

Statement: PS09.03

Cabinet – 18 January 2022

Re: Agenda item 9 - 2022/23 Budget Report and Treasury Management Strategy (Including Public Health)

Statement submitted by: Steve Mills - UNISON

Statement from Bristol UNISON relating to Budget Proposals being submitted to Cabinet 18/1/22

We welcome the ability to engage on the next round of cuts to our services and the workforce at Bristol City Council. We understand the difficulties faced by BCC with funding streams from Central Government and the budget pressure occurring due to the demise of Bristol Energy.

We also recognise that the majority of the proposals are only at the information stage and more detail will be offered for a consultation process. However, we are unsure how this consultation will occur, please see below the piece on Trade Union Facility time.

We would like to raise some issues on some of the proposals and would welcome your consideration and input.

Review of the Rehabilitation Service Budget Proposal [ASC6]

The proposal is as follows

“Health and social care leaders have specified the need for Sirona to fully open beds on the rehabilitation ward as soon as possible to help manage overall system pressures. There is already contract provision and funding in place to operate these beds, but currently insufficient available workforce is limiting the number that are available for use. The closure of South Bristol centre and transfer of workforce would enable them to fully open all beds (which is not currently possible), thus ensuring no overall reduction in rehab beds in the city”

Whilst we understand the limitations of the existing building and that it has been allowed to fall into disrepair. We do not agree with the treatment of the staff in this setting.

The proposals will transfer care staff under TUPE regulations and attempt to redeploy support staff, like cleaners and admin.

We do not understand or agree with transferring the staff to Sirona. Even though the consultation started in November, staff only met with Sirona for the first time on 12/1/22. Sirona could not be clear about future services, or terms and conditions. The consultation process can only be described as shambolic. We are still seeking basics like the pension comparators. Though to be fair, BCC HR have said that they can provide this.

We have asked why the staff cannot retain their employment with BCC and continue to serve the public within Sirona's setting. This would still free up the existing building for sale or refurbishment. We are yet to receive an answer and we do not feel that this proposal from staff is being taken seriously.

We are unsure how financially secure Sirona are and we all know about the existing problems facing outsourced social care. With some facing financial difficulties and all having staffing problems due to poor pay and terms and conditions.

There is not a need to transfer these staff out of BCC and we are asking you to instruct BCC officers to take this seriously and investigate this possibility. Members have made the significant point that they worked hands on throughout the pandemic, and now they are being treated like this. They are upset and angry and deserve a lot better.

Furthermore, support staff will not be transferred, but put into the ever decreasing redeployment pool. We all know that their chances of successful redeployment are very small. We have asked for them to be offered voluntary severance in the first instance. Better still, they should go with the rest of their staff team, to the new setting as BCC employees.

Review Bristol Community Links service delivery Budget Proposal ASC7

The proposal is as follows

“To conduct a review of day opportunities currently provided within Bristol Community Links by developing options to deliver cost efficiencies. This is subject to consultation.”

Whilst we recognise that this is start of the consultation process, we need to put a marker down now.

We are opposed to the transfer of staff out of BCC, especially in social care. The reasons are the same as South Bristol Rehab, that social care is in crisis at the moment and this transfer is very unlikely to improve services to some of the most vulnerable within our community.

The report goes further by stating that “Staffing model is considered outdated and expensive”. It is unclear who considers this. But if a proper TUPE is followed, then terms and conditions and pay will continue.

The report also recognises that “Local research has highlighted how long-term underinvestment and lack of equity in funding and procurement has eroded the local Voluntary and community sector”. This coincides with our collective concerns about outsourcing and why social care is in such a crisis within our city.

Lastly, it has been suggested that consultation will only take a month. This will not be adequate for proper consultation and due diligence on a TUPE transfer. Leaving the Council open to legal challenge. If BCC really need to do this, then do it properly.

Concord Lodge Budget Proposal ASC12

The proposal is as follows

“Concorde Lodge is a 7-bedroom, short-term (6-12 month) assessment residential unit (no permanent living) providing support and accommodation to people with learning difficulties and complex needs who’s behaviour challenges services.

The proposal would be to close Concord Lodge and transfer the service to an external strategic partner. Indicative savings may be produced by staff reduction / efficiency savings – TUPE would apply. Approx. 33 staff”

Once again, whilst we recognise that this is the start of the consultative process.

However, we are opposed to outsourcing staff, especially to save money. This is an essential service for many vulnerable citizens and their families. The staff have worked hands on throughout the pandemic and deserve better. If savings are being proposed, then this is likely to be at the expense of these staff members. UNISON will vigorously oppose this and urge you to reconsider.

