

Further to the comments made on 26 September 2011 and in response to the Consultation and Information Document UNISON wishes to make a final statement taking into account feedback from union members.

DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

UNISON accepts that council members voted in favour of proposals for budget savings but is convinced that the majority of members were neither fully aware of the implications the proposals would have on council services nor the number of compulsory redundancies that would ensue.

It is a contradiction in terms to suggest that members wished to protect services to customers but accepted at the same time that there would be a number of activities that the Council would no longer undertake. Once you remove those activities, services are no longer protected. It is ironic and evidence of a strange set of priorities that sees a Council plough scarce resources and capital into improving Hertford Theatre, which benefits a small, largely affluent group of the community, whilst funding is withdrawn from community partnership working, which aims to help the more vulnerable groups of society.

Response

Like many authorities across the country, EHC members had no option but to set a budget that required significant savings from many parts of the organisation and services. Members were made aware that staff resources would be reduced. The savings have been agreed by members in the MTFP.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE COUNCIL TO RETAIN TALENT

UNISON takes issue with the above assertion. How can these proposals, which are going to result in redundancies and fewer jobs, possibly achieve this aim? Two staff that UNISON is aware of (there may well be more) have already left the Council, knowing that there was no future for them in Communications at East Herts. How also can the proposals offer redeployment opportunities when every single service is contracting? There will be no opportunities other than lower paid jobs in areas where staff cannot use their skills and expertise to their full potential.

Response

The council's redeployment policy explains how the council makes best endeavours to retain talent wherever possible. This can be demonstrated in how restructure proposals have changed following consultation, flexible retirement and voluntary redundancy requests have been accepted to try and retain talent in difficult circumstances when posts are being reduced.

EFFECT ON STAFF

There are 23 posts at risk of redundancy in this proposed restructure. Obviously most employees will not be made redundant but they will all have been subject to a stressful period of uncertainty where some may have to take on a role, not of their choice, where

others will be downgraded or have their hours cut. Many will have to undergo a selection process, competing with their colleagues and being interviewed for a job similar to the one they have been performing for many years. For some, this will be yet another restructure on top of all the others they have undergone during the past ten years or so. Yet senior management appears to be quite happy to subject their staff to this time and time again.

Response

The council's redundancy and redeployment policies set out how a restructure process will be carried out, ensuring that the process is fair. .

COST TO THE COUNCIL

All the emphasis in the documentation is on savings that will be achieved by the Council. However, where is the cost/benefit analysis? There is a no mention of the cost of implementing yet another restructure, of the estimated cost of redundancies or early access to pensions, of the human cost in terms of morale and loss of good will. How many hours are spent by managers and HR in meetings, in job evaluation panels, in consultation with affected staff, in recruitment and selection and appeals?

Response

The council must reduce its ongoing revenue costs. There will inevitably be set-up costs to do so.

ALTERNATIVES

UNISON has already suggested using some of the East Herts considerable financial reserves to help maintain services and levels of staffing. Given that each year there is almost always an under spend of the Council's budget, it is unlikely that the Council will suffer any financial crisis. Extending the invitation for voluntary redundancy to all staff, not just those in the affected areas has also been suggested many times. UNISON does not accept the argument that the Council would lose all its key staff this way, since a) voluntary redundancy does not have to be granted and b) this would open up opportunities for staff to apply for internal vacancies without the need to spend so much time, energy and money on restructuring nearly every single service area within the Council.

The Council's MTFP sets out clearly the savings that need to be made. The Council's Redundancy Policy sets out the Council's position on voluntary redundancy.

SPECIFIC FEEDBACK BY STAFF

Following consultation with union members, UNISON wishes to include in this paper specific points raised by members of Democratic Services about how the proposals affect them.

Democratic Services Operational Needs

There is no mention in the proposals of the operational needs for the service going forward. Reducing staff numbers by 25% will need to be matched by a corresponding decrease in workload and yet there is no mention of what the service will look like in, say,

a year's time. There is a complete absence of detail on what work currently done is not required.

In the absence of any articulation of what Democratic services should look like and be focussed on, one can only conclude that CMT view the team as flabby, underworked and directionless. This seems strange considering Democratic Services won the Team of the Year award at the 2009 Staff Recognition Awards.

According to the then Chairman *"Democratic Services work closely and support each other to deliver a great service to the council. The team have a fantastic 'just get on with the job' attitude."*

The Chief Executive commented: *"This team are the glue that hold things together. The team ensure the smooth running of business and particularly support various chairmen. They are always working quietly and professionally in the background and therefore deserve some recognition."*

Response

The reductions in staff numbers in this area are no more than the Head of Service proposed for the MTFP.

Senior Democratic Service Officer

It is proposed that this grade 10 post be replaced with a Democratic Services Team Leader post at grade 9. There is no evidence to suggest that a revised job description was needed for this post as the post was re-evaluated in 2005, which is much more recent than other posts that have not been re-evaluated.

Considering the enhanced job description that has been submitted, it seems strange that a grade 9 post is required to deputise for the Governance Support Manager in managing the whole team including a grade 9 Senior Land Charges Officer. Where else in the organisation does this happen? The downgrading of this post has not been accompanied with any reduced responsibilities. Clearly, the downgrading (like others in the proposals) is about achieving the same for less, or even more for less, and is a cynical ploy to punish hard-working staff.

Response

The JDs were updated to reflect the changes. All posts which have been amended have been evaluated in accordance with the Hays Evaluation policy. Unison members are part of this evaluation panel. It would not be equitable or rational to pick and choose which posts should be re-evaluated and which should not.

Scrutiny Officer

It is proposed that the Scrutiny Officer post is transferred into the Governance Support team on the same grade and job description reporting directly to the Governance Support Manager. The suggestion for this transfer has been knocking around for a while and was originally mooted on the basis of achieving efficiencies and avoiding duplication with the duties carried out by Committee Services. This suggestion gained more weight when the decision was taken to cut one Committee Officer post on the basis of reducing support to non-statutory meetings and the Strategic Direction team was required to make savings.

Since the Scrutiny Officer post was created, there has been a clear link between the postholder and the Committee Section as it was recognised at an early stage that close working was needed. This has included regular 1:1 meetings between the Scrutiny Officer and the Senior Democratic Services Officer. It is unclear whether transferring the Scrutiny Officer post to report to the Senior Democratic Services Officer and to merge into the Democratic Services team has been considered. It is also unclear whether the natural synergies of merging all of these posts into one team under the management of the Senior Democratic Services Officer, has been considered. UNISON wishes to put this forward as a proposal and in so doing would suggest that this should prevent the downgrading of the Senior Democratic Services Officer post. Or, was the intention to come up with a structure where downgrading could be achieved?

[Response](#)

[Unison's suggestion is noted](#)

SUMMARY

UNISON welcomes the minor changes already incorporated within the proposals following informal consultation with staff. It is hoped that the intention of the formal consultation process was as stated, to listen to staff and union feedback and to incorporate further amendments where constructive suggestions have been made. There is after all no one that knows better the operational needs of the service than the staff employed in that service area.

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[Response](#)

[CMT thanks Unison for its comments and feedback.](#)