

UNION

eyes



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THE GENERAL ELECTION: DON'T FORGET THE CUTS

If you work in the public sector you will know that not all politicians are the same. Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats in the coalition Government pushed through the savage cuts to local government funding which has left us all reeling. Their plan was to reduce the national debt twice as fast as was proposed by Labour. As we all know, Labour predicted that such savage cuts would stifle growth and increase government spending in areas such as welfare were proved correct. The national debt actually increased under the Tory/ Liberal coalition leading to even more savage cuts to the welfare budget and further cuts to local government. As you read in this edition even schools are now facing cuts. "Education, education, education " is a thing of the past it seems!

UNISON members working for local authorities and commissioned to do work for local authorities have paid a heavy price. Low paid, zero hours contract jobs have increased. Public sector pay has been cut in real terms and jobs have disappeared left, right and centre.

UNISON work with and lobby all political parties. We seek proper funding for all public services that allows for staff to be fairly remunerated. At a national and Branch level UNISON are affiliated to the Campaign for Trade Union Freedom. They produced a Workers Charter which we will seek all candidates in the general election to support.

Labour have recently committed to the 20 pledges which would deliver significant improvements for working people. We are hoping other parties do likewise and move beyond sound bites and personality focused slogans that are reminiscent of all that was bad with the USA presidential election .

When candidates knock on your door please consider showing them a copy of the Charter and asking which of the 20 points they will publicly endorse.

- Give all workers **equal rights from day one**, whether part-time or full-time, temporary or permanent – so that all workers have the same rights and protections whatever kind of job they have.
- **Ban zero hours contracts** – so that every worker gets a guaranteed number of hours each week.
- Ensure that any employer wishing to recruit labour from abroad **does not undercut workers at home** – because it causes divisions when one workforce is used against another.
- **Repeal the Trade Union Act** and roll out sectoral collective bargaining – because the most effective way to maintain good rights at work is through a trade union.

continued

- **Guarantee trade unions a right to access workplaces** – so that unions can speak to members and potential members.
- **Introduce four new Bank Holidays** – we'll bring our country together with new holidays to mark our four national patron saints' days, so that workers in Britain get the same proper breaks as in other countries.
- **Raise the minimum wage to the level of the living wage** (expected to be at least £10 per hour by 2020) – so that no one in work gets poverty pay.
- **End the public sector pay cap** – because public sector wages have fallen and our public sector workers deserve a pay rise.
- **Amend the takeover code** to ensure every takeover proposal has a clear plan in place to protect workers and pensioners – because workers shouldn't suffer when a company is sold.
- **Roll out maximum pay ratios** – of 20:1 in the public sector and companies bidding for public contracts – because it cannot be right that wages at the top keep rising while everyone else's stagnates.
- **Ban unpaid internships** – because it's not fair for some to get a leg up when others can't afford to.
- **Enforce all workers' rights to trade union representation at work** – so that all workers can be supported when negotiating with their employer.
- **Abolish employment tribunal fees** – so that people have access to justice.
- **Double paid paternity leave to four weeks** and increase paternity pay – because fathers are parents too and deserve to spend more time with their new babies.
- **Strengthen protections for women against unfair redundancy** – because no one should be penalised for having children.
- **Hold a public inquiry into blacklisting** – to ensure that blacklisting truly becomes and remains a thing of the past.
- **Give equalities reps statutory rights** – so they have time to protect workers from discrimination.
- **Reinstate protection against third party harassment** – because everyone deserves to be safe at work
- **Use public spending power to drive up standards**, including only awarding public contracts to companies which recognise trade unions.
- **Introduce a civil enforcement system** to ensure compliance with gender pay auditing—so that all workers have fair access to employment and promotion opportunities and are treated fairly at work.

If you think news from your workplace is never reported in UnionEyes let us know what is happening!

Many employers such as Norse and Breckland Council have their own UNISON newsletters, but we want to try and cover stories in all our workplaces.

CONTACT US—Our Facebook Page is Norfolk County UNISON Branch. Feel free to check our newsfeed and post any news stories we might be interested in. Or follow us and tweet us on the Branch twitter account—UnisonNfkCounty.

Social Care in Crisis

Social Care provides support to disabled and vulnerable adults. It can transform lives, enhancing and complementing health and providing well-being, increasing independence, choice and control. Unfortunately, care provision sometimes falls short of these ideals – in particular care is not intended to be a bed clearing exercise for hospitals.

