

UNISON COMMENTS ON PROPOSED NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT SERVICE FORWARD STRATEGY AND RECONFIGURATION DRAFT REPORT

UNISON has received a copy of a draft report detailing reasons for a further restructuring of the Neighbourhood Management Service and has consulted with its members accordingly.

We set out below our comments, both general and specific, and ask that these be incorporated into the final report for the Council's Executive at the meeting of 20 December 2005.

INTRODUCTION – MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO UNISON COMMENTS

In accordance with Council procedures UNISON have been consulted about the proposed reconfiguration of Neighbourhood Management.

Following comments received on December 9, a useful meeting was held with the Union Convenor to discuss the comments in detail and to reach consensus on as many points as possible. The full service meeting was held 19 December and revised comments submitted.

The Management response to UNISON's comments is set out below. For ease of reference Management's comments are italicised and in red.

General Comments

We note Management's reasons for wishing to change the structure of the Neighbourhood Management Service. However, the Service was restructured in 2003 and we are concerned about aspects of this latest proposed restructuring which is scheduled to take effect in 2006. We would wish to minimize the impact of this on our members, some of whom had to undergo recruitment to stay exercises in the last reorganization.

Management notes the concerns regarding the impact of a restructure on members and will make every effort to facilitate a smooth transition as set out in paragraph 16.2 of the report.

We wonder also if there has been any analysis carried out on the previous restructurings in terms of what has worked and what hasn't. Although we are being told that there are more posts than postholders in these new proposals, restructuring, reorganisations and realignments are always stressful and create uncertainty for staff.

We would like to see something in the report about a vision for community engagement and a forward strategy for Neighbourhood Management over the next three to five years. Although links with some services and partners, such as Housing Management, Streetscene, Children's Services, the Metropolitan Police and the Primary Care Trust have been highlighted, we feel it is also important to emphasise the links with the Council's Regeneration and

Economic Development Strategies as the work of Neighbourhood Management is fundamental to these.

In relation to a vision for community engagement and a forward strategy the report sets this out, (sections 7 and 8), taking account of the wider government policy context of Local Area Agreements, Safer Neighbourhoods Policing teams and ODPM's consultation documents.

Our members feel that community development work is at the heart of the Neighbourhood Management Service and plays an essential part in joining up and bending mainstream services. It would therefore be beneficial if each neighbourhood developed its own community development strategy based on the needs of the area, alongside neighbourhood plans. Each neighbourhood also needs to be properly resourced in order to make this work meaningful and to continue to empower local people in disadvantaged areas.

Management agrees that community development is central, and we are pleased that UNISON is proposing the development of neighbourhood based community development strategies, and endorsing neighbourhood plans.

The fact that the work of the Neighbourhood Management Service has been instrumental in Haringey Council gaining Beacon Council status in 2005 is an important achievement. Our members are also proud of the fact that the Service has won other awards and has had many visits from other authorities and countries who are interested in finding out more about our good practice. We should now be looking at the sustainability of not only the Service but of what we are hoping to achieve in the coming years.

While the report states that "*the neighbourhood management approach should be universal*", (paragraph 10.2) we are concerned that by diverting resources to the more prosperous west of the borough the Council is in danger of cutting resources for Neighbourhood Management in the less prosperous east. This could undermine progress on projects and achievements of staff currently working in Tottenham and Wood Green, some of whom already have insufficient resources to carry out their tasks.

By amalgamating wards along the current Area Assembly areas it would appear that the Council is going against Central Government's wishes to go very local; some areas will increase in size with proportionately fewer resources.

Clearly exit strategies are required for Northumberland Park and West Green Neighbourhoods as the Single Regeneration Budget funding for both areas will cease at the end of March 2006. We understand that the Council has made a commitment to mainstream funding for posts in these areas.

UNISON is concerned with sustainability. This reconfiguration moves the service from a fragmented structure which reflects external funding regimes to a mainstreamed borough wide Council funded service, which is far more sustainable model. The exit strategies for both SRB programmes are inherent

in the reconfiguration, and have been discussed and endorsed by the local partnership boards. It is a policy decision to rollout neighbourhood management across the borough, but within this, resources are being prioritised to the east and the priority wards. There is an overall increase in resources in the new structure. Neighbourhood managers will be able to plan at local level how these are deployed to meet community priorities and needs to ensure as much local participation as possible within the new areas.

