

Blindcraft no more?

by Hannah Lister

It is with a heavy heart and great disappointment that I wish to update the people of Edinburgh on the issue of Blindcraft.

As reported in [my previous article](#), the workers were faced with a difficult decision, effectively choosing between a three day working week and accepting a massive 40% pay cut, or taking redundancy pay. The majority decision was to be taken, and the implication would either mean a 200 year old institution being kept open with workers on reduced hours, or closure of this unique sheltered workshop in Edinburgh.

Unfortunately, the majority of workers have voted not to accept the three day week. I understand this is because they have decided the redundancy pay and benefits they will get without a job far outweighs working a three day week.

However, this decision has, in my view, been poorly guided. Economically, the current and very real threat of cuts to benefits such as the disability living allowance could mean the redundancy pay will run dry fast, leaving these workers (many of whom have families and young children) struggling to contribute to their households.

Physically, there can be no justification for wanting to be on the dole, especially with a disability. It is a fact that being inactive contributes to a general deterioration in health, and with jobs very hard to come by at the best of times, the outlook is very gloomy for these workers.

✘ The Blindcraft workers I have met have all been fantastically positive about the possible future of their workplace. They have a real passion for it and I know some of them could run the business far better than it has been run in recent years. So where exactly did it all go so wrong? Many

will suggest that Blindcraft has been doomed since the Council first laid eyes on it, and that a three day week was never going to be workable. With that, I concur.

This Thursday, the [full council meeting](#) is expected to vote for Blindcraft to close. This disregards the workers who didn't vote to take a lump sum, who want to work and turn Blindcraft around. The utter lack of confidence in the management to turn the business around is part of the reason why many voted to take redundancy pay. Incidentally, the managing director has been very quiet throughout this process. In my opinion, lack of management has been a principal factor in few workers having any confidence in the future of the business.



What should happen now is that the fat cats at the top go, allowing those who want to remain a chance to rebuild the business they love, to resurrect it from its foundations up. Fewer workers would mean more work, but also less funding from the council as well. There is no doubt in my mind that the people of Edinburgh would embrace such a challenge.

I wish to express my thanks at this stage to those local website businesses who were happy to help straight away (help that the management at Blindcraft did not take them up on when I offered it). The workers should be able to choose a manager with passion, understanding and the motivation to turn the business around.

Indeed, turning around this 200 year old business is no mean feat, but it can and should be done as an example to sheltered workshops across Scotland, as more and more face deliberate attack by Local Authorities. We cannot simply disregard those with disabilities, confine them to a life that they do not want, and did not choose. I plead with The City of Edinburgh Council once more on behalf of the workers who want to stay, to take some leadership and use some innovation to secure the

future of Blindcraft. I for one am willing to help out in any way that I can.

I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the workers to thank all those in Edinburgh and beyond for many kind wishes of support that have been received. The end of the road seems nigh, but it does not need to be like this.

I am not utopian, I am realistic. This factory must survive if those with disabilities are going to continue to gain meaningful employment, and so that the fantastic people that I have met on this Blindcraft journey, continue to have the same passion and fight for life.

They are an inspiration to us all and Edinburgh Council must help them as a matter of urgency.