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Dear Lance

I met with the Associate Director of Estates and Facilities, Pasqualino Risi on 6 February 2019 along with members of the Princess Alexandra Hospital Trust (PAH) Human Resources team and the local UNISON branch officers, where we were notified of the commencement of the market testing of the Estates and Domestic Services.

UNISON was extremely disappointed to be told at that meeting that the Trust board had agreed to the market testing of the estates and domestic services, which is such a vital service within the hospital and that this was to begin immediately, and would run until 7 May 2019. We understand that a report will be given to the Trust board in May evaluating the market testing and a decision will be made on the future of those services and whether or not they would be outsourced to a private company. We also understand that some of the frontrunners for the contract are Mitie, G4S and OCS.

At the time of the meeting we were told some of the main drivers for the market testing were cost efficiencies, lack of investment in the domestic services for new equipment with capital funds being diverted to other parts of the hospital that were in greater need, and labour market issues in Harlow. This was highlighted as a particular problem as the Trust was having difficulty recruiting to certain shift patterns. The labour market driver was surprising given that Harlow's unemployment rate is greater than the national average, and we have since found out that following a recruitment open day last weekend all vacancies have now been filled and that all shifts have been covered.

The domestics and estates staff at PAH are a hardworking and dedicated group of workers, some with over 25 years service, and they desperately want to remain within the NHS rather than be transferred out to a private company. The domestics, independent of UNISON, set up their own online petition on the 38 degrees website which now has over 1,200 signatures.

I spend a lot of time in the hospital supporting the UNISON branch officers and know from speaking to staff there that all other staff groups and service-users are fully supportive of the domestics and estates staff remaining in-house. Many of the other staff groups have raised concerns over the market testing exercise as they feel that their service will be the next one earmarked for outsource.

I have spoken at length with the domestics at PAH and they have told us that they are currently using outdated equipment, but even with this the hospital has good infection control

rates, so imagine what they could do if they had the proper investment in equipment and were fully staffed. Many of the domestics have indicated that they would like to be offered extra hours and one of the main reasons they work particular shifts (8am – 2pm) is due to having caring responsibilities for school-age children. They have identified to UNISON that the change in shift patterns has been quite disruptive to the team and now there is a two-hour gap between the morning and afternoon shift which begins at 4pm, this has made this shift unviable for some.

Some of the domestics we have spoken to worked at the hospital in 1997 when they were brought back in-house from Mediguard, who failed to deliver the service, and just can't understand why the Trust would want to go through this process again.

I made it clear at the meeting we had with the Trust representatives that UNISON is against the market testing and outsourcing of these services to a private company and UNISON can see no rationale for the market testing of this service. UNISON is deeply concerned about the ability of private companies to deliver these types of vital services within the NHS. You will be aware of the numerous failures in these types of contracts from across the NHS, with Carillion going bust last year and Interserve and Mitie currently in profit warnings.

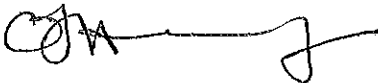
The main reasons for resisting the outsourcing of this service is to protect the quality of the current service. Recent academic research shows that when these types of services are outsourced, MRSA rates increase. UNISON also has a duty to protect our members pay, terms and conditions as the Transfer of Undertaking (Protections of Employment) Regulations only offers limited protections with no dynamic link to Agenda for Change pay uplifts, etc.

UNISON is against the creation of a two-tier workforce but by outsourcing this contract, this is exactly what the Trust would be doing. For that reason UNISON is notifying the Trust that unless the Trust is prepared to withdraw from market testing of the domestics and estates service within 10 working days of receiving this letter, UNISON will be left with no other option than to proceed formally to a position of dispute with the Trust and follow the disputes resolution procedure.

I should also add that I have been in contact with the local Member of Parliament and the local Labour Party who have both informed me that they support UNISON's position on requesting that the Trust think again and withdraw from the market testing of this service.

I am happy to meet to discuss the issues I have raised in this letter at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely



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cc: Jim Mcleish, Director of Quality Improvement
Steve Clarke, Chairman
Waida Foreman, PAH UNISON Branch Secretary
Daniella Pritchard, PAH UNISON Branch Chair