

Unite LE1111 Housing Workers



PAY UP

WORKERS DESERVE BETTER

Fighting and Winning Pay Claims – More of That Please!

Suzanne Muna, Branch Secretary

Many of our major battles over the last three years have involved fighting threats to cut the pay of frontline workers. Yet as Paul Kershaw's article shows, the vast majority of housing associations are rolling in money. The fifteen biggest London associations alone made a £1 billion surplus – up from £644 million in the previous year.

When one employer cuts wages, bosses at other HAs argue that their own frontline salaries should be cut too. It is therefore in the interests of our whole sector to fight every threat. The arguments for paying staff in line with the rising cost of food, travel, energy prices, and rents, does not need to be spelt out in detail. We know it is getting ever harder to make ends meet.

This is why the Housing Workers Branch has backed major disputes involving pay cuts at One Housing Group, St Mungos Broadway, Equinox and Look Ahead – succeeding at least partially on each occasion. The result of these struggles is that we have learnt more about fighting and winning pay claims.

www.housingworkers.org.uk

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Here are our top three tips drawn from our experiences.

How do I know how much money my employer has?

HA accounts are not easy for most people to understand. Yet it is vital to understand them for negotiations and talking to members. All HAs publish annual accounts, usually on their website. The Homes and Communities Agency also produces an annual set of 'Global Accounts' with a spreadsheet of HAs', income, surplus levels, and more (search the HCA website at www.hca.gov.uk for details). Find out if any of your members have experience of accounts and can take you through them. If no-one does, contact either Paul Kershaw or Suzanne Muna who will be able to source help from within Unite.

Combine campaigning and industrial methods for a really powerful fightback

The more methods you use, the more likely you are to win. Campaigning backs up negotiations and get members engaged. It prepares members for escalating the action. At my own employer during pay campaigns we used a petition to the executive, sent handmade Valentines cards to our board saying 'if you love your staff, pay them properly' with a letter setting out our case, and ordered cakes for each offices with our logo on it, then sent an all-staff email saying "All we want is a fair slice of the cake", explaining why we were balloting for action. These ideas were all suggested by members who had attended a planning meeting – they then helped organise them.

Striking works. Be prepared to strike

Strike action is a last resort. You reach a point in the negotiations when you realise that there is no movement from management and have to say to members that you have done all you can. It is for them to decide whether to strike or to accept the management position. But you need to make the case for fighting and you need to try to speak to every single member. The main argument is that striking works, as we have shown repeatedly.

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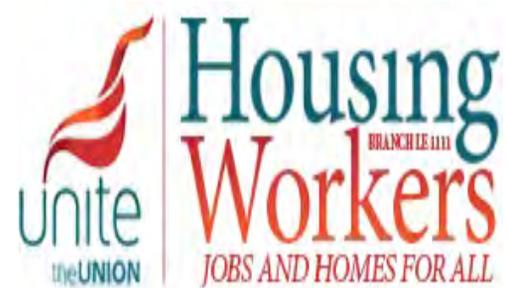
Paul Kershaw, Branch Chair: kershawpaul@hotmail.com 079804 48641

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Our **NEW** Regional Officer is **Adam Lambert**

(Adam.Lambert@unitetheunion.org) covering all organisations except Thames Valley & Equinox. (**Peter Storey**).

Gina Osborne supports Adam and Peter, particularly with updates to membership records, crucial for seeing where members are and balloting. (gina.osborne@unitetheunion.org).



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