

Appendix x – Submissions to the Steering Group – c. UNISON

From: Chris Taylor [mailto:abs1@haringeyunison.co.uk]

Sent: 26 June 2015 16:55

To: Wain Julian

Cc: Evans Tracie; Cllr Strickland Alan; Sean Fox; Gerard McGrath; Steve Bacon

Subject: Future of Housing

Dear Julian

UNISON has made its views on Housing Unification clear in a number of meetings and forums. However, I thought that I should reiterate our views in writing to you.

- 1) UNISON's policy is that Haringey's housing should be brought back into council control. This is both local and national union policy, and it is also the policy of all trade unions in both the council and the ALMO.
- 2) It should be noted that all of Haringey's neighbouring boroughs, apart from Barnet, now have their housing in direct council control or are in the process of doing this. We cannot see any reason why Haringey Council should take a different course of action.
- 3) We are concerned that staff and tenants/leaseholders have been "steered" towards supporting an ALMO in briefings and forums, using rather nebulous and unsubstantiated claims. For example, it has been claimed that bringing housing back into council control creates the risk of further cuts, and that there will be more job security in an ALMO. Of course, none of this is true. If there is a cut in the budget for housing, and subsequent job losses, it will make absolutely no difference whether housing is directly controlled or run by an ALMO; having an ALMO does not provide any greater degree of protection for staff, nor does it make cuts less likely to happen. The only difference is that the job cuts and or service reductions will be made by an external company rather than the council – the actual outcome will not be any different. There is a presentation on the council's website entitled *Future Housing Delivery Review – What do the options mean?*, which makes clear that there is no more money available by having an ALMO rather than in-house management.
- 4) On a similar note to point 3 above, it has been claimed at forums that the council should continue with an ALMO if it wants to "realise its ambitions." This is also incorrect and meaningless.. No details have been provided of what an ALMO could do that could not be done by the council.
- 5) According to information presented at forums, bringing housing back into council control could save £800,000. This is a significant amount that could save some jobs and services at a time of vicious cuts.
- 6) Overall, there does not seem to be any reason to continue with an ALMO – there is no advantage to doing so, certainly not a financial one. Bringing the service back in house would increase democratic control and accountability. It would still be possible to retain resident involvement and participation.
- 7) We have concerns about the role that Homes For Haringey has had in the process of deciding on the future of housing. It became apparent to us that HFH had been viewed as a "stakeholder" in terms of giving its views as part of the consultation, and that it been allowed to "pitch" for continuing to manage the housing stock. This is completely

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unacceptable. HFH has a clear conflict of interest. It also has an unfair advantage, as it has direct access to tenants, information and to senior management and elected members in the council, none of which is available to other groups who may also have a legitimate interest in this matter. HFH management clearly has a vested interest in the organisation continuing to exist, and may have been able to use its advantages in pursuit of this aim. The fact that HFH has been allowed to make a “pitch” for continuing to run housing is shocking. Nobody else has been able to do this, particularly anyone with a different view to HFH, and even if they had been able to so, there would not have been a level playing field as they would not have had the advantages of HFH. HFH should have had no part whatsoever in the process, apart from providing factual information when requested. If you had wanted to look at examples of how a possible continuation of an ALMO would work in practice, then you should perhaps have looked at a borough which had actually made a decision to continue with this arrangement once their original ALMO had come to an end. This would have been more useful and comparable than looking at HFH, which of course is still operating within its original contract.

- 8) As the ALMO was set up for a defined period and purpose which will soon come to an end, our view is that any decision to carry on with an ALMO will, in effect, be a change to the current arrangements and a ballot will therefore be required. If such a ballot is lost, i.e. tenants and leaseholders do not vote for an ALMO, then this should be viewed as a decision by those voting to bring housing back into council control.

Please let me know if you would like to discuss any of this further.

Kind regards,

Chris Taylor
Adults and Housing Convenor/Assistant Branch Secretary

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From: Wain Julian
Sent: 26 July 2015 14:54
To: 'abs1@haringeyunison.co.uk'
Cc: Cllr Strickland Alan; Illingworth Catherine; Evans Tracie
Subject: Future of Housing

Dear Chris

Thank you for your e-mail of 26th June restating the Unison position on the Future of Housing Delivery Review, which is as ever very clear and helpful.

