

Union's response to the Vancouver Public Library Branch Staffing Model Review - Decisions

Report to the Vancouver Public Library Board

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Preamble

The Union would like to say thank you for the opportunity to share our perspectives once again, on the Branch Staffing Model Review. This time, the focus will be on the decisions by the Director's Group on the recommendations to take forward.

Our last response was relatively general, as we were addressing the recommendations from the consultants both philosophically and broadly. Now that decisions have been made and there is a plan to go forward, this response will be a more focused on the possible implications for staff.

The Union will also take this opportunity to examine the process of this review so far.

The role of the Union

The Union has a vested interest in supporting initiatives that foster and support a healthy, viable and vibrant Library. This is important to our members, and so it is important to us, and we would like to reiterate our willingness to work with the VPL Management Team to ensuring a successful future. This is not lip service.

However, it is also our role to ensure that our membership's rights are not compromised, and this includes aspects of decisions that will adversely affect their livelihood (which includes access to hours, compensation, and opportunities), and ultimately, their sense of value to the organization. CUPE 391 represents the membership, which at this time are around 700 individuals. We are their advocates. We speak on their behalf.

Survey of the membership

In an effort to get objective and quantifiable data on where staff stand in their support of these initiatives, we created a survey, which at the time of the writing of this response, has been completed by about 1/4 of the membership. This survey attempts to gather information about:

- Status, classification, and work unit
- Levels of support or concern for the recommendations
- Relevant aspects of personal life (i.e. those which may be directly affected by recommendations)

The Process

The Union appreciates the Employer's efforts in consulting and meeting with staff around the Branch Staffing Model Review, both before and after decisions the Directors made as to which recommendations to go forward with. The consultation process is an acknowledgement that:

- These recommendations directly affect staff
- Staff are best situated to inform the Employer about how the work is being done
- That staff are a great resource

However, it is incumbent on the Union to raise some concerns:

1. Throughout this process has been referred to as the Branch Staffing Model Review, however it has become apparent that many of the recommendations will have an direct impact on Central, including some of the most challenging, which are a review of the compressed work week, the integration of evenings, Saturdays and Sundays, and, quite significantly, the creation of two new public service positions. Although librarians were not included in the Branch services review, it now looks as if there could potentially be a significant impact on adult services Librarians at Central.
2. The non-inclusion of Children's and Teen Services and Community Librarians in the review may have been an oversight. Their model is used as an example of success for the implementation of the recommendation for flexible worksites (WMC 7.3.4), but they did not make up part of the consultation. These groups also have a responsibility to the branch in terms of the delivery of in-branch services and leadership when the Branch Head is away. In essence, other than Branch Heads, librarians have been excluded from the consultation process, even though they currently play a vital role in the Branches. This is a concern.
3. There is still a tremendous amount of uncertainty and ambiguity around what the outcomes of these recommendations will look like, and the road to get there. This has led to a lot of speculation, anxiety and frustration.
4. In terms of this uncertainty, it is surprising that there is no firm determination of what the outcomes of these recommendations will look like. There has already been a lot of discussion and consideration given to these recommendations, first by the consultants who ostensibly had some basis in observation and data that led them to make the recommendations that they did; by the Branch Staffing Model Working group who oversaw the initial consultation process and also reviewed the recommendations so they could make recommendations on the recommendations to the Director's Group, who in turn reviewed the recommendations and contemplated and considered implications and staff input, in deciding what to bring forward. It must be asked, how can decisions be made without having a clear idea or understanding of what the expected outcomes are? If there are, these should be explicitly shared with staff, to be truly transparent.
5. Many Part-time and auxiliary staff have not been afforded the opportunity to be involved with the process because they are expected to come in on their own time. If there is a real commitment to a consultation process with staff, Part-time and Auxiliary staff should be paid.

The Memorandum

In the memo to staff and in the preamble to the report to the Board, the Directors' Group states, "...we will consider options to achieve outcomes in a manner that has the least impact on employees". (p. 4 of memo, p. 3 of report to the Board). The Union will be looking to the Employer to hold true to that promise.