We wish to express our misgivings at the contents of paragraph 11.7 which appears to be making a case for the relocation of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) Team from Neighbourhood Management to Finance. This proposal did not form part of the original restructuring plans and due to the nature of the work of this team we question the perceived need to relocate it.

We note the comments regarding the NRF team.

Paragraph 12.1 talks about a need to establish Neighbourhood Partnerships along the lines of the current Neighbourhood Boards in Northumberland Park and West Green and the Green Lanes Strategic Group. There are also Neighbourhood Steering Groups in Noel Park and White Hart Lane and the Bruce Grove Strategic Group on which representatives of residents' associations, Councillors and partner agencies sit. We note that the report seeks to regularize current arrangements but feel that there will still be a need to have more localized meetings with residents below Neighbourhood Partnership level.

In paragraph 12.2, the report proposes the development of Neighbourhood Partnerships which would presumably replace the current Boards and Steering Groups in the realigned areas. Given that some of the Area Assemblies cover up to four wards, and even those which cover two wards are often large geographical areas, we are concerned about a possible loss of local accountability.

With regard to comments on Paragraphs 12.1 and 12.2 of the report, the new arrangements will regularise the current mix, with a requirement to establish a local Neighbourhood Partnership in each area. Beyond that, the management view is that there maybe local variations in organisation to reflect the areas and to ensure accountability, but that this operates within the broad framework of the partnerships. Neighbourhood Plans with agreed actions and outcomes are central to this and to ensuring the accountability mentioned by UNISON.

We are concerned about the future role and viability of the Area Assemblies as we have seen that where there is a Board or Steering Group in a particular neighbourhood, attendance at the Area Assembly is often not great. While we are fully supportive of the concept of engaging with residents, partners and services to solve problems and improve service delivery, particularly in the

east of the borough, there is surely a limit to the number of meetings that residents can be expected to attend. We also know that the more local the issue, the more likely residents are to get involved and to want to change and improve the areas in which they live.

Regarding Area Assemblies, the report proposes how these will be sustained and developed in the borough wide structure, and sees these as the overarching umbrella forums. The changes offer an opportunity to continue improving them, and set out much clearer lines of responsibility for Neighbourhood Managers in relation to these than at present.

In keeping with all reorganisations in Haringey Council, we ask that a review six months after this restructuring of Neighbourhood Management be undertaken. This is necessary to ensure that any outstanding issues are dealt with.

We agree a six month review.

Specific Comments

Core Staffing:

We see in paragraph 13.1 of the report an acknowledgement that neighbourhood management work is “*labour intensive*” and that it “*requires concentrated and consistent effort to identify local needs*”. Paragraph 13.2 then goes on to describe an “*Area Assembly core local staff team*” which, as can be seen from the attached appendices, is not the same for every proposed new area. We are already concerned about the long hours culture experienced by our members in this Service and while we are pleased to see the acknowledgement that this work is labour intensive, we want to ensure that staff are not put under more pressure through this restructuring.

In relation to paragraph 13.1, the term Area Assembly team is used merely to describe the geographic boundary in which the team would work. Neighbourhood Team would perhaps be clearer.

Paragraph 13.2 describes the core staff team for a neighbourhood, with “*additional project officers deployed on a more flexible basis to support work in areas around, for example, youth, employment and environment*”. Our members are concerned about how this would work in practice: could this mean that, for example, a Project Officer might be responsible for projects in several different neighbourhoods at the same time? Would these proposed flexible arrangements also apply to other staff? Presumably staff would be deployed to the more disadvantaged parts of the borough first?

At the same time, we acknowledge the fact that working on projects in a variety of neighbourhoods could be developmental and could enable our members to be better placed for promotion. However, we feel that each Project Officer’s primary responsibility would need to be to his or her core

neighbourhood. We would like to know how flexible working as outlined in the report would operate in practice.

