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Councillor Phillip King  
Chair  
Employment Committee  
Harborough District Council

8<sup>th</sup> December 2016

Dear Councillor King,

### **TRAVEL USER POLICY**

I thought that it would be appropriate for me to write to you in connection with the above matter which I know is being considered by the Employment Committee on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2016.

You may be aware that the original proposal as staff interpreted it caused a great deal of concern to the extent that some members of staff considered that they should seek employment elsewhere or that they would alter their ways of working. They considered the removal of the payment of the essential car allowance, whilst still being required to provide a vehicle to undertake their role, as being draconian and a breach of contract.

UNISON recognises the pressures that Council's are under in respect of their budgets. We can hardly ignore the effect that budget settlements in local government has had on our member's employment with a number of them being made redundant whilst those remaining in employment have seen their earnings suffer a real term decline following pay freezes and a small pay increases. However, we are also realists and recognise that many of the difficult decisions that council's are facing are being imposed on them by the financial constraints of central government.

I don't believe that any employer wishes to impose changes on their employees which makes them significantly worse off, damages morale and makes it more difficult for them to recruit and retain staff.

UNISON, has worked together with the management at Harborough District Council, to produce a proposal that can address the objectives of the Council whilst at the same time gain the support of members of staff. In doing this I believe that UNISON has acted with honesty, leadership and in partnership with management to find a workable solution.

From the outset we advised members that we did not think that the status quo was an option but we set out the areas that we would try and defend whilst still enabling Harborough to achieve some of its objectives. As an employer who subscribes to national pay bargaining we think it is important for staff to have confidence in you to retain that link.

As a consequence our objective was to retain the principle of an essential car user allowance and a link to the NJC rate of reimbursement of expenses. Having set that as an objective we had to be realistic that some changes to these would need to be made in order for the Council to achieve theirs. It was also important for us to reach a collective agreement if possible so as to avoid the potentially messy and destructive option of imposition.

I believe that the final proposal that is before the committee achieves the basis for an agreement with us that enables the Council to introduce change in a positive way but that also leaves us, jointly, with a practical, fair, transparent policy that is sufficiently robust so that it will not be necessary for it to be revisited in the foreseeable future.

I consider that the approach that we have taken in finding this solution, to what could have been a difficult and damaging situation, highlights the benefits of having an open and meaningful dialogue with UNISON. This, together with a commitment to partnership working in which problems are viewed as being a collective issue which need a collective solution has been shown as a model for achieving the best outcomes.

However, having said that, I do not think that any of us are naive enough to believe that this will work every time or that there will not be times when agreement cannot be found, but that should not stop us from at least trying.

If the committee endorse the proposals then I would like to advise you that UNISON will recommend them to our members. I thought that it was important to advise you and your committee of the positive way in which this matter has been handled by all parties and I would like to thank you, and the management involved, of the manner of this approach.

Yours sincerely,

Keith Libetta  
Regional Officer