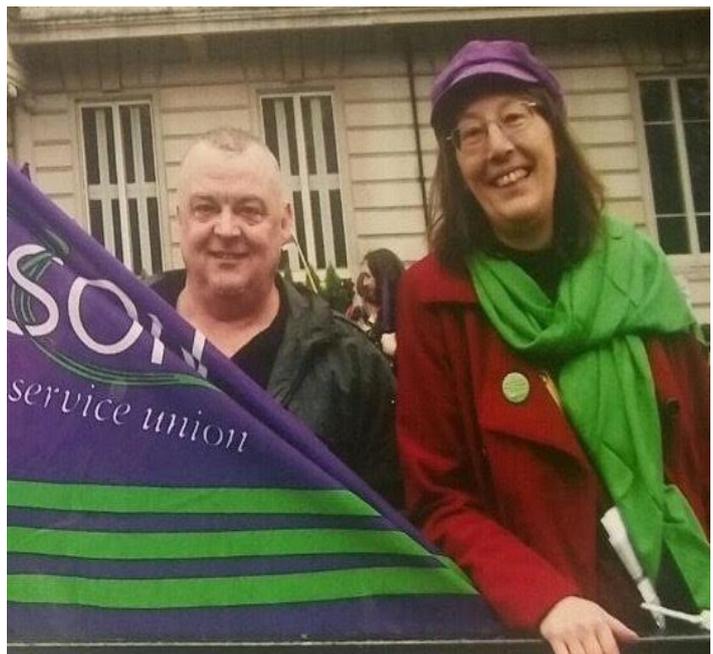
This is not a failure of staff— most staff go into social care to do a good job. However, the system itself is in crisis, something that has been recognised at last by Government and the media. However there is little actually being done to fund social care on a realistic basis. So far, any extra funding is a sticking plaster at best to hide the cracks that are apparent to all staff working in social care. At the moment, staff are between a rock and a hard place: 900 care workers quit their job a day in England due to a mix of factors. Many are paid below the minimum wage, on zero hours contracts that provide little security. A lack of training means that staff are left to perform intimate care with no guidelines. Many carers are afraid to speak out in case their livelihood is removed. No wonder they feel undervalued by their employers.

We live longer because of advances in the NHS and better living conditions, although there are already signs that in poorer areas some of these advances are not being maintained. It is critical that services are properly funded over the years to come as Norfolk's, indeed Great Britain's population over 80 years of age increases. Fewer and fewer people are eligible for help and politicians would do well to recognise the significant increase in the numbers and complexity of needs that will only increase in future years.

UNISON has long campaigned for increases in funding for keeping services in-house and for better terms and conditions for social care staff, believing that this will improve standards and help keep staff within the sector and happier and more confident in their vital work. Through the Ethical Care Charter, UNISON believes that it is everyone's interests to pay staff better, give them contracts and regular hours and proper training so they can provide the skilled level of care needed. The Charter sets minimum standards for workers and for the care they provide. If you know of workers who are not paid for their travel time or have to provide their own equipment, encourage them to join UNISON: they could have a legal case.

Norfolk County Council is signed up to parts 1 and 2 of the Charter, unfortunately not the Living Wage which is part 3 and for which Norfolk County Council have pleaded poverty, although other organisations, notably Independence Matters and Julian Support are signed up. Norfolk County Council uses the Charter in all commissioning of homecare.

Visit www.unison.org.uk/careworkers to find out more.



THE MOVE FROM CARROW HOUSE TO VANTAGE HOUSE—OR NOT!

The proposal for the move came **from management on the 9th April 2016**.

UNISON Stewards and members at Carrow House immediately went into action, pointing out that this would be foolish; there were no safe spaces at Vantage House, no toilets accessible to visitors, no safe reception area, and no parking which was being offered at a variety of public car parks in the City.



This was in contrast to the facilities available at Carrow House which had been set up with a safe system and crucially had parking.

Social workers, staff and visitors could enter and leave safely, and importantly for this service, access their cars on site.

A risk assessment was completed with UNISON, care staff and Health and Safety staff input which highlighted how unsafe the Vantage House move would be. Despite this there was little engagement with staff about the proposed move.

A staff and visitors petition was set up by stewards and sent to the Director, HR and the Chair of the Children's Services Committee. Even as late as 27 October 2016, staff were still waiting for answers.

To this day, the only response has been in the 15 November 2016 Children's Services Committee paper, 'Locality Accommodation Strategy', which confirms the future locality base for the City teams would be at the North Wing of County Hall once it has been refurbished, whenever that may be.

We find it amazing that there was never any formal announcement from the leadership team in relation to this.

This is a success for staff and UNISON stewards who have opposed the move to Vantage House from the start, and will now remain at Carrow House until the County Hall accommodation is ready.

UNISON Stewards and members in Children's Services were at the forefront of opposing this and they should be congratulated for standing together to oppose what would have been a retrograde step. As a result these teams should now move to a safer environment when the North Wing has been refurbished.

Hopefully there will be adequate car parking provision as well!

