

Howard's way

03/10/2014 | By [Heather Spurr](#) Inside Housing

Howard Sinclair has suffered a vote of no confidence by a trade union and now faces the prospect of industrial action. The chief executive of St Mungo's Broadway, tells Heather Spurr about his plans for the recently merged homelessness charity.

Positioned beside the chief executive's desk at St Mungo's Broadway headquarters is a hat stand bearing a curious object: a brown, rubber wolf mask which glares aggressively out of the window.

'That's for my union meetings,' the mask's owner, Howard Sinclair, explains.

He is clearly joking. But the mask is an apt memento, given the notoriously affable former Broadway chief executive is being forced to bare his teeth and make unpopular cuts just six months after taking over the newly merged organisation.

Last week, he and his management team were dealt a vote of no confidence by the trade union that represents nearly half his staff.

It has been a tense summer for St Mungo's Broadway, which was created by the merger of London-based homelessness charities St Mungo's and Broadway, in April.

Unite, which has historically represented St Mungo's staff, claims Mr Sinclair's appointment amounted to a takeover by Broadway, whose £15m turnover is one-third the size of St Mungo's.

Unite is now preparing to ballot its 500-plus members at St Mungo's Broadway on industrial action, citing 'swingeing cuts to pay' for new members of staff.

The problem with Mr Sinclair for union leaders is that he is hard to dislike. Speaking with Inside Housing at his drab office in Hammersmith, west London, Mr Sinclair warbles enthusiastically about his first job, aged 17, in the late 1970s at Friern Hospital (formerly known as Colney Hatch Lunatic Asylum), which he took because he 'couldn't get a job at Woolworths'.

'On my first day I turned up at 7 o'clock and was told to get 45 people up and dressed, washed and cleaned and at the table for breakfast by 7.45,' he recalls. 'It was bizarre but that's how it was, and that was care back then.'

He describes having to rouse the men, some of whom were shell-shocked from the war, some who had first-stage syphilis ('if anything teaches you about sex education, that does') and some who were from Poland – in the institution because no one could understand them.

So did Mr Sinclair always want to work in the homelessness sector?

Mr Sinclair responds with a characteristic grin and a self-deprecating joke, rather than giving away too much.

‘No,’ he replies. ‘I wanted to either open the batting for England or play centre midfield but somehow that hasn’t come my way.’

Funny business

Paul Doe, chair of St Mungo’s Broadway (and previously chair of St Mungo’s), believes this sense of humour belies a ‘serious’ side.

‘He can’t be separated from his iPad and at times I think he’s even sending me emails when he’s on his motorbike... he will think about something for too long when he’s on holiday.’

More than this, Mr Sinclair has recently proven himself to have a steely side, and is willing to take up some controversial stances - both within his own organisation, and the rest of the sector. For instance, he openly calls for greater regulation of homelessness hostels in England.

Last month, Inside Housing research showed that more than half (57%) of councils have dropped the nationally recognised Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) for regulating hostels and supported housing since 2009.

Mr Sinclair says the 2,500 people living in St Mungo’s Broadway accommodation ‘are just as vulnerable as elderly people, children in care and people with mental health problems’.

‘Yet the bulk of services in our sector are not registered or inspected. What QAF brought in was some accountability. That is going and I think it is wrong.’

Mr Sinclair worked as a learning disabilities training manager and development manager at Clwyd County Council between 1989 and 1992, just as the horrific stories of those who had historically been abused in children’s homes in north Wales began to emerge.

In 2013, a previously suppressed report commissioned by Clwyd Council revealed ‘extensive’ physical and sexual abuse of young people over a substantial period throughout the 1970s and 1980s in the authority’s children’s homes.

‘I have seen what happens when there isn’t an independent check on service quality,’ he says quietly. ‘I don’t believe everyone who works in care works with the best of motives.’

Mr Sinclair believes his big job is to try to inform the public about homelessness, and lobby for the government to ‘prioritise spend’ on homeless people. He says that local authorities slashed what they would pay for Broadway’s services from £26/hour to £16/hour over four years.

With council contracts squeezing adult social care services, charities such as St Mungo’s Broadway increasingly have to do more with less. How will providers survive the next five years?

