

South East CAMPAIGNER



JULY 2016



BLOG

REGIONAL SECRETARY

MAGGI FERNCOMBE

As another successful conference draws to a close in Brighton, it may seem that it's a mixed result for UNISON. On the one hand conference has debated and passed important policies that shape the objectives for our members, branches and activists for the coming year. Important policies on defending the Public Services our members deliver and that we all rely on, protecting terms and conditions of public sector workers and on the important campaigning work we, as a union, are so successful in delivering.

But it's also been a conference where we've reflected on what we stand for, with conference taking place in the week following the horrific and senseless murder of Jo Cox MP. In her honour and memory, the theme of conference was very much 'far more unites us than divides us'.

As members, we will never all agree

on everything BUT what we stand for, absolutely unites us - standing up for public service workers and the services they deliver and campaigning for a fairer society for our families and future generations.

On the last day of conference, we awoke to the news that the people of Great Britain have voted to leave Europe and whilst everyone was speculating 'What now?' our General Secretary Dave Prentis addressed conference with a very clear message for government - WE will continue to stand up to austerity, WE will continue to campaign for proper funding for public services and WE will hold the Brexit campaigners to account on their promises of investment in the NHS and other public services and that our rights at work will remain intact.

So as our members left the sunny coast of Brighton (well it was sunny on the last day!) with renewed energy,

we are not going to bury our heads in the sand - we are determined to renew our fight against austerity, our fight for our members jobs, terms and conditions and our fight to achieve a more equal society.

I'm proud to be in UNISON, a union that despite the challenges we face is once again ready to meet them all head on.

Please visit our Proud to be in UNISON website proudtobeinunison.org.uk where we publish the stories of our members and activists showing why we are such a successful fighting union.



"we are far more united and have far more in common with each other than that which divides us."

— JO COX, MAIDEN SPEECH

National Delegate Conference pay tribute to Jo Cox MP

Jo Cox was a young vibrant woman, she stood for everything we believe in, a dedicated MP, a campaigner, a UNISON member. But she was also much, much more than that, Jo was a daughter, a sister, a wife and a mother. There are no words to describe her family's loss. Our heavy hearts go out to them from this conference. Our Union will never forget Jo. Our Union will never forget everything she stood for; Kindness; Tolerance; Respect for others. We remember and we celebrate Jo Cox.

Dave Prentis, UNISON General Secretary speaking at the National Delegate Conference.

UNISON SOUTH EAST YOUNG MEMBERS

CAP IT! CAMPAIGN

Rent controls exist in many cities across the world. They may exist in different forms; primarily aiming to place a maximum cap on the price of rent, ensuring security of tenure and enforcing regulations for landlords. Such controls are prevalent in countries where rental is the primary type of residence, and the amount of homes being rented in the UK is rising significantly. In the past ten years, figures show that the percentage of properties being rented in London has exceeded 50%, and while the amount of people renting has risen steeply, so has the price of rent.

London has the highest median rent in the UK, standing at £1,451 per month from the period May 2015 to 2016. The South East has the second highest median rents, where private rental properties cost an average of £852 per month. The median rental values in London and the South East have grown by nearly four times as much as the national average, at over 4% in the year 2015. While rent is rising at these levels, wages are not, creating property which is unaffordable to people in full time work, and affecting young people disproportionately. These statistics translate to people typically spending over half of their salaries on rent, with the problems escalating as the supply of properties simply fails to meet demands. In order to address these issues, it is imperative the government introduce regulations to control the cost of rent, and skew the balance of power away from landlords, and towards tenants. (Statistics: Valuation Office Agency, 19/5/2016)

Rent controls are commonplace in Germany, particularly in Berlin where nearly 90% of people rent their properties. In many parts of Germany, it is illegal to charge more

than 20% more for one property than another comparable property. The high proportion of people renting in Berlin suggests that the regulations prove broadly successful; tenants have a high sense of security in their tenancy, with comparatively spacious and well maintained properties and far fewer instances of multiple occupancy tenancy than we see in London. New York has one of the oldest established records of rent controls in the world,

which have attracted both criticism and praise throughout history. While many economists hotly debate the long term implications of rent ceilings in New York, it is apparent that these properties have provided affordable accommodation for middle to low income families in the city. These are just two examples of the types of rent controls that exist, however there are many variations. For example, Canada has a 2.5% cap on the annual increase of rent, which if implemented in London would have had a distinct impact on the affordability of housing in the past year.

Housing shortages lie at the heart of the problems of soaring rent prices, however where building development is failing to meet demand, measures need to be put in place to ensure affordable rental is available, and the exploitation of tenants is minimised. The implementation of these regulations will have social benefits as well as financial ones, with stability in tenancy offering a greater incentive to become involved in local communities and the upkeep of one's own property. Many UNISON members in the South East, particularly our young members, are faced with the reality of having to spend the majority of their hard earned wages on rent, and in some cases having to commute long distances to work as they are unable to afford property nearby. At our 2016 young members' weekend, it was acknowledged that housing was one of the greatest worries facing our members, and we urge the government to take action to make rent more affordable for hard working people.