In these same two documents, the Director's have also referenced four criteria used to assess the recommendations (p. 3 of memo and report to the Board), two of which reference staff either directly or indirectly:

- VPL Values – of which one is “staff development and collaboration”
- Employee enablement

We will also be looking at the Directors' decisions with these criteria in mind.

Cost of doing business

In both the memorandum and the Management Report to the Board, there is a discussion of financial implications, which includes the following statement, “Operational impacts of the recommendations must be cost neutral to VPL”. (p12 of memo, p. 13 of report to the Board)

It's important to note that there have already been financial implications related to this Review. In fact, the cost of the Review itself, the engagement of the consultants, and the cost of staff time given to consultation and meetings all represent costs incurred in the production of the report. In addition, monies have already approved from reserves to hire a coordinator. Further costs must be anticipated in staff time and resources during the process of implementation. This is not mentioned as a criticism of these expenditures, but to ensure acknowledgement of the reality when it comes to the implementation of changes as fundamental as the changes contemplated in this review, in terms of cost.

In terms of long-term financial implications, it is difficult to say whether or not cost neutrality can be achieved. If cost savings are realized, the Union expects that this will be without negative impact on the staff, and that the notion of more for less (i.e. “efficiencies”), or even the same for less, will not equal less value, less compensation, and less support for staff, or ultimately, the public we serve.

If the purpose of this endeavor is to support important strategic goals and to create a more dynamic and nibble workforce, then any ongoing cost or additional costs must be seen as a necessary investment toward the successful realization of these goals. The case must be made and the funds advocated for.

Training, Education and Support

As discussed in the last response from the Union (p. 4), a critical component to the success of this model and the organization as a whole is consistent training and support. One of VPL's foundational elements is a “Skilled and resilient staff who meet the changing community needs with confidence”. This must not be simply rhetoric, but a real and concrete commitment.

Staff reactions

Based on the survey and comments, along with input in person and via email, it is fair to say that the recommendations are supported or not supported to varying degrees. A general lack of clarity has had negative impact on members' willingness to support or believe in the positive potential of some the recommendations. Support is also not necessarily synonymous with

concern, as staff see positive potential in some recommendations they would be willing to support, but feel concern at the same time by the possible negative implications, which are not assuaged by any clear vision. Past history has also presented some challenges in having trust in the process. This will need to be rebuilt by a dedication to supporting staff through this process, and ensuring they continue to feel valued.

The memorandum and Management Report to the Board

The survey we created is structured in a way to test the veracity of statements made in the memo to staff and the report to the Board prefacing each recommendation about how staff feel about the recommendations. It's uncertain whether these determinations are based on impressions or real data. Many staff feel they are misleading, as in some cases these statements do not align with how they or their colleagues are feeling.

For instance, the recommendation to fully integrate evenings, Saturdays and Sundays (WMC 7.4.3) is not broadly supported, despite any appreciation there may be that VPL is a seven-day operation. In addition, since many people already work evenings and Saturdays, we don't know what the true climate is around the full integrations of Sundays, since it is presented as part of a package. According to our survey, support for this is extremely mixed, and those that do not support it feel very strongly about how it may affect their work-life balance, their ability to care for dependants, spend time with their families, or have a negative impact on their religious practice.

Another red flag is the assertion that the recommendation for a flexible workplace, with assignments across multiple branches (MNC 7.3.4) is working effectively for Children's and Teen's librarians and Community librarians. Our survey suggests that those working within this model find there are inherent challenges in this aspect of the model in terms of capacity, efficiency, and fatigue. In the implementation of this recommendation, it behooves the Employer to look closely at this and what may be required to avoid the negative consequences, which ultimately have an impact on the quality of public service.

