

MANCUNION

THE UNISON NEWSLETTER

CHRISTMAS 2012

HOW THE TORIES STOLE CHRISTMAS!



MERRY XMAS FROM UNISON
MANCHESTER BRANCH

In the first instance, if you have a work problem or query then get in touch with your local UNISON steward or workplace representative. Otherwise, telephone the Branch Office directly on the number below.

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If you have a membership query, please contact the Branch on the number above or via our Branch website.

UNISON Manchester is organised by the Branch Executive Committee and is supported by skilled staff - locally, regionally and nationally. The UNISON Manchester Branch Officers are listed below.

Branch Chair: Sonia Stewart

Vice Chair: Steve Lynch

President: Mo Baines

Vice Presidents: Ruth Carr & Nixon Tod

Branch Secretary: Pat McDonagh

Assistant Branch Secretaries: Evelyn Doyle, Eddy Redmond, Jane Slater, Patrick Taylor, Julie Connolly, Cathryn Baggaley, Vimal Gadher & Rena Wood.

Joint TU Nominee to m people:
Pete Banks

Equality Officer: Sonia Stewart

Branch Treasurer: Julie Connolly

Communications Officer:
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Geoff Archibald

International Officer: Isobel McVicar

Welfare Officer: Helen Clarke

Labour Link Officer: Julie Connolly

Guest Edited By: Patrick Taylor & James Crowley

The Branch Executive Committee, the Branch's decision-making body, comprises of stewards from across all the workplaces represented by the Branch plus elected Officers. All members of UNISON Manchester are encouraged to attend meetings, vote in Branch elections and get involved in our campaigns and activities.

We are always looking for people who feel they can contribute to the work of the Branch and help other members. This could be a regular commitment or you could be a 'mailbox' contact and help pass on UNISON information to members in your workplace. The Branch provides training courses, advice and support for all our stewards and officers.



In my view...



Private sector job creation is not filling the gap of the loss of public jobs. There is only 1 'new' job being created in/by the private sector for every 12 public sector jobs lost.

The official reason for the austerity agenda was/is the eradication of 'the deficit' by the end of the parliament - but Government borrowing has increased by 22% in the last 12 months. Yet this borrowing is not stimulating sustainable growth and jobs, it is servicing higher national debt caused by austerity.

The cumulative effect of the last three years freeze is that pay has fallen by 13% since 2009 and is now more than 10% below where it was in 1996 in real terms.

In the midst of the longest wage restraint policy in 'modern' UK history the government is also cutting employment protections - and that from a starting point where the UK labour market is already the most unregulated in the 'developed' world;

Already the qualifying period for an employee to take a general claim of unfair dismissal to a Tribunal has increased from 12 months employment to 2 years.

The government is 'consulting' on an end to TUPE for transferred workers.

The Equalities legislation is constantly being pressurised.

The Real Debate?

...Austerity, the Economy and Jobs

Language is important. In the past few years "deficit", "debt" and "debt servicing" have become part of the lexicon of confusion. The deficit is effectively a snapshot of cash flow. The debt needs to be seen in the context of its proportion of overall income. And debt servicing is the affordability of repaying the debt over a given period.

Understanding the context is key to debating what is going on. The official UK data archives show that the "debt" is actually historically very low. In fact, since records of any sort began in the late 17th century the UK has only ever had a lower level of debt than it has now relative to GDP income for around 30 of those years. And the cost of "debt service" as a proportion of GDP was lower in 2010 than it was during the Thatcher government's manufactured crisis of the early 80's.

This is not being in "deficit denial" - but it does show that the overall financial situation is not something unique, and in fact is relatively 'tame' by historical standards.

The Tory/LibDem position to have a deliberate policy of eradicating the deficit in a single 4-year cycle is completely unnecessary on economic grounds. It is an entirely political choice. Or perhaps an ideological one.

- If the austerity agenda is just about balancing the books then it is demonstrably failing - not just in the 'voluntary austerity' of the UK but also across Europe.

