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## **UNISON COMMENTS ON INITIAL PROPOSALS FOR LIBRARIES RESTRUCTURE**

**(To be attached to management report for Executive on 19 December 2006)**

1. UNISON was given proposals for the Libraries restructuring in November 2006. We have subsequently held meeting with groups of staff, workplace stewards, and individuals who may be affected by the restructuring. The comments in this report are based on what staff have said in these meetings.
  - 1.1 Both as a collective group and as individuals, staff are extremely unhappy with the proposals. This is not just because it is detrimental to them, although that is also an issue for many of them. The fact is that they are committed to providing a high quality library service to the public, and the new structure completely undermines this.
2. One of the major comments that staff made is that the whole idea of what libraries are for seems to be missing from the new structure.
  - 2.1 Front line staff are the people who deliver the service to the public on a day-to day basis. However, in planning these changes, management appear to have made no attempt to talk to them about what the new structure should look like or what is needed to deliver a high quality service. This is unbelievable. Front line staff are in a position to know what is going on in the service, what the public want, what can be improved, and so on. To attempt a restructure of this scale without seeking the views of staff seems is extremely unwise. We would like to know who was involved in drawing up the new structure and whether or not they did attempt to talk to staff.
  - 2.2 What is absolutely obvious from talking to staff is their commitment to their jobs and their passion for libraries and the good they do – enriching people’s lives, helping them improve themselves, increasing knowledge and so on. They feel that this new structure completely undermines that ethos.
  - 2.3 Staff feel that management are not interested in the quality of service, only in saving money, With reductions in front line staff, it will be impossible to meet anything beyond basic standards of service, and even that will be difficult.
3. This restructure is not about providing a modern, high quality library service, and it will do exactly the opposite. We believe that it is actually about saving money. However, the actual savings targets seem unclear. Management originally claimed that this would save £850,000 in staffing costs, and gave this figure to staff in meetings. We have now been told that the savings will actually be £205,000. We would like some clarification on the actual savings that will be made

- 3.1 The first report we were given on the restructure said that the cost of the existing structure was £4.7 million. The second report says in section 10.16 that the cost of the existing structure is £4 million. Which figure is correct?
- 3.2 Obviously, we need accurate figures for current expenditure and predicted savings. Whatever these figures are, it is clear that a substantial cut is still being made. We would like to know the reason for this. Is this mainly about delivering savings? If there is a cut, and even if it is less than we were originally told, we believe that the quality of service will drop, despite the efforts of staff.
- 3.3 We believe that the service has £200,000 of NRF money. We would like to know what this is being used for (is it being used for to fund posts?), what happens when it runs out and what are the implications of this?
4. This restructure is not about providing career development for staff, as management are trying to claim. There will be even less opportunity for staff to progress than there is now. The number of posts for qualified librarians has been reduced, which takes away the incentive for staff to become qualified and reduces their opportunities within Haringey even if they do. There is less scope for career progression for those who are already qualified. They can currently progress to Senior Librarian. The only progression management have identified for them in the new structure is to Library Manager or senior management level; these are specifically management posts, not Librarian posts.
  - 4.1 In general, the removal of whole groups of staff at specific grades will obviously make career progression harder. For example, there will be no SO2 Senior Librarian posts, and very few SO2 posts at all. Most of the staff reductions seem to be at lower grades.
5. Too much emphasis has been put on new technology as a reason for reducing staff, particularly RFID (self-issuing). However, only two libraries currently have this system, and many items still cannot be processed through it. Staff report that there are often problems with it, which they have to deal with, and this is labour-intensive. Generally, management are overstating the case for technology as a reason for this huge budget cut.
  - 5.1 Much of the work that is done in libraries is unavoidably labour-intensive. Technology has not lessened the amount of work that needs doing. Staff are needed to put items back on the shelves. A machine cannot deal with enquiries and fines, etc.
  - 5.2 The feedback staff have had is that members of the public do not like self-issuing – they like to deal with a person, and the machines often don't work properly.
  - 5.3 We believe that other local authorities have not used RFID as an excuse to cut staff, and that doing this is generally considered to be bad practice in libraries. Some local authorities that will be reducing staff through new technology are doing this over a period of years, so that it is done through natural wastage. We question the need to reduce staff, particularly to the extent that the new structure proposes. However, if staff are to be reduced, natural wastage over a period of years is preferable to the current proposals. This does not mean that we agree to staff reductions.
  - 5.4 Is there any evidence that RFID saves staff time? If so, we would like to see it.
6. There is currently not enough staff to run the service as it is now. We have recently been informed of a Saturday Assistant opening, running and then locking up Stroud Green library with only one casual worker for support. A Counter Assistant has also been left running

Highgate library. Apart from the obvious health and safety implications, what is going to happen if the new structure is implemented? There will be less front line staff, and they will be stretched to breaking point. This could actually be dangerous, and it would be unacceptable. Lower graded staff will have huge amounts of responsibility pushed down on to them, particularly in smaller libraries. If opening hours are extended at all, this situation will be even worse.

