

Programme Nexus: The Next Steps
Representations from UNISON (Lewes Branch)

1. UNISON welcomes the opportunity to give initial feedback on the proposals in the report. Clearly the report sets out some radical and far reaching changes which will affect staff and service users. As the only recognised trade union at the Council, UNISON remains disappointed that the report does not reference UNISON specifically and that there is no reference to consultation with UNISON in Appendix E. UNISON expects to be involved in active and ongoing dialogue with the Chief Executive and others on the implementation, development and impact of these changes.
2. UNISON is concerned about the lack of information in the report about how consultation and engagement with residents/service users (including those who demonstrate protected characteristics under the Public Sector Equality Duty) will be handled. In addition, there is no direct quantifiable research/evidence of the expectations, needs or demands of service users and the opinions of staff. Given the time since the launch of Programme Nexus (November 2011) it is surprising that resident/service user/staff survey data has not been captured in order to inform this process. UNISON considers that an Initial Equality Impact Assessment should be undertaken at this early stage in the process in order to assess the potential impact on those groups of staff and service users specifically covered under the Equality Duty (protected characteristics). UNISON is concerned about the potential for certain groups of staff and (vulnerable) service users to be disadvantaged by some aspects of these proposals. How does the Council plan to consult with these groups of staff/service users to ensure the needs of protected groups are considered?
3. The report is unclear and unspecific about the exact nature and operation of 'service units/pods' and geographical teams. Given that the Council's policy is that the majority of staff will be office-based, it is unclear whether staff will be located other than at either Southover House or in Newhaven. Further information and meaningful consultation with staff and service users is required on this issue. UNISON seeks assurance that ongoing consultation with staff and service users will enable these and alternative options to be fully evaluated.
4. Further details on how the Council will handle the effect of significant staff relocation are needed. It is unclear how the proposals will result in 'savings on travel and service delivery'. In accordance with the NJC 'Green Book' terms and conditions, UNISON seeks assurances that proper policies and protections will be put in place to ensure staff who are required to relocate do not suffer any financial detriment or hardship.
5. The report fails to identify a number of specific risks. These include:
 - the potential loss of professional expertise and specialist skills – further discussion and careful consideration is needed on the balance between specialist and generalist roles;
 - detrimental impact on services and effect on staff from introduction of rotas – detailed discussions are needed on how this would work in practise;
 - the potential for de-skilling of the workforce which may have a detrimental impact on customer service, efficiency and quality;
 - the potential for claims against the Council if the restructure, recruitment process and associated job and grading review is not conducted fairly, objectively and it fails to properly consider equality impacts and equal pay issues;
 - the potential risk of an industrial dispute arising from any adverse impact to pay, conditions and benefits or lack of suitable protections;
 - the risk to customer service and service quality during this period of significant change and upheaval – what measures will be taken to inform service users and ensure issues are identified and dealt with?

- Risk 2 identifies 'early recruitment of new chief officers' as the mitigation of risks associated with the loss of experienced senior staff. What about the succession planning required to deal with the loss of expertise and experience in other parts of the Council? How does the Council plan to maintain adequate staffing levels and skills required to maintain service quality?
 - UNISON notes the inclusion of Risk 4 regarding staff morale, motivation and stress arising from uncertainty and potential significant changes to jobs, pay and conditions. As recent statistics show there has been a significant increase in staff turnover and sickness absence due to stress, depression and other mental health related issues. UNISON repeats its concerns over this worrying trend.
6. UNISON is concerned about the trend towards short-term/fixed term posts and the procedures for filling/not filling vacancies. UNISON asks that the Council makes a commitment to ensuring that all current vacancies, temporary staffing arrangements and any vacancies arising in the future are the subject of consultation/ discussion with the Branch. Is the intention that the any new posts in the new structure will be permanent rather than temporary/fixed term posts?
 7. UNISON notes the recommendation to discontinue the percentage salary link between Director and Chief Executive posts (and any future posts at this level) as set out in the Council's Pay Policy Statement. Does the Council intend that the pay, terms and conditions pertaining to the new Director posts will be in accordance with national (JNC) pay and grading structures? If this salary link is broken, on what basis will the salary levels of other Chief Officers be established? Does the Council intend to make any other changes to its Pay Policy Statement as part of these proposals?
 8. UNISON seeks further clarification on the process for establishing job roles and grading for the local service team heads and other manager posts. Will this be based on the Council's current job evaluation scheme? Will UNISON be given an opportunity (as present) to participate in this process? UNISON has some concerns over the proposed phasing of the restructure and the impact that any 'fall-out' from each phase will have on the next.
 9. UNISON has repeatedly requested that any key decisions or proposals which affect staff should be subject to a staffing assessment. This would provide key information in a simple, straightforward, consistent and easily digestible format which could be used for communication and consultation with staff. A model staffing assessment form has previously been provided by the Branch and is attached (for information). UNISON requests that this staffing assessment (or similar) be adopted and introduced with immediate effect.
 10. Given the significant HR implications arising from the proposals and the imminent departure of the Interim Head of HR, what arrangements are being made for ensuring there are adequate HR resources, skills and expertise during the period identified in Appendix E to the report?
 11. The report appears to focus on office-based functions and staff and does not make mention of how these changes will impact non office based staff or services such as waste and recycling, parks, Clean and Green etc. How will staff in these service areas be engaged and what input will they have to this process?
 12. Finally, it is vital that the Council does not lose sight of workplace health, safety and welfare issues arising from these changes. UNISON repeats its concerns that health and safety at the Council has been under-resourced in recent years. It is understood that the post of Safety Officer is likely to become vacant. What arrangements are being made to ensure the Council has proper H&S arrangements in place going forward? UNISON gives early notice that it wishes to discuss Health and Safety issues and arrangements at the next meeting of the Employment Committee in July.