



UNISON Dorset Branch

Response to the report to the Shadow Dorset Council on 15 October 2018

Shaping Dorset Council - Change, Control, Convergence.

The Branch notes that this proposal involves bringing forward the convergence of some teams before 1 April 2019 in order to realise savings quickly after that date. It also notes that the report makes clear that this is not the transformational redesign of the new organisation required to enable the operating principles for the Dorset Council.

The potential for some job losses from convergence were outlined some time ago in the outline business plan. At that time UNISON indicated that since 2010 the Government's austerity agenda had placed considerable pressure on local government finances resulting in significant reductions to services, such as Social Care, provided to local communities. It indicated then that these funding pressures were continuing and intensifying and as a result UNISON understood why the Local Authorities were looking to merge to achieve cost savings. Whilst UNISON accepted the authorities have had little choice but to go down this route, it made clear that it was keen to ensure that this was not at the expense of further cuts to public services. UNISON noted that Central Government were providing no funding to support the merger process and the costs that had been identified by the authorities to pay for the inevitable costs associated with such a significant structural, organisational and administrative change. It expressed concern at the time that these additional costs would have their own pressures and would need to be found from existing, already very financially constrained, budgets.

Equally, the local Branches (now merged into the UNISON Dorset Branch) advised at that time that they would work very closely with the authorities to minimise the impact on staff and people receiving services over what will be a very challenging time limited implementation period. This would also involve challenging management, where appropriate, about any steps being considered to form the new Unitary Council. The aim being to work hard with staff and elected members to ensure that our members are treated fairly, that members' jobs were protected and to ensure that members were not disadvantaged by any harmonisation of existing agreed policies, terms and conditions. Furthermore, that the impact of this process of change would be minimised.

The Branch regrets the fact that it has only just been made aware of this proposed change and that at no time was it raised during our established consultation arrangements.

The report raises a number of concerns which need to be the subject of discussion as part of that process. The Branch notes the recommendation to agree structure proposals for consultation purposes and that discussion of these elements will commence soon. However,

a number of the issues have now been raised by UNISON on a number of occasions without resolution, which, given the apparent urgency, is now regrettable.

The Branch is concerned that the original number of posts in the business plan that might have been affected by convergence will have changed over time. The figures are over 18 months old and do not reflect the actual numbers that might be affected. At present it is unclear to us what alternatives are going to be considered other than staffing costs. In addition, the Branch is not aware whether the costs of redundancy, pension liability, redeployment, etc. have as yet been built in. Clearly existing staff hold significant concerns over the potential impact of the proposed changes, particularly in respect of job losses. It is also important to ensure that staff feel engaged with the process rather feeling it is being imposed upon them

There are also existing agreements in place which need to be addressed as part of this process, which we are concerned have yet to be acknowledged.

In terms of general points, the Branch is concerned about the legality of the proposed acceleration of any convergence measures potentially involving job losses at this time, particularly in respect of impacts on TUPE.

At this time there is the potential for inequality under this process, primarily due to carrying out EQIA's after decisions are made. Concerns have already been raised by our members that the new authority will have few women in senior positions, that in the two areas likely to suffer the brunt of the redundancies (Environment and Support Services) it seems likely many more women will face losing their jobs. Therefore, with further potential inequality, it is critical that a thorough and robust EQIA is presented for consideration prior to firming of any plan in order to prevent potential legal challenges.

To date, there has been no agreement on details of the proposed TUPE need for EQIAs.

Furthermore, and most importantly in terms of the current proposals, there is no agreement on Organisational change procedure to be adopted. As things stand there are a number of agreed documents.

The Branch would request that it would wish to see a more detailed breakdown of the budget costs and how any job losses are justified in each case.

Aileen Powell
Amanda Brown
Joint Branch Secretaries