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UNISON'S BUDGET RESPONSE 2013/14

UNISON was briefed on the budget proposals on 16th December 2013 and was told this year's budget is different. The City Mayor informed us that when they approved the budget for 2013/14 the council also approved strategy which also balanced the budget for 2014/15.

Then in early January 2014 we again met with the City Mayor regarding the budget for the next year and beyond and whilst he did not give us any specific proposals he did say that services and jobs will be cut. However our concern is there appears to be no debate about how Leicester is run and where the axe will fall. Instead we were told that the cuts will come from twenty planned reviews of the following areas;

Corporate Support Services, Neighbourhood Services, Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Contracts, Review of Housing Revenue Account Charging Policies, Sports and Leisure Services, Parks and Open Spaces, Park and Ride, External Communications, Substance Misuse Treatment, Welfare Advice and Customer Support Review, Investment Property, Information Technology, Homelessness Follow Up, Housing Related Support, Technical Services Facilities Management, Housing Management, Maintenance and Investment Spending, Adult Social Care, and Children's Services:

This piecemeal approach to cuts essentially prevents the public from seeing the full picture. In essence this administration has presided over the biggest decimation of Social Care this city has ever known.

UNISON believe that Leicester City Council are hiding behind Organisational Change/Reviews and carrying out the coalition cuts by stealth, this is clear from the cuts carried out to date, some of which are listed below;

Cuts to Learning Disabilities, Closure or the sell-off of Elderly Persons Homes in Social Care, The review and closure of Hostels in Housing, The review of Property Services, The Community Services Review resulting in redundancies and reduced opening hours, The review of Children's Social Care resulting in redundancies and big reductions in pay levels, The change to Terms & Conditions and removal of allowances (including the essential car user's allowance.

We have now been briefed on the Children's Centre Redesign which is going to result in 133 (fte) jobs being lost and a reduction in opening hours. This of course will result in a much reduced service to many of the most vulnerable families in Leicester.

UNISON has been made aware that this is obviously only the beginning. It was confirmed to us that the total cuts agreed to date are £85m and an estimated £60m of cuts by 2017/18 making £145m in total; We understand that so far Leicester City Council have cut £45 million. However they have to be reminded that a huge proportion of the cuts have come from the reduction in use of consultants and the deletion of vacant posts, although consultant use is climbing again and the number of vacant posts has seriously diminished, therefore the savings will inevitably come from job losses and even by the councils figures there would be up to 1200 job losses for them to reach their target of cuts.

The council's approach also does not take into account that the staff left behind are left to pick up the slack when jobs go and vacant posts are deleted. This is having a massive impact on the health and wellbeing of Leicester City Council staff.

Despite being in the midst of what is often cited as 'the most severe government cutbacks in decades' there is a desire at the most senior levels within the council to perpetuate the myth that we are 'managing' within the available resources. From the perspective of UNISON members this is a dangerous myth to peddle.

We have seen an unprecedented level of redundancies over the last three years; coupled with the constant deletion of vacant posts Leicester City Council is staffed by an ever decreasing workforce. Far from this workforce 'managing' UNISON has gathered a significant amount of anecdotal evidence that they are in fact buckling under the strain.

We hear frequently from our members that they are accruing significant amounts of TOIL which can't be taken and further, in order to avoid the (often threatened) capability procedure, many of them are taking work home which they then don't record as working time. Unfortunately many staff, afraid of losing their jobs, is helping to conceal the fact that workloads are becoming unmanageable.

However we must not be under any illusions these figures quoted are likely to mean more job losses than Leicester City Council predict with also massive cuts to services as such we will be lobbying the public to make the people of Leicester aware of the consequences of the coalition governments unwarranted attack on local government services and the staff that deliver them.

Gary Garner

UNISON Branch Secretary