One aim of this reconfiguration is to establish a broad framework for neighbourhood working, with local teams in place. The project officers are part of this, bringing specific skills which could be used in the specific area more widely to support development across more than one neighbourhood.

We also feel that it is confusing to describe these teams as Area Assembly teams, since the Area Assembly is only one element of the work these teams will be expected to carry out.

Our members attend evening meetings and weekend events on a regular basis as part of their work, and while this is made clear to staff when they take up their posts there are ongoing issues with time off in lieu (TOIL) and non-payment of overtime.

We wish to see these matters resolved in line with National Conditions of Service and the Directorate's current practices in other areas such as Member Services and Scrutiny. Staff frequently build up large amounts of TOIL and flexitime which they often have difficulty taking. Management have agreed to review this and have undertaken to come back to UNISON with a way forward by the end of January 2006.

Regarding TOIL and overtime, the Management undertakes to develop a draft policy on flexible working in Neighbourhood Management since we recognise the issues related to evening and weekend working. UNISON has accepted this.

Equalities:

The report states in paragraph 18.1 that "*empowering local people in disadvantaged areas*" to become proactive in their communities is fundamental to the neighbourhood management way of working. We do not agree that the residents in the west of Haringey can generally be described as living in disadvantaged areas.

Proposed reconfiguration of staffing establishment:

We have a number of questions on this part of the report, as follows:

1. Paragraph 15.1 of the report outlines arrangements for an assimilation process for the proposed new structure with ring fences to be organized for certain posts. The term "recruitment to stay" is also used.
2. However, Appendix C states that "*staff will be invited to express their preference for which neighbourhood they would wish to be considered for in order to facilitate a smooth transition*". The posts are grouped into "pools" in this Appendix. We would like to know how this will work

– for instance, if more than one Community Development Officer expresses a preference for a specific neighbourhood, will competitive interviews have to take place? What would happen if they were unsuccessful?

Management is seeking to meet staff preferences in relation to where they would like to work, and we will ask staff to express these. This applies to all pools, and we will endeavour to meet preferences where possible. However, management also reserves the right to make final designations.

3. We need to see a proper process for the transition from the old to the new structure. We understand that the more senior grades (i.e. Neighbourhood Managers) will be appointed first and the teams thereafter.

Agreed.

4. There are currently several acting-up arrangements for certain posts in Neighbourhood Management and there are several agency staff covering other positions. We want Management to ensure that *permanent* staff in *permanent* posts get priority in this restructuring when it comes to ring fences, pools and preferences for areas.

Self evidently, we agree that permanent staff will be prioritised.

5. We would like confirmation of current vacancies in Neighbourhood Management, how these are being covered (whether through interim/acting up/agency staff or other arrangements) and how and when these posts will be permanently filled.

A list of vacancies and how they are being covered is being supplied.

6. We have so far seen two job descriptions for new posts. We have been assured that the others are being prepared, but it is difficult to comment fully on the implications for our members without seeing these. We therefore assume that the grades against the new posts are approximations as they presumably are still in the process of being evaluated.

Two of four new job descriptions have been drafted and are awaiting evaluation. These, and suggested grades for the other posts are all subject to final evaluation. The other job descriptions are currently being drafted.

7. Because we have not seen all of the new job descriptions it is difficult for us to comment on the actual work of the posts being proposed. We see that grades for some posts, such as those for Neighbourhood Managers, Project Officers and Community Development Officers appear to be changing: in the case of Neighbourhood Managers and Community Development Officers, range grades are proposed (PO6/7

for Neighbourhood Managers and PO1/2 for Community Development Officers). How would our members progress from one grade to another? Could someone who is now working as a Community Development Officer become a Project Officer? How does the work of these two posts differ in practice?

Operation of range grades will be in line with the Council's established procedures.

A community development officer can apply to work as a project officer in the normal way.

8. In terms of grading, we note that the new grade for Neighbourhood Managers is PO6/7. We need to point out that managers at this level with similar responsibilities and spans of control elsewhere in Chief Executive's Service have also recently undergone restructurings and have been graded PO7/8. We see that the grade for the Tottenham High Road Strategic Manager is PO8 and that the grades of staff in this team are higher than those proposed for the neighbourhood teams.

