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INTRODUCTION BY BRANCH PRESIDENT

Dear Councillor

UNISON believes Edinburgh is facing the most critical time in its history as the principle of publicly provided services, fully accountable to the people of Edinburgh and to the politicians who serve them, faces its biggest challenge yet from outsourcing and privatisation through the Alternative Business Models (ABM) programme.

Since the birth of the City of Edinburgh Council and before, one single uniting factor has created a common purpose between most politicians, chief officials and trade union members. That is a shared commitment to public service. A commitment to the people who rely on Edinburgh's services and to the people who deliver them.

Of course there have been differences and sometimes fundamental disagreements. However, we worked together to protect services through Compulsory Competitive Tendering. We worked together to deliver on Best Value and our members have delivered millions in efficiency savings.

UNISON is not against new ideas. As early as 2000, we launched "A Partnership to Save Edinburgh's Services". It called for "New ideas, new partnerships, new involvement by workers and the public... but they need a basic value to underpin them and that is a belief in accountable and directly provided services." The partnership foundered because the Council would not rule out compulsory redundancies but many of the principles remained as we jointly worked to improve services and protect jobs.

The ABM programme steps away from all of that joint work, undermining the principles of quality and accountable services delivered by a respected and properly rewarded public service team.

We will show in our critique that the projected benefits of ABM are flawed and at best wishful thinking. The size and strategic importance of 'strategic partnerships' or 'joint ventures' will limit the ability to call them to account, with the risk of a millstone around the Council's neck for years to come. But worse than that, the sheer scale of the exercise risks destroying the very ethos of locally accountable services - and councillors' ability to influence them - for years to come.

The councillors of the past took services into civic control exactly because the market cannot provide the equality of access, the flexibility, the accountability and most of all the reliability of service required by the people of Edinburgh.

UNISON recognises the financial pressures on the Council and our members urge you to tackle that by studying our critique, stepping away from ABM and engaging with us to continue to build quality and accountable services in-house for the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Stevenson".

John Stevenson
Branch President.

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