



## **JCC Staff morale on the frontline**

Dear Christine Lawrence,

UNISON were asked to collate views on staff morale and report back to the next JCC meeting in July. It has been agreed that all views will be submitted anonymously so no members can be identified. Here are our views.

It should be noted that groups of staff got together to collectively submit their views.

The last national UNISON library survey - 'The view from the frontline' reported that just 38% of respondents felt valued by their management. Over 60% felt that their local authority did not value the library service. However, 88% of respondents felt valued by the general public.

Everyone has a breaking point and I reached it this month (April 2011)

Volunteers - What do you think will be the effects of this plan on staff who have been suffering a lot of worry and stress over the last year or so, some of whom already feel betrayed by (council) members and managers

Redundancy payments - SCC should have 'due regard' for equalities - Not it appears if you work for the library service

Frozen Posts – I do feel the whole thing was exceptionally badly handled. An e-mail deleting the posts, a verbal denial of any decisions, followed by us being told Heritage had been given the hours

Deleted Posts- At the Street staff meeting colleagues asked specific questions about the frozen posts and were told they would be counted

In other council decisions have been taken to protect the library service. The council has no idea what we do and how much our customers will be damaged by their snap decisions

The people who work on the frontline feel let down by the whole reorganisation. Although we realise the service has to be put in order from the top down, it is the time it has taken the service to reach the

staff that actually face the public. And yet after all this time the front line staff still do not know if their hours are being reduced or their new days of working. When we finally know we have to go through this uncertainty again when RFID is brought in. The only thing we know for sure is that we will not have the opportunity that those on a higher grade have had and that is a higher rate of redundancy. Brilliant!

We feel undervalued and left 'high and dry' by the management.

Library Assistant - I have talked to my colleagues with the following results:

- Very demoralised. Job security, increased workload, questions from the public and just not knowing what will happen. Recipe for stress
- Feeling that we are being squeezed from both ends. Public want same level of service. They do not understand our situation. Management - our perception is that their concerns are leading to them coming down harder on library and information assistants. We feel picked on!
- This unsettled situation has gone on too long. Colleagues feel stressed, irritable and far less patient with our customers and each other.

I feel betrayed – management information is released to the press and public before I hear about it. I have worked hard and in good faith, being flexible for the sake of an evolving service. This appears to count for nothing.

I have had an effective pay cut over the last 2 – 3 years and now struggle to pay bills, etc. As mentioned we are already very low paid compared to other library services. We are very undervalued.

The worry about my job has gone on for over a year now and with the introduction of RFID I will be worrying for another year or two. This has had a severe effect on my mental health and this has meant I have been in trouble at work over my attitude. My customer service, on which I used to pride myself, is now very poor due to pressure and stress.

I am exhausted from covering frozen posts and posts of colleagues who have left. My work/life balance is awful. Obviously, I worry when I am at home. I cannot get the situation and threats to my security out of my head (which is where I am going!) I feel pressured, depressed, stressed, totally undervalued as it appears my job can be done by anyone walking in off the street.

I feel under pressure to take on tasks I am not comfortable with for the same reason. I am confused by the financial information that comes out. What has happened to the frozen posts funding?

I feel threatened by the proposal to use volunteers and the introduction of RFID. My mental health has never been worse, my financial situation gets worse. I am being put into a situation that is becoming very hard to sustain by employers who either no longer value me or just plain want to get rid of me.

I find it very hard to put into words my thoughts about morale at work

- 1) because it's depressing to dwell on and
- 2) because I don't feel Senior Management actually care and it's a further waste of my time, much like the staff meetings we attended.

The length of time this is taking is completely unacceptable as we are still in the dark about many issues.

The deletion of the frozen posts is shameful, especially after being told this would not happen - we appear to be lied to on a regular basis.

We are told not to have certain conversations in public areas, something I rather resent, and then discover information on the BBC website before staff are informed - this has happened more than once. We are now told not to discuss certain issues. We have many regular readers who are concerned about the service and the staff (it's nice to know some people are) but we can't be openly honest with them - the other side of this is having to deal with the rude people who are quite happy to say to our faces we should cut back

It's stressful dealing with the public - we are supposed to provide information on staff and/or have volunteers do our jobs. Both situations are hard to deal with and I'm concerned my tongue may fall off if I have to bite it for much longer. This also applies to the position we have been put in by our increased charges, especially the bizarre decision to charge £5.00 for a replacement card - I still have no idea how to justify this. We're expected to be loyal to the County Council and support their decisions but we receive no loyalty or support in return. I used to have a certain amount of pride in the service we provide but now I often feel embarrassment

The whole uncertainty over our hours, and pay, impacts on our home lives as it's hard to plan too far ahead without knowing if our hours will be reduced soon. I have no idea how our colleagues in the libraries that are due to close are coping with such an awful situation and such lack of information.

In many ways I am impressed that we are still providing such a good service and that staff aren't having time off with stress - I think it's a testament to our commitment to the service and each other but I have to wonder how much more we can cope with before reaching breaking point

Am very disappointed about how information has been communicated regarding the changes to timetables. The cuts driven by county and changes by managers have shown LITTLE RESPECT.

I know cuts are inevitable and changes to opening times are service led. However, please remember employees are the best and most important resource the service had. Personally feel anxious about future changes to working hours. It has caused sleepless nights.

We have already had our hours / timetables changed around but quite a few of us are worried about how they are going to 'squeeze' our hours into new timetables, without making us work extra days. (Somebody mentioned this could be a form of 'constructive dismissal' if applied). We need to know a lot sooner than the last change!! Accepting change is one thing - being pushed into it is another! Thanks one of several despondent workers.

