



Social Care Newsletter

UNISON have attended a number of the question and answer sessions held by Richard Hancock for staff in Families First. These sessions are informative and we would urge you to attend your local session if you have the opportunity. It is also an opportunity for you to raise your concerns with Richard and responses to those already raised can be found in an FAQ page on the Intranet.

The main message coming from the sessions is that any decisions on where Families First will sit in the future have been deferred until there is a clearer perspective on what service provision will need to look like going forward. This means that for the moment, Families First will remain part of the Council. Please see this article communitycare.co.uk/2015/01/07/ste... to understand that the threat of Children's services being transferred out of local authorities nationally has not gone away, this is something UNISON are lobbying against and believe such a move would be detrimental to those requiring a service.

Budget pressures remain a concern across the County Council and UNISON continue to support members facing redundancy and restructuring in many areas, the Council does recognise that there are exceptional pressures on Child Support services but even so there is a possibility that some staff may face restructuring over the next 12 months. UNISON reps will do all they can to support members in facing these challenges, but we need strength and organisation in our membership to be most effective, the members are the union.

UNISON Families First Team Visits

Our UNISON Local Organiser, Chris Round, is continuing to attend local team meetings in Families First to remind members about the services UNISON provides and to encourage non-members to join. Please do all you can to persuade your colleagues who are not members of UNISON to join as it is in all of our interests to have a strong membership base so that we can influence whatever changes the service will face.

If Chris has not yet been invited to one of your local team meetings or you need membership forms or other information, please contact him at c.round@unison.co.uk or call him on 07432 735166 to arrange a visit.

Social workers too stressed to do their job according to survey

At least 80% of social workers believe stress levels are affecting their ability to do their job, a Community Care survey of more than 2,000 frontline staff and managers has shown. The survey, which has had the biggest response rate of any undertaken by Community Care, found a third of social workers responding to the survey are using alcohol and 17% are using prescription drugs such as anti-depressants to cope with stress. Almost all respondents (97%) said they were moderately or very stressed, yet only 16% said they had received any training or guidance on how to deal with work-related stress, and less than a third had been offered access to workplace counselling.

Sue Kent, British Association of Social Workers professional officer said this figure was "staggering". "Until stress is acknowledged and employers find methods to deal with this, the situation is unlikely to change," she said. "Why do we not have automatic opportunities for counselling and support for all social workers, like other professions? And how can we accept that in our people-focused profession it is still taboo to talk about stress within the workplace?"

The most common reason given for stress was heavy and increasingly complex caseloads, followed by a fear that something will go wrong and bullying by colleagues or managers.

Alan Wood, president of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) said the Department for Education and local authorities were looking together at what support social workers needed, however the results of Community Care's annual survey have shown little has changed year on year.

Almost 80% of social workers are thinking of leaving their jobs and two thirds are considering leaving the profession altogether because of stress; both figures have increased since last year's survey.

Other findings were:

- Half said they felt they couldn't talk to their managers about being stressed
- Almost half (47%) said stress was not discussed openly in the workplace
- 37% of social workers whose managers were aware of their stress said they had done nothing to help
- 13% said they had made it worse
- 41% said just the fact they had listened helped

Naming of Social Workers in Court Judgements

UNISON has growing concerns about the naming of social workers in court judgements and the effect this is having on morale, recruitment and retention in the social work profession, at a time when people are struggling with excessive caseloads and the effects of the cuts. We fear it exposes social workers to public hostility and media intrusion, and that many employers do not have plans in place

to protect them.

Some judges have been ready to criticise individual social workers in their written judgments, despite the fact that decisions and evidence in court proceedings will always have been scrutinised, reviewed and approved at senior levels within the local authority.

UNISON has issued comprehensive guidance for branches covering:

how to support individual members affected by this issue

how to negotiate protocols with employers covering their duty of care to protect their social workers

In the meanwhile UNISON is running a survey to ask social workers about their experiences of court work, how well prepared, trained and supported they are by their employers, and what they think the effects of this issue could be.

We will use the findings to further our campaigning work on this issue. We have already written raising our concerns to the relevant government departments, the Local Government Association (LGA) and WLGA in Wales, and the social services directors' organisations.