'I don't think that matters,' he says. 'I don't think that is the first question.'

'The question is: will there be organisations that can best use the resources they have got in order to meet the needs of the people presenting to them?'

'If that means there are more organisations or less organisations, that doesn't matter.'

Urge to merge

But Mr Sinclair does have some ideas about how charities can keep their heads above the water during a climate of funding cuts.

For instance, he is open to working with the private sector and big contractors such as Serco.

'I think the private sector can bring skills experience, resources that we don't have.'

And St Mungo's Broadway is leading on the £36m Real Letting's fund. Over the past 18 months, the fund, backed by Croydon Council and Big Society Capital, has used £36m of private investment to buy 181 homes on the open market.

The other way charities will survive, he predicts, is through mergers.

'Broadway is gone,' he says wistfully. 'Twelve years of my life gone.'

One of the key reasons for the merger, he explains, was the anxiety that tighter public funds for running services would lead to poor-quality provision.

'Basically, we would have not been able to run services in the way and with the safeguards we believed in.'

Accounts dating back to 2009 show Broadway was running a deficit for at least the five years to 2013, when the charity posted a shortfall of £25,000.

St Mungo's was in a stronger financial position, but its surplus more than halved between 2012 and 2013 to £1.3m.

Mr Sinclair says the savings from the merger will be 'over a million', which seems small, given that St Mungo's turnover was £49m in 2013. Some of these savings will have come from the loss of 20 senior staff positions in both organisations in the merger.

Mr Doe describes a different motivation for the merger: the desire to expand the regional reach of the organisation, beyond London and the south of England.

He sees it as a chance to 'talk to different cities and keep an eye on contracting opportunities outside our core area'.

Liverpool is one potential venture.

'We are aware that there are opportunities there but we have not made any bids yet.'

Daniel Currie, an independent consultant, believes St Mungo's Broadway has laid down the gauntlet to other homelessness providers by becoming a 'gigantic' competitor.

'It sends out a challenge to some of the other organisations in the sector, the Thames Reaches, the Single Homeless Projects, because [St Mungo's Broadway's] size is so great. It might make them think about either a merger or a high degree of specialisation.'

Rat's tale

For now, though, Mr Sinclair has some internal problems to sort out, namely his dispute with the organisation's main trade union, Unite.

St Mungo's Broadway proposes to change the pay structure for new staff, from one set by the National Joint Council – which is negotiated with unions – to market rate salaries.

Unite argues that, because salaries have been depressed in the housing sector, this represents a substantial pay cut. At the time of the interview, it is unclear whether pay and conditions will also be changed for staff involved in any restructuring.

An anonymous employee emailed *Inside Housing* to say they are 'appalled' by the pay cuts. 'Many people were enthused at the merger. That is no longer the case,' it says.

Unite is balloting for industrial action and the week after our interview, the union protests outside a board meeting, along with a 9 foot inflatable rat.

Mr Sinclair remains adamant that funding cuts for homelessness services means the charity can no longer afford to maintain previous salary levels for new joiners.

'We need to manage our money and cut our cloth accordingly,' he says. 'We can afford to maintain [current staff] pay, and terms and conditions, but for new staff coming in, we cannot continue at those rates.'

'We have so many common concerns [with Unite], I don't know why they are choosing to squabble with us.'

Mr Sinclair suddenly looks sad when asked if the atmosphere at the charity is 'fraught'. After all, given his history as a 17-year-old employed in a care setting and having previously been involved in strikes himself, it must be difficult to be on the other side of the picket line?

He shifts and looks up abruptly. 'I have to justify [the changes] to myself and look myself in the mirror. I hope I can get that over [to staff]. If I don't do that, so be it. It doesn't mean I am wrong.'