Management of change – Culture & Creative Industries

The UNISON members working within museums would like to make the following points on this proposal.

Our overriding concerns are that the full impact of what is being proposed have been ‘hidden’ from public scrutiny:

- A presentation was made at our weekly staff meeting at which staff were told that one of the proposals to make savings involved a review of the Museums & Archives service with a view to reducing costs by £400K pa
- The Cabinet papers published on the BCC website reference the review and savings of £83K but do not reference the anticipated level of reduction to be achieved by it and therefore the consequent level of impact on service delivery or significant job losses this will entail. The anticipated level of reduction we are told is 5x more than expressed publicly.
- When the discrepancy was queried it was confirmed that Council anticipated making savings of up to £430K from the Museum & Archive service. This does not tally with what staff were told at the briefing, nor what has been published in Cabinet papers.
- There is no public transparency about either what is being proposed, or the level of cuts that will be made. What is being expressed publicly is an £83,000 saving in the 2023/2024 financial year and not £400-430K. This does not allow anyone outside the Council to know or understand the true impact of what is being proposed or to ask questions informed by the facts.
- It is not clear why these anticipated savings have not been detailed, the impact of which has not been made available for public scrutiny in advance of a public meeting when there must also be a rationale/scoping document that supports this somewhere that has clearly has also not been made publicly available.
- This level of reduction, we are told, will necessitate job losses - we estimate at the very least 8 – 10 people being made redundant but the real number will likely be considerably more and possibly double. Our staffing levels will literally be decimated, as will the service we provide.
- These job losses will not be at SLT level since we are told that SLT restructure and recruitment will be expedited to deliver the proposed review –

this is completely at odds with the “deleting budgeted vacancies, to ensure we retain capacity in priority areas and reduce the impact on employees.” One SLT post is currently $\frac{4}{5}$ vacant with the temporarily appointed postholder seconded to another role with no backfill in place, whilst another is a permanent post being covered by secondment from within – the Equalities Impact Assessment is misrepresentative of this. The overall budgeted expenditure on 3 SLT posts related to Museums & Archives is in the region of £160K alone – not appointing to one of these posts would save at least £50k per annum.

- The proposed SLT restructure was framed in advance of the now proposed service-wide review - as yet it has not been delivered and to do so in advance now, would be like putting the cart before the horse since SLT needs to be relevant to whatever is left of the service after the review. It is impossible to believe that it is appropriate to separate the two activities and doubts were expressed that what was proposed was appropriate especially as it was not made clear which museum teams would report to which SLT post and an imbalance of responsibilities.
- The EqIA supplied largely refers to the SLT restructure and not the Museum & Archive review, consequently it shows that only 1 x FTE is directly impacted when this will not be true of a service-wide review.

Item 9 - 2022/23 Budget Report and Treasury Management Strategy (Including Public Health)

1. There is inconsistency in the messaging about proposed budget cuts and the impact on CCI. Staff have been told by senior managers that the Museum & Archive team faces ‘a budget saving of up to 10% on salary costs by 2023/24 depending on the findings of review work’. (Email to all CCI staff from Jon Finch, Mon 10/01/2022). This figure seems to vary from £400,000 to £430,000 depending on which manager is reporting to the staff team. Only £83,000 is clearly specified in the Public Report Pack Agenda - Section 1: Proposals that may be subject to consultation (p11). How and when will the full extent of the proposed savings be made public, especially since these will clearly have a major impact on a public-facing service, and why was this detail not supplied from the outset?
2. We estimate that the Museum & Archive team makes up around 1% of the total BCC workforce yet it would appear that the anticipated staff cost savings of up to £430k associated with the Museum & Archive review represents a disproportionately large percentage of the £5.5m savings to be made over the whole of the projected BCC workforce savings. This is almost 8% of what is proposed to be being saved. Why is the Museum & Archives team which is a workforce group comprising of about 1% of all BCC staff being targeted for savings in such a disproportionate way?
3. BCC has stated that it will be taking steps to reduce the impact on employees when it comes to workforce change. For example, through vacancy management with the common activities programme, by deleting budgeted vacancies and also reducing the number of managers through succession planning. The proposed SLT restructure is completely at odds with this strategy.

How can a recruiting to an as yet undelivered (uncosted) restructured version of SLT be justified in advance of a further workforce review of the Museum & Archives teams and why are senior management posts not being brought into the scope of the same review? How can a restructured SLT be delivered in advance of the wider review be guaranteed as fit for purpose if the results of the wider review are as yet unknown?

