

BRANCH LINES

UNISON West Sussex Branch newsletter • www.unisonwestsussex.org.uk

Council to cut £6m from children's services

Threat of outsourcing hangs over early help.

See page 3



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INTRODUCTION



We start this edition by asking you to complete our schools' survey. This will provide further evidence to support the 'Worth Less?' campaign's efforts to lobby government

to give fair funding to our schools (see page 13). We outline the council's funding pressures (see below). The impact on services is already being felt, especially in social care as our articles on pages 6, 7 and 10 illustrate. Our members in both further and adult education face testing times in the next few months, as do those in some of the

council's outsourced services, for example those now run by Grace Eyre and Essex Cares (pages 12 & 15). We also feature important national issues impacting our members: the Labour leadership election result and the Labour Party's perspective on grammar schools. We hope you enjoy reading this edition.

Dan Sartin, Branch Secretary

Government continues to cut, regardless of the human cost

The 2017/18 West Sussex County Council (WSCC) budget shortfall is a staggering £39.6million if the council increases council tax by 3.95%. If the council chooses to freeze council tax again, as it has done for 5 of the previous 6 years, that budget shortfall increases to £54.9million.

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 from its previous policy of promoting tax freezes at any cost, showing what chaos and instability central government is bringing to local government.

The current budget gap until 2020/21 is £59m if council tax is raised by 3.95% each year, or £127m if it's frozen.

Difficult year

This means that next year, 2017/18, is going to be a very difficult year, when the council needs to make two-thirds of its cuts over

the next four years in one year. However, savings are increasingly difficult to achieve, leaving the council with hard decisions to make.

In this year 2016/17, paradoxically there are underspends in some areas – such as Adults' Services. But there are also overspends in others – particularly Children's Services where demand for services is rocketing. For example, 'Looked After Children' placements are at a 30-year high. The council simply has to respond to this demand if we are to call West Sussex civilised and care for our most vulnerable children. At the same time the council is caught in a trap. It wants to invest in non-statutory

'prevention' services to stop children needing more expensive interventions, but it is proposing to cut £6million from this discretionary spending next year. Meanwhile, councillors still spend money unnecessarily on local pet projects (see page 10).

Worsening the overall position, some savings and cuts agreed in February carry a risk they will not be implemented. Relatively few savings are on track to be delivered in Adults' Services, Children's Services, Corporate Relations, Highways & Transport or Residents' Services. Sometimes this is because they were never achievable in the first place.

Also, large corporate risks are known. The following are rated RED:

- Service quality, safeguarding and duty of care in Adults' Services and Children's Services;

- Internal controls, governance and partnership arrangements;
- Contract management – and if contracts are not managed properly or outsourcings bungled, services deteriorate fast and cost the council more to put right.

Deepening problems

Overall the council is not in a good place. We are also seeing increasing strains in education (see page 13). The country needs a fundamental change of direction to solve what are deepening national problems.

Some hope came from a debate on finance at select committee on 30 September. It was clear the cabinet member was not minded to recommend a council tax freeze, given the harm this would do to our most vulnerable residents. The cabinet member was also asked by the committee to use council reserves to help smooth the budget shortfalls over the four-year period. Decision-making could then be as considered as possible, and not rushed to make matters worse. These are both measures UNISON has long-argued for.

UNISON will support its members through the inevitable restructures to come, and will defend public services and your terms and conditions. To help us to do this, encourage your colleagues to join us (see centre pages).

Children's Services outsourcing

UNISON is deeply concerned about last minute changes to the council's plans for a new 'Integrated Prevention and Earliest Help Service' (IPEH).

It was not made clear to either the 546 affected staff or UNISON that the contracting of the Healthy Child Programme (HCP) would result in the successful bidder 'co-designing' the new service. This could include future options to outsource services to the winning bidder. UNISON fears bigger players such as Virgin will tender bids. UNISON's Brighton branch and others are currently campaigning to prevent a Virgin takeover of children's services there. WSCC services which could be impacted by the £6m savings target include:

- Children and Family Centres
- Youth Services
- Youth Offending Services
- Domestic abuse workers
- Young carers workers
- Think Family

The County Council has an awful track record in outsourcing. Failure after failure has been imposed on staff and service users. Branch secretary Dan Sartin attended the Children's Services select committee and spoke to councillors about our concerns. Councillors did not in our view adequately scrutinise:

- the plans and how they'd been developed;
- why the HCP had to be procured as proposed;
- why staff had not been involved;
- how an effective integrated service could be achieved through outsourcing;
- the lessons learned from the Clinical Commissioning Group's failure of the Bupa musculo-skeletal services takeover;
- what would be different this time, to avoid the mistakes that we have seen elsewhere in managing the county's contracts.