Young Members from SE Region that attended the National Young Members Weekend in May, identified a campaign idea for the region. In keeping with South East's motion to National Delegate Conference (see Conference report), our Young Members prioritised the issue of housing, specifically rental, costs and conditions. After assembling ideas, this manifested itself as a new regional campaign- Cap It!

***Please sign our petition at:
http://www.unionsoutheast.org.uk/cap_it_cutting_the_cost_of_housing***

POTENTIAL CHANGES TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME

Phil Reynolds
*Chair of Regional
Finance Committee
& National Pensions
Forum Member*

The Government currently has 2 consultations going on that could affect the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

The first one is looking to restrict how much redundancy pay employers can pay out when making staff redundant.

The second one is about the overall amount of any early retirement payments. They are consulting on a cap of £95k. Many of you may be thinking 'this won't affect me' but you may need to think again. The cap includes the redundancy pay, pay in lieu and the capital cost of the pension being paid early. Any members who have long service of 20+ years could easily be caught up in this.

On top of this the Government has set a requirement for Pension funds to invest in Pooling. This could have a huge impact on our funds. Each member of each fund has a fiduciary duty to invest in the best interests of its members and to be forced to allocate monies in this (Pooling) way could have a detrimental effect.

UNISON has started an online

petition to get this debated in the House of Commons and, as at the time of writing, this has over 80,000 signatures. Because the figure has already exceeded 10,000 signatures the government has to already respond to the petition but if we get over 100,000 then it will have to be debated in Parliament.

If you haven't yet signed, please go to: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/125475>

On a positive note, I am pleased to report that UNISON has been appointed to all nine Boards that exist in the South East Region. A South East Forum has been set up and will meet 2 - 3 times a year to help support our Board members to undertake their role efficiently. I would like to thank Steve Brazier in helping to

set up this group.

Finally, all our funds are being valued this year (known as the tri-annual valuation) and again this could have a huge impact on our members. Cost sharing could come into place if the results of the valuation mean a significantly worse pension fund deficit.

So it's all to play for. Please let your members/colleagues know what is going on. Find out who your pension board rep is, on your pension fund.

And if you're not in the scheme, or know a member who isn't, talk to them about joining the 50/50 scheme. You get half the benefits for half the contributions!



NATIONAL DELEGATES CONFERENCE 2016



A rousing reception for Jeremy Corbyn

His pledge: "The next Labour Government will repeal the Trade Union Act"

Conference delegates gave warm applause and a standing ovation to guest speaker Jeremy Corbyn.

Jeremy started by giving a moving tribute to Jo Cox following her tragic death outside her constituency office. He reminded delegates he is a UNISON member the importance of the union continuing to work with the Labour Party.

Jeremy covered a number of issues including Labour's position on the Europe, the scandal of housing in Britain and the increasing inequality in the workplace

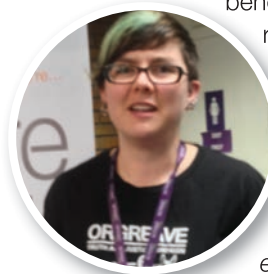
The loudest cheers came when he pledged that the next Labour Government would repeal the Trade Union Act.

First Time Delegate Impressions

Claire Ransom, Southampton District Branch.

"I was particularly looking forward to Wednesday morning to hear Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party as it was an opportunity I wouldn't otherwise have had. That, combined with seeing how UNISON works across the sectors and also seeing the democratic process in full swing was a great experience. It was interesting to see how a quite controversial motion was handled and to hear the voices of particular delegates and their point of view.

I am particularly pleased that Motion 121 went to a card vote. I thought that



it was really important to ensure that a motion was not going to be led by certain voices and some that like to push their personal political agenda, rather than promoting the views of their members and what could potentially benefit the majority of branches rather than a few individuals.

I hope to continue to see our democratic processes work.
Claire Ransom

Motion 121 was proposed by the NEC following an extensive Branch Resources Review, which focussed on the need to ensure the viability of local branches. It developed proposals to address the inequalities in branch funding and avoid the danger of creating a two tier union, where some branches amass huge reserves whilst others are deprived of the funds they need.

Regional Motion on Housing

The SE Region's Motion on Housing, was put into Composite B and was carried by the conference.

The main points of our Motion were calling on the UK Government to;

- Invest in a public sector led house building programme, which will create homes, jobs, lower housing costs and improve the availability, accessibility and affordability of housing;
- Commit to the development of new social homes at below market rent which are affordable to people on average incomes;
- Reform welfare benefits, including an end to the bedroom tax and the lifting of welfare caps;
- Stop the Right to Buy across the whole of the UK, in line with Scotland to safeguard social housing stock for current and future generations;
- Regulate the Private Rented Sector by introducing stronger rent controls and better regulation to drive up standards, strengthen tenants' rights and conditions by making private renting more accessible, affordable, decent and secure;
- Provide adequate financial support for the young and vulnerable to help them with housing costs and to combat homelessness and social problems.