For the most part, I am happy to note your comments and feed them into the final report as comments from one of the major stakeholders. I should however comment for the record on a few of your points to ensure absolute clarity:

You state in your point 3 that you are 'concerned that staff and tenants/leaseholders have been "steered" towards supporting an ALMO in briefings and forums' using an example of this: 'it has been claimed that bringing housing back into council control creates the risk of further cuts, and that there will be more job security in an ALMO'. However, this example is inaccurate. At no time in any of the presentations has any comment been made on the level of job security, not least because as you are aware in public service generally such security is uncertain. Nor has it been 'claimed that bringing housing back into Council control creates the risk of further cuts.' The presentation simply pointed out that the austerity regime was still in force, and that raised the question as to whether there may be an enhanced requirement for savings in the Council. It also noted that considerable savings had been made by Homes for Haringey already.

In your point 4, you state 'it has been claimed at forums that the council should continue with an ALMO if it wants to "realise its ambitions"'. I am not sure where this point comes from, because it is certainly not part of the presentation, which is available on the Council's website. In fact, the presentation states that this option provides 'insufficient money for all Haringey aspirations, which is quite the reverse. It is explicitly clear that neither the continuation of Homes for Haringey, nor a return to direct in house management allows the Council to achieve all its aspirations.

In your point 5, you state 'bringing housing back into council control could save £800,000'. At the forum the figure quoted was £700,000, and it was made clear that this was an interim figure subject to verification. Whilst the point you make is that this could be considered a large sum of money, it is also insufficient to be able to bridge the huge deficit in the first 10 years of over £120m in the worst case.

In your point 7, you express your views that Homes for Haringey should not have been viewed as a 'stakeholder' through this process, nor be allowed to 'pitch' to the steering group about their approach to additional service provision. While we understand the UNISON views on this, I feel we must agree to disagree. This matter was discussed at some length at the recent meeting with Gerard and Councillor Strickland. The point was made that it was entirely reasonable for Steering Group members to understand the views of the Council's current provider and to be clear what they did,

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how they operated and in particular, their views on what additional service provision could look like. If an ALMO is already in place, DCLG guidance ‘recommends strongly that its staff and Board members should be allowed to contribute fully to the process and the council should work collaboratively with the ALMO towards an agreed outcome’. The council is in the position where it already has a provider partner in the ALMO and it is only right that this provider’s views should be sought, particularly as one of the options being considered is additional service provision. Whilst views were sought from other local authorities and providers across England about how this works for them, it needs to be right for Haringey. It should also be noted that Homes for Haringey’s ‘pitch’ was no different from the opportunity provided to other LAs, RPs and ALMOs we spoke to, and the same criteria and evaluation form was used for all options. Although these other opportunities were mostly provided through visits to those organisations, Family Mosaic also attended the Steering group to ‘pitch’ their model. In addition, should a decision be made that resulted in change to Homes for Haringey’s position, both Council members and your own trade union members would undoubtedly consider it important that Homes for Haringey had been consulted and spoken to because of the impact on staff.

I note your point that ‘there does not seem to be any reason to continue with an ALMO’. Throughout this process, we have been clear and open about following the DCLG guidance issued in 2004, consolidated it in 2006 and reiterated it in 2011. This guidance states that: *‘DCLG believes that existing ALMO arrangements should remain in place unless an alternative can be shown to have demonstrable benefits for tenants’*. Therefore, the process has been considering if there is an alternative that shows demonstrable benefits, rather than assuming the Council is the default option, based on objective data analysis.

Finally, you suggest that tenants should be balloted on any proposal to retain the ALMO. Whilst we note your position on this, the test of tenant opinion gives a clear position regarding the tenants (and leaseholders) views that the Steering group will consider very seriously, and members will no doubt also consider the issue of ballots in their final deliberations.

I hope this clarifies the points appropriately. As always, happy to meet and discuss further.

Kind regards,

Julian