All residents and taxpayers should be concerned at this lack of scrutiny. UNISON will be calling a meeting of its reps working in the affected teams above in order to prepare for a defence of our services. We are sure the public will not tolerate a corporate takeover of our children's services because they know what privatisation means for jobs, terms and conditions and service quality. Do you have a UNISON Rep in your team? Are all your colleagues in UNISON? Now is the time for them to join.

College merger threatens jobs

Northbrook College, Worthing and City College, Brighton are likely to be merged from March next year.

This will mean City College will be dissolved and run jointly, with Northbrook as lead partner under the current working title of 'Greater Brighton and Sussex Institute of Arts & Technology'. The merger has been forced under the government's 'Area Review' which dictates that wherever possible, services should be shared between further education colleges in the same geographical area to save costs.

There are two major problems: the impact on jobs and on staff pensions.

There is a high risk of more jobs in business support and HR being moved into the existing shared services outsourced contract with SISSC (Shared Services in Sussex and Surrey Colleges). However, staff transferred to SISSC may



not necessarily be able to keep their Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) going, as the company could decide not to go for 'admitted body status.' Most jobs affected will be at City College, as recent savings at Northbrook have left very little to cut.

Northbrook's UNISON workplace rep Karen Fisher said: "There is a huge amount of work to be done in a very short space of time. To generate the necessary savings many jobs will have to be harmonised. With job evaluation having never

been done in Brighton, I'm seriously concerned about the impact this will have on staff. It will certainly not be possible to do this by March.

"One thing we will insist on to ensure fair treatment of all staff in the new corporation is the need to formally recognise the union, including the need for reps to have a reasonable amount of facility time so they can meaningfully help both before and after the merger. We don't yet know if all courses will continue to run in both colleges. Many students cannot afford to travel to a different venue if their course is only available at one college. There will have to be huge changes and cuts made to justify the merger. Without doubt there are rocky roads ahead for both staff and students. That's bound to have an impact on student numbers and ultimately on college funding."

Testing times ahead for Aspire

Employees at Aspire (the council's former Adult Learning Service) have reluctantly agreed to accept a 1% pay offer for the academic year 2016-17. However, UNISON has been able to negotiate additional annual leave for all staff except the most senior.

Aspire is preparing for the re-procurement of the service next year. As money for adult learning is provided by the Skills Funding Agency work has begun preparing a bid and

providing the required workforce information under TUPE regulations. However, when the council had the chance of potentially insourcing the service, it took the decision not to do so based on the flimsiest evidence. That the 'back of a fag packet' is deemed sufficient for these decisions is another source of concern. The council needs a fresh and more rigorous approach to how it takes decisions about the future of its services, but there is scant sign of this yet.

Care worker pay challenge

UNISON is fully supporting 17 Haringey homecare workers (mostly women) in a dispute with their employer Sevacare and the council over the widespread non-payment of the minimum wage.

All are employed on zero-hours contracts and care for elderly and disabled residents across the London borough. They visit people in their homes and some provide 24-hour live-in care.

UNISON's biggest ever case involving homecare focuses on the failure to pay staff a legal wage, as time spent travelling between people's houses was unpaid. It can mean on a typical day that staff could be working for 14 hours, yet be paid for only half of them. It can leave as little as £3.85 per hour (compared to £7.20 national living wage). The legal case received national TV coverage. The tribunal will be heard early next year.

Those who provide live-in care earn even less: just £3.27 per hour, as printed on their pay-slips.

Many staff are too afraid to complain as they feel vulnerable on zero-hours contracts. They fear being given reduced hours or no work at all. Meanwhile, last year Sevacare's profits were over £1m.

WSSC commissions similar homecare contracts and the UNISON West Sussex branch was involved in the development of the tender documentation. We agreed for the inclusion of several clauses which would protect workers from unscrupulous firms and stop these minimum wage issues arising.

If you hear of any company in West Sussex not paying the National Minimum Wage to their care workers, please contact us: office. unison@westsussex.gov.uk 01243 777636.