- Beneath the headlines in the UK this is hardly surprising as the largest single target element in GDP growth forecasts is private consumption (consumer spending). With employment basically flat lining, pay restrained or frozen, and inflation outstripping earnings value (even more so for 'essentials') it is practically impossible to achieve that growth model.

From a fiscal perspective the entire deficit reduction plan is founded in voodoo economics.

In the UK cash and cashable assets to the tune of more than half the deficit are locked away in corporate vaults. Why are they not being utilised to invest in rebuilding the economy; even to seed fund the developmental, technological and physical infrastructure programme necessary to step change to a more sustainable economic balance?

We also know that there is significant individual wealth in the UK and the 10 years between 1997 and 2007 saw the largest growth in earnings inequality the UK has seen.

People earning up to 90% of the top pay level saw their pay rise by 18% in that period.

For the top 1% it rose by 60%, for the top 0.5% by 67%, and for the 'elite' top 0.1% it rose by 83%. In terms of pay disparity the multiple of earnings between the top and bottom increased from a staggering 61 X to an immoral 95 X.

The IMF World Economic Outlook in late 2010 forecast that by 2015 the UK would have the lowest ratio of public spending to GDP of all the G20 countries.

So we were not "all in it together" during the good times - and we are certainly not "all in it together" during the austerity programme.

There is no growth to low growth in the economy measured either as output, employment or GDP;

Public services (and local government in particular) are under financial pressure to the point where many services will simply cease to exist; We have a growing North-South divide; a growing have and have not divide;

An establishment consensus that is largely uncritical and largely unchallenged;

A privatisation of profits and a socialisation of debts.

All of which raises the question of whether the austerity programme is really (or just) about deficit reduction and purely mathematical economics - or is there something more to it?

Is the austerity programme successfully delivering other intended outcomes?

Is it part of a shock and awe tactic to impose a new 'social settlement' on society?

Is it about reshaping the entity of the workforce as a whole (or at least the 'bottom' 90% of it)?

A drive to a deeper bottom for those already at or near the bottom - whilst also insulating those at the top?

So is the fight for decent pay also part of the fight for the type of society we want to live in?

What is abundantly clear is that accepting an ongoing pay freeze/pay restraint is not saving jobs in local government - they are going anyway, in large numbers, and will likely continue to do so for the better part of this decade.

Our living standards will continue to fall. And our jobs will still go.

Unless something changes

We have to seriously consider breaking the pay freeze and this Government in the new year and that will mean taking strike action.....

Pat McDonagh
Branch Secretary

How the Tories Stole Christmas!

This Christmas there is a cold wind blowing through Manchester and a strange sense of déjà vu. Once again we are waiting for the Government's financial settlement with the City Council.

Two years ago, the scope and depth of the cuts Manchester experienced were staggering, as we saw a shameless redistribution of funds from Northern cities like Manchester to the Tory-dominated leafy shires.

Manchester suffered the fifth worst budget cuts in the country. Cuts of £170 million, which forced the loss of 2000 council jobs through voluntary severance. However, many more jobs were lost across the city through budget cuts to voluntary sector agencies, like Connexions. The effects of all these job cuts in total are now filtering through to the wider economy, reducing demand for local goods and services.

Short of David Cameron being visited by three ghosts before midnight, we can expect more of the same this year. Make no mistake, this right wing Tory / Lib Dem Government are ideologically opposed to public services and to local Councils in particular.

Manchester City Council is already in the process of opening a new voluntary redundancy and early retirement scheme. Despite what the Tories and right wing bloggers would have you think this is not "trimming the fat", or "efficiencies."

Whilst UNISON members will of course continue to try to deliver services to the people of Manchester, these cuts will not be painless. Less staff will mean fewer services.

The VS/VER scheme details have been circulated to staff (not sent to home addresses as happened last year) and applications will be accepted from 6th December until 25th January.

Whilst the figure of up to 700 - 900 jobs being needed to be lost over the next two years has been mentioned, this is only an estimate and not a specific total. Around 200 posts may be expected to be reduced via natural annual turnover with 500 - 700 being the subject of staff leaving via VS/VER.

The Branch will advise and support members through this difficult time. We have arranged meetings for members to receive updates and to be able to raise concerns, questions and views to be taken forward by the Branch.

