



**UNISON response to the Formal Consultation
on the Proposals for the Restructure of Adult
Social Care Services in Barnet Council
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Barnet UNISON

Barnet House

1255 High Road

Whetstone

N20 0EJ

Telephone: 020 8359 2088

Email: contactus@barnetunison.org.uk

www.barnetunison.me.uk

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Recommendations

1. Restore the structure of Adults and Communities to the way in which it used to be managed with one Director responsible for the service overall and Assistant Directors reporting to the Director.
2. Develop and Implement strategies for ensuring Direct Payments are paid appropriately and for collecting Direct Payments which have been paid out inappropriately.
3. Focus on clearing the backlog of incomplete Financial Assessments ensuring that residents are aware of the charge they are assessed as being able to pay.
4. Hold on the proposed deletion of posts both occupied and vacant whilst the revenue generated from points 2 and 3 has been established.
5. Retain the review team.
6. Undertake to never consult with colleagues again without adhering to the best practice for consultations.

Summary

There has been a woefully indecent lack of consultation regarding these proposals. The consultation period was extended to 8th January (the second day back for very many colleagues) by demand although UNISON had requested the 11th January to enable more reasonable time to collate responses and feedback to management. As such we can only offer some observations and convey the risks in going ahead with the proposals without further discussion.

Notwithstanding this there has been a positive development as the Adults and Communities senior management team has now agreed to retain review team. This is very welcome. It will also be moved to sit with the other social work and OT teams. This is also welcome.

Also welcome is that the Senior Management Team has made a commitment to involve relevant staff members in an exercise to recover Direct Payments from individual bank accounts where appropriate. We understand this could be in excess of £100,000s. There is also a commitment to put in place a way to clear the backlog of Financial Assessments.

Our concerns now remain around the way in which specialist professional oversight and processes will be managed.

Background

The restructure document states that the rationale for the restructure is primarily driven by the need to make savings. It is also needed in order to manage the consequences of the Senior Management Restructure which sees the deletion of one Assistant Director post in this service area.

The majority of restructures over the years have been developed with this aim in mind. There has been no discernible reduction in demand on services, instead there has been a rise in the complexity of the cases colleagues are managing due to a

number of factors but which include dealing with the pressures arising out of the difficulties the NHS has managing demand for its resources.

This restructure consultation opened 5th December and was due to close 3rd January. The statutory consultation period is 30 days. However, this time period was automatically reduced (from the statutory period) as due to the number of Bank Holidays, this means there were only 18 working days in which to consult. In addition this period of time is a peak holiday time with higher numbers of colleagues taking 1-2 weeks annual leave. Effectively colleagues had a mere two weeks to respond this consultation. Significantly there had been no breath about these changes prior to consultation opening.

Changes to at least one job description is being proposed to one postholder and yet no new job description has been produced, no consultation has been undertaken with the postholder during the consultation period. There is a general lack of clarity regarding what the changes proposed will actually entail. There has been no new job evaluation regarding the changes to the jobs outlined.

There has been almost no opportunity to have a meaningful dialogue although there have been some interesting anecdotes and details which have come to light in those 2 weeks and which deserve greater exploration. (see comments in the Summary section regarding Direct Payments and Financial Assessments).

All of this is extremely disappointing and unnecessary given recent history in managing some recent, albeit lower level changes in Adults Services. These have been around the recreation of the Review Team and re-design of the Front Door and the Re-design of the OT service. Both of these changes, by contrast, involved staff right from the start in terms of designing the way the service should be delivered and resulted in extremely positive and appreciative feedback from staff.

In 2013 the Review Team was disbanded and reviews were distributed across all other social work teams to complete. This resulted in reviews (which are statutory) not being completed in larger numbers. This created a huge risk for the service as residents were potentially receiving inadequate support or were receiving too much support which is a risk for the ongoing budget in Adults Services.

By 2017 the Review team was being resurrected (as already discussed above). This team is key in terms of assisting the service to manage ongoing demand and resources. This proposal had sought to return to the period following the 2013 restructure.

The Safeguarding Head of Service manages teams delivering DOLS and Mental Capacity Assessments; expertise and oversight on practice and management of Safeguarding cases and Training and Development. These are specialist and technical areas guiding the way colleagues work. All colleagues are clear about where they can turn to in terms of up to date and relevant information being collated, guidance offered and therefore in terms of receiving quality professional, timely support.

At the start of the consultation it was reported that one of the Assistant Directors would already be leaving the service. Halfway through the consultation it was announced that the Director of the Delivery Unit would also be leaving. This has led to number of managers expressing more alarm than they otherwise would have regarding the extra work and responsibilities they will be picking up.

Over the last few years there has been a steady review of the way in which some service areas are being delivered. Colleagues have felt listened to when they have voiced their concerns (even if not immediately) or made suggestions for improvement. There is no doubt there are other areas which also desperately need this level of review. These are the way Financial Assessments are done (there is a significant backlog). This has meant that residents who should have been making significant financial contributions to their care, have not been doing so and so the Local Authority is losing thousands of pounds.

Colleagues advising around Direct Payments have alerted Senior Managers to large sums of money (£100,000s) which are now inappropriately in the bank accounts of some residents of Barnet. Some of this accumulation has arisen from inadequate reviewing arrangements.

This has not been reported on in the corporate risk register although it represents a significant financial risk.

Risks

- The risk to losing colleagues who are specialised in managing the DOLS work is that the local authority fails to manage its statutory obligations effectively, causing reputational damage.
- The risk that standards around Safeguarding will not be maintained and that colleagues will struggle with the timeframes if there is no specialist leadership maintaining the confident handling of Safeguarding practice.

Conclusion

Without extending the consultation period there is no assurance that the work left by the 2 departing colleagues can actually be managed.

Confidence needs to be restored to colleagues regarding the way in which consultations are done. The short time period demonstrated no lack of enthusiasm for engaging in discussions around the change. However, there was insufficient scope for useful detailed discussion. It should be borne in mind that there are now 2 colleagues facing redundancy after many years' service for Barnet and who have every reason to feel they've been thrown to one side with scant regard for their contribution.