Questions about the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) Management of change document for Cabinet Tuesday, 18th January, 2022 4.00 pm

1. The Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) Management of change – Culture & Creative Industries (Appendix E, p344) only focuses on proposed changes to SLT and does not discuss the huge changes/impact that the proposed budget reduction of up to 10% (£430k) by 2023/24 will have on the current staffing structure. Though wider workforce changes are addressed in the Workforce implications of budget proposals for 2022/23 (p 177), no specifics are given. Why is this?
2. The rationale for change within the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) Management of change – Culture & Creative Industries (Appendix E, p344) states as its reasoning, that:

‘The quality of life survey shows a continued reduction to engagement and satisfaction with CCI services from Bristol citizens – particularly from our priority groups. Only 33% of Bristol residents participate in cultural activities at least once a month, down from 43% in the previous year (QoL 2020).’

There is however, no reference to the fact that between 2020 and 2021 museum and archive services were not allowed to open or were operating on reduced capacity due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Why has such an important mitigating factor been left out and do the figures represented here refer directly to all types of cultural activity or just those provided for by the BCC museums and archives team?

The following statements within the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) Management of change – Culture & Creative Industries also require clarification/further information:

1. ‘The current service does not sufficiently reflect the needs of Bristol citizens and the culture sector, further emphasised by the Black Lives Matter protests and toppling of Colston statue in 2020’. Please could we have further clarification as to how the current service does not sufficiently reflect the needs of Bristol citizens and the culture sector. Staff from CCI have a proven track record of reflecting the needs of Bristol citizens and delivered an important display/public consultation on the Colston statue.
2. Recent events have highlighted the need for the service to be more resilient and flexible i.e. have the capacity to recover from difficulties and respond to changing demands on the service. Please could we have examples of these recent events? Staff have responded to the difficulties surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic in a resilient and flexible way, changing ways of working and ensuring the needs of audiences are met – we have robust data sets that demonstrate this.
3. Rapid growth of service in recent years through new services being added to CCI has put pressure on staff and management in terms of time and ability to support staff to deliver service objectives. If rapid growth of the CCI service is putting pressure on staff and management, then why is it that only museum and archive staff are being reviewed and restructured?

4. Under 'Obstacles to improving CCI service provision', the document states that 'The service has been working towards the 'future service' state for a number of years.' We would like clarification on what this means as this has not been communicated to staff. The museum and archive service has modelled and adopted new ways of working and delivery mechanisms that are emulated by many others.
5. Under 'Likely interventions & timescales', the document states that 'It is recommended that CCI deliver a transformation programme over 18-24 months with a focus on: workforce (July – March 2022)'. These dates do not match the dates given to staff. Please clarify.

Modernise Trade Union Facility Time Arrangements

The proposal is as follows

"The Council currently has a budget to fund trade union time spent on council-wide matters (such as negotiations on terms and conditions of employment, consultation on HR policies and major change across the organisation). When an employee is elected to a corporate trade union role, the budget is used to reimburse the service where they work for the time they spend on corporate trade union duties. The budget and internal agreement around corporate trade union duties have not been reviewed in many years. This proposal removes £145k of the budget for corporate trade union duties, leaving £50k to cover the cost of employees who are elected to regional and national trade union roles, which the Council is required to do by the National Agreement on Pay and Conditions of Service for local government – known as "the Green Book".

This will significantly curtail our ability to represent members and consult efficiently. Even the day to day running of the Branch will be compromised.

This is a serious attack on democratic standards within BCC as members will lose their voice and ability to engage. Within the budget proposals consultation with the trade unions is mentioned numerous times. If this cut goes ahead, then this will be unachievable.

The corporate time is also used for organising and running the Branch Committee. Allocating case work and supporting stewards. Health and safety inspections and supporting risk assessments. Representing members, collectively and individually. This work could cease and leave the Council open to legal challenge.

Throughout the pandemic our workload has grown, but we have continued to support members throughout. This is a real kick in the teeth for Council employees and their employment law rights. To be frank, it is unbelievable that a Labour led administration is even considering this cut to our facility time.

Furthermore, we strongly believe that this is a political decision. Made by a labour run authority, to outsource our services and BCC staff to "strategic partners".

We sincerely hope that you will reconsider this and allow future trade union representation in Bristol City Council and not make budget cuts at the expense of BCC employees.

Steve Mills Area Organiser on behalf of Bristol UNISON.