All new information will be placed on the Branch website which will include a Frequently Asked Questions section and circulated to all stewards and contacts.

UNISON will continue to completely oppose any introduction of compulsory redundancies. This position has been made very clearly.

Our Branch Executive Committee recently agreed to submit a motion to our Branch AGM reaffirming our policy of balloting all Council members to take all out strike action should there be proposals to carry out compulsory redundancies.

We also oppose any changes to terms and conditions, and UNISON will defend them vigorously.

The terms and conditions we work under in Manchester are amongst the best in the country.

Certain conditions such as sick pay of six months full pay and six months half pay were established by this Branch 100 years ago, others, such as the 35 hour week, are more recent victories. All were fought for and won by our predecessors. It is not for us to give them up, but to defend them for members in the future.

Now is the time to remember one of the key principles of our movement; "unity is strength." We all need to work together in difficult times and all members are urged to recruit any non-union members so we can collectively get the best deal for members and deliver good services to the public and our community.

Patrick Taylor

Stormy days ahead?...



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UNISON will continue to completely oppose any introduction of compulsory redundancies.

What's Going On?

As ever, space limits us setting out the diverse range of work that stewards, activists and Branch Officers undertake, so here's just a snapshot from your Branch Officers on what is going on across workplaces...



Jane Slater
Chief Executives

Over the past few months there have been some reviews of services. In ICT there have been reviews of the helpdesk and security team, seeing some staff entering M People and taking up opportunities elsewhere in the council.

In Corporate Communications the web team have moved over into ICT, to take on a wider role looking at web-based activity for all departments, making it easier for Manchester residents to access our services.

In the Corporate Contact Centre, a pilot of 8am - 8pm opening went live in September. The preferences of staff around the shifts they work have been accommodated wherever possible.

There is a monthly staff panel attended by UNISON stewards and quarterly review meetings of management and the trade unions. Staff have had the opportunity to attend drop-in sessions with the Branch officers to help resolve any individual issues.



Evelyn Doyle
Directorate for Adults

As with the rest of the Council this year has been a difficult year for UNISON members in Adults. There have been a number of redesigns of Services as a result of the impact of Tory cuts. We have seen the final stage of the implementation of the 'Customer Journey Project' in North localities in March, but despite best efforts across the city it has been a major change that hasn't been without resource problems. UNISON continues to be involved in issues that arise.

The Directorate has just concluded consultation on proposed reductions in Social Work posts. This was strongly opposed by UNISON Social Workers and UNISON submitted formal comments to the Directorate Management Team raising concerns that workloads would become more unmanageable and that these cuts would result in increased risk to the vulnerable adults that Social Workers in Adults support. As a result of the Consultation DMT have deferred until April the proposed reductions in the Drug and Alcohol Teams, as well as Learning Disability. Whilst this is welcome, they have only been deferred, so the threat remains. The Branch will work closely with UNISON stewards to monitor workloads and continue to press for appropriate resourcing, both in Social Work and Primary Assessment Teams.

The 'redefined offer' in Adults is the largely unseen aspect of Tory cuts to local government. Its implementation in Manchester has meant assessments that have drastically reduced to the absolute statutory minimum the services that vulnerable Adults can access. This has put enormous pressure on those having to implement them, and has impacted upon the number of assessed cus-

tomers able to attend day services run by MCC, which has further impacted upon UNISON members working within these services. As this year draws to a close management are in consultation on a redesign for day services, both Older People and Learning Disability Centres. This commenced in November but staff have been left waiting as management, as a result of consultation, are looking again at some of the proposals. As we go to print further briefing sessions are scheduled to share the new proposals with staff and trade unions. It has been a very worrying time for the UNISON members involved and Branch Officers are doing all they can to ensure that members receive the new proposals, with proper time for full consultation and negotiations.



Eddy Redmond
Childrens Services

The past year has seen some very difficult times as UNISON members and public services have come under the sustained ideological attack on the public sector by the coalition of fat cat Tories and right-wing Lib Dems. No better example of this is the attack on Sure Start. Around 500 staff in Sure Start faced the bleak possibility of redundancy from a much needed resource.

