

# Investment without strings, not stock transfer

**T**hat is what UNISON is campaigning for in the run up to the tenants' ballot which could come as early as November this year.

UNISON is warning that if Edinburgh's council housing is transferred out, it can never come back 'in-house'.

*That is why the Branch AGM in February voted unanimously to campaign against stock transfer.*

When housing staff are farmed off to new employers, the evidence from all around the country is that they will be at the mercy of broken promises on conditions.

Colleagues in other areas report poorer conditions and the focus moving away from the range of housing support tasks to rent collection only.

That is why UNISON wants to make sure there is a real debate before tenants are balloted.

We believe the huge sums being poured into consultants and glossy propaganda in the campaign for a yes vote would be better spent on improving housing.

UNISON is opposed to housing stock transfers for a number of reasons including

- the implications for staff,
- loss of democratic accountability
- the costs of transfer
- reduced choice for tenants.

A more effective alternative is direct investment using investment allowances, creating a level playing field between the different options.

### Staff transfer

Normally staff who spend 50% or more of their time on the services the new housing body will provide will be transferred. But what about the rest?

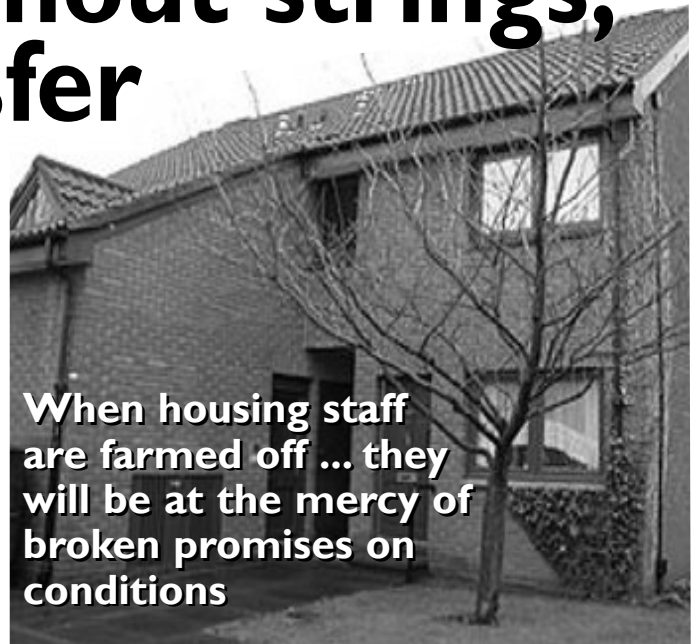
Other transfers have brought problems for IT, wages and other staff. The Glasgow DLO lost the contract and had to lay off staff.

- Staff transferring to the new organisation will NO LONGER be council employees. At the point of transfer the council gives up all responsibility for staff.
- Transfer of Undertakings regulations (TUPE) only offer protection at the moment of transfer.
- Pensions are not covered by TUPE.
- Eventually the new employer will want to impose their own terms. Edinburgh Leisure refused to honour a national pay award.
- Glasgow Housing staff are facing redundancy threats as £1.7 million is cut from the staffing budget. The GHA also wants to replace annual pay awards and increments with performance related pay.
- The new organisation will be much smaller with fewer career opportunities and little chance of redeployment.

### The principle at stake

- Stock transfer means privatisation of an essential public service.
- Once transferred, there is no going back for staff or tenants.
- Democratic control and

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**When housing staff are farmed off ... they will be at the mercy of broken promises on conditions**

## What is UNISON doing?

### ● MEMBERS MEETING:

After the Festival, we will be organising a major meeting for Housing members. We hope to have an expert speaker from UNISON HQ and members from councils where stock transfer has taken place along with briefings and a question and answer session with branch officials. *Look out for details - this will be a crucially important meeting.*

- In the meantime the Branch has been supporting EAST and is backing leaflets in conjunction with them.
- We have made a submission to UNISON HQ for extra money to fund materials to counteract the current well-financed and one-sided council campaign.
- We have been supporting staff who feel they are being asked to campaign to bring tenants into line rather than just informing them.
- We have been trying to get the media to recognise there are two sides to the argument and we are still trying - we can't make them publish what we give them!
- We have called for a Scottish Conference on Stock Transfer and we have contacted Glasgow UNISON to learn from their experience.

● UNISON Scotland has produced a number of briefings and responses on Stock Transfer - see [www.unison-scotland.org.uk](http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk) and click on Briefings or Responses and choose 'Housing' - or click on the Housing link on the branch's website [www.unison-edinburgh.org.uk](http://www.unison-edinburgh.org.uk).

