

BRANCH LINES

West Sussex County Branch of UNISON Newsletter

A FUTURE THAT WORKS

The TUC has called a national demonstration for Saturday October 20th. The protest, ending with a mass rally in Hyde Park, is demanding more investment in the economy and public services. It's clear that austerity economics is a dead-end agenda, causing mass hardship and poverty across the UK and Europe. The economy is contracting and the deficit is increasing, not reducing.

UNISON West Sussex has organised two coaches for the day, and each member is entitled to two free seats. Pick up times will be 8.30am in Chichester; 9.00am in Worthing; 9.00am in Horsham; and 9.30am in Crawley.

To book your space, please phone 01243 777636 or email j.ellis@unison.co.uk

HE and FE ballot results

UNISON has announced the result of its industrial action ballot in higher education (HE) over pay. 50.3% were in favour of strike action; 49.7% were not. UNISON's national committee for members in HE has since met and decided against strike action after UCU members voted separately against strike action. Members in Chichester University will be informed of next steps.

UNISON members in further education (FE) have voted by 79 to 21% in favour of accepting the Association of Colleges final pay recommendation. This is for: a £200 increase for staff earning less than £15K; a 0.7% increase for those earning above £15K; and a new minimum hourly rate of £7.30.

Worthing High School debacle continues

Huge controversy continues to surround attempts to force Worthing High School down the path towards 'academisation'. When schools become academies, they effectively become private businesses, outside the control of the local authority and beyond any sense of accountability to the local community. They can choose not to employ qualified teachers, and are able to set the terms and conditions of all staff at any level they choose.

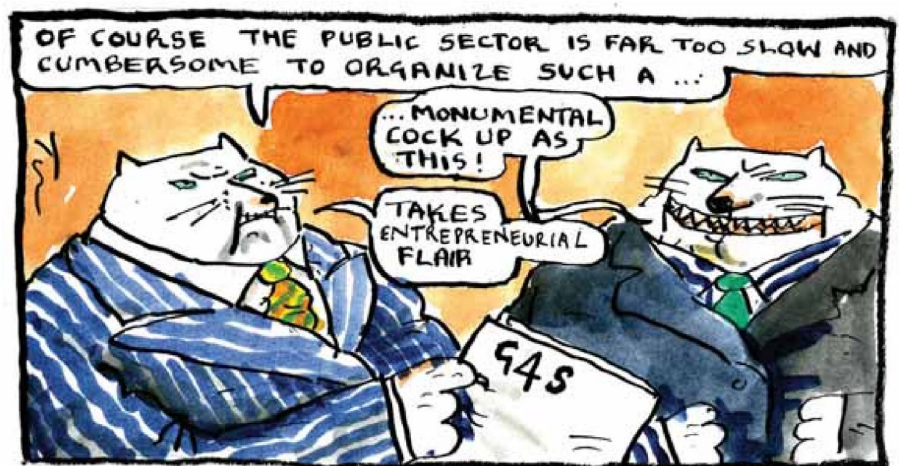
Local parents set up 'Worthing High Academy Action Group' (see their website at www.whaag.blogspot.co.uk) to campaign against the proposals after the school failed to articulate a case for academisation in its consultation process.

Since then there has been a Teachers' strike, which UNISON members were unable to join due to legal technicalities connected to the school's Trust status.



The latest development is that the Headteacher—who, along with the Chair of Governors, local businessman Tony Cohen—was the key advocate for the unpopular proposals has now resigned due to 'ill health'. This happens to be at the same time that WSCC is conducting an investigation into irregularities within the school. Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education, is awaiting the outcome of this investigation before deciding whether to green light Tony Cohen's plans for the school.

October 23rd is looking likely as the next date for strike action, with other dates planned for the autumn which UNISON expects to be able to ballot its members on.



New Branch Secretary

Dan Sartin took over from Chris Earwaker as Branch Secretary on October 8th. Dan spent two years as the Branch's Negotiations Officer, followed by 18 months as Deputy Branch Secretary before the Branch Committee unanimously voted for Dan to take on the vacant role at its September meeting.



Prior to working for the Branch, Dan worked in WSCC Adults' Services, and before that in a range of jobs for local and national voluntary organisations. He lives in Worthing with his partner and two children. Dan said, "There could not be a tougher time to take this role on, but I welcome the chance to protect and further members' interests and to defend the public services we all rely on. I am committed to open and improved communication with members, and increased opportunities for participation within the Branch's work at every level."

All elected Branch roles will come round for nominations in the usual annual cycle beginning in January. To get in touch with Dan call the Branch office on 01243 777636 or email daniel.sartin@westsussex.gov.uk

Essex Cares cut starting salaries by 16%

When the County Council outsourced its Reablement service for disabled and elderly people to Essex Cares Ltd, assurances were given about the reputation of the new employer. Its first act though, has been to slash the rate of pay for new starters on the contract from £8.15 to £6.83—a cut of 16%, and resulting in a pay rate which is now well below the Living Wage.