UNISON negotiated a scheme of VER/VES for our members that staved off any possible compulsory redundancies for those 500 workers.

Since then, we have negotiated a move for over 120 of these staff to the Complex Families section. This has led to moving a highly trained and motivated staff team to an area within the council where their skills can be put to best use.

I have been actively attending meetings throughout the workplace, and this helped encourage the development of two stewards committees; one for Sure Start with regular attendance of 10 to 15 stewards and the other group actively recruited from the social work teams, contact team and complex families.



Patrick Taylor
Corporate Services

- Suspension without pay
- The withholding of sickpay
- The option to increase the sanction at appeal, so there is now nothing to fear in appealing a decision

We have also reached agreement on a group of new policies:

- Clear guidance on deductions of overpayments,
- Agreement that annual leave should be agreed within five working days
- When staff are required to work at a new site, line managers will now discuss the move, explain the rationale and consideration will be given to transport implications, members' caring responsibilities, etc.

We are close to concluding negotiations on harmonising the discrepancies in pay between former MANCAT and City College staff. The stewards and I will be visiting workplaces to explain future proposals.



Rena Wood
Careers Solutions

UNISON has won a significant victory at Connexions recently. We were contacted by several members who had been denied their annual increments and were not being moved up to the next scale point. We submitted a successful grievance appeal on behalf of over thirty members, who have now received their increments and back pay.

The Con Dem government assault on public services includes massive cuts in careers provision for young people. Connexions are already arranging consultation meetings with staff about potential cuts in contracts with four local authorities, Manchester,

This year saw a restructure of the shared service centre, with Branch officers meeting frequently with members, both in large meetings and on a team-by-team basis where there were particular issues to address.

As part of the restructure, UNISON negotiated a new flex scheme, allowing staff to start as late as 11am and finish as early as 2:30pm. This has been implemented on a trial basis, which is going well.

Members in Revenues and Benefits have been raising concerns for some time that they were having difficulty in opting in to m people. UNISON has had very constructive meetings with management to help resolve the problem and staff are now able to access the m people process subject to the usual backfilling arrangements

The Manchester College

After long and sometimes fraught negotiations we now have a new disciplinary policy which will ensure fair treatment for all staff moving forward. Here are some of the new agreements we have secured:

- The right to have your UNISON rep with you at investigation meetings
- Fixed time limits on warnings
- A clear process for the hearings so everyone gets to have their say

Just as important, here are some of the things we have had removed:

- Informal warnings that were being issued with no process followed



Julie Connolly
Neighbourhood Services

Neighbourhood Services has undergone a full service review to best resist the cuts brought on by the Con/Dem Government. UNISON members have faced many challenges throughout this period, which we have met and supported members in the process.

There has been a review of all the working arrangements of employees to ensure that all staff are being paid correctly and that all policies are implemented equally, fairly and consistently. There are however no changes being proposed to existing core Council policies.

UNISON has held consultation meetings with members and attended all the meetings on working arrangements when management have been present. When necessary we have challenged proposals and argued the case for our members strongly.

Did you know that UNISON offers a Free Will Service for members?

In association with **Thompsons Solicitors**, this service enables members to safeguard themselves and their families as a benefit of membership.

Contact the Branch or visit our website for more information.



Rochdale, Salford and Tameside who are themselves facing further budget reductions.

In my work in schools there is, as ever, a high level of casework and we are there to ensure our members are represented at all levels. It isn't just in formal processes that UNISON protects our members' interests. We recently had an issue at a school in Wythenshawe where the hours of lunchtime organisers were cut. I secured an ex-gratia payment equating to a year's payment for those hours.



Cathryn Baggaley
Schools Department

Schools are also encountering challenging times with increasing pressure from the Department of Education for schools to convert to Academies.

There are two processes for academisation. One being that of Converter Academy, which is where a school seeks to become an Academy due to their Outstanding Status. The other being that of a Sponsored Academy which is when Schools do not achieve the floor targets set by Government, and are forced into becoming an Academy and assigned a Sponsor.