# Government can be challenged

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accountability through elected councillors will be lost. Take Edinburgh Leisure - they often say things are the council's fault for cutting money. The council says it's a separate organisation and they can't interfere. No-one appears to be responsible.

- There is no demand from tenants for a change of landlord.
- Tenants are denied real choice. Real choice would mean the council having the same access to funds as a private body.
- The £1 billion promised is **public** money and should be directly invested publicly without strings.
- The Treasury can write off debt for a private body, so why not for the council?

## Staff provide a good service

- The Housing Dept is not a failing organisation, so why break it up?
- The Modernising Housing Agenda and Neighbourhood Management initiative shows the service is developing and forward looking
- The plans are at odds with the much vaunted joint working with social work, for example.
- It is ironic that just recently Housing staff were being told that a merger with Social Work was the best way forward.

## The hidden costs

- Stock Transfer is not Best Value
- Vast sums are spent on publicity, set-up costs, consultants, solicitors etc that could be spent directly on improving housing.
- The Parliament Public Accounts Committee reported that Stock Transfer costs £1,300 per tenancy more than councils doing improvements themselves.
- The National Audit Office reports repairs and improvements are expected to cost a third more after transfer - about £1.3billion - than if councils did the work themselves.

## Alternatives to Transfer

- Direct investment in Council Housing without strings

- Take council spending on housing out of the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement as other European countries have done.
- Urge the government to give an Investment Allowance as revenues stream that would let councils borrow using the new Prudential Borrowing arrangements.

## The Government can be challenged

- Westminster is coming under more and more pressure to make concessions to councils and tenants demanding fair play and a level playing field.
- The Prudential Borrowing Framework was introduced in April 2004 and allows some councils to borrow more. This was a significant concession to the campaign to defend council housing.
- The House of Commons Select Committee on Housing called on the Government to end the injustice of tenants being financially penalised for voting to keep the council as their landlord.
- After pressure from the trade unions and the Defend Council Housing campaign, the last Labour Party Conference demanded that the same 'stock transfer' funds should be available to councils if tenants vote to stay with them.

## What your AGM said

Members attending the Branch's AGM in February decided to:-

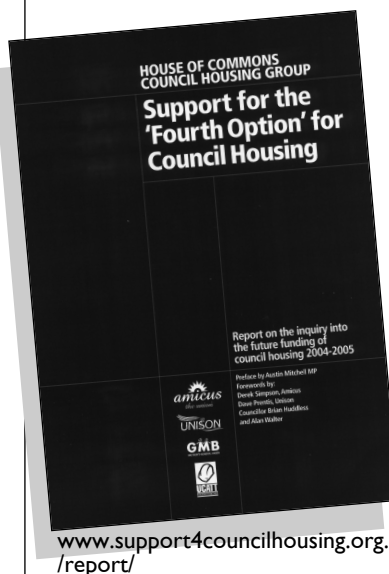
- Defend any members faced with victimisation for standing by UNISON policy.
- Seek advice about the legality of management instructions to members to canvass tenants for the Yes vote that may mean their transfer out of council employment.
- Write to all members in the Housing Department to clarify UNISON's position and seek their views on the campaign.
- Apply to UNISON's General Political Fund for the resources to mount a campaign against Stock Transfer.
- Write to the Council to insist that the information given to tenants sets out the case for *and* against transfer.
- Affiliate to Edinburgh Against Stock Transfer, set up as a broad campaign to argue the case for Council Housing and to campaign for a No Vote.

## Get organised

There are still workplaces in Housing without a steward. Whatever happens with stock transfer, this will still be time of change and members need to participate in their union so it can support you better.

If you could become a steward (or even a contact), contact the Branch Office on 220 5655 or Housing Convenor Duncan Smith on 529 7726.

## MPs demand level playing field for tenants



**T**he House of Commons Council Housing Group of 27 MPs has produced a report calling for councils to get the same rights to borrow whether stock is transferred or not.

Sponsored by four trade unions, including UNISON, the report makes nine recommendations, including calls on the government to:-

- Give real choice through a level playing field and a fair and balanced debate before tenants choose.
- Write off historic debt or take over maintaining it.
- Let councils use the Prudential Borrowing initiative.
- Ensure any planned change of landlord is 'tenant led'
- Give tenants material with BOTH sides of the debate and do not instruct council staff to selectively take material to areas opposing transfer.