6.1 In addition to the overall numbers of staff reductions, the removal of whole tiers of staff will mean that fairly high level responsibilities will end up being pushed straight down to lower graded staff, as there will be no-one else to delegate tasks to. This will be particularly bad in branch libraries. In the new structure, there will be a branch manager for each branch library, graded at SO1. The next person down will be a Library Assistant on scale 3 or 4. There will not be enough staff to cover the SO1 post if they are ill, so it is likely that the Library Assistant will end up being pressured to take on the tasks of the Branch Manager when he or she is off. Given the huge gap in grades, this will be unacceptable. The fact is that this type of situation is already happening now; the new structure, with its staff reductions, will only make matters worse.

6.2 We want management to state who will run branch libraries when the branch managers are not at work.

6.3 Generally, staff and the trade union will not accept tasks and responsibilities being pushed to the next grade down when a member of staff (particularly a manager) is not at work.

7. Senior Librarians are absent from the new structure, which is of great concern. This is an extremely important role. They take responsibility for many areas, including the quality of service provided, managing stock, etc. They also take on specific specialist areas, e.g. multimedia. They are an important link between the management structure and front line staff, which is completely missing in the new structure.
8. Management appear to have backed down on their proposal to downgrade Library Assistants to scale 3. We object to any attempt to attack low paid staff in this way. We completely object to the Senior Library Assistants in the Schools Library Service being replaced by Library Assistants on a lower grade. These posts require specialist knowledge and skills, as well as having a higher level of responsibility.
9. There is a strong feeling amongst staff that management are neglecting Marcus Garvey library, and to some extent attempting to “downgrade” it from a major library to a small branch library. This was based on the fact that in management’s original proposals, the other two major libraries had an Operations Manager at SO2 and an Operations Supervisor at scale 6; however, Marcus Garvey would only have had the scale 6 post (no SO2). Management have now informed us that they will have the SO2 post at Marcus Garvey, but no scale 6. Although this is an improvement that has been made in response to our concerns, Marcus Garvey is still being treated differently from other libraries, in that it will not have a scale 6 operations manager and appears to have less staff. Also, what happens when the Operations Manager is off?
  - 9.1 This is just the latest attempt to attack Marcus Garvey library. Only a few years ago, management proposed reducing it to just one floor. We do not understand what their problem with this library is. It is in a deprived area which desperately needs investment and improvement. Management claim that Marcus Garvey has fewer visitors than other libraries; if that is the case, we would like to see evidence of it, as this is not what staff are saying. However, the volume of visitors in itself is not an excuse for neglecting this library. Management should be investing in it and looking to build it up, not writing it off. The area is improving and benefiting from regeneration, and a new arts centre will soon be opening next door to the library. This should be the time to be promoting and improving this library. Running a service down tends to create a self-fulfilling prophecy; i.e. if this library is

neglected because it is apparently not as popular as other libraries, then even less people will visit it, which in turn creates more excuses for under-investing in it.

9.2 If this library is downgraded or neglected, or the local community perceive this to be the case, then this could lead to political problems and negative publicity for the council.

10. The Mobile and Housebound Librarian post was originally only graded at scale 6, despite the fact that the postholder would be managing that service, with a corresponding level of duties and responsibilities. Other managers are graded at SO1 and above. It would be unfair to expect someone to do this work at scale 6. **(Following negotiation, this post has now been graded at SO1).**

11. There was a proposal to get rid of the specialist Senior Librarian for multimedia at Hornsey. Management have now said that there will still be a specialist post for this area, but this will be at a lower grade than it is currently. Also, this Senior Librarian currently has a team of staff; this is not the case in the new structure. The audio-visual collection at Hornsey is renowned for its excellence, and it is astonishing that management do not seem to place any kind of value on it. Even with the concession management have made, this section will be staffed by one person on a lower grade than currently, with no other staff. This represents a major downscaling of this important and valued service.

