

EMPLOYEES' CONSULTATIVE FORUM: 6th JULY 2011

EMPLOYEES' SIDE REPORT ON THE BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICE 'IN SCOPE' REDUNDANCY SELECTION CRITERION & LACK OF MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

SUMMARY AND DECISION REQUESTED

Despite a formal request from UNISON, the Business Support Project Team failed to provide an adequate criterion and rationale used by Directorate management teams in assessing which positions are 'in scope' for the Business Support BDfR project. UNISON has not been adequately consulted within the statutory consultation period and we believe the selection process could potentially be discriminatory and disadvantage approximately 150 low paid staff members. We request an urgent review into the situation and that those responsible officers in charge are scrutinised and are held accountable for their actions or, where applicable, their inactions.

CHRONOLOGY

| DATE | ACTION | OUTCOME |
|----------|--|---|
| 17/12/10 | UNISON raised initial concern re Selection criterion and impact on employees within the Business Support /Mobile & Flexible Working Trade Union Meeting | Concern not minuted |
| 4/5/11 | Written request made to the Business Support Project Team for the Rationale and Selection process used to determine 'in scope' status | Inadequate response provided by Business Support Project Lead dated 23 May 2011 |
| 11/5/11 | Further written request made to the Business Support Project Team requesting criterion applied and when this criterion was consulted with the trade unions | Inadequate response provided by Business Support Project Lead dated 23 May 2011 |
| 24/5/11 | ECF Report submitted on basis of lack of meaningful engagement in redundancy (HR1) consultation process | Awaiting outcome pending ECF recommendation/s |

REPORT

The Business Support Project is part of the Better Deal for Residents (BDfR) Programme and seeks to transform the way the Authority undertakes its administrative and business support functions, creating standardised ways of working in the form of Business Support Hub and Spoke service areas and implementing generic role profiles (job descriptions).

The Business Support Project has identified approximately 150 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) positions as 'in scope' for the Business Support Service and it plans to release 30.81 FTE's. However, given the proportion of part time positions 'in scope', the FTE releases

will potentially impact a far greater number of staff through the loss of part time roles. The Project will also have a considerable impact on equality as 84% of staff 'in scope' are female.

As the project proposes to dismiss twenty plus employees as redundant, the redundancy consultation period commenced on the 20 April 2011 in which UNISON have taken a full and active part in the attendance at staff consultation sessions and Project Team/Union consultation meetings. Owing to the late distribution of Draft Role Profiles within the new Hub and Spoke service, the statutory consultation was extended until the 6 June 2011.

As we believe the Project Team has ultimate responsibility in the consistent and fair coordination of the Business Support Project, UNISON have made several formal requests to the Team relating to the selection process and the original selection criterion used by Directorate management teams in selecting those posts as 'in scope'.

UNISON also requested information from the Business Support Project Team regarding the checks and processes the Team had undertaken prior to the publication of the 'Positions in Scope' list published within the Business Support Consultation document. As many employees had not been initially informed as planned by their directorates that they were 'in scope' prior to the consultation process, some staff were unsurprisingly dismayed and shocked to find out about their inclusion. Furthermore, UNISON also raised an additional concern surrounding the Project Team's knee-jerk response to a staff consultation meeting in which it conveyed to staff that they would review and establish why some individuals were 'in scope' and why some were 'out of scope'. In correspondence following this meeting UNISON questioned why the Project Team had not undertaken this scrutiny work prior to the commencement of the consultation process.

A response to our concerns was provided by the Business Support Project Lead on the 23 May 2011 and was presented in a Project Team/Trade Union consultation meeting the following day. The content of the response was completely inadequate, hastily compiled and displays a woeful understanding of what a robust criterion for redundancy selection is and how fairness in its application should be demonstrated following implementation.

In response to the question of criterion, UNISON was provided with several contrasting documents. One included a simplistic list of activities which presumably an administrative employee of the Council would be responsible for and which posts had been assessed upon. However, what clouds the matter is the following phrase within the document; 'listed below are examples of what **may** be viewed as administrative/Business Support functions'. Therefore, UNISON can not be certain if this was the actual criterion and definitions used by Directorates thus confusing the matter further. However, we are certain that the Project team did not provide reasonable answers or information demonstrating how fairly or objectively the criterion had been applied by Directorate senior officers and so we firmly believe that the criterion used was not robust and does not stand up to challenge.

For example, UNISON requested evidence to confirm if the Project Team conducted any safeguards, checks and balances to ensure that the Directorates applied the selection criterion consistently and fairly across the Council. No evidence of our request has been supplied, merely an assurance that the Team responded to individual queries when they had arisen.

We also expected to receive information surrounding the clarity in the form of guidelines provided to managers in how the selection criterion should be applied. No information has been supplied.

Also, we expected to receive information regarding whether or not managers had to weigh criterion according to importance within posts and if managers had been asked to score each role. No information has been supplied. If scoring did apply, were managers provided a rationale for their decision to include a role 'in scope' and can this be backed up by verifiable evidence. No information has been supplied. And finally, if scoring did apply, we expected to receive information surrounding whether or not the rationales had been cross-checked centrally for consistency by the Project Team. Yet again, no information to confirm that this did or did not take place has been supplied.

To illustrate the importance of this point one only needs to look at the proportion of roles per Directorate that have been included as 'in scope'. For instance, approximately 55% of those 'in scope' posts are made from positions within Children's Services and we question what the Project Team actually did to ensure that the application of this criterion by Directorates was not carelessly and mistakenly applied? We also question what comparative analysis they had undertaken from the selection pool to ensure that no one Directorate or service area could be disproportionately impacted prior to implementation?

Finally, the Project Team assert that 'the Trade Unions (although it is worth noting UNISON is the only union that have attended Business Support Project meetings) have been made aware of the 'in-scope' criteria through a range of meetings'. This is incorrect and we can not find any record of being informed or consulted on the criterion used for selection within Business Support. As stated above, UNISON requested the way in which employees were selected for redundancy within the statutory consultation period but received unsatisfactory information or no information at all. Not only is this yet another example of bad industrial relations but a possible breach of the consultation provisions as laid within Section 188 of TULRCA (1992) an issue which has been escalated to our Regional Office.

In conclusion, the Business Support Project is part of the Better Deal for Residents Programme and so should be treated as such; a better deal for our residents. It should not be treated as a method in which to attack and significantly disadvantage our low paid administrative members through a process which has not been checked for fairness or consistency while Senior Officers once again remove themselves from any financial impact and are not held accountable for their decisions. We request an urgent review into the situation and that the responsible officers are held accountable for their actions and where applicable their inactions.

AUTHOR: Harrow UNISON LG Branch

CONTACT DETAILS: CONTACT DETAILS:

*Harrow L.G. Branch
The UNISON Office
Central Depot, Forward Drive
Harrow, Middlesex
HA3 8NTTel: 020 8424 1795
Fax: 020 8424 1835
Email: info@harrow-unison.org.uk*