The recommendations

We are happy to see several recommendations that are supported by members and that will bring positive changes to VPL. These are recommendations that would mean tangible improvements to processes or services and skills that support improved service, such as:

- Investigate review and upgrade Maintenance and IT services (WMC 7.5.2.) (This has received the most support, with that caveat that this should mean more staff in these departments and better training)
- Review and redesign administrative process and systems such as scheduling (WMC 7.5.1.)
- Review the requirements and staffing alternatives for technical support for patrons (WMC 7.3.5.) (With the caveat that this would mean appropriate compensation for expertise)

Staff are generally less supportive or not supportive of those recommendations that will have an impact on their schedules, whether this will mean negative impacts on work/life balance, the

fulfillment of dependant care needs, the ability to balance other commitments, and the deterioration of personal agency. These are the particular recommendations that we have found not to be supported by staff:

- Review of the compressed workweek (WMC 7.4.6.)
- Flexible scheduling as determined by Management (WMC 7.4.2.)
- Reset reporting requirement and employee expectations for a flexible workplace, with assignments across multiple branches (MNC 7.3.4.)
- Full integration of evenings, Saturdays and Sundays (WMC 7.4.3.)

In regards to scheduling it is important to note that 40% of respondents have dependent care responsibilities (i.e. Children, elderly parents, or other).

Staff have also expressed concerns about the impact of less predictable and stable working conditions and worksite assignments on public service and the fostering of relationships with patrons and the community as whole.

The two most contentious recommendations are the following:

- Review of the compressed workweek (WMC 7.4.6.)
- Creation two new non-librarian public service positions in branches (Amended recommendation #1)

Compressed workweek

In terms of the review of the compressed workweek (WMC 7.4.6.), it is by far the least supported recommendation. Over 73% of respondents to our survey do not support it. It is important to note that this includes Full-time Staff who currently benefit from it (37% of respondents), but also Part-time and Auxiliary staff.

The Directors acknowledge this lack of support (p. 8 of the memo, p. 9 of the report to the Board), however they go on to state that many understood the Consultants' finding that the compressed workweek adds complexity of scheduling and increased costs.

The Union has concerns with this statement and the findings by the Consultants. Compressed schedules are predictable, and it is debatable whether any related scheduling complexities are actually onerous, especially in light of the inherent complexities that "flexible schedules as determined by management" would bring. Also with the streamlining of scheduling processes and the employment of an automated system, any administrative impacts would be nil.

As to the cost of a compressed schedule, although there may be one, it must be noted that anecdotal reports from Management to the Union on what the current cost implications actually are have been inconsistent. What is the criteria being used to calculate this cost? Is it restricted to the cost of Part-time shifts to cover compressed days off? Many of these days are already covered by staggered Full-time schedules.

It is also debatable whether elimination of the compressed workweek would result in a savings from the need for less Part-time staff since it is not clear what coverage needs the other

recommendations will bring, such as a flexible schedule, minimum opening protocols and multiple assignments across worksites. There may in fact be operational benefits to having a compressed workweek.

What has certainly not been considered are the potential increased costs associated with the potential for increased risks to the health and welfare of affected staff. Our front line staff are experiencing increased challenges in regards to security incidents, and staff at worksites that experience a higher level of exposure to threats and violence, such as Mount Pleasant and Carnegie, have been adamant in expressing the benefit of the compressed work week to their mental health. In fact, Carnegie Center staff have maintained a compressed work week in acknowledgement of the stress and fatigue inherent in dealing with these challenges.

Elimination of the compressed workweek would likely lead to burnout, absenteeism, lower employee retention, and productivity. Ultimately, however, the most negative impact would be on morale. This directly effects engagement, belief and trust in the organization. All of these will have an effect in numerous ways on public service, and quite frankly on the success of this new model. The compressed day is not a “perk” as has been suggested by our Management team. The compressed day off is a day of rest, well earned.

Creation of two new public service positions

Over 65% of respondents consider this (amended) recommendation to be one of their top three concerns. It is also right behind compressed workweek in being the least supported. The emergent themes from comments and feedback are:

- There is a distinct lack of clarity in terms of what this will look like. Several comments were identical in stating that the descriptions are “vague”
- This is a major upheaval to realize relatively minor changes to what already exists and is working successfully (i.e. the LA II and Lib Tech positions)
- It strongly suggests the degradation of the Lib Tech and Librarian I classifications
- It has created a tremendous uncertainty around job security (for instance, staff have been told that will have to apply for their own jobs)
- That if this recommendation is to be successful, it must come with appropriate compensation, training, and support.

