

## **ONS Transparency Commission – Response to Unison Presentation**

### **Public Consultation**

Unison raised a number of issues about how the public consultation exercise with regards to the last round of budget savings was managed. Consideration has been given to the issues raised in response to the last consultation exercise. Trade Union involvement in meetings that management have with staff around the latest public consultation is now covered in the guidance that has been circulated to managers. This has been welcomed by Unison.

With regards to the specific issues raised in relation to Children's Social Care and public consultation, the Corporate Director of Children's Services has met with Unison, GMB and Unite to discuss the proposals that relate to their services in more detail. The service is happy to engage in discussion about ways to improve the process and ensure any lessons learnt from the last round are considered.

In addition, a separate meeting has been held by the Corporate Director Children's Services with Unison to discuss the issues raised in their presentation that are specific to Social Care.

### **Whistleblowing**

The Council take any whistle blows seriously and aims to ensure any issues or concerns raised are investigated and dealt with as timely and effectively as appropriate. Social Care manages any whistle blowing concern in line with the Council's processes. It has been recognised that there are areas that can be improved in relation to current processes and a piece of work is being undertaken corporately to look at this. In addition, staff in Children's Social Care have been encouraged to raise issues directly with managers in order to create a culture of openness. This will mean that problems are resolved jointly and not allowed to fester. Such a culture sits alongside the Council's Whistleblowing policies. We welcome the opportunity to work with the unions in this respect.

Social Work Health Check 2014 was a detailed report with a number of findings for both Children and Adult services across a range of issues. Within Children's Social Care the new Service Head is working with her team on implementing the recommendations which were taken seriously. There will be a follow up check in 2015 to see how this is being received by staff.

To avoid duplication of work, the corporate review of current processes will pick up the issues raised in the Health Check that relate to whistleblowing. All directorates will have an input into this work, as will the Trade Unions.

In their presentation, Unison stated that the Council lost an employment tribunal case as the tribunal found the individual in question had been targeted due to supporting a whistle blower and was sacked as a result.

The tribunal found that an agency worker had their contract terminated by the Council and that the reasons the Council gave for having done this were valid, but they found that they were not the only reasons for dismissal. The potential grievance that was threatened against the agency worker and the response the agency worker would have given, did have an influence on the decision to bring the contract to an end, in the view of the tribunal. However, the award for injury to feelings was in the lowest of bands in that it was a single act of detriment with no aggravating factors. The tribunal did not find that the Council's conduct in terminating the contract or conducting the proceedings was anything other than appropriate.

The fact that Unison remain open and willing to work with management is welcomed and reciprocated. As stated above, the Trade Unions will be a key stakeholder in the work being undertaken with regards to whistle blowing and will continue to contribute towards the work of Social Care.