

Gateshead UNISON News

May 2017

Protecting jobs, protecting terms and conditions – proudly representing over 5000 members in over 130 employers.

Gateshead Council & The Gateshead Housing Company (TGHC) Budget and Review updates

This year's budget negotiations have been the toughest yet. UNISON reps have attended hundreds of meetings, read through pages of reports and are still involved in extensive discussions and negotiations to save jobs.

We formally responded to each of the 63 savings proposals contained in Gateshead Council Budget report - 27 could have potentially affect **357.5** posts.

We also responded to TGHC on ten core proposals linked to a £1M savings target which directly affected **8.93** posts. This included reductions within housing management and neighbourhood relations teams, as well as a number of changes to structures and posts across wider front-line housing management services. None of which resulted in any compulsory redundancies. It is expected that further reviews will be developed during 2017/18 to continue to meet savings targets and efficiencies. We will continue to liaise closely with UNISON members.

Our efforts are focused on UNISON members in areas where staff are still at risk in including Live Well Gateshead and Sport & Leisure. We are working tirelessly to facilitate alternative options and linking redeployment and bumped redundancy opportunities across the council and TGHC.

There have also been challenging negotiations supported by UNISON members across the Library Service, Development and Public Protection, Highways, Catering and Cleaning, ICT, Public Health, Economic and Housing Growth and TGHC which may have resulted in some reduced service levels but no compulsory redundancy notices have been issued in these areas at this stage.

We are aware of the uncertainty and concern created by the current or proposed service reviews across the council and TGHC - here are the latest updates.

Leisure Services - following many years of extensive discussions, the council continues to commit to give Leisure Services time to reach a more sustainable budget position. Generating additional income across the range of fantastic facilities is absolutely vital. We will continue to work closely with UNISON members and the Council to support this approach and to deliver further efficiencies - but not at the expense of UNISON members terms and conditions.

Domiciliary Care - significant operational changes are currently being implemented across the service. These new ways of working mean upheaval and change for UNISON members but they are essential to develop and grow the service and deliver savings. We meet with the council almost daily to address some initial concerns raised by members and working groups **will** be established.

Gateshead's Dom Care Service is the envy of other Local Authorities and private sector providers and should be treasured.



Access to justice no longer a worker's right but a luxury?

(unless you're a UNISON member)

UNISON has had a legal battle to give people at work the right to access justice, without having to pay expensive fees when employers break the law. UNISON went to the Supreme Court on March 27th and is the climax of a four-year legal battle over one of the most fundamental rights of all - the right of workers to stand up for justice.

The two-day hearing was the final stage of UNISON's campaign against the introduction of employment tribunal fees, which began back in 2013. Since July of that year anyone who has been treated unlawfully or unfairly by their employer, and who wants to challenge them at an employment tribunal, has had to fork out a fee, which ranges from £390 to as much as £1,200.



Back in January the government produced a review of the impact of fees. It showed there'd been a 70% drop in the number of cases since July 2013. **Low-paid women, especially those treated unfairly when they were pregnant or on maternity leave, have been the biggest losers.** UNISON's case to the Supreme Court will assert that the government's decision to demand a fee from anyone taking their employer to court has stopped many thousands of badly treated employees – especially those on low incomes – from getting justice.

Commenting on the Supreme Court case, UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis said: "If an employer breaks the law and treats one of their employees unfairly, they should be challenged. It cannot be right that unscrupulous bosses are escaping punishment because people simply don't have the money to pursue a case. The introduction of fees was a terrible decision. It has denied many thousands of people the right to seek justice. All it's done is penalise lower paid employees with genuine grievances. That's why it's so important our legal challenge succeeds."

The Supreme Court is expected to adjudicate by summer 2017.

Gateshead Council & TGHC - Budget and Review updates continued

Adult Services - We continue to challenge the need for recommissioning exercises relating to **Independent Supported Living Schemes, Extra Care Schemes** and **Day Services**. You only have to look at the experience in other Local Authorities, outsourcing isn't the answer. Services will deteriorate, staff will suffer and savings won't be achieved - only profits for private sector providers delivered by lawyers hitting the council with restrictive contracts. The only viable future for public service delivery is evident - all costs attributed to services must be examined - both direct and indirect.



We are also aware that the demand management 'model' developed in Adult Social Care continues to struggle - we have carried out a stress survey to establish concerns from staff and determine areas that need improvement. We will continue to work closely with UNISON members to develop and deliver action plans - to establish timely solutions.

Children's services - to date we have not received any proposals relating to the redesigning of Children's and Families Services.

TGHC - Following many years of extensive discussions TGHC recently launched its own in-house 'Home Repairs' service to almost 20,000 tenants and leaseholders across Gateshead. The service will employ more than 400 people, most of whom TUPE transferred into TGHC from Gateshead Council's Construction Services and Mears Group. This bigger team will allow TGHC to develop and grow into a significant operator across the local and regional Housing and Construction sector.

Looking ahead - 2018/19 budgets deficits could well be the most challenging yet, so they come with an increasing risk of compulsory redundancies.

But by working closely with the Council and TGHC our record of protecting jobs is second to none.

The next few years is our biggest challenge but we will remain as committed and united as ever. We must do all we can to grow our strength by recruiting colleagues who have not yet grasped the value and strength of being in UNISON. The stark reality is - the more members we have - the more we can do collectively to protect us.

We have received an anonymous letter setting out some potentially significant issues. We have discussed these concerns directly with the Council.

We would like to have the opportunity to deal comprehensively with the issues raised in this letter but can only do this through further dialogue. Please contact davesmith@gatesheadunison.co.uk or call 4776638

Jobs-Watch

It is almost universally recognised that high-quality, public services are best provided by in-house local authority teams.