Pic by Twocomis / Shutterstock.com

LABOUR LEADERSHIP ELECTION

Commenting on Jeremy Corbyn's re-election as the leader of the Labour party, UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis said: "Jeremy Corbyn has won because he's captured the imagination of party members. I'm proud that our union nominated Jeremy for leader."

"People are inspired by his promises to end austerity, fix our broken public services and build a different kind of economy."

Dan Sartin, UNISON West Sussex Branch Secretary said, "A clear majority of Labour-affiliated UNISON members in the South East backed Jeremy Corbyn, just as they did across the rest of the country."

"Now the MPs in parliament need to get behind the leader who was the overwhelming choice of the party for the second time in a year, and get back to doing the job we need them to do, which is holding the current government to account."

Adults' Provider Services research challenges options

Adults' Services has been carrying out an 'options appraisal' of its in-house provider service (such as day care and residential centres for people with learning disabilities and the elderly).

UNISON was so concerned by the alternative delivery models being considered (such as staff mutuals, social enterprises and local authority trading companies: LATCs) we asked deputy branch secretary Karen Daubney to conduct research on those options, especially LATCs. She found little track record of success elsewhere.

"There appears to be considerable over-estimation of potential savings and income generation. The reality is that LATCs often struggle to adapt to changes in demand because of their poor financial reserves," said Karen. "We've found evidence of failure across the country: in Barnet, Kensington & Chelsea, Surrey, Stockport, Essex and Dorset. It seems the LATC business model is based

on a two-tier workforce, where new staff are employed on worse terms and conditions than those TUPEd over from the council. This appears to be the primary way they attempt to make a profit, which of course is totally unacceptable to us.

"At a time when demand for Adults' Services is increasing, surely the answer is not to de-skill and underpay staff or reduce their terms and conditions? The profound implications of doing this are obvious to anyone in social care."

The branch has used its research to help the council with its decision-making. We're now told decisions have been put on hold for this year. We will know more detail of future proposals in Spring 2017. You can find Karen's research paper on our website.



Successful compensation for West Sussex member



UNISON solicitors Thompsons successfully negotiated a £40,000 compensation claim for a West Sussex member recently.

It's just one example where our solicitors have achieved a successful outcome for one of our members when they have been injured.

All the compensation went straight to our member with no deduction by Thompsons.

Cases such as this show the value of the union's legal service. It also shows that the union is prepared to take cases that claim companies and no win/no fee solicitors will not.

Marjory Cobby Centre rated 'good'

Council residential care home, the Marjory Cobby Centre, was awarded an overall 'good' rating by the CQC earlier this year.

It scored consistently well in all five categories of assessment, with very positive feedback from inspectors. The report records that staff, service users and visiting professionals such as social workers were almost universally supportive, with 'significant improvement' being a consistent theme.

We extend our congratulations to staff at Marjory Cobby, many of whom are UNISON members. Since the assessment, consideration is being given for the centre's staff to offer domiciliary care as an option for the council, as well as residential care. Centre staff have the skills, confidence and experience to provide this service and now have the recognition of a good CQC assessment to support their offer.

THANK YOU
"Thanks for all your support and input over the past months: a very heartfelt and sincere thanks to you, and best wishes."

UNISON member to Branch Officer.

HOME CARE

National concerns, local impacts

The recent case of home care provider Mears pulling out of both Liverpool and Wirral's service contracts should raise local alarm bells.

The dispute is over the increased amount of council funding offered to cover increased staff costs because of new national living wage requirements.

Representing providers, the UK Homecare Association said councils should pay at least £16.70 per hour. Liverpool offered £13.10 and Wirral £12.92, both up from last year. According to Mears, this was not enough to meet costs so they withdrew from the contract.

West Sussex social workers are finding it increasingly difficult to find appropriate care packages.

UNISON believes local authority rates to pay for service contracts are set too low. It's one of a combination of problems in the supply of domiciliary care, impacting especially on the recruitment of younger people into the service and the inability to pay staff the national living wage (NLW). The situation will become even more acute if restrictions are applied to recruit European staff post-Brexit.

To its credit, the County Council already has plans being developed to meet the extra demands of the NLW, as reported

to its Performance and Finance Select Committee in late September.

Problems are particularly serious when people are discharged from hospital. Care packages are difficult to find, resulting in 'bed-blocking'. In some cases, even self-funders cannot find agencies with the capacity to take them on.

