



## **Bromley UNISON LG Branch**

### **Response to Library Service Outsourcing Proposal 2017**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

UNISON opposes in principle the outsourcing of public services to the private sector and believes that local services are best delivered by staff employed by local authority employers who are democratically accountable to their residents and tax payers.

The reasons for our opposition include;

- The long term protection of our member's jobs, pay, terms and conditions
- The long term need to maintain dedicated expertise (in the delivery of statutory and non-statutory local services) within the public sector, where the statutory responsibilities will remain
- Any savings that can be generated through business and organisational efficiencies, economies of scale, and the like, should be for the benefit of local authorities and their residents, and not creamed off by private sector company share-holders
- The need to maintain and develop good employment practices and industrial relations
- The need to maintain high staff morale and value their contributions to local communities
- To ensure consistency in staffing which facilitates good working relationships with service users

#### **SUMMARY OF THE ISSUES & CONCERNS RAISED BY UNISON MEMBERS**

Many local authorities, including our former Shared Service partner (LB of Bexley) still run successful library services in-house. Why has Bromley completely discounted this option?

Staff have not been provided with any information about why Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL) specifically are to be awarded the contract – what was it about their bid that made it successful? What is their offer to Bromley Council, service-users and staff that make them preferable, apart from (presumably) price and because they were the only qualifying bidder left in the process?

What checks and balances have been carried out to ensure that GLL really can deliver all the services currently offered and included in the specification, and more, for less money than the Council is currently spending?

What is the real justification for Bromley's "commissioning agenda" and why are third parties deemed to be best placed to deliver library services?

When we ask questions about how much money will be saved by contracting out this service, we are told that this is "commercially sensitive information" that cannot be divulged. How then are we to engage in any level of meaningful consultation on the

proposals. What level of savings will the implementation of the commissioned library service generate? Can we be given any indication of how the savings are proportioned in terms of being achieved through “efficiencies”? “improved purchasing power”? and “rate relief/charitable status”?

Why wasn't consideration given to other alternatives for delivering the service, such as a staff-led mutual like they have in Devon and York?

Staff have noted difficulties in being able to express a view on proposals around the Client Team. If this is part of the package of proposals being consulted on, can information be provided about the posts involved (2 officer posts?), grades and job descriptions? How will the client-side team work with GLL, and with library staff, in practice to ensure the contractor complies with all requirements consistently? Where will the Client Team be located and how much contact are they likely to have with the workforce they are monitoring? Why are current staff not able to apply for these posts?

GLL has a much longer-standing, and greater base in the leisure sector than in libraries. How can Bromley be sure, based on only around 5 years' track record in this area, that we can expect a reliable and successful delivery of the service from them?

GLL presents itself as a “charitable social enterprise” but we know that the majority of their workers are on low pay and working in their leisure centres – many on casual contracts. We understand that most, if not all, of these workers do not “own the organisation they work for” or receive the “non-dividend paying share which increases empowerment”. This leads us to question the way they are being portrayed in the consultation document.

What would happen if the contract were to be terminated early for any reason – who would run the library service then, and what would happen to the library staff?

What is likely to happen to staff after the 10 year contract ends?

If branches are currently running on minimal staffing, how will GLL expand opening hours and offer additional services and activities? Will more staff be brought in? Will Sunday opening be implemented in some of the larger libraries?

How will the existing support staff (back office) be deployed generally once GLL take over?

How will professional librarian staff engage in the strategic management process after the transfer?

How will “continuous improvement” be measured? The KPIs seem largely quantitative in nature – how will the more qualitative aspects of the service be monitored, for example learning outcomes?

GLL's website mentions “stretch targets” being issued to staff in Greenwich and Wandsworth – would Bromley staff be given these too?

What is meant by “efficiencies” in practice? Are we to assume that there will be a reduction in pay or posts beyond TUPE? Will GLL be making use of unpaid volunteers to help staff libraries?

What is the reasoning behind Bromley's decision to withdraw from the LLC? It was a big selling point for customers – why is it no longer such a good deal now that the service is being out-sourced? How will GLL ensure that customers have an equivalent standard of requests service?

Various LBB reports in relation to the library service commissioning have noted that library staff are largely not in favour of the out-sourcing and that staff morale is generally low. How will these concerns be addressed, and how can Bromley/GLL ensure that this general lack of staff engagement will not negatively impact upon the service going forward? How will a smooth transfer be accomplished?

How will the current sessional staff be employed after the transfer?

Will views expressed by staff as part of this, and other, consultations around the proposed transfer have any impact upon the outcome, or upon the Executive Committee's decision?

How will the LBB support staff through the TUPE process?

## **UNISON REQUESTS & SUMMARY**

Staff are understandably concerned and anxious about the proposed transfer to a new organisation – a move which is not of their choosing, and which they have not really been able to influence. They are worried about whether GLL will be able to offer them long-term stable employment. Staff may feel let down, angry, stressed or upset by the transfer out of public service. Many feel that management not being personally affected by these proposals cannot truly understand how they feel or empathise with their situation.

Therefore, we are asking for more acknowledgement of the distress this has – and continues to – cause Bromley libraries staff. We are also asking for more to be done to provide support and information to all affected staff over the forthcoming transfer period.

Members may have valuable contributions to make in terms of ideas for improvements and change. Perhaps some work could be done around demonstrating the value of library services to the Council and the local community? Could staff assist in carrying out an enhanced evaluation of what is currently being done within the constricts of scarce resources to ensure maximum benefit for customers, by seeking more input from library users, residents and other stakeholders about the service offer?

UNISON members need to know that their union will be given reasonable opportunities to support them through the transfer period and into their new employment with GLL. We are therefore asking to be given as much information as possible, with as much notice as possible, about any and all future staff consultation meetings, to facilitate access to representation. This includes opportunities for facilitated meetings with GLL representatives at the appropriate times.