Timetable: a timetable change at local level affected us all at a time when we were already anticipating changes in October. Everyone's TT was changed, some very significantly - we were told it *had* to happen but not consulted until *after* a proposed timetable was produced for each of us - i.e. No one was asked whether they had other commitments etc. and we are not sure that other less radical changes were considered. There was room for some negotiation but only within limits outlined by our LOM.

There is already a great deal of worry about how the pending TT change will affect us all - in particular I am concerned how, as a BLANK, my hours will fit in with changed opening hours.

Jobs: It seems that our terms and conditions are being constantly undermined while pushing the boundaries of our job descriptions outwards e.g. UK online (This is teaching). And we are now doing things that team librarians used to do etc. Sometimes the training for new tasks is last minute or minimal (e.g. Go-on)

We have had no wage rise recently, pension conditions are being 'rewritten' and to add insult to injury we were not considered 'public servants' so SCC did not pay us the £250 promised by the Government! (Even though other councils did). The only reason I received my 'Green Book' payment was because they had tried but could not legally take it away from us.

Frontline staff were encouraged to enquire about their potential redundancy package (based on 3x salary), did not hear for months after they were supposed to and then all were refused – we heard later that frontline staff were never going to be considered – only those at County Hall / HQ got the 3X package which SCC have now managed to reduce to 1X (even though some district councils etc are still at a higher level)

Senior cover: Several times in last few months we have been open to the public without a senior on the premises (i.e. supervisor or above) up to 1 ½ hours. When I raised this I felt I was 'being awkward' but am concerned about the legal / moral implications – we are not paid to take responsibility for a large library and its not the same to have a senior at the end of a phone'.

Communication: On the whole I am happy with my direct line managers (senior assistants) but feel that there is very little positive communication with higher management and a general feeling that they do not really understand what we do in our jobs, treat us as pawns and have no respect for us as human beings – I feel like a resource to be juggled rather than a hardworking and professional individual who takes home a salary which is – according to some measures – below the poverty line.

Stress: The changes in the last 18 months – 2 years and proposed future changes mean that there is an increasing level of stress and uncertainty about job security, particularly for breadwinners.

Staff morale : Rock bottom. Thanks for asking for our feedback and allowing us to get things off our chest.

- 1) *Feel as if service is being 'run down'*
- 2) *Too many things still up in the air*
- 3) *Many colleagues de motivated, depressed and have extremely low morale*
- 4) *Also very very angry that SCC refused to pay the £250 rise promised by Mr Cameron for the low paid public sector*
- 5) *Dissatisfied with recent timetable changes and worried about future changes in Sept / Oct 11. When opening hours change.*

I feel that we're missing such an obvious opportunity with our cd's dvd's etc, cd's especially. As a medium that's becoming increasingly obsolescent, to counteract the declining rental and income the decision was made to raise the cost to the borrower, not lower them. I don't know who's decision this finally rests with, but it shows a complete lack of business and retail acumen and a complete lack of experience with the current shop space. (For my opinion, they should be 3 for 2 or 50p to 80p; at least that would encourage people to use the stock rather than have a room full of dead stock that nobody touches).

Ditto with the raising of the PN fees, although this is compounded with the need for a full replacement of the system and therefore shows a different

issue again. AND raising the costs of replacement cards! £5.00?!? They don't cost us more than 10p! How are we ever meant to encourage library usage when we concurrently dissuade people from using us with badly thought through pricing? We're told from the top that we must be an income generating business, but all of the ideas work to the opposite effect!

If the café was open when it should be - afternoons and Saturdays it would be lucrative library customers are often disappointed to see it closed. Some come in mainly to have coffee or a sandwich and are let down. The café and library should help each other to get more business.

Mobile: Old people who struggle to get their books TO the van, and themselves INTO it, but nonetheless are not listed as housebound because no-one ever suggested they should be – these are the people we will be letting down. There are very few of the BLANK mobile stops scheduled to continue, and hardly any housebound in our area who will get a delivery. The fact that no one has ever spoken to these customers is a disgrace. Also, those who have made the decisions to stop the service should have informed the customers, not left the soul-destroying job to library assistants.

It's the not knowing, that's going on and on, that gets me down! And knowing that there will be potential redundancies next year, and the year after that as well!"

"We still haven't been told where we stand with our timetabling. I don't know how the cuts will affect me. It is really annoying me. It's the not knowing."

"There is a lot of uncertainty, and it's dragging on. No-one knows where they stand. I try not to think about it. It is annoying and I notice staff are getting stressed."

"I'm really sad that everyone is optimistic about the injunction, because unless the council commits to offering us more staff on a longterm basis, we are not going to be able to offer the service that we want to. I'm sick of the council relying on the good grace of the staff. They ought to help us on a practical level."

"The uncertainty has really damaged staff morale!"

"Staff morale is rock bottom and everyone is stressed because of the uncertainty. I'm worried that I'll lose hours and not be able to gain increased tax credits to compensate. I feel the public's concern but am fed up with repeating myself."

I have always enjoyed my job and feel valued by colleagues, line managers, Sue and Phil. I have no faith in any management level outside of our service. Other councils have protected frontline services but it appears

if you work within the library service in Somerset you have no worth or value. The service you continue to provide in worrying times can be accomplished by any volunteer. The customers you know well and assist value you and the service you provide but no one is listening to them. It hurts and is so painful watching a service you take great pride in being destroyed. You will never know its real value until you have finished kicking it into the ground and by then it will never recover. Maybe for once you will listen and learn.

It's all the uncertainty, it's really difficult.

Is the CEO taking a pay cut?

Yours Sincerely,

Somerset County UNISON members  
July 2011