

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

LOCAL JOINT PANEL – 20 JUNE 2007

REPORT BY THE SECRETARY TO THE STAFF SIDE

9(B) INTERNAL SERVICES RESTRUCTURE

WARD(S) AFFECTED: None

RECOMMENDATION - that (A) the UNISON response attached at Appendix A be noted; and

(B) feedback to the above and any other representations made be communicated to all staff

1.0 Purpose/Summary of Report

1.1 To give Council Members the opportunity of hearing staff views and debating the issues raised in the response.

2.0 Contribution to the Council's Corporate Objectives

2.1 To improve the health and sustainability of the organisation.

3.0 Background

3.1 The Director of Internal Services has consulted widely with staff about the proposed restructure within his directorate. On 17 May he met with UNISON to discuss the matter and UNISON has subsequently consulted with all staff and responded accordingly.

4.0 Report

4.1 All the issues raised are contained within the UNISON response in Appendix A (Pages 9.6 - 9.8).

5.0 Consultation

5.1 All East Herts employees.

6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 Many relating to employment legislation mentioned in the report.

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 Unknown

8.0 Human Resource Implications

8.1 All employees in Internal Services and in the Services they support are affected by the restructure.

Background Papers

None

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PROPOSED INTERNAL SERVICES RESTRUCTURE – UNISON RESPONSE

UNISON was formally consulted on the proposed restructure of Internal Services on Thursday 17 May and has now had the opportunity of consulting with staff, including non-union members.

There are a number of positive aspects relating to the new structure, which UNISON welcomes, such as the proposal for no fewer than four new Head of Service posts. Any fewer than this could have been problematic and caused considerable disruption to service areas and individual employees. The proposed service areas into which the directorate is split are logical and comprehensible and the titles of the new Heads of Service denote clearly the areas of responsibility. (The only exception to this may be that Head of Democratic Support Services could be re-titled Head of **Legal** and Democratic Support Services.)

There are, however a number of concerns which UNISON has, many of which have also been raised by employees. These relate to the position of certain functions within the new structure and also to potential problems that may arise in respect of the reorganization process.

Structure

1. Several functions, such as Internal Customer Services, Property, Facilities Management and IT are split between more than one service head. This will inevitably impact on employees below Head of Service (HOS) level. Staff were led to believe that only HOS posts would be affected by the restructure. This split in functions may result in the deletion of some existing posts as they stand now and the creation of new posts with additional responsibilities. Presumably this will mean that the new posts will have to advertised and ring fenced to postholders whose existing posts are at risk.

Splitting the functions between service areas increases the potential for redundancies, since there is no guarantee that employees whose posts are deleted will find suitable alternative employment, commensurate with their current pay and status. If the new post is of a lower grade, although employees are offered some pay protection, this is still detrimental since pay is frozen for three years and will then drop after three years if the lower graded post has not caught up in cash terms with the grade of the new post. This is a situation UNISON would wish to avoid wherever possible.

The merger of certain services has also raised concerns among many staff below HOS level about the possible amalgamation of further posts in order to achieve efficiency savings. They see this as an inevitable consequence of the merger, despite being told that the restructure should not affect staff at this level.

2. UNISON and many staff have questioned the business case for moving Land Charges from Democratic Services to Revenues and Benefits. The analysis of fit

is based upon Land Charges being a 'public facing service'. This is a tenuous argument since Land Charges staff deal mainly with solicitors and personal search agents. Their contact with the public is no greater than that of functions such as Electoral and Democratic Services, or Insurance. On examination of the structures of other Local Authorities it was found that Land Charges generally form part of Legal, Democratic Services or Planning. UNISON believes that they should remain part of Democratic Support Services where they will continue to have close and easy access to legal advice and support and whose Head of Service they will share.

3. UNISON is concerned about the suggested split of IT between IT Development and IT Support, because there has been no convincing business case put forward in favour of this split.

IT Development and IT Support are closely interlinked, working together on a daily basis, discussing problems, sharing ideas and expertise. There are not sufficient resources in such a small team to split into two without it having a detrimental effect on the service they deliver to all Council departments.

For users of the service it will almost certainly be unclear as to which HOS was responsible for which function and will lead to confusion and frustration. It makes far more sense to have a single HOS who can take a holistic approach to service delivery, security and systems and who can represent the Council both internally and externally in all IT matters, both strategic and operational.

UNISON understands that the Council will be seeking advice from SOCITM – the professional organization for public sector ICT management. This is to be welcomed, although it is not altogether clear whether or not this will delay the process or what the cost to the Council will be. (It is worth remembering that many posts are not currently being filled due to budget constraints.)

4. It is important for any restructure to succeed, to ensure that all staff understand the purpose of the restructure and ideally support it. It is questionable whether IT, Land Charges and some other service areas will be persuaded that the proposals relating to them are the right way forward.
5. The point has been made by several members of staff that the proposal for Internal Audit to report to a HOS who will be responsible for a wide range of crucial functions, could generate conflicts of interest. What would happen if the current Audit Manager becomes the HOS and is responsible for auditing his own responsibilities, systems and decisions? Would Internal Audit fit more comfortably with Legal and Democratic Services?

Process

6. UNISON has not yet seen the draft job descriptions (JD's) or person specifications (PS's) but care should be taken that individuals are not being asked to apply for what is effectively their own job. Under the Achieving

Organizational Change Policy employees can be assimilated into posts without having to go through the full recruitment process.

7. It is important to ensure that if, as a result of the restructure, posts below HOS level are affected, new JD's are completed and jobs evaluated as soon as possible so that employees know exactly what their options are, so as to avoid potential redundancies.
8. A number of concerns have been expressed from and on behalf of employees in seconded posts, where the secondment has been extended pending the restructure. In some cases, the secondment has exceeded a year and the staff concerned have been unable to take on any long-term financial commitments due to the uncertainty of their job situation. It would be helpful if these staff could be reassured that even if the timetable for implementing the restructure slips, their jobs will be looked at by a certain date with a view to making their appointment permanent.

Conclusions

UNISON's main objectives when being involved in a restructure are to ensure that:

- a) the proposals will result in a more efficient and effective service
- b) that there will be no compulsory redundancies
- c) that disruption and uncertainty will be kept to a minimum
- d) that all employees will be treated fairly and decently in accordance with employment legislation and agreed policies and procedure.

UNISON feels that the best way to achieve the above would be to move Land Charges back to Legal and Democratic Support Services and to retain IT, Facilities Management, Internal Customer Services and Property as complete service areas or functions under Business Support Services. Further consideration should be given to the best fit for Internal Audit and Insurance (the latter which seems to fit more comfortably under Financial Support Services). This would achieve the main objective of reducing the number of HOS at the same time as causing the minimum disruption to services and employees.

Jane Sharp
UNISON Branch Secretary

30 May 2007