David Lambert, UNISON Steward

SCHOOL CUTS—Already Hit Norfolk

Schools in England are now facing the most significant financial pressure since the mid-1990s. Funding per pupil is reducing in real terms. If they are to manage within the funds available, schools will have to find efficiency savings rising from £1.1 billion in 2016–17 to £3.0 billion (equivalent to 8% of the total budget) by 2019–20 because of “costs which are outside their control, such as pay rises, higher employer contributions to national insurance and the teachers’ pension scheme, and the apprenticeship levy”. *House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, Financial sustainability of schools, March 2017*

Our schools are under serious threat. In response, a growing campaign of parents, school leaders, staff and their trade unions are demanding ‘fair funding for all schools’.

The campaign must succeed. If not, our children’s education will be damaged by cuts to the curriculum, rising class sizes and cuts to teaching and support staff, further worsening pressures on an already overstretched workforce.

unions are backing the website www.schoolcuts.org.uk This shows how schools right across our region will be hit.

The majority of schools in Norfolk face real terms cuts of over 10%. This has resulted in numerous consultations where staff numbers have been cut and UNISON have had to support members and work hard to try and stop compulsory redundancies. Go onto the website and enter your postcode to see how this affects your area.

MPs, the National Audit Office (NAO) and the Institute for Fiscal Studies are all warning government about school cuts. Yet, as things stand, they are refusing to listen. Ministers are either denying the extent or claiming that schools can somehow manage through ‘efficiency savings’. The NAO showed that 60% of secondary schools already had to spend more than their income in 2014-15. That position has only got worse. The hardest hit schools are now starting to make staff redundant.

The much-publicised National Funding Formula will do nothing to address the problem. It just aims to cover up the overall shortfall by taking money from some Authorities to give to others. But over 98% of schools will still lose out in real terms! Our children and staff who deliver education services deserve better.

Everyone who values education must campaign together to reverse these cuts and demand genuinely ‘fair funding’ that is sufficient to meet every child’s needs.



A SOCIAL WORKER'S DAY GETS LONGER

Social Workers also provide a vital service and we all know social workers who are struggling with caseloads, bureaucracy and long hours. Norfolk County Council's own Social Work Health Check proved yet again that staff are working long hours unpaid and are encouraged to do so by an overloaded system.

A survey by Community Care and UNISON found that the average number of hours worked was 9.5. The average respondents said they were paid for was 7.5 hours. A majority had experienced emotional distress during the day while four in ten (42%) had been verbally abused. Both figures were increases on previous Social Work Watch Days. 55% reported that hot-desking had a detrimental

effect on their work. However, they still managed to make a positive difference.

The UNISON and Community Care survey found that nearly half of over 2,000 responses from social workers in all specialisms (48%) said that their caseload left them feeling "over the limit".

The report "A Day in the Life of Social Work" gives a snapshot of a typical day, highlighting how austerity and staff shortages impact staff morale in the profession. Download and read the full report at www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2017/03/CCSocialWorkWatch_report_web.pdf.

THE VALUE OF BEING IN A UNION– Legal Action

Whilst this compensation win is not from within our Branch, it has a very relevance to many of our members whose jobs leave the public sector and transfer to the private sector. It demonstrates that even in trying times, this union will fight and will win for its members. This was first reported in April's U Digital newsletter.

In Greater Manchester, the union helped secure nearly £178,000 compensation for seven UNISON members after their new employer left them jobless and without redundancy pay. UNISON took a company called Arch Initiatives to an employment tribunal after it refused to take on the seven staff, who worked supporting adults with addiction issues, when their jobs were transferred from Greater Manchester West NHS Foundation trust.

Arch argued that its jobs were different to the NHS ones, after it tendered for a contract to oversee the management of addiction treatment patients when the service was restructured by Bolton Council.

Arch claimed that it meant that it was not responsible for the seven workers under the TUPE regulations protecting workers whose jobs are transferred between different employers.

But the employment tribunal ruled that Arch acted unfairly in dismissing the seven who were left out of work and with no redundancy pay. Denise Holcroft was one of the seven members who lost their jobs, having worked for the NHS trust for more than three years.

She was forced to take lower-paid work elsewhere and on less hours until she found a full-time role and said: "There's never a good time to be told you're out of a job, but this was so stressful. I couldn't pay my bills and had to take what work I could just to cover my mortgage."

Amy Barringer of UNISON North West added: "Arch Initiatives refused to play by the rules, but UNISON ensured it was held accountable and staff were properly compensated. We'll continue to challenge bosses who ignore the law."

This case is a valuable reminder of the importance of being a UNISON member and what can be achieved through the union.

Your pension and catastrophic climate change

Norfolk Pension Fund has over £140 million invested, directly or indirectly, in the fossil fuel industry in companies such as BG Group, Royal Dutch Shell and Rio Tinto¹. Historically these industries have been very profitable. However, they have a big problem. They are responsible for a vast amount of the emissions that are causing global climate change, which poses a threat to the very future of humanity.