These are national concerns, but with very local impacts. UNISON is monitoring the situation carefully. If you have any concerns, please let us know: office.unison@westsussex.gov.uk

Join UNISON – Membership Form

Please fill in the form and send to UNISON West Sussex,
Central Attic, County Hall, Chichester, PO19 1RQ

1 Tell us about you

Title	First name														
Surname/family name				Date of birth / /											
Home address															
Postcode															
email															
Phone number (please indicate if home, work or mobile)				National insurance number (from your payslip)											
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Please give your ethnic origin: <i>(tick one box)</i>															
<input type="checkbox"/> Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/> Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/> Black African	<input type="checkbox"/> Black UK	<input type="checkbox"/> White UK											
<input type="checkbox"/> Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian UK	<input type="checkbox"/> Black Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/> Black other	<input type="checkbox"/> Irish											
<input type="checkbox"/> Indian	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian other			<input type="checkbox"/> White other											

2 Tell us about your job

Employer's name
Your job title/occupation
Workplace name and address
Postcode
Payroll number (from your payslip)

3 What you will pay each month

Please tick the appropriate box for your earnings before deductions.

Annual pay	▼	Your subscription
Up to £2,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£1.30
£2,001–£5,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£3.50
£5,001–£8,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£5.30
£8,001–£11,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£6.60
£11,001–£14,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£7.85
£14,001–£17,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£9.70
£17,001–£20,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£11.50
£20,001–£25,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£14.00
£25,001–£30,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£17.25
£30,001–£35,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20.30
over £35,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£22.50

4 Choose your political fund

One of the ways UNISON works on your behalf is through political campaigning. Your subscription includes a political fund payment so you won't pay any extra, but in UNISON you choose how you want that money to be used.

Please tick one box only.

- Our Affiliated Political Fund takes UNISON members' views directly into the Labour Party, working to promote UNISON policies.
- The General Political Fund is used to pay for branch, regional and national campaigns but is independent of any political party.

5 Choose how you wish to pay *Please tick ONE box only*

EITHER deduct from salary:

I wish to join UNISON and authorise deduction of subscriptions from my pay by my employer.

Signature

OR pay by direct debit:

please complete the direct debit form below

I wish to join UNISON and authorise deduction of subscriptions by direct debit

Date

Please go to unison.org.uk/privacy-policy to see how we will protect and use your personal information

Instruction to your bank or building society to pay by Direct Debit

Please fill in the form and send to UNISON West Sussex



Name and full postal address of your bank or building society

To: The Manager	Bank/building society
Address	
Postcode	

Name(s) of Account holder(s)

Bank/building society account number

Branch sort code

Service User Number

Reference number (for office use only do not complete)

Please pay UNISON Direct Debits from the account detailed in this Instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this Instruction may remain with UNISON and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my bank/building society.

Signature(s)

Date

Banks and building societies may not accept Direct Debit instructions for some types of account

Best use of tax payers' money?

The seemingly never-ending litany of questionable grants awarded to 'community projects' has produced yet more contentious examples from the County Council's various County Local Committees (CLCs).

Below is a recent selection you may find interesting, especially in the light of the huge savings needing to be made by the

council. UNISON finds it hard to believe that clubs in some of the county's wealthier towns and villages really need to spend tax payers' money on items when there are many other funding streams available.

We'll continue to bring you more examples in future editions. Meanwhile, if you disagree with any of the above awards, please talk to your local county councillor.

How much?	What for?	To whom?	By which CLC?
£1,000	A euphonium	Petworth Town Band	North Chichester
£1,850	A cricket roller	Midhurst Cricket Club	North Chichester
£2,500	New sight screens	Arundel Cricket Club	Joint Downland
£2,700	Marketing, publicity and displays	Green Dreams Community Food and Green Spaces Festival*	Worthing
£2,700	Media marketing	Tide of Light and Fireworks Festival*	Worthing

*Interests declared from county councillors.

Vacancies and recruitment in children's social care

We're pleased to report that the West Sussex Social Work Academy seems to be having a positive impact on children's social work recruitment, particularly for newly-qualified social workers.

Through its regular dialogue with senior managers, UNISON has encouraged Children's Services to look at vacancy levels and caseloads to help alleviate overwhelmed staff. The number of newly-qualified staff moving into vacant posts has contributed to an improvement.

However, we are concerned that some services have a high dependency on those who

are newly qualified. Such staff need high quality supervision and coaching.