This has implications for all of us, not least the Council which is hoping to maintain a service with a motivated and loyal workforce, and will see its own plans to stimulate the local economy undermined. UNISON raised this with the Council's Chief Executive in one of its regular meetings and work is being undertaken to examine if there are consequences the Council should consider for its own policy and practice.

Casework round-up

The Branch has some 60-70 cases open to us at any one time. Successes since the last *Branch Lines* include one member who was granted flexible retirement under WSCC policy, only to see the offer withdrawn after the Cabinet member (who signs off such requests) tried to link the approval to a permanent reduction of hours in the service. The UNISON member's grievance was upheld at appeal and the policy applied correctly.

A social worker who was exposed to violent behaviour and was lucky to escape physical injury had her grievance on the failure to carry out risk assessments partially upheld. As a result, managers will be reminded to proactively risk assess when a client's circumstances change. Social workers with concerns which are not addressed should contact UNISON for guidance.

A recent case in a school has led to the reduction of the time final warnings can be retained on an employee's record from 24 to 12 months. The WSCC policy will be re-issued imminently.

News in brief

Southampton pay cut reverse

Southampton Council workers have voted overwhelmingly to accept a deal to end the long-running dispute over pay cuts imposed by the previous Conservative leadership of the City Council. Labour took control of the Council after local elections when the public and public service workers had the chance to pass judgement on the disastrous pay-cuts policy. Under the deal, staff will see their pay reinstated over various instalments up till 2015, with the lowest paid being sorted first. UNISON will now withdraw all legal action against the council and call off ongoing industrial action. UNISON West Sussex donated twice to the Southampton strike hardship fund, and we are delighted to see this outcome.

WSCC Stress Risk Assessments

A recent UNISON West Sussex online survey of its members in Adults' and Children's social care revealed unacceptable stress levels, poor working conditions and health issues. Union reps pressed management to conduct Team Stress Risk Assessments so that the issues could be formally investigated with plans put in place to mitigate the worst practices, and these took place over the previous two months. UNISON Health & Safety Reps will be reviewing the evidence in their November meeting with Amanda Rogers and Stuart Gallimore.

WSCC Staff Survey

The Council is running its annual Staff Survey until 31st October. To find it, go to the WSCC Staff Intranet. This is a good opportunity for members to tell the Council how you feel and what should be improved. After UNISON representations about the 2011 Survey, this year there are more questions about what its like to work for the Council, and a free-text box for you to leave feedback and examples.

Capita transfer

Capita plc took over a range of County Council support services from 1st October. 600 employees transferred over to the private provider. A new Joint Consultative Committee will shortly be established to allow Capita and UNISON to discuss issues affecting the transferred workforce. If you work on the Capita contract and think you could help the Branch in its negotiations, please get in touch with us.

Compensation victories

Since the last *Branch Lines* two UNISON West Sussex members have won £30,000 and £8,000 respectively in compensation for injuries suffered in accidents. Cases such as these show the value of the union's free legal service—and that often UNISON solicitors will take on cases that claim companies and no win/no fee solicitors will not. Get in touch for more information about this service.

Did you know?

UNISON West Sussex has 5,000 subscription-paying members and 60 trained Reps in workplaces. We also have 800 Retired members. We are the third largest UNISON Branch in the South East region. If you would like to know more about becoming a UNISON Rep, please get in touch.

A shot in the arm

WSSC is encouraging all its frontline social care staff to consider getting a flu jab. Social care staff in a 'health at risk' group will be contacted via their GP surgery to access a free jab. More information can be found at www.westsussex.nhs.uk

The light of day

UNISON members in the WSSC Family Resource and Leapfrog teams contacted their Health & Safety Rep after they were relocated to office space without natural daylight and a range of health problems ensued. Council managers have now agreed to relocate the Teams to more appropriate office space.

Are you up-to-date?

UNISON increasingly stays in touch with its members by email. If you only receive *Branch Lines* in its paper form, chances are we don't have your email address and you are missing out on other useful news.

Get in touch on 01243 777636 or office.unison@westsussex.gov.uk if we don't hold the right information about you. We also need to know about changes to your employer, department, job title or home address. Otherwise it can be difficult to make contact when we need to.



**March with us on
20 October 2012**

Northbrook news

UNISON Rep Karen Fisher writes: "We are still wading through Job Evaluation here at Northbrook College but after nearly four years the end is in sight. We have been working hard to attain the best outcome for our members.

"We did not receive a pay increase last year and the year before was 0.3% - virtually worthless for members on the lowest grades who are increasingly struggling to make ends meet. Northbrook did not implement the underpin for low paid workers either. After attending the UNISON colleges seminar in Bolton I decided to tackle college management about implementing a Living Wage. At the College's next Joint Consultative Group meeting I put it on the agenda. Armed with what I had learnt at the seminar and what I picked up from the website (www.unison.org.uk/livingwage/index.asp) I negotiated with the college not to pay any staff below the £7.20 per hour the Living Wage Foundation has set.

"To aid UNISON's case I talked about the lack of underpinning implementation when applying salary increases over the last few years, and outlined the cost of housing locally both in the rental and owner-occupied sectors. I also quoted the cost of living rises which proportionately hit those on the lowest wage the hardest. The Northbrook Principal agreed with our case and no staff will be employed on sub-Living Wage salaries in future. Having UNISON Reps can make a huge difference."