SAVE THE NHS

STUDENT BURSARY

George Osborne set out plans to CUT THE NHS BURSARY for nurses, midwives and allied health professionals in his 2015 Autumn statement. This will impact on students from 2017. The effect of this will be to force health care students into at least £51,600 of debt. The current starting salary for a registered nurse is £21,692.00.

UNISON's General secretary Dave Prentis, responded to these plans, saying:

"Government claims that this will attract more students to the profession are totally unfounded and will not help fill current vacancies. The long term plan must be to train and properly fund the nurses of the future".

The NHS is facing a chronic nursing shortage and needs another 15,000 nurses. Expensive agency staff and overseas recruitment are being used just to plug the current gaps. Even with the current student bursary system UNISON research shows that over 50% of student nurses currently consider leaving their course, the single biggest reason

given for this is financial difficulty.

During the latest student nurse recruitment events, it was clear that if the bursary had not been available many of these current students would not have been embarking upon their studies this year. UNISON believes this change to student funding will have significant impact on the future number of Registered Nurses.

UNISON recognises that the best asset of the NHS and other health care providers is their workforce and believes this plan to be reckless. It will not help in remedying the problem of staffing being faced now or in the future.

To find out how you can support the SAVE THE NHS BURSARY CAMPAIGN visit www.unison.org.uk/our-campaigns/save-the-nhs-bursary to find out more and keep updated.



Assistant General Secretary Roger Mackenzie, speaking at the NHS Student Bursary Demo



No pain no gain!

Ron Harley, Regional Manager in South East Region recently completed the London Marathon for a second time in a personal best of 4.45. He raised over £3,000 for his nominated charity – Age UK. With no aches or pains he was back at work the following Tuesday. Ron thanked all the staff and members in South East Region who so generously supported his fundraising efforts.

FUNDING FOR OUR FUTURE

NEW LEARNING BURSARY FOR LOW PAID WOMEN MEMBERS

Women make up over two thirds of workers delivering public services and make up 76% of UNISON membership, yet a disproportionate number of women across the public sector are in low-paid, part-time, often insecure (zero hours contracts) and undervalued work.

One way that UNISON seeks to support low paid women members is by providing access to quality training for members and activists. In addition to UNISON South East Education Programme is the Women's Officer Passport which offers a full training suite of courses for women who are just starting out in UNISON to advanced courses that will assist the most experienced women activists in their union roles. You can find out more information about the regional education programme and the women's officer passport on the South East website

www.unionsoutheast.org.uk/women

UNISON's low-paid or part-time women members across the South East wishing to take up study at their own expense can now access a new 'education bursary' which is a scheme designed to help with the financial cost of studying. Launched now in time for new autumn term, information about the bursary can be found on the regional website and/or you can request to be sent information and an application form. There are two grants available, 1) a grant of £150.00 per year for a maximum of three years for a shorter courses for example, skills based courses, GCSE's, A Levels undertaken at further education colleges and 2) a grant £1,000.00 per year for a maximum of three years to support women undertaking Trade Union or Labour Movement studies which could include a degree, diploma or MA level studies at a recognised university

(including Open University).

This opportunity is provided by the former Regional Secretary Phil Wood who retired in 2015. He was adamant that the funding donated by him for the bursary should be used exclusively for low-paid women members and the South East is proud to be able to offer low-paid women members this opportunity. Many of our women members have benefited from the excellent training opportunities that UNISON offers but this new learning bursary goes one step further and provides exclusive opportunities for low-paid women members.

To find out more please go to the website where you can download a copy of the bursary application form or contact Fiona Roberts, Regional Women's Officer at f.roberts@unison.co.uk or on 01273 544039

UNISON NATIONAL YOUNG MEMBERS WEEKEND

13-15 MAY, LEICESTER

As an active young member I know how important the UNISON young members' weekend can be.

Branches often send young members who have never had any involvement with the union before and who don't really know what to expect. After attending my first young members weekend was when I chose to become active.

The weekend was held in Leicester and around 120 young members attended. It

started off with an ice breaker exercise to get people talking to each other and moving around the room.

There was also a social event held on the first night- an excellent quiz (which is always the highlight of the weekend).

I like the format of the weekend because it is much less formal than conferences for self organised groups so it means more engagement from the young members.

On the Saturday there was a range of different workshops, which people had chosen beforehand. These workshops catered to experienced young members officers, people who wanted to get more involved and people that had never had any involvement before.

After these workshops the groups were changed around again for street campaigning. For this all the young members had to take to the streets and get people to sign a petition about the living wage.

I found the session before this very useful as it helped set out what we were going to be doing and allowed everyone to share ideas on how to approach this. So many people came back afterwards

saying that they thought it went really well and they felt much more confident.

It was also great to have a talk from UNISON president Wendy Nichols discussing the issues we faced and how we are tackling them, together.

Lucie Jones

Unison South East Young Members Chair





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to be in
UNISON**



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