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17th December 2009

Dear Sirs,

Re: Housing Landlord Services
Unison Response for EKJAC 18th December 2009

Unison has accepted that shared services are a means of providing services in today's financial climate and will work with councils to make these work as well as they can whilst protecting the interests of our members in your authorities.

We note the proposal for Landlord services to be progressed via an arms length management organisation (ALMO) and are fundamentally opposed to this.

For our members, it will entail their removal from local authority service to a company that, whilst owned by the authorities for now, will increasingly depart from the culture and conditions of those authorities. We cannot see it as anything other than a first step towards privatisation.

Whilst terms, conditions and pensions would be protected by TUPE, Unison has seen this process lead to a change in the way that policies are applied and discussions around changes in future, normally alterations detrimental to our members. There is the possibility that future new staff would be employed on different and lower pay and conditions and may have access to the local government pension scheme restricted or denied.

For the councils concerned, there could be problems if this new ALMO decided to get it's services from another provider to save money. The sections affected would find themselves with a major loss of work and the councils would incur the costs of following the redundancy process, redeployments and redundancy and pension payments where they applied. In the short term, the overheads would substantially increase for all services.

We believe that the concept of one authority hosting is accepted but there may be difficulties in putting that into practice because of the scale of this

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shared service. It is also clear that most staff will need to remain in a local workplace to support the tenants' needs and wishes.

We would like to suggest that the management and leadership be separated from the delivery when considering hosting. This would mean that most staff could remain with their current authority and the management of the service could be brought together and hosted by one of the authorities. This would require fewer transfers and less space to house the staff concerned and would be cheaper to set up.

There would need to be proper agreement between the authorities about management of the staff, including tenants in the direction of the service and linking back with councillors but we see no difficulties in this.

When the proposed East Kent terms and conditions are negotiated and agreed there will be a harmonisation so that staff will have equal terms and conditions whichever council they work for. The longer term project of pay equality will further combine East Kent councils in the shared services model.

Unison would like to submit this as a real alternative to the favoured recommendation.

It is fair to say that our members do not see this as an exciting project, they worry for their jobs and futures and are watching keenly for developments.

As always, we are prepared to discuss this further and look forward to good consultation as normal.

Yours,

Andy Campbell

Andy Campbell
Unison Regional Organiser
On behalf of the Unison Branches of Canterbury, Dover, Shepway and Thanet.