

Welcome to the Winter 2012 newsletter. As well as fighting individual cases against unjust practices, we have been working with different workplaces to bring together housing workers and to demand decent sector standards, which is about pay, hours, training and more!

This quarter we also encourage all organizations to **PAY UP** and to respect our Health & Safety. Updates on campaigns against cuts at One Housing and St Mungos are also included and the battles go on. We look forward to seeing you all in the coming months and for a wee dance, quiz and chatter at our Christmas do on **Friday 7th Dec at the Roxy**, 128 Borough High St! Get your teams a ready! Next Branch **Tue Nov13th** 6pm for an informal catch up & snacks, 6.30 -8.30 meeting. All welcome!



March together,

Strike together?

By Jonathan Cox branch treasure

You may have seen some news coverage of the massive march organised by the TUC against austerity. Well, around 30 branch members were right at the front of the march, blowing whistles, vuvuzelas and in one case a trumpet (!), on behalf of housing and support workers across London. Why? Well, at branch meetings we have heard stories from many different organisations about how the cuts are devastating lives. Union members at St. Mungos, Equinox and One Housing Group to name just a few are in a constant struggle with management to preserve their terms and conditions, and the quality of services delivered to their vulnerable clients. Management however often blames government cuts for the attack on standards and the race to the bottom.

However, the Branch and millions of others believe that austerity is not the only option (even though government and media try to persuade us it is so!) -

hence the TUC organised the march and rally on Saturday 20th October. After the march we were a bit knackered and hoarse so we sat on the banner and watched rabble-rousing speeches from Union leaders like Bob Crow and Mark Serwotka, as well as TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady (who I thought was Janet Street-Porter for ages!). Even Ed Miliband showed up to support the rally! Although there was a mixed reception to his speech. He said the Labour party would still have to make cuts which earned him quite a boo, but he did say he would halt the privatisation of the NHS and also tax the rich.

Anyway, this march was only the beginning so there will be plenty more ways you can get involved; just ask the branch or your local union rep! There may even be a **general strike** coming up. Do you think this would be a good idea? Join the debates at meetings or on the branch website www.housingworkers.org.uk where you can read more about everything the branch gets up to & feel free to take part in the forums.

St Mungo's creates "Support Assistant" role in latest de-skilling plans

St Mungo's senior management are attempting to replace Project Workers with "Support Assistants", earning as little as £13,050 a year. The new role is part of restructure plans for a service in Hitchin, Hertfordshire, where management propose to replace one third of staff. It follows the de-skilling of "Night Project Workers" to "Night Concierge" roles last year.

St Mungo's management wish to replace roles that specialise in working with clients, with positions defined in the restructure proposal as existing merely to "undertake housing management and other functions including reception (telephone and door) cover and H&S requirements". That senior management might actually believe that our Project Workers can be replaced with staff that would only fulfil these functions shows how detached and profit-motivated they have become. The reality is that Support Assistants would inevitably do the same job as Project Workers for over 35% less pay, ignoring years of experience and commitment to supporting vulnerable people. The wage for Support Assistants is proposed to be £6.81/hour – two pence less than the average hourly rate for supermarket workers.

The job description for the new roles state that the role is an "essential part of our staffing structure". Unite at St Mungo's know that if management are successful in replacing Project Worker roles in Hitchin, other projects will face similar restructures soon. We will be fighting this latest attack by any means necessary, alongside campaigning for a re-instatement of last years' NJC increment as part of our "Fighting For Our Future" campaign.

We are urging all our members to come to our union meeting on Tuesday 30th October, 3:30pm at St Mungo's Kings Bench Street facility in Southwark to discuss the best way forward. For more information get in touch with your Unite reps or Convenor: adam.lambert@mungos.org

One Housing Group members vote to **reject** cuts!

One Housing members of Unite and Unison overwhelmingly rejected management's final offer to mitigate salary cuts of up to £8,000 per employee, by offering a one off payment of an average £300 each and delaying the implementation date of the salary cuts by three months. This offer follows an open letter to the chair of One Housing from Unite and widespread publicity.

Despite management's claim of declining revenues in the last financial year, recently released financial statements have disclosed a group wide increase in surplus revenue as compared to the previous year: £12.5 million, up from £4.5 million in 2011. Even in supported housing, where employers blame competitive pressures for driving down pay, income has risen from £700,000 in 2011 to £1.2 million this year.

One Housing have boasted that they can cut the cost of contracts previously run by the NHS by 80 per cent and have aggressive expansion plans in supported housing. It seems they expect to win contracts by undercutting other providers on the backs of poorly paid staff. A clear example of the importance of Unite's campaign to maintain standards in the sector and against the 'race to the bottom'. Staff at One Housing are in the fourth year of a pay freeze while the Chief Executive's pay rose from £159,000 to £176,000 last year.