Nationally, the expected employment 'lifespan' of a children's social worker varies between just 5 to 8 years. After that, many reach 'burn-out'. High dependency on newly qualified staff has an impact up the management chain because it results in far fewer staff being able to be considered for promotion

into management positions. The service gradually becomes less experienced.

UNISON West Sussex has agreement to discuss the issue of vacancies and recruitment at every Children's Joint Consultative Committee (JCC). This is so we can challenge managers to address problems of inexperience and make sure the academy and further recruitment initiatives continue to deliver successfully.

If you have local problems recruiting or retaining staff, please email us.



JUDITH TAYLOR

Our new branch pensions champion

Judith has just taken over as our scheme member representative on the West Sussex Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) pensions panel.

This is a statutory body that oversees pension investment on behalf of its members, but has also recently been a channel to voice concerns over the administration of the Capita West Sussex pensions service. For the second year running, Capita has missed its deadline for delivery of annual pensions statements to scheme members. UNISON believes the council will again need to refer itself to the Pensions Regulator.

'Pensions Champion' Judith will be trained by UNISON and investment experts Baillie-Gifford

in Edinburgh so she can contribute meaningfully on behalf of UNISON members. This will be followed by further training in London by UBS on the concept of 'spreading risk'. So our members can be reassured we will have increasingly informed, trained and professional representation.

"Part of my role," said Judith, "is to look at both individual and collective pension problems, but also help to reduce risk on the West Sussex fund as it is compulsorily merged with other regional county funds. The West Sussex LGPS is

well funded, but others are less-so. Therefore, I need to make sure our funds are not put at unnecessary risk."

"We have struggled in the past to get pensions admin on the panel agenda," said Judith, "but frankly we have so many cases of poor service from Capita (due to its business model, not its staff – see our pensions research on the contract on our website), we would be failing our members who need to use the service if we didn't raise this issue."

If you have a concern about the West Sussex pensions service, please see our website home page for details on how to get support from the branch to resolve it.

Do the problems continue with Adults' Care Point?

Circulating rumours suggest there remain significant issues with the Adults' Care Point service.

It appears filling staff vacancies, high levels of sickness absence and long waiting lists for care assessments are particular problems.

Our members have raised concerns with us, for example, locality teams being asked to help clear the backlog on top of their existing workload. They suggest the council is being forced to cover the service partly by using expensive 'locum' staff. We will do our best to raise this issue with management. Watch this space!



ESSEX CARES

No pay rise this year

The County Council's 'reablement' provider Essex Cares Ltd (ECL) will not be awarding a pay rise this year. Reablement is the service that helps vulnerable adults rehabilitate at home after being discharged from hospital.

It's also threatened with a possible council re-procurement of its service. This could see ECL – which has struggled to deliver the contract since its award – lose the contract. UNISON is directly involved in discussions with the council's commissioning manager on how reablement will be delivered in the future.

Ade Adetukasi, ECL head of HR explains: "I can confirm that ECL has rejected UNISON's pay claim for a 2.5% increase for all pay points within the scope of these negotiations. In addition, ECL is unable to offer a pay increase with the decision on the procurement of the West Sussex service still pending and also due to ECL's current difficult financial situation."

The new service needs to be in place by September 2017. The council asked ECL to continue providing the service through a contract extension, until all future options had been appraised. This will be a challenge for ECL as it is currently unable to increase pay for already low-paid staff with challenging jobs. It already pays them at rates below those for staff at a well-known discount supermarket. Even some local cleaning services pay more per hour than ECL. It's not difficult to see that any reablement provider must pay its staff appropriately or it risks losing them to other local employers.

Outsourcing has these negative implications for staff. If an employer fears it will lose the contract, it may simply refuse to make the usual pay awards.



ADULTS' OPERATIONS Going back to the community

The County Council proposes to introduce community-based social work pilots from 'innovation sites' across the county from January 2017. If successful, the model will be expanded to deliver adult social care across West Sussex.

The pilots will require a number of social work staff to volunteer to work from innovation sites and in different ways with customers. These sites are currently proposed in parts of Chichester, Adur, Crawley and East Grinstead. This, the council suggests, will:

- help social workers reach people earlier;
- reduce social isolation;
- maximise people's independence;
- provide a more bespoke care service; and
- make better use of technology.

UNISON believes there could be huge implications by introducing different ways of working in care services such as the Contact Centre's Care Point, already struggling under the weight of demand and staff shortages.

