

# Housing Workers

Newsletter



Spring Newsletter 2014 - LE 1111

## 59 Unpaid Days! No More!

**Work your Proper hours** day on Friday 28th February, represented the 59th unpaid day an average workers does. What would you do with 59 days of free time or paid overtime? Last year we gave away **£28 billion in unpaid hours** and it is time to get our lives back. **Long hours are not good for us.** They cause stress, poor health, and damage to personal relationships. Long hours make caring for children or dependents more difficult, and tired, burnt-out workers do not deliver good services. This Spring Newsletter focuses on getting our time and money back by fighting for our right to balanced lives in relation to working hours and working patterns, and proper pay for all work, including sleep-ins. We also highlight that the bedroom tax is increasing workloads for members and costing us all more. **AXE THE BEDROOM TAX!**

**NEWSFLASH:** One of our leading workplace representatives has been suspended from his job. We strongly believe this is due to his leading role as a trade unionist, fighting cuts and winning back £2.3m for members at the association that the provider intended to cut. It is a basic principle of our movement that we defend our reps with all means at our disposal, and we will do so in this case.



## Reclaim Your Time and Money – The Shifting Law

A recent legal judgement confirms that if you are paid a set amount of say £25 or £30 per sleep-in, this is likely to amount to a breach of the National Minimum Wage. In the case of *Whittlestone v BJP Homes EAT 2013* the Tribunal made clear there was an entitlement to the National Minimum Wage for all the hours of a sleep-in as the argument some employers have used that they can average your rate of pay out over a week is clearly false. At the current rate (if you are over 21) that means that you should be being paid a minimum of £50.48 per sleep-in. This sum is back datable for six years.

Community Care magazine reported; "To comply with this ruling, many care providers will have to change their existing working arrangements. The consequences for non-compliance include civil penalties and criminal sanctions." Contact your rep or branch officer or look on our website for the briefing summary produced by our full time Regional Officer, Nicky Marcus.

You are also entitled to:

- **Weekly rest** at least 24 consecutive hours off in any 7-day period, or 48 consecutive hours off in a 14-day period.
- **Breaks** You are entitled to a minimum of 20 minutes break in a 6-hour period of work. It can't be at the beginning or the end of the shift. You should have break time away from your workplace.
- **Night work** A night worker is someone who regularly works for at least three hours between midnight and 5am. All night workers must be offered free health checks.
- **Sleep-ins** Whether you are woken or not during your sleep-in is irrelevant, sleep-ins are not rest. If you are 'on call' and are not allowed to leave the premises, sleep-ins are counted as work and are subject to the Working Time Directive regulations. Time spent sleeping must also count towards the 48-hour maximum working week and any calculation of your annual leave.

[www.housingworkers.org.uk](http://www.housingworkers.org.uk)

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The new Inside Housing pay survey paints a picture of frozen pay and increased workloads in the sector that will come as no surprise to branch members. According to another Inside Housing survey, the average chief executive had a pay increase of £2,247 – many got much more. Shockingly, the combined surpluses of Britain's 30 biggest housing associations soared to almost £1 billion in 2012/13.

Richard Gelder of Hays Social Housing, who carried out the survey, has said *"Whenever we meet people [searching for a new job], money is becoming a much bigger issue than it's ever been, as salaries are not keeping up with the cost of living. Normally when you ask people what's important to them at work, things like the working environment, company culture, opportunities for progression come out top, and salary normally comes about seventh, this year money's towards the top."* He goes on to observe *"All it would take is one or two organisations starting to pay more money and you get to a situation where they would be much more attractive."*

Workplaces with big pay gaps between the highest and lowest wage earners not only suffer more industrial disputes and higher staff turnover, they also make their workers sick, according to a recent report from Queen Mary University. Where top earners get eight times the pay of junior staff, there is at least one case a year of work-related illness. Workplaces with pay differentials of 5 or less do not report any. Organisations with average pay ratios of 7:1 experienced higher staff turnover, the report found.

