

Statement: CS23.01

Cabinet – 9th March 2021

Re: Agenda item 23 – Bristol Holding Group Business Plans

Statement submitted by: Tom Merchant, UNISON

When sorrows come for UNISON they come not as single spies but in battalions. I refer to item 23: 'Bristol Holding Company - Business Plans'. We are fighting multiple attacks on our staff's conditions (including another Tupe transfer of staff to one of your other companies) and we are now faced with a possible cabinet approval of another Tupe transfer of staff from Bristol City Council into Bristol Heat Networks Limited. We are opposed to the transfer.

The comments we have made about transfers previously also apply here. HR advisors may insist that terms and conditions of staff will be protected but the experience of transferred staff elsewhere (especially in the NHS and universities) shows we should not rely too strongly on that advice. And there are holes in the regulations that don't protect the worker: changes to pensions, location of work, hours of work, changes to work/life balance agreements; changes to contracts for economic, technical and operational reasons; etc. The administration of those terms and conditions that are protected can also be changed, so that staff can rely on so many months full pay and half pay for sickness to be in the contract - for example - but may fall foul of sickness policies in the new company that dismisses them much more quickly than that.

Strategically, it is no skin off our nose if the policy of this administration is to form a company to do a specific project that benefits the city. What we do oppose is the authoritarian idea that our staff should have their contracts ended at Bristol City council and started again at that new company with no say in the matter at all. Workers are not resources to be moved around willy-nilly and they have charged me to tell you so. There may be bright new opportunities in the new company but the staff should be given the courtesy to choose to take up those new opportunities or decide not to and carry on doing their work as before.

A better alternative, if this really is a joint venture, is that of seconding the staff in BCC's energy department to the new company, something that organisations regularly do, would reassure the staff that you care about their dignity and agency; and enable you to fulfil your political promises. That seems like a win-win to me. Your advisors may tell you it is not possible or the system can't handle it but I can assure you it is possible and the Labour movement puts people before systems. It would be better to keep all of this work in the public sector but if that is not possible then consider the above option.

Staff of the Heat Networks team of BCC, The Energy Service were shocked and surprised to learn of the apparent plans, contained in the Bristol Holding's Business Plan for 2021/22, to TUPE them into Bristol Heat Networks Ltd by August of 2021. Having been involved in the delivery of the Council's Heat networks since 2013, staff are disappointed to firstly find out of this decision via a leaflet rather than via the

proper management channels and secondly feel that their hard work and professionalism over the past 8 years is being dismissed out of hand. The recent successful bids for HNIP funding from Central Government totalling nearly £10m and £6m from Salix Public Sector Decarbonisation indicates that the existing team operating within BCC is more than capable of delivering the Heat Networks Program without the need for staff to be TUPEd out into external company or companies

As I understand it, none of the unions were given recognition at Bristol Energy even when we asked you to do so to protect staff being transferred. This despite promises to do so years ago. My request is that you insist that the new City Leap company formally recognises the unions for all staff covering all usual bargaining and consultation matters.