

Gateshead UNISON News

September 2016



Gateshead UNISON protecting Jobs, protecting terms and conditions. Proudly representing over 5000 members in over 130 employers in over 400 workplaces.

Update - Budget, Reviews, Brexit, Devolution and Pay.

Huge politically motivated Budget cuts continue across Gateshead Council with in excess of £20m expected to be taken out of budgets next year. From Libraries to Social Care these cuts continue to devastate services across our communities. Following on-going changes to Government Housing Policy - extensive reviews are also expected across the Gateshead Housing Company to address financial and operational pressures – we will work tirelessly with all involved to get the best outcomes for UNISON members. A range of other council services are under sustained attack from Government policies implicitly designed to remove Local Authorities as service providers - at any cost. On a slighter brighter note a range of in-house options are being developed - albeit sluggishly in some areas. Housing Repairs and Maintenance is moving back under the remit of The Gateshead Housing Company/Council. An extensive enablement service is close to becoming operational across Adult Social Care, elements of Waste Services are being commercialised and Gateshead's - best in the region - Schools continue to buy back high quality support services delivered by Gateshead Council.

Unfortunately we continue to challenge Gateshead Council's 'chipping away' at staff Remuneration, Terms & Conditions and Protection Agreements. It's regrettable when UNISON members are delivering services with 100% commitment and as a Recruitment and Retention 'perfect storm' is fast developing. Public sector wages are at their lowest level relative to the private sector in over 25 years - while average pay in both sectors was around the same level last year, private sector wages are expected to grow by around 17%. Changes to national insurance contributions could also equate to a reduction in take-home pay of up to around £480 per year for most Public Sector Employees - distinct pay pressures are rapidly emerging. From Economic Development to Waste Services - Leisure Services to Commissioning your support clearly shows UNISON members absolutely understand, embrace and deliver significant changes with total commitment - but are not prepared to be trampled over and left behind in a dash to the bottom with our Terms and Conditions and Protection Agreements.



On a regional setting - Gateshead Council's purposeful stance on Devolution continues with decision deadline fast approaching. Any Devo Deal will have a profound impact across council services and our communities for decades, it has to be right. The current deal fails miserably to meet the needs of Gateshead and the North East. Look at the hard won Devo deals on offer else where - the democratic deficit and lack of endeavour seen from some is bewildering.

Nationally UNISON's relentless campaigning has also achieved significant changes to the forced Academy Schools proposals and confronting the 'Sports Direct' style employment practices' across Social Care. Following the vote to leave the EU big business may well be keen to remove employment rights - we must remain alert. In addition, the North-East heavily relied on European funding - receiving £430m - the third highest in England. As promised, Government must honour its commitment in protecting areas like Gateshead by guaranteeing that every penny of EU Funding is replaced - especially beyond 2020.

Join UNISON today



Care, Wellbeing & Learning

Adult Social Care and Independent Living/ Health and Social Care Comm./QA/Public Health

Karen McArthur/Dave Watson Tel: 4776638

karenmcarthur@gatesheadunison.co.uk

davewatson@gatesheadunison.co.uk

Social Work - Children and Families/Children and Families Support/Learning and Schools/ Education Gateshead

Kim Convery /Juliet Giddens Tel 4776638

kimconvery@gatesheadunison.co.uk

julietgiddins@gatesheadunison.co.uk

Corporate Services & Gov./Chief Executives

Dave Smith Tel: 4776638

davesmith@gatesheadunison.co.uk

Communities & Environment

Development, Transport and Public Protection/Economic and Housing Growth/ Council Housing, Design and Technical Services

Clive Gowlett Tel: 4333424

clivegowlett@gateshead.gov.uk

Waste Services, Grounds Maintenance and Fleet/Facilities Management/Construction Services/Commissioning and Business Development

Dave Watson Tel 4776638

davewatson@gatesheadunison.co.uk

Culture, Communities and Volunteering

Karen McArthur Tel: 4776638

karenmcarthur@gatesheadunison.co.uk

Gateshead Housing Company

Deborah Ewart Tel 433 6164

deborahewart@gatesheadhousing.co.uk

Branch Support Team

Ali Toward/Judith Turner/Chris Sharkey
Tel 477 6638

info@gatesheadunison.co.uk

Home Care - The Scandal Continues

Some Homecare Workers have to work three and a half hours to earn two hours' pay. That's because being a homecare worker in most private sector employers, they do not pay for the time spent travelling between visits.

Homecare workers spend their entire day making visits to people who need care; they are constantly on the move. However, tens of thousands of homecare workers are not being paid for their travel time - including here in Gateshead. Government guidance is clear that they should be paid for this: "Unless they are genuinely self-employed, then workers in most circumstances should be paid at least the national minimum wage when travelling directly from one work assignment to another."

But most employers ignore this guidance – and pay nothing for travel time. As a result homecare workers find that, averaged over the course of their very long days, their basic pay doesn't even reach the national minimum. UNISON believes that this is a scandal, and is urging the government to end the systematic underpayment that it believes is widespread in the sector.

Gateshead UNISON has challenged providers working on Gateshead contracts to adhere to the Law for a numbers of years - with limited impact. We have also directly highlighted our concerns to Gateshead Council who are aware of the issue and appear to be unable or unwilling to act.


Our Chair Dave Walkden, Central Services Convenor Chris Sharkey, Reps Anne Marie Foster, Clare Harwood, Judith Turner and John Burt have all moved on to pastures new. All have played a huge part in Gateshead UNISON and beyond for many years - and will continue to do so. Their day to day presence will be a big miss and we wish them all well, however if boredom creeps in - you know where we are.



We may not be in Europe - but the threat of TTIP remains

UNISON delegates recently agreed that it is a "top priority" for the union to continue to campaign against Public Services being included in the trio of trade treaties that are currently being forged between politicians and businessmen behind closed doors.

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the US and the EU, and the broader Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA) are still being negotiated, while the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between Canada and the EU is closer to ratification.

Public services have been included in all three agreements, despite an unprecedented European and US public and trade union campaign. Introducing a composite motion, Jane Carolan of the NEC told delegates: "even though we're now leaving the European Union, we're still subject to TTIP through the single market. And some of the extreme Brexiters are the strongest TTIP supporters." 

Ms Carolan said that TTIP, TiSA and CETA were negotiated with "no democratic accountability or transparency" and were "acronyms that cover a multitude of sins" – among them, a licence for multinational companies to take control of public sector services. Not only was there a major threat of privatisation of services, but also a "lock-in of privatisation" so that private companies with a hold on health care and other services could not be removed, she said.

Roz Norman of the East Midlands region called the agreements "very, very dangerous, threatening the heart of public services. "If they go forward, they will affect every person in this conference. Our public services will be sold off to the highest bidder, with no guarantee that we will ever get them back." Employment and trade union rights would be attacked, and health and safety standards driven down, while the deals could also pose a threat to the environment. Ms Norman also warned against a particular proposal of the TiSA agreement, which is for a necessity test so that new regulations are "no more burdensome than necessary" – namely to profits. **UNISON has led the fight against TTIP, as a founder member of the no TTIP coalition - and it will continue to do so.**