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UNISON Comments on Proposals For The Feedback Team

These comments have been assembled by a combination of meetings with staff and also giving an opportunity for one to one discussions with myself either by phone or in person. We are aware of one person within the effected group who is a member of UNITE and they were also included in the process of assembling these comments. We did not consult non-union members actively although obviously they were free to contact us with concerns or queries however no such enquiries were received from them.

Redundancies

We recognise the difficult financial situation the Council is currently in; however in all such proposals we are formally restating our complete opposition to compulsory redundancies as a way of achieving reductions. It is our belief that the Council should be operating a joined up approach to managing change this should include creative use of "bumping" to facilitate Voluntary redundancy applications and avoid compulsory redundancies. Allied to this proactive consideration of options such as voluntary reductions in hours, flexible working etc should be considered where staff support these the normal business case process should not be applied. The presumption as a family friendly good employer should be that the manager is required to make a business case AGAINST the staff's proposals. We are concerned that the current approach in this respect may in fact cause unnecessary redundancies rather than preventing them. In essence it requires staff to be appointed then to apply for reductions in hours rather than allowing them true creative and meaningful consultation on alternatives to the cuts.

We would urge that any requests for voluntary redundancy which have been received are responded to ASAP and that as far as is possible that they are supported by management. NO staff have made any direct approaches to UNISON with proposals for collective reductions in hours or job sharing etc, however if they have done so directly to management we would ask that these are treated in the context of our above comments. We are not clear as to whether any staff currently work less than full time and would seek clarity on how they will be dealt with in the recruitment process?

Inclusion In Multiple Processes

We are aware that some post-holders who are currently within Services are involved in multiple proposals: For example staff currently employed within Urban Environment (Now Place & Sustainability) appear to have also been included in the Single Frontline proposals, while colleagues from Libraries have an opportunity to apply for a job in their service as well as posts in this process. It would be our view that as far as is possible choice should be facilitated; as such we would seek clarity that nobody who is involved in more than one process will be served with notice until they have been considered in all available areas. The exception to this would be where they have made a clear decision to opt for one process over another. We have advised any such staff in this situation to discuss this with their current and potential managers and Human resources to ensure they are not seen as failing to cooperate with a process. It is recognised that this situation will not apply to all staff and it will need to be carefully managed.

Job evaluations

We have provided detailed analysis of the job evaluation scores carried out by HR; in the majority of cases these do not have impact on the grades. However the proposal for a post containing a range grade of Scale 5-PO1 is not an acceptable one as it is clearly in contravention of the Single Status agreement on the maximum length of a range grade. We would welcome further discussion on this point particularly if there was a logical reason for it such as that it was necessary to commence at Scale 5 in order to include post-holders in the ring-fencing. Our proposal as set out in our job evaluation comments would be that the lowest two levels are merged creating a range grade of Scale 6-PO1.

We await responses to our specific queries on the evaluation scores. We note that the consultation document indicates that post-holders will have the right of appeal against first time evaluations. It is our understanding that all these posts are first time evaluations, does this mean the intent is to grant appeal rights for all post-holders?

Use of Range Grades

The structure appears to contain an unusually high number of range grades: While we are not opposed to such an approach we would seek clarity on the basis on which staff will be placed within the grades. Is the assumption that all staff may progress to the upper levels of the grade subject to performance and development being satisfactory or is there a budgetary assumption that there will be a mix of levels in each of the roles. Staff will clearly wish to have an understanding on this point both as part of the recruitment process and as part of ongoing development of the new team.

This area will need to be carefully monitored in the future in order to ensure that no Equal Pay issues arise as a result of the use of range grades. Staff should be paid in accordance with the work they do or are required to do rather than simply be left on a particular element of the range grade for financial reasons.

We would seek an assurance that staff will be appointed on their existing grade or above where this is possible. Further that where they are subject to a cascading ring-fence if they are appointed at a lower level that they will be appointed at the maximum available spinal point so as to avoid or minimise any financial loss.

Recruitment Processes

We are conscious that selection processes are a stressful time for staff involved and would therefore support where possible approaches which avoid or minimise multiple interviews. Staff will require adequate time and support to prepare and appropriate details about the methods of selection need to be supplied in a timely fashion. Where presentations are proposed staff should be given some guidance with regard to the likely content and length of such selection processes. It should be noted that some staff may not have participate in interviews or recruitment processes for some time and they should therefore be afforded access to appropriate support from OD&L. Please confirm the purpose of the application forms and whether these will form part of the recruitment process from a scoring point of view.

We are concerned that "open" ring-fences are being used routinely for all posts. While there are changes to the roles it would be reasonable to expect that all staff would have the necessary transferable skills to successfully fill all vacancies. We would suggest that all ring-fences with the exception perhaps of the Manager's post could be changed to "closed" The Authority has a statutory duty to seek to minimise or avoid redundancies and this requirement extends to offering suitable alternative employment where this exists.

As the team is being brought into a "corporate" centre we are concerned that this may be seen as favouring post-holders who already work in the centre. We would therefore seek assurances that no specific tests will be applied when deciding who to recruit which might lead to such an imbalance occurring. Particularly it is clear some post-holders may have skills and expertise in dealing with complaints from within a particular service while some may have more generic FOI and Complaints knowledge: The recruitment process needs to ensure that both are weighted equally.

With regard to interviews please confirm how panels will be made up? We would request that serious consideration is given to having post-holders from services and an independent person from Human Resources on the panel. This is to ensure that the process is both fair and reasonable and is seen to be such by applicants

Redeployment

Please confirm whether post-holders who are also involved in other reviews will be given their notice should they fall out of this process? We believe such an approach would be unreasonable where other alternative ring-fences exist in which they can be considered. In particular they should not be excluded from service based ring-fences where there may be opportunities on the basis of having been considered within the FIG SFR: we accept this is unlikely to be the case for all post-holders as some posts are 100% involved in this process.

Notice Periods

Please confirm what unsuccessful post-holders will do during their notice periods? Will they remain within their current roles and will they be required to attend work as normal? If this is the case it will need to be recognised that such staff will be effected by worries and will also need time off to undertake the search for alternative work and training and development

Location

Please confirm where the new service will be located and whether all staff will be co-located.

Seán Fox UNISON Branch Secretary