UNISON also notes it appears the council is going full circle; back to providing more adult social care contact locally from community hubs. It did this before several rounds of needless restructures forced it to apply generic and sometimes inappropriate care provision.

The success of innovation sites will depend on sufficient numbers of social care staff coming forward to volunteer for those roles against a background of increasing demand for services and significant budget reductions.

Papers were heard at the Health & Adults' Services Committee (HASC) at the end of September. The committee approved the overall direction of travel.

SCHOOL FUNDING CRISIS

Please complete our survey



If you work in or send children to a West Sussex school, we'd like you to know that UNISON West Sussex is conducting a survey of all its schools and academies members and parents.

We want to better understand the impact of the school funding crisis on our members and the children whose education they support. Results will complement the work of the 'Worth Less?' campaign, to secure an improved budget settlement for West Sussex schools through the national funding formula. This will help secure our members' jobs and working conditions and improve education in our county. We have seen:

- members' jobs go;
- pressure placed on remaining staff;
- reduced support to children with special needs;
- downward pressure on grades;
- vacancies not filled and

posts deleted; and

- increasing use of temporary contracts.

None of this is good for West Sussex children. It's caused by government failure to address the schools' funding crisis. We want to understand your views and experiences of what's happened in West Sussex schools over the past two years. Please take a few minutes to complete our survey: share it with colleagues and encourage them to join UNISON!

We will campaign to bring this funding scandal to the attention of all West Sussex residents, and force a change for the better.

Please go to our survey at: www.unisonwestsussex.org.uk/news/schools-survey

Learning grants

UNISON offers grants to members studying at further education or first degree levels as part of the support offered to help members get ahead and develop their careers.

For members studying at their own expense the following grants are available: learning support grants of £70 for members

on further education courses or first degree level courses; and Open University grants of £120 for 60 point courses at first

degree level with the OU or £60 for 30 point courses.

One West Sussex member was recently awarded a UNISON Personal Learning Grant of £300 to support her degree studies. To find out more about such grants, go to the national UNISON website. Search for 'personal learning grants'.

WORKPLACE REP PROFILE

Jo Cooke

UNISON workplace rep and branch committee member Jo Cooke works as a Community Officer (Arun area) in the County Council's Communities Directorate.

"I'm lucky because both my professional and union roles involve helping others. One current workplace example involves working alongside a woman setting up a community centre in a deprived area of Arun. My team has helped secure them funding, and I am helping them find support to complete the renovation of a community garden. I have linked them up with local volunteers and the project is going well," said Jo.

"I really enjoy bringing people together who want to bring positive change but lack the means to do it.

"Before I joined the union, Dan (branch secretary) did one of his office recruitment rounds that week which got me interested. I did lots of

research and discovered that its principles matched my own; it was an easy decision for me to join.

"As the workplace rep for Communities, I now sit on the new Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) for the Residents' Services and Communities Directorate. It's a forum where I can put forward our members' views on what needs to improve. Some members can feel fearful of professional repercussions if they speak up to managers, so I am happy to be their voice.

"I'm pleased that the idea of an anonymous reporting system I put forward last time is now in the department's action plan. I'll let our members know when it becomes a reality."



"No evidence grammar schools are needed"

So says Angela Rayner MP, Labour's shadow education secretary and UNISON member.

Angela left school without A-C GCSEs and became pregnant at 16. Her mum could not read or write. She became a home carer and, as a member of UNISON, became a workplace rep. She was then involved in UNISON's regional structures, becoming convener for the North West. This is the highest lay member position.

Here's her views on the government's emerging grammar schools policy. "I would have been the child who failed the 11-plus," said Angela, "not because of ability but because of social background. Though my mum loved me, she wouldn't have known which were the best schools. And she wouldn't have been able to pay for private tuition to get me through the test. These are social and economic barriers that face a lot of kids."

"I talk passionately as someone who's not stupid but was failed by the system. That's what makes me strive to make sure that whether you're vocationally, technically or academically gifted, whether you've got special needs or a disability we have an absolute duty to ensure everybody reaches their full potential. I hope all MPs rally behind the evidence and oppose grammar schools."

TRADE UNIONS

A student's perspective

Sixth-form student Harry Young spent a week's work experience with the UNISON West Sussex branch office in Chichester. Here's his report.

"My week working with UNISON has changed the way I see unions, how they work and the ways they defend workers.

