

# BRANCH LINES

Retired  
Members  
edition

UNISON West Sussex Branch newsletter • [www.unisonwestsussex.org.uk](http://www.unisonwestsussex.org.uk)

## Back in Business!

After a break that went on for somewhat longer than I had anticipated, here is your latest Retired Members' (RM) newsletter, full of information I hope you will find interesting and useful.

Top of the bill has to be the continued budget cuts which can only have an adverse effect on public services. Branch secretary Dan Sartin attended the performance and finance (P&F) select committee meeting on 30 September. This is what he says about the council's situation:

### **Government continues to cut, regardless of consequences**

"The 2017/18 West Sussex County Council budget shortfall is a staggering £39.6 million and that is provided council tax is increased by a further 3.95%. The government now assumes councils will increase tax by 4% each year and has factored that into its local government settlements. This is a complete U-turn on the previous policy of promoting council tax freezes, showing what chaos and instability central government is bringing to local government. Furthermore, savings are recognised as being increasingly difficult to achieve, leaving the council with hard decisions to make about cuts."

In other words, in spite of the council's best efforts in recent years to comply with central government edicts on cost cutting and reductions in services, it has got to the point where even this council, who many would expect to agree with the government's policy of

shrinking the state and local government, recognise that further cuts cannot be made without making serious inroads into the services provided for residents. This was evidenced by some of the discussion at the P&F meeting where it became clear the cabinet member responsible was unwilling to recommend a council tax freeze, given the harm this would do to the most vulnerable residents. Added to which the committee requested the use of council reserves to help smooth the budget shortfalls over the four year period so that decisions could be given proper consideration rather than rushed through then later regretted.

## **And Welcome Back 'Don't Cut Us Out!'**



As some of you will know, Don't Cut Us Out is an organisation that campaigns on issues caused by cuts in local government. After a break of several months, a meeting was held on 22 September, and a number of new campaigns were identified, including the crisis in funding for West Sussex schools,



possible outsourcing of the League of Friends cafes in West Sussex hospitals, and further cuts to fire and rescue services.



The scandal of the lack of funding for West Sussex schools has now reached the national press. You may well have seen local headteachers on the news saying that they are looking at closing for one day a week to save money. West Sussex receives the lowest funding level per pupil in the country. As a result, heads and governors are lobbying for emergency funding of £20 million to be found whilst a new funding formula is put together. You can find out more on the branch website where you can also complete a survey which will help assess the impact of the financial crisis:

<http://unisonwestsussex.org.uk/news/schools-campaign-media/>



Campaigners on their way to Downing Street

## Threat to League of Friends shops



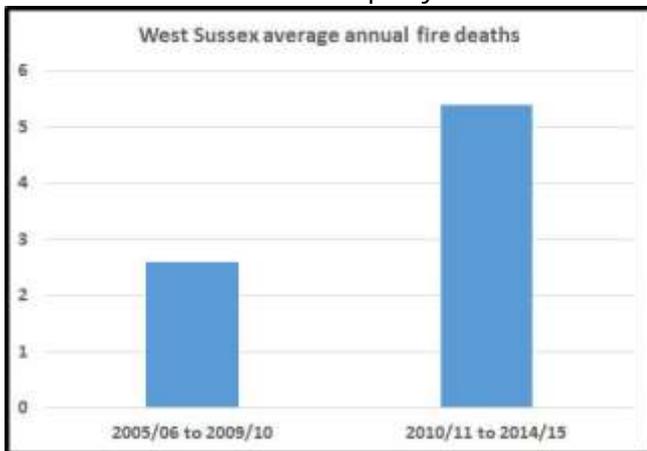
When you pay a visit to your local hospital in West Sussex you are probably accustomed to seeing a League of Friends (LoF) shop or cafe where you can buy all sorts of useful bits and pieces you might need for your stay or to give to the person you are visiting. These shops are now under threat from privatisation as Western Sussex Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust has decided to put these facilities out to tender using a process that is so complex and time-consuming it is highly unlikely any organisation other than big commercial companies like Costa will be able to take part.

The existing supplier LoF, is a small, local charity that has worked for many years to support our hospitals. They generate funds to help purchase vital equipment and provide their services via volunteers who have the welfare of the hospital and its patients at heart, not the generation of vast profits.