A career carer: Howard Sinclair's CV

1978: Temporary nursing assistant, Friern Barnet Psychiatric Hospital

1984: Teaching English as a foreign language teacher in Turkey

April 1985: Care assistant in an older peoples' home in Lewisham, south east London

November 1985: Project worker with people with learning disabilities at Camberwell Health Authority, south London

November 1986: Project manager at Camberwell Health Authority

May 1988: Resettlement co-ordinator, Darenth Park Hospital

November 1989: Training manager, people with learning disabilities, Clwyd County Council

June 1992: Development manager, Clwyd council

April 1996: Head of planning and strategy, housing and social services, Wrexham County Borough Council

April 1999: Director of Mencap Cymru, Mencap

July 2002: Chief executive, Broadway

1 April 2014: Chief executive, St Mungo's Broadway

Unite ballots for industrial action to oppose Broadway's "coup d'etat" merger with St Mungo's

Thu, 25/09/2014 - 15:42 | Mark Cantrell Housing Excellence

A trade union has called the merger of two London-based homelessness charities "a bizarre coup d'etat" and is balloting members over industrial action.

In April this year, St Mungo's and Broadway merged. The new entity – St Mungo's Broadway – is headed up by Howard Sinclair, who was the chief executive of the latter, smaller charity. Broadway was itself created in 2002 out of the merger of two earlier homelessness organisations.

Sinclair's appointment to the chief's job, along with three other members of the seven-strong executive team who came from Broadway, including the HR director, means that the smaller charity has effectively take over the older, larger St Mungo's. Or so said the union Unite, which is less than pleased with the new set up.

In its annual report for 2012/13, Broadway indicated that it was actively looking at merger opportunities, following a difficult time for the charity. It was – in the words of Unite – "struggling", having failed to renew service contracts, or had them cancelled early. This combined with funding cuts and the impact of welfare reform was taking its toll.

To cap it all, in the union's eyes, the new management is embarking on "swingeing" pay cuts and changes to its terms and working conditions, prompting Unite to begin balloting over 500 of its members working at St Mungo's Broadway for possible industrial action. The ballot is

due to close on 7 October.

Unite has expressed its concerns that the 'coup' will damage St Mungo's, which was established in 1969. The union has accused the management of slashing the pay of new starters by £5,000 a year for project workers, as well as for those staff facing restructuring; it also alleges that the newly merged charity has taken pay out of collective bargaining, has imposed "draconian" new policies and procedures, and has "repeatedly" breached its recognition agreement with Unite.

"Staff are furious. They are simply not prepared to stand by and watch the heart and soul being ripped out of their organisation; an organisation with a hard-fought reputation built on quality – quality of services and quality of staff," said Nicky Marcus, Unite's regional officer.

"Cheap labour, downgraded roles, staff working under minimum standard policies and procedures are never a path to quality in social care. We urge the management to have a radical rethink of their current approach... They are about to transform a high quality organisation with a reputation second to none into yet another low quality, minimum standards, race-to-the-bottom business."

However, this is not a picture St Mungo's Broadway recognises, and it has dismissed such accusations, saying it remains committed to quality services.

In a statement, chief executive Howard Sinclair said: "We deeply regret that Unite has taken the step of balloting and remain open to talks with staff and Unite representatives. We are making no redundancies, honouring terms and conditions and not cutting salaries for existing staff. We remain committed to paying at least the Living Wage. We do propose paying new staff to the median level for our sector. Our priority remains providing services of the highest quality for the increasing numbers of clients we are seeing, within the ever tighter economic environment."

'No confidence' vote in management at St Mungo's Broadway

22 September 2014 | By [Heather Spurr](#) Inside Housing

Union members at one of Britain's largest homelessness charities have undertaken a vote of no confidence in the senior management.

Howard Sinclair says St Mungo's Broadway is 'committed to paying the living wage'

Trade union Unite, representing 550 workers (nearly half) at St Mungo's Broadway, said it was unhappy with changes to pay and conditions following the merger of London charities St Mungo's and Broadway in April.

Unite said separately it was balloting members on industrial action.

Howard Sinclair, chief executive of the charity, said: 'We have so many common concerns [with Unite]. I don't know why they are choosing to squabble with us.'

In the six months since the merger, talks have been ongoing to settle the pay and conditions of staff at the new organisation.

Proposals put forward by St Mungo's Broadway include adjusting salary scales, so new staff will no longer be paid according to rates set by the National Joint Council – which are negotiated with unions – and will instead receive wages in line with market rates.

Unite said because market rates have been depressed in the homelessness sector for a number of years this will lead to a reduction in the salaries of new staff.

On Wednesday around 50 staff of the 550 staff who are Unite members unanimously passed a vote of no confidence in the executive team.