Seconded social workers in mental health

The Branch recently surveyed its members on secondment to the Sussex Partnership Trust about their current experience at work and where they would wish to see their long-term futures lie. Their employment status is uncertain from April 2014. The results were definitive in the concerns raised about their 'host employer', SPT, and have been fed back to senior managers.

UNISON Rep Lorna Cornett said, "The survey results reflect the real anger staff have about their treatment and what is happening to the service. There are separate talks underway on how social workers who can detain people under the Mental Health Act are paid, and this will be a key issue imminently."

Supporting the most isolated workers

UNISON West Sussex has held useful preliminary talks with the Independent Living Association (ILA) regarding access to Personal Assistants (PAs). There are around 170 PAs and rising in West Sussex. PAs are employed directly by people who have social care needs who receive a 'direct payment' from the Council to do this.

This is usually a positive relationship for both parties but sometimes the PA can be left isolated should difficulties arise. The ILA provides much needed advice and support to disabled people, the employers. UNISON and the ILA are keen to work together to support this relationship by providing more access to training and information about employment rights to both PAs and their employers.

UNISON Rep Di Knight, an Occupational Therapist at WSSC, said, "We are concerned about PAs who may not know their rights and find themselves in difficult situations at work without support. We also need to get across the training options to PAs so they are able to develop their career and not put themselves at undue risk."

Auto-enrolment

Thousands of people retire in poverty each year, especially women who make up the majority of pensioners living in poverty. From October 2012, new legislation has come into force which requires employers on a set date to automatically enrol their staff (who meet certain criteria) or offer the opportunity to be enrolled into a workplace pension. This may present a good opportunity for some members to start or resume saving for their retirement.



Employers with one or more employees must automatically enrol eligible staff and make mandatory employer contributions into a qualifying workplace pension scheme or the National Employment Savings Trust (NEST). The employee will also need to contribute, and the amounts will be phased in over time. For the first year the minimum combined contribution must be 3% but will rise to a minimum of 8%. Your employer is obliged to inform you within one month of the enrolment. You will be able to opt out, though saving for a pension is generally a good idea. The largest employers will go first with the smallest employers having until 2017.

County Council staff

Public service pensions, even after reform, still provide one of the best ways to save for your retirement. However, around 25% of eligible members opt-out of them. The County Council's given date for auto-enrolment is 1st January 2013. Employees who are currently members of LGPS will receive a letter and need take no further action. Employees who are NOT members of LGPS will, subject to them meeting the relevant criteria, be auto-enrolled into the LGPS or have the opportunity to be re-enrolled into the LGPS, even if they have previously opted out.

The County Council is still working on developing the processes for auto-enrolment, and staff who wish to opt out of the scheme should look out for the broadcast announcements and information posted on the Intranet or WSGfL. Depending on the final processes there MAY be a short window in which to opt out, and some employees who wish to opt out may have a deduction made from their salary for pension contributions that will not be refunded until the following month. UNISON would encourage its members to stay in LGPS once enrolled. These are your 'deferred wages', which the union has fought hard for.

Call us or visit the Branch website for a detailed briefing paper.

More news in brief

Contact Centre

Serco Listening took control of the WSCC Contact Centre over a year ago but has still not implemented the revised grading scales which TUPE transferred with the Liberata staff. Local negotiations had progressed well, but recently came unstuck when the management side unilaterally tried to end discussion on the subject. UNISON is continuing to talk to management, but is also now engaging the union's solicitors. Local UNISON Rep Ian Harvey said, "We will be holding a members' meeting shortly to get input and buy-in for the strategy we should use going forward."

Schools

NUT and NASUWT members are currently taking industrial action short of strike action. To assist UNISON members in schools to support their action, the union has issued guidance for members which is available to view on the website at: www.unisonwestsussex.org.uk/schooladvice_1.pdf

Grace Eyre Foundation

This charity took over the Council's Supported Living Service from June 2012. UNISON Rep Catherine Goldsmith said, "We have now signed a Recognition Agreement and had a positive first meeting. The charity has made changes to its grievance and retirement policies in response to our early representations."

ALPHABET POOL

The Alphabet Pool is our local lottery. As a member of UNISON West Sussex you are entitled to join the Alphabet Pool. One unit costs £1 per month. Payment can be made direct from your salary or by standing order.

Recent winners include:

£200	Karen Russell
£100	EM Newman
£ 50	Anthony Whiting
£ 50	Richard Ball
£ 25	Susan Cooper
£ 25	Robina Edser

UNISON WEST SUSSEX — RECRUIT A NEW MEMBER

When you recruit a new member, you are entitled to receive a £10 Store voucher. Just make sure your name is included on the 'recruited by' section of the form, and we will send a voucher to you as soon as we receive the completed form.

Please could you send an Application Pack to:

Name: (Capitals) _____

Home Address: _____

Their workplace: _____

Introduced By: _____ Your Workplace: _____

Please return to: UNISON West Sussex, County Hall, CHICHESTER PO19 1RQ (Please **photocopy**—if required)

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