Grades for other posts reflect the duties in those specific job descriptions.

9. Some postholders are in receipt of plusages (i.e. extra increments) which in effect take them above the grades shown in the present structure. We have been told that these arrangements will not continue in the new structure.

Additional increments have been awarded in relation to specific circumstances and were always temporary.

10. We note that a new post of Area Assemblies Co-ordinator at grade PO4 is proposed. Will that postholder co-ordinate administrative functions, or will the role deal with wider issues concerning the Assemblies? Neighbourhood Managers currently organize agenda items, speakers and liaise with Members before each Assembly. We understand that the Area Assembly Budget Officer will report to the Co-ordinator.

The role and function of the Area Assemblies Co-ordinator is described in the report. The role is wider than just administration and includes assisting the lead member in working with Assembly Chairs to minimise fragmentation. See paragraph 14.3.

11. Appendix B sets out the proposed staffing establishment for each neighbourhood. We note that there are different configurations of staff for different areas. We can see that in general there are fewer staff proposed for neighbourhoods in the west of the borough, but we still feel that there are some inconsistencies. For example, four staff are proposed for the Wood Green and Noel Park Neighbourhood, but 3.5 staff are proposed for Crouch End and again for Muswell Hill. We wonder how these allocations have been made, as the needs of the

community in Wood Green are greater than those in the west. We see that only two neighbourhoods have Administrative Assistants attached to them (West Green/Bruce Grove and Northumberland Park/White Hart Lane). We are concerned that staff on relatively high grades are currently undertaking more administrative duties than they ought to be because of a general lack of administrative resources. We have now been told that these staffing allocations are "indicative" and will be kept under review.

12. We are unhappy with the revised proposals for Admin/Finance Officers. In an earlier version of the report, it was proposed to have four Admin/Finance Officers allocated to certain neighbourhoods. We were concerned about this in the light of our comments in point 10 of this part of our response to the report. However, we now see that it is intended that they are pooled, presumably centrally. This will mean that only West Green and Bruce Grove Neighbourhood and Northumberland Park and White Hart Lane Neighbourhoods have Administrative Assistants on Scale 4, while the other neighbourhoods have to compete for the attention of the four Admin/Finance Officers on Grade SO1. We also wonder how much support, if any, neighbourhoods can expect from the central administrative resources. Our members have expressed concerns about the difficulty of recruiting staff who are competent in both Administration and Finance, based on recent experience in recruiting elsewhere in the Service.

The aim is to be fair, whilst targeting more resources to the east. Three staff are provisionally allocated to Wood Green and Noel Park, 2.5 to both Crouch End and Muswell Hill neighbourhoods. Additional administrative support will be provided from the 'pooled resource'. Detailed arrangements remain to be determined, but could include an administrator working part time in two areas for example. In relation to support from central resources, administration for Area Assemblies will be undertaken centrally. The management is strengthening the finance team centrally and it is therefore likely that more emphasis will be on strong administrative skills to support the teams at neighbourhood level.

13. UNISON is aware that there are also current restructuring proposals for the New Deal for Communities, which is also nominally part of the Neighbourhood Management Service. We have stated elsewhere in this response that we feel that it is imperative that permanent staff in existing affected posts in this restructuring are given priority. Once this restructuring has been dealt with we request that any vacant posts are circulated first to UNISON members in the NDC who may be displaced as a result of their restructuring before posts are advertised elsewhere. Many UNISON members in the NDC are doing work of a comparable nature to those in Neighbourhood Management and they are also permanent members of staff on Haringey Council's terms and conditions.

Management takes note of UNISON's request concerning the NDC.

14. We would like to see a timetable setting out what will happen next following the report's submission to the Council's Executive on 20 December 2005. Presumably the intention is that the entire restructuring will be complete by 1 April 2006.

Agreed.

This concludes our comments on the report, which we have arrived at after consulting with UNISON members in Neighbourhood Management.

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Neighbourhood Management

19 December 2005