11.1 The audio-visual library needs a specialist to run it, and this post needs to be backed up by a team. If management's proposals go through, this section will not be able to maintain its reputation. It will not be able to operate at the same level and stock the huge range of items that it does currently. Diversity will suffer, and it is likely that only the most popular items will be available.

11.2 The audio-visual library is extremely popular with the public, yet it is being attacked and downgraded in this way. It will be impossible for the sole staff member who will be dealing with this section to deliver the level of service that is currently offered. This is evidence that management have not only failed to consult library users, they have completely failed to even consider their needs and wishes. This is going to be an extremely unpopular move and could create negative publicity for the council.

12. There seems to be an emphasis in the structure on business. There will be four Business, Information and ICT Librarians at Central, and one at each of the other two main libraries. We would like management to explain why this is such a priority and how it relates to what libraries are actually meant to do. In particular, business services will only appeal to a minority of library users. Has any market research been carried out to ascertain the need for this? We believe that people can obtain business information from other sources if they want to. In terms of the business lounge at Central library, we would like some statistics on how well used it is and how much it is costing.

13. There seems to be a proposal to make Sunday working compulsory, which is a change to the terms and conditions of most staff. This will be a deeply unpopular move. Staff already work evenings and Saturdays, and do not believe that it is reasonable to expect them to work Sundays as well. This will have a significant impact on the personal lives of staff, particularly those with child care commitments. Staff question the need to have libraries open seven days a week, and we do not see any need for this.

13.1 If management want the service to be open seven days a week, we suggest that they look at employing Sunday-only staff (in the same way that they currently employ staff to work on Saturdays only).

13.2 This proposal in particular is likely to lead to industrial action if it is approved.

**13.3 (Following negotiation, management are now claiming that there are no plans to make Sunday working compulsory or to have more libraries opening on a Sunday. However, our position remains the same: nobody should be forced to work on a Sunday and this should be removed from job descriptions).**

14. Management state that staff who are displaced as a result of these changes will be offered the opportunity for redeployment. However, working in a library is a fairly specialised job, and there will possibly not be many posts that displaced staff can go for. A significant number of staff are likely to end up without a job at all.
15. We would like to know if the Equalities team has been informed of these proposals, and if an assessment of the impact on equalities has been carried out, particularly in terms of race and sex discrimination.
16. Given the number of staff that will potentially be affected, we expect a Section 188 notice to be issued.
  - 16.1 Staff have complained that an external personnel consultant has been attending meetings between them and management and telling them that “we only need to give you 30 days notice if we’re going to make you redundant.” It is not acceptable to talk to staff in this way, particularly when their jobs could be at risk. “30 days notice” refers to the statutory minimum consultation period for redundancies. We should be working to council policies and procedures, not statutory minimums. 30 days notice is a minimum for redundancy situations which could potentially involve between 20 and 100 employees. In practice, employers must consult as soon as possible and not wait until the “statutory clock starts ticking”. Also, in order for consultation to be fair, it must take place when proposals are still at a formative stage.
  - 16.2 Management have proposed a consultation period which begins on 20 December 2006 and ends on 29 January 2007. This is completely unreasonable. This means that consultation starts just a few days before the Christmas holidays, and management know that many staff will be off and that it will be difficult to do any work on this before the new year. That will leave a consultation period of approximately 20 working days. For a restructuring of this size, with the number of staff potentially affected, that is completely unacceptable. We would suggest that consultation should go on until at least the end of February 2007, if these proposals are approved. However, we believe that much more work needs to be done on the new structure.
  - 16.3 Even with the current proposed consultation period, and implementation date of March/April 2006 is completely unrealistic and this should be postponed.
  - 16.4 Management need to remember that consultation needs to be real and meaningful and conducted with a view to avoiding redundancies/dismissals. If it becomes clear that management have already decided to make redundancies before consultation takes place, and are not prepared to consider other options, then this could lead to a ruling that the consultation was not genuinely meaningful.
17. The savings created by these cuts may look attractive on paper, but they will be at the expense of the quality of service that is now offered to library users. The public are likely to be angered by this, which could create negative publicity for the council. There could also be other consequences if the performance of libraries drops.

- 17.1 If this structure is adopted, it is highly likely to lead to a campaign of industrial action. There is also the possibility of legal claims from staff who lose their jobs.
- 17.2 We are asking the members of the executive to reject these proposals, or at least delay them so that proper discussions can take place.

**CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR**  
**Assistant Branch Secretary**