

### **Bromley Labour Group response to UNITE strike action.**

Labour Councillors in Bromley are supporting the strike action to be taken by UNITE on Tuesday 7 and Wednesday 8 April 2015.

Speaking on behalf of the Labour Group, Cllr Angela Wilkins (Leader of the Opposition) said:

“We support this action for a number of reasons:

Tories in Bromley are openly committed to being a ‘commissioning council’ and to reducing the number of council employees from 4,000 to 300. For them this is not about delivering the best levels of service for Bromley residents, it is a purely political and ideological commitment to privatisation.

Since the days of Margaret Thatcher, Tories have always promoted the private sector over the public sector, and they have always tried to destroy trades unions, so this situation is no surprise. It is, however, extremely worrying because the lives and welfare of local people are at risk.

The reality of privatisation is that contractors have to keep their prices low to win the contract in the first place. They then struggle to deliver the contract specification and to make a profit for their shareholders. Experienced staff are replaced by others on lower wages; key performance indicators are not met because these lower-paid staff are not suitably qualified or are not properly trained; service levels deteriorate. The public suffers whilst the shareholders get richer.

During the last year In Bromley, Capita and Liberata have missed numerous performance targets and are struggling to do what they are contracted to do for the contract price. People have been evicted from their homes and forced to sleep on the streets because the benefits to which they are entitled have not been correctly processed. Another contractor has been found to be employing illegal immigrants. Many of our roads and pathways are not being cleaned as they should be.

Councillors are supposed to scrutinise contracts and whether they are being properly fulfilled. Yet many of the reports that go to Bromley’s committees are written by the contractors themselves and contain highly complex information so it is hard to see the truth beneath the technical terminology. We just don’t think this ‘commissioning’ is working in the interests of the public.

Bromley Tories argue that they don’t always choose the cheapest contract. But one contractor who was rejected by Bromley Tories on grounds of quality of service then bought out and took over the company that did win the contract. This is what happens in the private sector where money matters most.

Labour councillors believe that proposals to change the arrangements for union officers to represent their members are based on political prejudice not common sense and that this could end up costing the council more. We also believe that UNITE’s proposals for a procurement strategy deserved proper consideration and not instant dismissal.

We are also shocked because legally it is the councillors who employ council staff, and councillors have not been told by officers that this strike is taking place.”