

SC45 Public Speaking

Chairman and Councillors thank you for allowing me the opportunity to address you. My name is Sue Hayden, and I am here in my position as Chair of Uttlesford branch of UNISON.

Under Part 11, which will exclude members of the public, you will be presented with options moving forward with the repair's arrangement for Uttlesford following the decision to terminate the Uttlesford Norse joint venture which will be discussed, and a decision made at Cabinet on Thursday. UNISON and staff have yet to see the options being presented.

However, UNISON has met with the Chief Executive and made its position clear that it wants all elements relating to the property management service, including repairs, returned in-house. We have also met with our members and staff working from the Newport Depot and they have clearly stated that their preferred option is to return to working for Uttlesford District Council. At present there is a two-tier workforce, with staff carrying out the same job under less favourable terms and conditions under the Uttlesford Norse arrangement. Staff TUPE transferred from Uttlesford District Council have better sick leave, pension scheme, and are under National Joint Council pay arrangements. A two-tier workforce is what happens when people are transferred to private companies, services become about making profit, not about providing a good service for residents.

Mr Holt made a self-referral to the Regulator of Social Housing after falling behind with maintenance checks on its stock of 3,000 homes as he wasn't satisfied that the necessary paperwork was in place, or checks carried out mainly in relation to electrical wiring. I am sure this was one of the reasons why Councillors decided to withdraw from the contract with Uttlesford Norse despite the compliance position now being better than it has been for many years and the regulator deciding not to take further action. If the

service was brought back in-house, we would have total control over this.

The Council has also had to employ a client-side team in the last 12 months to oversee the contract at extra cost. A joined-up approach from the start underpinned by a robust service agreement and strategic approach would have largely negated the need for this.

As the contract is already 50% owned by Uttlesford District Council, and a framework is in place, an in-house option would be less problematic. If the Council has to start from scratch procuring a new contract, this will take considerable time to both procure and mobilise and significant legal fees. We cannot have another failed contract; it needs to be done right. UNISON would like to see how the options have been costed and decisions made.

UNISON recognises that if/when the service is brought back in-house there needs to be changes. Our policies and processes need to be looked at and strengthened, the right people need to be in place to ensure the service delivers for residents.

UNISON also makes a plea that councillors and senior officers work with the branch and staff working from the Newport Depot to ensure everyone is engaged in the process every step of the way, as they have been promised they would. When people are unsure of their future or don't feel they are part of that decision making, they will leave, and it is usually the best staff who walk first, this will be of detriment to any potential contract and service provision.

Uttlesford District Council should be rightly proud that it still has its housing stock so why would we not want to be in control of the high standard of repairs service for our residents. Why would we put this out to the private sector who are more about profit than performance? Why would we think that another partnership would succeed when Uttlesford Norse has apparently failed?

Thank you