Given that the Central didn’t make up part of the review, it is also concerning that the implementation of this recommendation will include Central, as it will have significant impacts on every department. It will especially affect the relationship between Circulation and Information Services, and suggests a radical overhaul of these two departments, as, given their sizes, the distinction between LA II responsibilities and Information work has so far been very clear, even in the physical layout of the branch.

This latter speaks to the issues that have arisen from the lack of clarity around what the intent and the vision are around the creation of these two new positions. For instance, if there is no plan to radically change the way Information Services and Circulation are organized, then this should be clearly articulated. If the intent is to provide consistent opportunities across the system, then again, this should be clearly articulated.

There is a lot of support for the enhancement of the LA II position and the potential for more opportunity from within this group, and appreciation for including training in Horizon and Circulation work for Lib Techs (essentially some cross-over of skills and knowledge), but there is tremendous concern for the potential of these new positions to devalue the Lib Tech classification. The Lib Tech II role is heavily relied on in the branches to develop some, and carry out, all adult programming, and to support and assist in the same for Children's and Teens Services (see Children's and Teens Services Review, 2012, p. 26-28), perform the lion's share of information work, community engagement, and provide leadership for the branch when Librarians and Branch Heads are absent. There is nothing in the recommendations that suggests that these responsibilities will diminish, especially as Librarians are conspicuously absent from the equation.

LA II's are also not exempt from anxieties for their futures in this scenario. There has been no commitment from the Employer in terms of training and support to ensure they have the skills they require to provide the service that will be required of them in the new model, and that they will be determined not to be qualified and lose their value and ultimately, their jobs.

This recommendation has great potential for the enhancement of service and the enablement of staff, but this potential cannot be realized unless:

- There is clarity around intent and vision for these positions
- These positions are enhanced, not devalued or downgraded.
- These they are compensated appropriately.
- That there is adequate training and support for incumbents to be successful

In brief

- Staff are generally supportive of those recommendations or aspects of recommendations that would mean tangible improvements to processes, services, and skills that support improved service to the public
- Staff are generally supportive of recommendations, or aspects of recommendations that would mean more opportunity, engagement and stability
- Staff are not supportive of recommendations or aspects of recommendations that threaten their work/life balance, access to opportunity and hours, imply job loss, or that would downgrade or devalue them.
- Staff need clarity around outcomes and expectations.

Implementation and outcomes

The Union believes there are ways to achieve the overall goals of the Branch Staffing Model Review in finding efficiencies, furthering strategic goals and initiatives, and enhancing service to the public, while enabling, supporting and engaging staff. We ask for the following:

- That implementation be considered and appropriately paced
- That there be a commitment to training and support, and this include a monetary commitment

- That savings be achieved over time and through attrition (for instance, in the creation of more F/T and PPT positions)
- That staff be grandfathered should there be an impact on their classification
- That changes to schedules maintain and respect the need for work/life balance and dependent care needs, ensure a level of predictability, and consider the health and welfare of staff.

We believe adherence to these strategies will fulfill what we hope is the Employer's commitment to "...consider options to achieve outcomes in a manner that has the least impact on employees". (p. 4 of memo, p. 3 of report to the Board).

Conclusion

The Vancouver Public Library has a very dedicated staff, who have embraced the organization's core values and its' strategic objectives, in particular patron centered, community led service. In that aspect I think it is fair to say that VPL has captured hearts and minds. CUPE 391 members are dedicated employees who are very passionate about the work they provide and they want to continue to provide this service to the community, and who have proven over the last few years that they are adaptable and can thrive in a climate of change.

These recommendations are directly related to people's livelihood and our members are very concerned about their futures at VPL. It is not ok to make changes and say to staff who have given years of their life that they no longer have value or a role to play, or that they may have to apply for their own jobs. It is not ok that loyal, long-serving employees feel devalued, dismissed and discarded.

We can work together to achieve our mutual goals of a vibrant and vital library with a bright future. Mutual respect and compromise are key, but not at the expense of the people who make this a great organization. Let's make this new model a great example of positive change for our Management Team, our staff, and ultimately, the public we serve.