The union is balloting all of its members at the charity on industrial action this week.

St Mungo's Broadway has assured current staff that their pay and conditions will not change. However, it is still unclear whether salaries will change for staff involved in any restructuring.

Mr Sinclair added: 'We deeply regret that Unite has taken this step and remain open to talks with staff and Unite representatives.'

'We are making no redundancies, honouring terms and conditions and not cutting salaries for existing staff.'

'We remain committed to paying the living wage. We do propose paying new staff to the median level for our sector.'

'Our priority remains providing services of the highest quality for the increasing numbers of clients we are seeing, within the ever tighter economic environment.'

[St Mungo's Broadway staff announce strike ballot over worker terms and conditions](#)

24/09/2014

By Matt Ritchie Charity Times

A strike ballot of more than 500 staff at St Mungo's Broadway has been announced by union Unite, over workers' terms and conditions.

Homelessness support charities St Mungo's and Broadway merged into one organisation earlier this year. Announcing the ballot, Unite raised objections including reduced pay for new staff, existing staff being restructured, pay being taken out of collective bargaining, and imposition of "new, draconian policies and procedures".

The union also claimed staff are discontent at Broadway effectively taking over the much larger St Mungo's after the merger, and highlighted a £30,000 pay increase for new chief executive Howard Sinclair who previously led Broadway.

However, St Mungo's Broadway said it is making no redundancies, honouring terms and conditions, and not cutting salaries for existing staff. Sinclair said the charity deeply regrets Unite's decision to ballot, and that it remains open to talks with staff and Unite representatives.

"We remain committed to paying at least the Living Wage. We do propose paying new staff to the median level for our sector. Our priority remains providing services of the highest quality for the increasing numbers of clients we are seeing, within the ever tighter economic environment."

Further, a spokesperson said Sinclair was appointed as chief executive by the board of the charity, and is paid the same salary level as the previous CEO of St Mungo's.

The strike ballot closes on 7 October.

St Mungo's Broadway staff to vote on strike action over terms and conditions

24 September 2014 by Andy Ricketts, Third Sector

The union Unite calls the ballot over changes to starting salaries and HR policies after the merger of the two homelessness charities this year

More than 500 staff at the homelessness charity [St Mungo's Broadway](#) are being balloted over possible strike action.

The union Unite, which is running the ballot, said the dispute concerned what it called "sweeping changes" that had been made to employees' terms and conditions and HR practices after the [merger of St Mungo's and Broadway earlier this year](#).

The union, which said that members had already passed a vote of no confidence in senior management, said that the starting annual salary of a new project worker had been cut from £25,000 to £20,000, and that significant changes had been made to HR policies and procedures without consultation with the union.

The merged charity employs about 1,200 people, about 200 of which worked for Broadway before the merger.

Nicky Marcus, regional officer at Unite, said that Broadway – which she described as a "struggling" organisation that had posted a deficit in each of the past six years – had staged a "bizarre coup d'état" that had resulted in four of the merged charity's seven-strong executive team, including chief executive Howard Sinclair, coming from Broadway.

"Management has slashed the pay of new starters by £5,000 a year for a project worker and for existing staff being restructured; taken pay out of collective bargaining; imposed new, draconian policies and procedures; and breached the recognition agreement with Unite repeatedly," said Marcus.

"Staff are furious. They are simply not prepared to stand by and watch the heart and soul being ripped out of their organisation, one with a hard-fought reputation built on quality."

She said that staff were concerned about the effect that any strike action would have on the vulnerable people they worked with, but that they were more concerned at the long-term negative effects of the changes.

"Cheap labour, downgraded roles, staff working under minimum standard policies and procedures are never a path to quality in social care," she said.

Sinclair said the charity deeply regretted the fact that the union was balloting over strike action and remained open to talks with staff and Unite representatives.

"We are making no redundancies, honouring terms and conditions and not cutting salaries for existing staff," he said. "We remain committed to paying at least the living wage."

"We do propose paying new staff to the median level for our sector. Our priority remains providing services of the highest quality for the increasing numbers of clients we are seeing, within the ever tighter economic environment."

The ballot will close on 7 October and union members will meet on 8 October to discuss when any industrial action might take place.