"I have a new understanding about how essential unions are to protect workers and their rights. From observing casework, I see it's needed to ensure terms and conditions are upheld and people are treated fairly. I also see how without representation, members would often get a worse deal or be made redundant. Cases have shown me how often



workers are being unfairly treated and how unions can help and protect them. I have a better understanding of the day-to-day running of a union. A union office needs to keep members informed, ballot and survey them as well as helping them.

"I have had the chance to

see how unions negotiate with management. It's not always as I pictured it: Arthur Scargill with thousands nationwide ready to strike. It's a partnership where the union fights for the best deal for its members. It will always ensure there is the best outcome for members.

"I can imagine clearly what non-unionised work environments would look like."

Branch Secretary Dan Sartin said: "UNISON takes educational opportunity seriously. We were very happy to make time for Harry and hope it has helped him achieve a high standard in his politics course. We'd be very happy to consider requests from suitably motivated candidates in the future."

Staff return in-house

The council's commissioning approach is having a negative knock-on effect even on some of its most competent service providers.

An example of this is the supported living service for adults with learning disabilities provided by the charity Grace Eyre Foundation (GEF).

GEF has been forced into a situation where it is struggling to provide the service. One case of this is the supported living service provided by its Coastal Team. The council argues that use of the service is diminishing.

Current users are not replaced because new users are being offered personal budgets instead. This means potential service users can choose to spend their budget in other ways, which may not mean using GEF facilities. As GEF is paid by the number of service hours provided to customers, their income from the council has reduced.

The council tried to re-procure the service but there

were no bidders. GEF was asked to continue providing the service, but refused as it couldn't break even.

The council saw that its only option was to transfer the Coastal Team back in-house. So six staff – all UNISON members – will start working again for the council, even though their former employer was exemplary.

It's a sad reflection on the council which used to consider itself a 'commissioning council'. It is finding out the hard way that commissioning ideology is a dead-end for public services.

“The government’s recent Education and Adoption Act is devolving more responsibility for school inspections onto local authorities (LAs), yet at the same time reducing funding and letting multi-academy trusts (MATs) off the hook.”

Are academies being let off the hook?

The above quote is the view of UNISON West Sussex branch secretary, Dan Sartin.

It would seem the County Council must become the lead inspection agency and be able to offer four categories of support. It also requires the council to set-up a ‘West Sussex Networked Learning Community’ (WSNLC). Yet these are exactly the ‘benefits’ schools were supposed to gain from academy conversion through their MATs.

It’s a far-cry from the rhetoric that hailed the expansion of the academies programme in 2010 when we were told academies would ‘remove the bureaucracy

of the LA and free schools from its meddling.’ Yet it would seem that far from being a bureaucratic annoyance, the LA is the sole accountable body for the progress and safety of children in our county, whether in maintained schools or academies.

Not surprisingly, some academies welcome this approach as they still ‘feel affinity’ with the LA. However, it would seem to this branch that academy trusts have come up short in their primary task: to implement school improvement. The

council’s strategy document on this issue describes the principle of ‘universal support’ for both maintained schools and academies being provided ‘free of charge’. Why is this work not conducted by their MAT or the DfE? After all, academy conversion was meant to make schools ‘free of local government control’.

Councils running quasi-inspections lets MATs off the hook and is an admission of failure in the government’s academies agenda. The bureaucracy and cost of academy conversion is a national tragedy. The impact is there is less money for teaching our children (see page 13).

Southern Rail reject RMT offer

At time of going to press, rail union RMT had confirmed that a fresh set of proposals that could have resolved the on-going guards’ dispute was rejected out of hand by the company. As a result, the next phase of action is going ahead.

RMT proposals would allow for the current conductors to migrate across to the new role of On Board Supervisor (OBS), addressing the issue at the heart of Southern’s plans.

For an agreed transitional period the OBS role would retain all the current safety competencies of the conductor. During transition, the company and union would

work jointly to create a new framework to retain the second safety critical members of staff on current services, agree a safe and reliable method of train despatch, address the customer service objectives of Southern and ensure access to services for all.

Not only has the company rejected RMT’s rational proposals, but it has also rejected a union offer to bring the government conciliation service ACAS in immediately.

Please support the rail unions by writing to your MP via: bit.ly/23MXnzK

Remaining strike days are confirmed as:

- **3–5 and 22–23 November**
- **6–8 December.**