The 'High Cost of High Pay' report was based on a survey of almost 2,000 workplaces. High Pay Centre director Deborah Hargreaves said: *"High executive pay is not only frequently unmerited but has a huge hidden impact on the rest of the organisation and society as a whole. Whether it's through staff turnover, sickness, low morale or industrial action, big pay gaps undermine employees' loyalty to the company and their managers."* She added: *"Employers suffer lost productivity, have to pay more sick pay and legal and recruitment costs as staff left feeling the financial and emotional strain are driven even further into the ground."* One social housing employer has a gap of over 10: 1 between top paid and worst paid employees. Is this an example of Housing Associations 'making a difference' or addressing social exclusion?



## HCA & Circle members to ballot over pay

HCA Members will be balloting for industrial action over the inequitable and divisive pay award. Circle members will be balloting for a decent pay award. In both cases we support a **VOTE YES** for action.

## Strike at St Mungos

Members at the St Mungo's hostel in Hitchin were on strike over Christmas and new year. The workers had re-arranged their lives to provide a 24 hour service when St Mungo took the project over. The organisation had agreed to assimilate the workers onto standard terms and conditions used by St Mungo but reneged on the agreement. Management also denied them all but the statutory minimum sick pay meaning that workers needing sick leave, even when the need was serious, were not paid.

At the time of going to press the workers had finally been paid sick pay for past absences, and there were constructive negotiations at ACAS. It is to be hoped that employers in the sector will rethink any move to an inappropriate 'hard nosed' management style.

# Axe The Bedroom Tax!

Without enough smaller (or accessible) homes to move into, growing housing, food and fuel costs, almost half-a-million tenants and families have been plunged into extreme hardship with the 'Bedroom Tax'. A further 10% cut to council funding by the ConDem government has led many councils to force 3.2 million more people to pay council tax. Councils and housing associations could fight these cuts, but at present choose to shed crocodile tears and claim helplessness in the face of the onslaught.

At the same time Channel 4's 'Benefits Street' has added to the poisonous propaganda that paints those on benefits as not just 'unworthy' of support, but of adding to the economic crisis which requires cuts to all areas of our life. There is no analysis of factors such as 'casino capitalism' or the systematic failure to crack down on corporate tax evasion and avoidance which have been among the real contributors to the economic crisis.

The Bedroom Tax reportedly costs more to implement than it saves. It forces many into private accommodation, breaking up families and communities. To 'axe the tax', we call for:

**Housing Associations.** Providers should absorb costs and not send out possession orders to those affected by welfare cuts. With record profits and vast capital assets, most associations could easily absorb the cut in Housing Benefit. Some employ more staff to support tenants and benefit claims, and this should be encouraged across the sector. Associations should also ensure they are following the Ministry of Justice Pre-Eviction Protocol and sharing appeal information.

**Housing Association Workers.** We would strongly advise members to report and challenge overworking and demand specialist training. Clearly identify and report Health and Safety issues on a regular basis, and particularly note any increase in incidents arising from working with clients. Where workload increases, workers should organise under the union banner and demand more resources. The Branch can help to share information on challenging the impact of welfare reform, for example the importance of the Bolton Upper Tribunal decision on room usage. Please attend the Branch meetings or get in touch with a Branch Officer for more information.

**Local Authorities.** We know that most councils have chosen to implement large cuts programmes resulting in job losses and work intensification for those left behind. Benefits staff are increasingly unable to properly process claims or support their claimants. The councils could stop this immediately by awarding Discretionary Housing Payments to all those effected.

You may find some of the following resources useful:

- **Joe (Welfarewrites)** Excellent detailed updates, with case information on welfare reforms. <http://speye.wordpress.com/>
- **Reclaim** Tenants group sharing cases won and template letters. [thereclaimgroup@aol.com](mailto:thereclaimgroup@aol.com)
- **Our new branch website** has regular updates <http://www.housingworkers.org.uk/> & branch officer Arti Dillon on [unite.le1111@gmail.com](mailto:unite.le1111@gmail.com)



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## Metropolitan Housing Worker Shot During Eviction

A tenant who shot a housing officer and bailiff during an eviction in August is now facing years behind bars. It is an extreme case but a recent Inside Housing survey showed that, as the effects of benefit cuts mount, assaults on front line staff are rising dramatically.