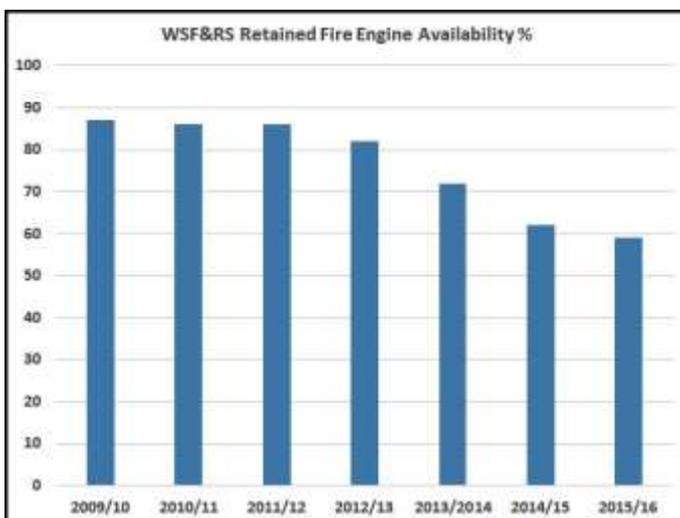
**Stop press!** Hospital volunteers say they are “deeply disappointed” at a decision to award a major contract for shop, café and restaurant services to a private company. Compass Group is to take over at Worthing Hospital, Southlands Hospital and St Richard’s Hospital in Chichester. The trust has said it will provide space within its hospitals for Friends to continue their fundraising activities and also wants them to continue to run daily ward trolley services.

## Fire and Rescue Services

In spite of promises from the council to cut the number of fire deaths in West Sussex, it is a shocking fact that they have actually doubled since 2010 from 2.6 to 5.2 per year.



Needless to say this is due to service cuts the council claimed would make the service more efficient. In fact it has meant that the number of fire engines has been reduced from 46 to 35, while cuts to the number of firefighters mean that even these cannot be guaranteed to be available when needed.



Crews are dispersed too widely throughout the county. This is having a serious effect on response times, clearly a critical factor in saving lives and minimising damage to property. The quality of training is also suffering as there are not enough firefighters to provide cover when courses are being run. This just isn't good enough. You might want to approach your local

councillor or write a letter to the local newspaper before more cuts are made and more lives are put at risk. More information to follow.

## Children's Services Outsourcing



Despite West Sussex County Council's awful track record on outsourcing, children's services look like they are being lined up to meet the same fate. The council originally sought bidders for the Healthy Child Programme but then, without warning or consultation, the contract was suddenly widened to possibly include:

- Children and Family Centres
- Youth Services
- Youth Offending Services
- Domestic Abuse workers
- Young Carers' workers
- Think Family

This means that such a large contract could attract big companies such as Virgin, which is currently in the running to take over children's services in Brighton.

Branch secretary Dan Sartin attended the council's select committee on 8 September and concluded there was insufficient scrutiny at every stage of the process. There was every likelihood that the mistakes previously made in outsourcing e.g. poor contract management, would only be repeated if this latest privatisation goes ahead. You can read more about it on the branch website here <http://unisonwestsussex.org.uk/news/children-s-outsourcing/> There are links to newspaper websites from this article showing features in the local press.

## National Pensioners' Convention (NPC)

Here's the latest version of the NPC's publication 'Campaign' <http://npcuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Campaign-Bulletin-114.pdf>

Here's a link to the website where you can find the 'Pensioners' Charter': <http://npcuk.org/publications>

and this leaflet advertising the RM's AGM: <http://npcuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Fair-Care-Leaflet.pdf>

## Results of RM survey

We recently asked retired members to complete a short survey to let us know a bit more about you and how we can make the retired members' group more relevant to your needs.

The survey was sent out electronically which meant that only about a third of you received it (unfortunately the cost of postage these days prohibits much postal communication) but of those who replied, some interesting facts emerged.

Most people saw the main purpose of the group as campaigning on older people's issues, and in that we hope to offer more in the future, either through local groups like Don't Cut Us Out or by participating in NPC-led activities such as lobbying parliament.

From the replies, it was evident there was a wide range of knowledge and experience and a willingness to get involved, even if ill health or simply the distance travelled deterred people from attending meetings. This is very encouraging and tells us that even if you can't get to meetings you are looking for ways to help such as writing letters to the press, keeping abreast of local issues and taking part in local campaigns.

## Email addresses

You are probably fed up with me saying this but I'll give it one more go - if you want us to be able to stay in touch, please, please consider giving us an email address, even if it's just a friend or family member who will pass messages on!

We are not in the business of trying to force people to use computers when they don't want to - I'm someone who bought a new laptop and when it arrived kept it stashed in its box under my desk for three months because I was afraid to open it - but the cost of postage really is prohibitive. If we cannot contact you by email we could well lose touch, which is the last thing we want.

So, if you're ready to take the plunge, please contact the branch office by any means possible and we will be delighted to hear from you:

UNISON Office, Central Attic, County Hall,  
Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 1RQ.  
[office.unison@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:office.unison@westsussex.gov.uk)  
Tel: 01243 777636

## Next meeting

The next retired members' meeting will take place on Friday 9 December from 12 noon to 2pm at County Hall, Chichester. Sandwiches will be provided. All group members welcome.

I'd also like to wish you all the very best for Christmas and the New Year.

Kind regards,

*Ruby Cox*