There is an increasing trend within Manchester for primary schools seeking to become Academies.

Historically the Catholic Faith Schools were averse to academisation; however, the Shrewsbury Diocese has now given Schools within their Diocese the option to convert if they so wish.

When Schools hold Academy and TUPE consultation meetings, UNISON are there to ensure that our members are being given the best advice and that their Terms and Conditions are protected.



Vimal Gadher
Housing Associations

It has been a difficult time of late in the Housing Associations. There have been a number of restructures that have taken place due to Associations downsizing as result of economic constraints. Unfortunately, in some quarters this may lead to redundancies and it is a really trying time for our members.

The introduction of Universal Credit in October 2013 including huge and worrying changes in Housing Benefit that the government are driving through will place even more pressure on Housing Associations especially in relation to the collection of rents from tenants. The crux of the matter is that if rents are not collected, then this will further impact on how the Associations can deliver a service to tenants and how they can operate as a service provider. This is an ever too real prospect.

With all the changes that are taking place, I will continue to work with stewards and to represent our members to achieve the best possible outcome for them, whatever the difficult circumstances that they are presented with.

Your UNISON Manchester online!

The Manchester Branch website www.unisonmanchester.org is regularly updated with the most recent news from your workplace

and features articles on local and national issues. It's also got information on member services and benefits (eg free wills service, etc)

We have been taking on board comments from our members and are also currently doing some upgrades. These improvements include:

- Regular updates from the Branch Secretary discussing the most important issues affecting our members
- New sections and updates outlining current Branch activity.

To save you checking for new posts, you can also follow us on Twitter by our handle @UnisonMcr. As part of our drive to improve Branch communication, we are now tweeting regularly, letting our followers know about new updates on the website and links to other sites you might find useful.

If you have a smart phone, check out the UNISON app. Available to download now from iTunes, Google play or the Blackberry webstore, it's the best way to read national news on your phone and contains easy-to-access advice on your rights at work.



We depend on feedback from our members, so if you have any suggestions or comments on our Branch website or our Twitter feed then do get in touch with us on unison@manchester.gov.uk.



Scan in the QR code above to be taken directly to our website!



Good to meet you...Vimal Gadher

Name: Vimal Gadher

Job: Assistant Branch Secretary

How long have you been a member of the union? 8 years

What do you like about your role in UNISON? Being able to help our members and to provide them with support on issues that they face to achieve a positive outcome that our members are happy with.

Whereabouts do you live?
Bolton

Where would you want to live?
New York or Buenos Aires

Best thing about UNISON?
UNISON provides a powerful voice for public sector workers to campaign for better pay, better working conditions and equal rights.

Who or what is your inspiration?
My Mum

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself? Stubbornness

What is the trait you most deplore in others? Rudeness

If you were Prime Minister, what would you do first? Stop the cuts and the decimation of the public sector, there is an alternative!

What superpower would you like?
Invisibility

What's the worst job you've ever done? What's your ideal job?
Selling windows over the phone!
Secretary – General of the United Nations.

Favourite holiday destination, film, drink, football club? Too many places, unable to pick one! City of God. A nice pint of Ale. Bolton Wanderers.

What was your best day at work, and your worst? Everyday is a good day, not had a bad day yet!

Why do unions matter? Unions fight injustices put on its members by employers and campaign for better pay, benefits and working conditions for their members in the workplace.

Calling Young Members...

Are you a young UNISON member? For UNISON that means aged 27 or less!

The Branch encourages every young member to consider taking up training and opportunities to be active in the union at a local and/or regional level.

This would involve working with other young UNISON members so you would be part of a group and not working on your own!

If you are interested then please contact the Branch for more details.

Thanks from the Branch!

The Branch Officers would like to thank our shop stewards for all their efforts over the past year. As always they have proved themselves to be the backbone of the Branch, facing tremendous difficulties in hard times for the public sector.

We are always on the lookout for potential new activists. If you are interested in becoming a shop steward or a workplace contact and wish to discuss it with us, please contact us via the UNISON Manchester Branch Office on 254 7500 or via our website www.unisonmanchester.org.