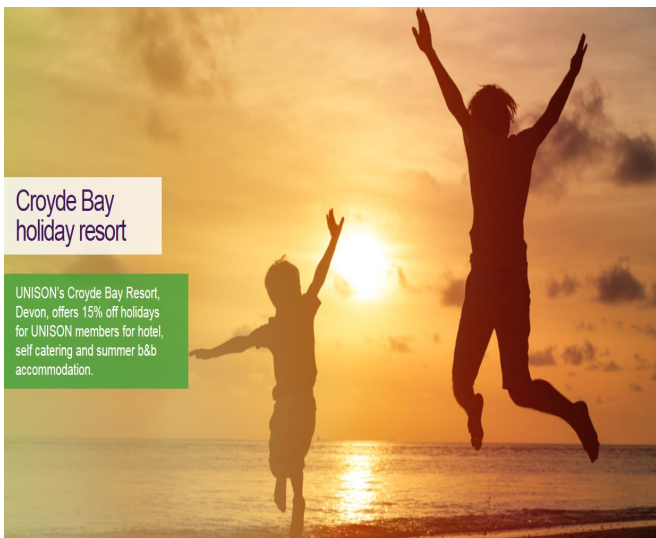
Our in-house teams continue to deliver and develop high quality and efficient joined-up services - some of which provide a valuable surplus for council budgets. We continue to seek assurances that in house provision will be considered whilst commissioning or procuring services. If you are aware of any work or activities being outsourced that could or should be

delivered by our in-house teams please speak with your convenor or contact info@gatesheadunison.co.uk or 4776638.

Retirement Policy - consultation update. *Too Old to Work Too Young to Retire?*

After almost a year of consultations on the Council's draft Retirement Policy we're now moving towards conditional agreement on a framework that will protect members' vital interests. Whilst we were told that the priority was to "rein-in expectations" about access to options such as Flexible-Retirement, we've insisted that this and Ill-Health Retirement are key aspects of nationally-negotiated terms and conditions which must be protected. Accordingly, we've argued for transparency and fairness in dealing with retirement applications, along with proper consideration of the personal circumstances of each applicant, regardless of undoubted financial pressures on the Council.

To achieve these objectives, therefore, we're placing great importance on monitoring how the new policy will be implemented. Our first key safeguard is to have secured a commitment from H.R. to provide us with regular data on the number of applications for Ill-Health, Flexible and Early Retirement to include job title, grade and service and whether or not they were approved. And, secondly, we'll insist that our compliance with this policy is subject to review once we've had an opportunity to assess how it works for members. In these hard times the prospect of a fair retirement is a precious thing: so we'll not agree to changes and will actively lobby for changes on your behalf if implementation of the policy is unsatisfactory.



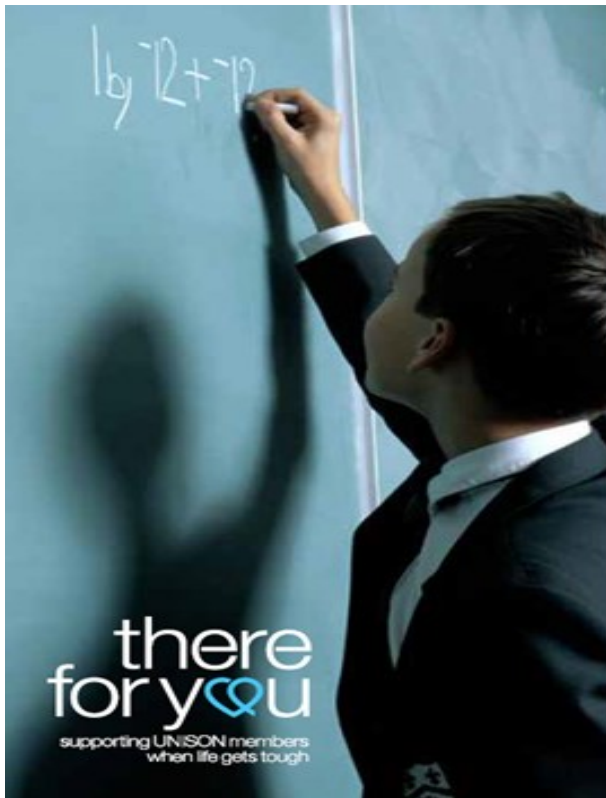
Croyde Bay holiday resort

UNISON's Croyde Bay Resort, Devon, offers 15% off holidays for UNISON members for hotel, self catering and summer b&b accommodation.

UNISON owned and operated Croyde Bay Resort, in North Devon, offers 15% off any holiday or short break for UNISON members, rising to a huge 50% off for low paid UNISON members.

The resort features a modern 56 bedroom hotel as well as self catering cottages and summer chalet b&b rooms. The brilliant location next to the fabulous Croyde Beach, matched with top quality 4* rated accommodation, lots of free facilities and a super friendly welcome, have all contributed to Croyde Bay Holiday Resort winning a **TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence for the last 3 years!**

This popular surfing mecca has a well-earned reputation with all age groups and makes a great base for exploring all that beautiful North Devon has to offer, on land and sea.



there
for you
supporting UNISON members
when life gets tough

Worried about back to school costs?

Are you struggling to cope with the rising cost of living? Finding that you're having to economise in every area of expenditure?

Help is on hand

We have set up a limited fund to help UNISON members on low income with school uniform costs by way of a one-off payment of up to £120 (this is the maximum grant available where there is more than one child).

To apply or find out more about other help that is available visit unison.org.uk/thereforyou to download an application form. Alternatively you can contact your UNISON branch.

Closing date for receipt of applications is 11 July

PS. If you know of other members who may need our help, please pass this on!

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