those that are on maternity leave)?

UNISON has not been able to get the numbers from management stating they are not confident the numbers are correct. How can this be if these individuals are considered in the assumed Quality Impact assessment undertaken without HR overview. Who is considering the impact on our members and protect groups we have so persistently over many years fought so hard to ensure fair and equal recognition and rights.

LD Response

A/There are 9 staff on maternity leave (plus one FTC on maternity leave) and yes I can confirm we have and will continue to take the appropriate provision for those staff.

When asked for total number of staffs recruited in past six months

UNION Question

Can you please provide the exact number of new permanent staff recruited in the past six months, with a breakdown of post?

I'm assuming they will also be included in the current restructure, if not, please advise why this is?

LD Response

I have asked for this information to be collated. All staff including those more recently recruited are included and therefore affected. In terms of whether they are proposed to be at risk this will depend if they were recruited into roles proposed for deletion (for clarity this excludes PAs and EAs but includes all other roles at all grades)

UNIONS were subsequently informed today 26th September 2018 that 35 new members of staff were recruited from April to September 2018 sighting Vacancies.

Our members are concerned that to recruit a significant number of staff to replace vacant post is a smokescreen as lack of skillset was quoted during a UNION management meeting. Why are Waltham forest council looking to sure up with more senior managers from PO7 to PO10 rather than consider developing the existing workforce, a great concern of our members are that the new appraisal programmes are one sided, and may be used to manage staff out of the council from appraisal to capabilities which has recently increased in numbers across the council.

UNION Question

Can you remove the point on paid tea breaks as we believe this to be incorrect and contentious with the Unions. Accepted!

LD Response

I will change the point as agreed and remove that statement. The amendment will clarify that there will no longer be scheduled 15-minute morning and afternoon breaks. As discussed, staff will be encouraged to take regular screen breaks the same as all other staff in the service. Dan O could you advise me of the process of changing the consultation document?

The UNION response to this is we have benched marked against other Local authorities and found that they also provide not only tea breaks given the nature of the role being 100% computer based but some boroughs included an additional 5 minute per hour health and safety break away from the PC.

This is clearly still a contentious issue for Management who previously sighted the reasons for removing the breaks are industry standards.

Information on apprentices provided by UNISON which is lacking in the overall document.

Apprenticeships can be a wonderful route into employment and provide the opportunity for people to earn while they learn. However, apprenticeships need to be well-funded, provide training and lead to a meaningful job. Apprentices should not be used as cheap labour and need the protection of a union around them.

Apprentices have the right to:

- An employment contract.
- A job offer, once their apprenticeship is complete.
- Payment at the rate for the job.
- The same terms and conditions as existing workplace policies and procedures.
- High quality training – both on and off the job.
- Appropriate job supervision, pastoral support and clarity about rights and responsibilities.
- **Not be used for job substitution, including covering staff shortages of any duration.**
- A safe and healthy working environment – free from discrimination and bullying.
- Join and participate in a trade union of their choice.
- Remain on the same contract, terms and conditions, if they are already existing employees who start an apprenticeship.

What does the council intend to do when the programme is complete? Our members would like assurances that their roles will not be reduced in salary yet again when the programme is complete and their feel the need to undertake yet another restructure to employ and retain staff in this way, reducing salaries yet again in line with currently payment to apprentices under the guise of the need of further savings required (but with an increase in management)?

Note

UNISON STRONGLY OBJECT to this proposal. Please note this is the first response from our members and we look forward to the rejection of the current proposal for one that truly reflects the needs of the service, staff, residents and those wishing to make WF their place of work and home.

We recognise the need for savings, but this again believe the process is not transparent based on the points outlined.

We recognise Waltham forest is the borough of Culture for 2019 with significantly high number of staff and residents for whom English is not their first language. Members are

concern that resident's way of accessing services will be negatively impacted with the over reliant on Technology.

An Equally impact assessment to understand how these individuals will affected is not forthcoming, with the response from the Council being it is not necessary and is included in the overall restructure. Please advise how this can be measured.

We advise all our members to let their feelings be heard via the process of alternative proposals and or objections to the current process.

Janet Walker

On behalf of UNISON WALTHAM FOREST