



UNISON response
to the restructure of
Housing Needs and Resources
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Barnet UNISON
UNISON Office,
Building 4, North London Business Park,
Oakleigh Road South,
London, N11 1NP
Telephone: 020 8359 2088
Fax: 020 8368 5985
Email: contactus@barnetunison.org.uk
www.barnetunison.me.uk

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Introduction

Barnet UNISON is committed to supporting our members working in Housing Needs and Resources who deliver a high profile services to some of the most vulnerable members of our community. It is important to us that our members that they are able to carry out their work in a safe and healthy work environment. It is the view of UNISON that this restructure presents a number of concerns some of which could have an impact on the health and well being of our members as well as the overall efficiency of the service.

Head of Service

This post was deemed not needed when Housing needs & Resources staff transferred across to Barnet Homes. It has subsequently reappeared in your proposal albeit for a limited period of 2 years. UNISON's position is that it is untenable for following reasons.

- **Cost.**

The saving of this post was made by Barnet Council; it is unacceptable that an already diminishing budget is placed under further pressure by the introduction of another layer of bureaucracy. This proposals seems in direct contradiction to the Barnet Homes CEO briefing given during the senior management restructure

- **Separation**

The proposal actually reinforces separation and not inclusiveness within the Barnet Homes Delivery Unit.

- **Public Perception**

At a time when public sector is under public scrutiny (recent [headlines](#) about high pay at Barnet Council) it does not look good that public services in creating an extra senior tier of management.

UNISON view

Our view is that Barnet Homes retain the 3 housing manager posts which were transferred over and direct all additional resources saved to front line services. Any leadership role should be paid for with the use of an honorarium. This would enable the organisation to save money and develop the skills of the existing management group.

Temporary Accommodation

The use of Housing temporary accommodation is in the [national media](#) and quite rightly so. UNISON believes all resources need to be channelled into front line services and not into senior management hierarchies.

Risk

Property – There is a serious lack of available properties available within the private sector in addition to this there is virtually no accommodation within this borough. The deletion of staff in property procurement places the council at higher risk of not being able to fulfil their statutory duty especially in view of the high profile media interest and

with imminent introduction of the localism bill where full duties can be discharged within the private sector.

There is increasing evidence to suggest that the number of Judicial Reviews is starting to escalate. This restructure provides no supporting evidence to suggest how it will mitigate the loss of the staff professional expertise and knowledge to prevent further costly JR's. This could lead to an increase in the number of complaints going to the Ombudsman which will lead to further costs.

Our members are reporting they are already finding it financially impossible to procure Private Sector properties & temporary accommodation within this borough. This proposal could bring the attention to the Council that was focused on Newham last week as the implications could mean that residents and their families are shipped to other parts of the country.

	Homelessness applications	New placements into temporary accommodation	Homeless duty acceptances
January 2011	83	37	9
January 2012	91	63	45

UNISON understands there are currently have 24 HNO's doing the duty rota and picking up cases.

There are currently 1345 cases that are being dealt with in total. 550 of those are currently under investigation. This is a total of roughly 56 cases each with more being picked up by the hour. This does include those in Band 4 where the client has little or no chance of being housed and so nothing is really being done about those. There are a total of 209 of people in Band 4.

Officer numbers

It is UNISON's view that the proposed **deletion of posts** in the housing needs team, and the property management team is **unsustainable** in terms of service delivery and to the health and well being of our members.

UNISON is currently carrying out a **stress survey** following feedback from our members about the already high levels of stress which members are directly attributing to the duty system, and the increasing pressures of the continuing lack of accommodation. Admissions into TA have **gone up** by over **40%**. We do not have capacity now to deal with this – in addition homeless approaches have sky rocketed has **gone up by 14%** in the past year. This restructure comes at a critical time and we seek to **work with you** to ensure the health and wellbeing of our members in what continues to be an incredibly stressful environment. UNISON looks forward to Barnet Homes ensuring ongoing assessments for our members to monitor their health and safety. UNISON would like to have discussions of both our survey and the in house

survey being carried out to measure not only the **levels of stress** of members but of **all staff** within the service.

We note the increased use of temporary accommodation – we are also aware that one of the **income streams** is through the numbers that are approaching this Local Authority. In light of the previous deletion of the housing register team the service can no longer produce **accurate figures** on the numbers of those presenting themselves as homeless and as a result could **lose funding** from central government. Reducing the number of housing needs officers will likely **impact** on the ongoing accuracy of figures on the numbers of those who are in Temporary Accommodation and the numbers that have been given negative decisions under the Housing Act Part VII since the beginning of Lean.

Team Leaders

We are concerned that further **genericisation** of HNR leadership will lead to the de-skilling of staff which cannot be an advantage to customers as the required level of experience and expertise will deteriorate. In addition to this, it will likely **impact** on the **performance of statutory duties and standards of customer service**. Team leaders carry out several functions and perform statutory duties for which a level of expertise in points of law is essential from the onset of carrying out this work. The new structure does not recognise this. Housing needs team leaders are responsible for covering the duties of housing needs officers on leave. They are already stretched and there is **no evidence** being produced within the current consultation to suggest how you will mitigate the loss of skills, experience and knowledge that each part of our service has.

UNISON is also concerned that the current structure **greatly underestimates** the necessity and intensity of the duty senior system.

Redundancy Selection Criteria.

We understand a number of staff may wish to apply for VR.

If this was to leave sufficient number of vacancies UNISON expects the remaining staff to be assimilated.

It is our understanding from the London Borough of Barnet 'Managing Change Policy' that LBB redundancy Selection criteria are applied where it has not been possible to avoid making employees compulsory redundant. We note however that it is your intention to proceed with the assessment of the staff at risk even if compulsory redundancy is no longer necessary. We would welcome further discussion on this.

Staff at risk proposals

UNISON has had sight of a proposal submitted by Staff at risk and would welcome your response.

Equalities Impact Assessment

At the commencement of the consultation the above was not produced. Please can you provide it as a matter of urgency.

Call Centre

The new structure does not shed any light at all as to how the call centre proposals may impact on the delivery of this high profile service. In absence of any information we are concerned that there will be further detrimental changes to way this service is to be provided. Specifically, there is a concern here that once the Council's proposals come through, Barnet Homes will be forced into another hasty process of restructure.

Job Descriptions

We are requesting **an extension** to the consultation in light of the fact that the job descriptions were not produced until close of play **Friday 20 April (17 days** after consultation began. Furthermore the grades have not been produced which limits the ability of our members and UNISON to reasonably consult over your proposals.