This wave of misery affects our members in different ways, according to a report from Straight Forward consultancy, who say almost half of housing staff have experienced resident suicide threats by their clients. The problem appears to be escalating rapidly; 77% report that customer interactions are more challenging than six months ago with 55% feeling 'unsupported' or 'moderately supported'. If you have experienced similar problems, talk to your Unite rep. Members should ask their employers to renew risk assessments, increase staffing levels reviews, and provide additional training on safety. For more details see <http://www.uniteunion.org/unite-at-work/healthsafety/>.

# Make Your Vote Count

We have nominated the following to represent us on the Unite Executive Council, and to help create a democratic, fighting and organising union.

**Kingsley Abrams**  
**Kwasi Agheman-Prempeh**  
**Richard Allday**  
**Brian Holmes**  
**Lizanne Malone**  
**Sean McGovern (Disabilities)**  
**Mohammad Taj (BAEM)**  
**Jenny Douglas (LGBT)**  
**and Jane Stewart (Women).**

For Unite Housing Workers, the priorities will be to actively oppose the race to the bottom that constant re-tendering of services creates in our sector, as well as fighting to improve standards for all workers through campaigns such as that to fight blacklisting. More details on people we have nominated can be found on – <http://unitedleft.org.uk> or email [le.ul.ec@gmail.com](mailto:le.ul.ec@gmail.com).

## What We Stand For

This branch is sending a resolution to the Unite Policy Conference noting the need to give working people a political voice, and one that better represents our interests than the Labour Party. The vast resources of the union which currently get sent to Labour without evident benefit for our members should be redirected to only those holding or seeking an elected position who support our aims, both in word and in practice, regardless of which political party they belong to.

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## Diary

### Branch Annual General Meeting and Branch Committee Elections – Tuesday 11th March

Please come to find out more of what has been done over the past year, elect new branch officers and get involved in the campaigns that are already making a real difference to our members' lives.

Branches usually take place on the second Tuesday of each month. These will be April 8th, May 13th, June 10th, and July 8th. Informal start with light refreshments at 6pm, formal business between 6.30pm and 8.30pm. Meetings are usually at Unite HQ, 128 Theobalds Road, but check the venue first.

### March 8th International Women's Day

Over a 100 years ago, 15,000 women marched for shorter working hours, better pay and voting rights. This developed internationally as women workers fought for workers' rights and women's rights. The fight continues.

### May 1st Mayday

A commemoration of May 4, 1886 in which Chicago workers took part in a General Strike for an eight-hour workday. We continue to demand a share of the wealth and resources we create, especially as the rich get richer, whilst the vast majority earn less and less.

### Talking of £££ – Union Deals

Unite has joined forces with The People's Operator to give you an **Unlimited Mobile Deal** for £14.99 per month.

Contact 0845 225 2505 [http:// bit.ly/1c5k6zG](http://bit.ly/1c5k6zG)

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## Contact Us

General branch info – [unite.le1111@gmail.com](mailto:unite.le1111@gmail.com)

**Suzanne Muna**, Branch Secretary, at [suz.muna.unite@gmail.com](mailto:suz.muna.unite@gmail.com) or 0796 885 2255.

**Paul Kershaw**, Branch Chair, at [kershawpaul@hotmail.com](mailto:kershawpaul@hotmail.com) or 07980448641.

The other Branch officers are Bryan Kennedy, Kingsley Abrams, Cheryl McLeod, David Oladele, Kerry Feetham, Adam Lambert, Vanessa Doidge, Emma Robinson, Michael Ologun and Arti Dillon.

Our Regional Officer is **Nicky Marcus** ([nicky.marcus@unitetheunion.org](mailto:nicky.marcus@unitetheunion.org)) with administrative support from **Gina Osborne** who also updates membership records ([gina.osborne@unitetheunion.org](mailto:gina.osborne@unitetheunion.org)). Please ensure we have your most up to date email and workplace for regular and relevant updates.

