BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES STRUCTURE

17 NOVEMBER 2007

Thank you for giving UNISON the opportunity to comment about the proposals for Business Support Services.

The first observation I would make is that the structure does not include any post below the level of manager, only boxes containing the different functions. This may be because there are no proposed changes below this level but it would be helpful for the individuals concerned if they could be included in the structure so that they could be left in no doubt where they fit in. It would also send the message that every individual counts, not only managers.

There are some proposed changes, which are to be welcomed, such as the reinstatement of original staffing levels of Internal Audit. This should take place as a matter of some urgency to relieve the existing officers of a workload that must have put them under considerable stress for a long period of time. This level of staffing will need to be kept under review to ensure it is sufficient, particularly in light of the proposed increase in responsibilities of the Internal Audit and Consultancy Manager.

The proposals for IT appear to be in line with the recommendations of the SOCITM review of June 2007. UNISON does have some reservations about the proposal to staff the helpdesk with non-technicians. This may result in a poorer service for users, who will almost certainly have to wait longer to have a problem resolved. Very often currently, an immediate resolution to a problem is provided over the phone. The proposal to broaden the scope of the helpdesk to encompass facilities management and property related issues will almost certainly slow down the whole process.

There are a number of specific concerns UNISON has about the structure. These are listed under the following headings:

Financial Implications

It is stated in 7.1 that '**the intention is to design a structure with existing budgets'**. It is difficult to reconcile this statement with the plans to create what is in effect an extra management tier, i.e. the

three posts reporting to the Head of Business Support Services. With the exception of the ICT Manager, the other two new posts will both be gaining duties and responsibilities. In the unlikely event of an officer wishing to apply for these posts without any increase in grade and salary, the Council would struggle to defend an equal pay claim at a tribunal if these posts are evaluated at a higher grade but paid at the current rate.

If there is no additional funding, would it not be better to leave existing posts under Head of Service level alone? UNISON and staff were originally led to believe that there would be no changes below Head of Service level, yet this structure impacts on many jobs at a lower level.

Originally, as is quoted below from a report submitted to the Human Resources Committee of 31 August 2006, savings made from the reduction in the numbers of Directors and Heads of Service were intended to be redirected to front-line services.

As a result of the restructuring a rationalization of posts at lower levels will occur. It is recommended that the savings that accrue from this report be used to fund any changes at lower level. This being in line with the Council's policy of redirecting the resources to front-line services.

To date, there is no evidence of this.

Internal Audit

The report stresses the need to provide an independent and objective internal audit service. This aim may be jeopardized by the proposal to include Insurance and Purchasing within this section. It would surely be difficult for auditors to be independent and objective when auditing a service they are responsible for! It would make more sense for Insurance and Purchasing to come within Financial Services or a different area within Business Support.

With regard to Health and Safety, although there is some logic in linking this to Insurance, the problems involved far outweigh the benefits. UNISON does feel that the profile of Health and Safety needs to be raised but that this would be best achieved by

increasing resources rather than by moving the function to a service based at a different location to that of the Health and Safety officer.

Facilities and Property Maintenance

This section appears to contain a mismatch of functions which do not fit comfortably together. There are also implications for a number of staff who could be adversely affected by the proposals. There is one officer whose duties are spread over all three areas and the ICS officer who will be gaining responsibilities which have little relation to his current functions. There are potentially three members of staff who could compete for the new manager post, but if they choose not to do so this would create a problem. If someone does apply, they will be taking on a wider range of functions at the same time as having to continue with their old job. This coupled with the lack of additional funding provides little incentive for anyone to apply.

Conclusions

UNISON acknowledges that Business Support Services, given their current structure is probably the most difficult of all the service areas to review. Although on paper the proposals divide the service nicely into three areas with three sub-areas under these, in reality the proposals may not work. UNISON is concerned that some individuals may be forced to take on additional workloads and responsibilities, thereby increasing the risk of work related stress. Others may suffer loss of job satisfaction as a result of changed roles and reporting lines in what is effectively a more hierarchical structure.

An alternative structure would be to leave the existing managers as they are and have four areas instead of three, Audit, IT, Property/ Engineering and ICS. Although most other Heads of Service may not have quite so many managers reporting directly to them, it is inevitable, given the diverse range of functions that there will be more in Business Support Services. It would also make sense if the S151 officer role could be given to someone in Financial Services.