Please take our short survey by clicking [here](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/socialworkinthecourts) or putting this link into your browser:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/socialworkinthecourts>
All responses are anonymous.

Regulation of Social Workers by the HCPC

There are very real concerns about the increasing workloads of many social workers but what does this mean for the regulation of individuals who are concerned that their workload is putting vulnerable service users at risk or fear they could be hauled in front of the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) for making a mistake? Below is a summary of an article from HCPC.

In 2013/14 just 1.22% of the profession was subject to concerns. The majority of these cases (76% in 2013/14) relate to conduct rather than competence, typically including boundary violations, dishonesty, theft, poor record keeping, poor communications or poor clinical skills. The fitness to practise process is not designed to be punitive nor is it there to punish people for mistakes. It is about public protection and ensuring that individuals who pose a serious risk to themselves or the public are prevented from causing further harm. If you make informed, reasonable and professional judgements about your practice, with the best interests of your service users as your prime concern, and you can justify your decisions if you are asked to, it is very unlikely that you will not meet HCPC standards.

If you become aware of a situation where a service user is placed in danger you should raise concerns internally with your manager or employer first. This is

because your concerns may be able to be addressed at a local level. If for any reason you cannot do that, or your concerns have not been addressed in a timely way, you should escalate to a higher management level. Where possible, act in accordance with your employer's whistleblowing policy.

In the unlikely event you find yourself subject to a complaint the HCPC panels will consider a range of mitigating circumstances including employer environment. Employers have a responsibility to support employees and ensure that they have adequate supervision and safe caseloads. UNISON members should contact us as soon as possible for support.

Ethical Care Charter – further UNISON success

Camden Council has formally announced that it is adopting UNISON's Ethical Care Charter. The move will help vulnerable people in the borough who receive homecare services as well as the 860 strong homecare workforce.

Homecare workers will benefit from:

- being paid the London Living Wage
- being paid for travel time between visits
- being offered fixed hours in place of zero hours contracts
- having occupational sick pay schemes.

The move shows that despite the very challenging financial situation being faced by many councils that it is still possible to improve the treatment of homecare workers.

The Council leader Sarah Hayward said:

"Despite facing our toughest financial challenge ever, we are committed to investing in this area where we know it will have the biggest impact on the lives of our most vulnerable residents". "By raising wages for home carers employed by our providers we're going even further in helping to tackle inequality across the borough."

Holiday pay too low? Act now

Two recent legal cases on holiday pay could mean that UNISON members may have claims for underpayment if they did not receive their normal pay when on annual leave.

In the first - known as the Lock case - the European court ruled in favour of a UNISON member who argued that paid annual leave should include commission payments if these were part of normal pay.

And recently, the Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) ruled in another case that overtime payment should be included in holiday pay if members are required to

work overtime regularly.

The EAT took the UNISON Lock judgement into account when it reached its decision.

Both cases referred to the European Working Time Directive, with its guarantee of paid leave, and the judgements only apply to the statutory leave entitlement.

Both issues may affect members who have been underpaid in the past when taking leave and UNISON will support members who have a claim.

As with all tribunal cases, there are strict time limits for when a claim must be submitted: for these cases it is three months, less one day, from date of the last alleged underpayment following a period of statutory annual leave.

If you think you may have been underpaid talk to your local UNISON rep or branch now. The strict time limits mean that you might lose out if you delay.

Update your details!

Many members will have changed workplaces over the last few years and we know some of our records are out of date, please contact the office or speak to Chris Round to update your records, if you have colleagues who are members of UNISON who have not received this email it is because they have not provided us with an email address, please feel free to share this newsletter with your colleagues.

AGM Reminder

The UNISON Staffordshire Branch Annual General Meeting will take place on Thursday 26 February at 5.30pm. The meeting will be held in the UNISON offices, 56 Eastgate Street, Stafford. A free buffet will be available from 5.00pm and there will also be a free prize draw sponsored by Frizzells. All members are welcome to attend so please come along and take the opportunity to meet those who are representing you.