Management have informed the union side that they are considering their response to the ballot which showed majorities against management proposals of 90% of Unite members and 87% of Unison members. To keep up to date and get involved in your workplace contact:

bkennedy@onehousinggroup.co.uk

OMG! Surplus; £12.5 million, supported housing the surplus has rose to £1.2 million

PAY UP PAY UP PAY UP PAY UP

At a time when Unite members are considering next year's pay claims, the latest annual Chief Executive pay survey is now out. After a near standstill last year, bosses pay is increasing again. The average total pay package (including car allowances, bonuses etc) was £160,869. The biggest package was £363,498 for David Cowans of Places for People. Deborah Hargreaves of the High Pay Commission commented on Cowans' pay rise: "I would say that a pay increase of 27% is pretty outrageous at a time of heightened economic austerity and when staff are getting very modest increases or seeing their pay frozen."

Michael Gelling, chair of the Tenants' and Residents' Organisations of England, says he's "disappointed" to see that average basic salaries have risen. ***"With welfare reforms, the bedroom tax, and rents going up, average people are feeling the pinch,"*** he says: ***"People I speak to can't think about tomorrow financially, they are just trying to get through today."***

As Paul Kershaw, branch chair argued in the Guardian last month, *"I used to work with former rough sleepers and often found myself counselling them about money problems and their fears of falling behind with the rent. Now, as chair of a Unite union branch for housing workers, I find myself counselling the people who work with the homeless about their own fears of losing their home."*

We are seeing far too many cases where staff are transferred to a new employer after a service is tendered, only to be faced with drastic pay cuts and additional workloads. Either the bid for the service never stacked up, or the employer seeks to boost its surplus to undercut other providers in future contract wars.

Commissioners are passing on government cuts but responsible providers should speak up about the concerns they express to us: safe services require decently paid staff.

This is why the branch-led **Sector standards** initiative is being rolled out nationally by Unite. It is about challenging the bidding war which is undermining our ability to work safely, with decent wages instead of poverty wages, decent and safe hours and quality services at a time when homelessness and the threat of homelessness is on the rise. Full details of how you can get involved will be sent out to everyone, make sure we have your email address!

As well as a national campaign for sector standards, we are encouraging all the organizations in our branch to put in pay claims. As energy prices, food prices and transport are set to rise AGAIN, we need more not less so that we do not end up as clients of the services we provide! **Its time to pay up!**

Unions in the public sector, including Unite, Unison and the GMB are calling for a fair pay after a 3-year pay freeze. In real terms, with inflation, this has actually meant a 13% cut!

More on how and why to make a pay claim is available. We will have a session on this at the Reps Forum on Sat 17th Nov & discuss it briefly at the next branch. In the meantime, if you haven't already done so, now is the time for reps to make preparations by deciding:

1. **How much to ask for and what non-pay items you might include such as additional leave.**
2. **How to communicate with and involve all members**
3. **What strategy you will use to negotiate with management.**

Get in touch if you need any help with this or any information on this. A detailed Unite pay claim guide has been sent to all reps. E: Unite.le1111@gmail.com



DIARY

Branch meetings: 6.30 – 8.30 (informal at 6pm)

Tuesdays 13th Nov, 11th Dec & 8th Jan 2013

REPS FORUM: Sat 17th Nov 10.30 – 4pm

CHRISTMAS social: Fri 7th Dec 6.30 – 1am

Roxy Bar, 128 Borough High St, SE1.

Donations & Affiliations: To support our work and that of other branches or unions taking action, and complimentary activity, the branch regularly donates and affiliates. Here are three recent donations:

Amnesty Unite Strike Fund: 3 days strikes in total. Human rights workers at Amnesty International's global headquarters, & International Secretariat, struck in October over a serious breach of trust by an Amnesty senior management that refuses to honour agreements. & redundancies. Messages of support from branch given as well as members attending picket lines. A donation of £250 was agreed.

Remploy Unite & GMB Fund: Sadly 50% of the factories have sadly closed but there are ongoing battles to save some of the others and campaign for decent jobs for disabled workers. A donation of £100 was agreed

Don't mention the 47: Documentary film on the relevance of the Liverpool 47 councillors who fought against Thatcher's cuts in the 80's and an exhibition of photographs of the wider struggles of that time will be held at Richmix, May 2013. A donation of £47 was requested & agreed. Contact: dontmentionthe47@gmail.com

Staff at Circle 33 should recently have received a survey from their union reps asking them about the main issues in the workplace. Issues already identified by members include unfair performance related pay assessments, bullying and harassment and increased workloads leading to stress.

Please take a few moments to respond to the survey as this will help shape the union's priorities at Circle over the coming months. If you'd like a copy, e-mail larry.olasiyan@circle.org.uk

Health & Safety is a RIGHT, not a PRIVILEGE!

According to the recent branch wide survey, some of our members' key concerns were over workplace safety, including violence and aggression in the workplace. As such we want to better highlight some of the issues but more importantly, actively challenge these.

It's a step in bringing H&S issues to the fore and challenging the idea that we have to accept unnecessary and avoidable risks. You can access the flyer from the website and it will be circulated to all reps. There are also some excellent posters and other material available. Email: unite.le1111@gmail.com.

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healthandsafety@unitetheunion.org

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