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REFERENCE: Task and Finish Group

Dear Cllr Braun,

I have been asked to respond to your email suggesting UNISON could provide you with an update regarding the issues at Your Choice Barnet (YCB).

UNISON submitted a response in May of this Year in response to the proposals from YCB around the consultation document issued by YCB March 2013. Since then the management restructure has already been implemented and some 30+ members of staff have taken the option of redundancy.

Before the consultation period it was already clear YCB were using a substantial number of agency and Zero Hours Contract staff (As and When), which appeared to be much more than covering for unplanned absences or dealing with fluctuations in the service. The volume of redundancies has radically exacerbated this situation.

According to the figures we have seen (attached) some 4564.6 hrs in July of this year were covered by casual and temporary workers. UNISON has grave concerns about this usage of casual and temporary workers.

1. This is a client group which is highly reliant on getting to know and trust their support workers. Support workers need to get to know the service users in order to be able to understand their communication needs properly.
2. It has become clear that support workers who are dependent on the whim of their manager as to whether they can come back to work another shift are much less likely to feel comfortable about voicing their concerns about practice. This reduces the safety of the workplace for the workers – both permanent staff members and casual - and the service users.
3. The staff members need to develop a relationship between one another so that they can rely on one another, in terms of assisting one another and being able to safely handover work from one shift to another.
4. All of these points become even sharper when we take into consideration where these hours are being used – they are not evenly distributed across the service

and so Supported Living alone uses more hours than the other services put together.

5. Supported Living has the settings where workers are working in a much more isolated way than the day services. Good working relationships and communication becomes even more paramount to be safe.

In order to stabilise the workforce we have repeatedly requested that the “at risk” of redundancy letters of the remaining staff are withdrawn. The volume of hours worked by casual and temporary staff indicates that those colleagues “at risk” could easily be absorbed into the structure by now.

YCB has only this week agreed to assimilate Support Worker colleagues with “at risk” letters into vacant and advertised Support Worker posts to mitigate redundancy situations, following appointments to such posts of colleagues who were not “at risk”.

Morale is extremely low as colleagues become more anxious about the financial stability of YCB and their own security in terms of maintaining their income and job. In addition there has been an anxiety about safety from settings where the staffing has radically changed as a result of the redundancies. The redundancies were also not evenly spread across YCB but were concentrated in a couple of settings – Supported Living, BILS and Valley Way.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Davies
Branch Chair
Barnet UNISON.