The latest figures² suggest that we can only emit 353 more gigatons of CO₂ into our atmosphere to have a chance of limiting the increase in global temperatures to 1.5°C. This point of no return, when catastrophic climate change is inevitable, is the target agreed to by the international community at the 2015 Paris Climate Convention. 353 gigatons may sound like a lot, until we consider that reserves held by fossil fuel companies total approximately 942 gigatons. Therefore, to meet this vital target, the oil, coal and gas reserves already discovered cannot be entirely used and no additional fossil fuel extraction or exploration can be undertaken. In climate terms, we simply cannot afford a single new oil well, coal mine or shale gas field.

Fossil fuel companies are valued on their reserves and so they are predicted to plummet in value as soon as the reality of our climate targets is truly faced. With the recent ratification of the Paris agreement, such a time is approaching fast. The governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, has warned that such losses are “potentially huge”³. Furthermore, evidence suggests fossil fuel companies are already losing value, while the value of the renewables sector goes from strength to strength⁴.

The grim irony is that our pension funds should be about protecting our future, yet with these huge investments they are helping to ensure a very unstable future instead – both for our environment and for our economies.

Divestment is the removal of money from certain organisations (the opposite of investment). It was a powerful tool that helped to bring about the end of apartheid and now it is being used to encourage better environmental decisions. Instead of helping to fund the fossil fuel industry, our pensions can instead help to fund a clean, low carbon future.

The divestment bug is infectious and spreading fast. Commitments to divest from fossil fuels have been made by notable organisations including the cities of Paris, Berlin, Oslo, Copenhagen and Melbourne, the British Medical Association, the World Council of Churches, the Environment Agency, and many others.

So far, nine councils have passed motions calling for divestment and four pension funds have made commitments. The sooner Norfolk County Council joins this list, the sooner we can be safe in the knowledge that the money we pay into our pensions isn't causing us harm.

We are petitioning Norfolk Pension Fund to freeze any new fossil fuel investments and to divest its current portfolio from fossil fuel industries within five years.

If you are concerned about the money that Norfolk Pension Fund has invested in the fossil fuel industry, please add your name to this petition via the link below. Please also email the NPF directly to tell them your concerns and contact your MP or local councillors.

<https://campaigns.gofossilfree.org/petitions/divest-norfolk-pension-fund-from-fossil-fuels>

- Matt White, UNISON member

Matthew White—Fossil Free Norfolk

ANOTHER STITCH-UP

Up to now, if you were injured and your claim was worth over £1,000 any legal fees for a lawyer to fight for you to get back lost wages and damages were paid by the person (or company) responsible for your injuries.

The Conservatives now propose stripping you of this right by increasing the small claims limit. They want a 100% increase to the limit to £2,000 in all non-road traffic personal injury cases and by 500% to £5,000 in road traffic accidents. That would mean 95% of personal injury cases would end up in the small claims courts. The cost of legal fees will mean that many people will simply not be able to afford to pursue claims. This means innocent victims of injury would lose out on justice.

The big winners of course will be the insurance companies who are predicted to gain £200m in extra profit from this proposal. Of course insurance companies are having a hard time, after all in 2015 only four insurance companies were able to pay their CEO's packages between £4.55m and £11.55m!!

The principles behind this proposal are similar to those behind the introduction of Employment Tribunal fees. This has been challenged by UNISON all the way to the Court of Appeal as we are arguing it denies access to justice for ordinary workers.

UNISON are also campaigning against this latest punitive proposal by supporting the "Feeding Fat Cats" Campaign. For information go to www.feedingfatcats.co.uk



STAND UP FOR EU WORKERS

Four of the five political parties have signed a UNISON produced statement supporting the work EU nationals do for Norfolk County Council. Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats and Greens all were prepared to recognise that council services whether provided direct or via commissioning depended on EU workers, particularly in the care sector.

Unfortunately UKIP have yet to sign claiming the statement is ambiguous. UNISON have tried to clarify the statement is non political but designed to highlight the consequences for public services Norfolk County Council are responsible for if EU workers drift back to their home countries because of uncertainty or if eventually compelled to leave.

The statement was drafted by UNISON's International Workers Group that was set up after the Brexit vote. In the intervening period hate crimes have increased and UNISON members have been subject to offensive comments; most commonly comments designed as humour such as "when are you going back home".

Chair of the Group and UNISON steward Ariane Hoppler says "We were pleased four of the five parties signed the statement of support. It seems UKIP councillors are putting their own political agenda before the public interest when it comes to the delivery of high quality public services". So it was telling to see none were re-elected in the recent County Council elections.