

UNISON NEWS

Free Pocket Diary for 2021!

If you would like one of UNISON's famous pocket diaries (free to members) - please email marychapman@southend.gov.uk with your name and address and we will arrange to get one to you!



Immigration Status Problems? - Get UNISON's support

Many of our members are from outside the UK. Their jobs depend on complicated and expensive visa and other regulations.

UNISON provides free immigration telephone advice to members who have come to work in the UK from a country outside the UK. We work with the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI) to provide this support.

If you have been a member of UNISON for more than four weeks and need immigration advice and information, please call UNISON Direct at 0800 0 857 857.

Your contact details will be passed on to an adviser from the JCWI, who will call you on a Tuesday, between 10am and 4pm.

When calling UNISON Direct, please be ready to give your full name, contact phone numbers and your UNISON membership number.

Contacting Southend UNISON during the Pandemic

The Covid 19 pandemic means that our UNISON office is closed to visitors. If you need to contact UNISON, or want more information about anything in this newsletter, please email us at unison@southend.gov.uk or leave us a message on 01702 215980. You can also follow us on social media:

There is also a national helpline on 0800 0857 857



Unison Southend



@unisonsouthend



unison_southend

UNISON NEWS

December 2020

Southend-on-Sea
Local Government Branch

A Happy and safe Xmas to all our members!

2020 has been a difficult year and this will be an unusual Xmas! We hope you, your friends and family are well.

We all hope that 2021 will see vaccines and treatments making us safer and that life will become less restricted.

Covid 19 has shown that it is 'ordinary' people, like our members, who run the services that keep daily life going and also keep us all safe.

We also know that many members may themselves have had Covid or have lost people due to the pandemic and our thoughts are with you.

Whatever your circumstances, we wish you a happy and safe Xmas and New Year and hope you are able to enjoy the season.

UNISON will continue to be here for you and to always stand up for our members - on health and safety, pay and jobs.

We wish every member all the best for 2021!

...but watch out for the public sector pay Grinch!

Whether we're working hard on the front line or in back room services, juggling working at home with child care, this government plan to cut our pay and pit us against our colleagues in the private sector.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak's November spending review made it clear we are to pay for a bungled pandemic out of our own pockets!

NHS staff are getting peanuts, but there aren't even peanuts for local government workers! In reality a zero % increase is a pay cut.

Billions have been given to friends of the government in contracts for PPE and track and trace that have failed to deliver, yet they have the audacity to say they don't have the money for workers who have kept people safe and well through the services we deliver.

We represent the social workers, the environmental and public health staff, the learning support staff and the cleaners and caretakers and IT workers who keep everything running.



We are told a pay rise for us wouldn't be fair on the private sector, but when has cutting our pay helped a shop worker or a private home carer?

The cut in wages for the public sector adds to the 'race to the bottom' in pay. It won't save a single one of the retail jobs 'Sir' Philip Green's Arcadia group are trashing.

The money's there at the top - even under Thatcher taxes for the rich were much higher! Maybe we even could collect the taxes companies like Amazon and Facebook should be paying?

**Claire Wormald,
Branch Secretary**





Covid Fund

UNISON's national COVID-19 response fund reopened on Monday 16 November, offering grants of up to £500 to help members whose household incomes have been affected in a number of ways

You may qualify if you (and/or your partner):

- are currently furloughed
- are currently receiving Statutory Sick Pay and are either shielding, self-isolating or off sick due to other COVID-related reasons
- have been made redundant or lost your job due to coronavirus
- have had your hours reduced by your employer, including loss of regular overtime (applicable also where partner is self-employed and loss of earnings can be proven)

Depending on your situation, help will be awarded as follows:

- £350 living costs for applicants who are furloughed or have a salary reduction due to COVID
- £500 loss of employment grant due to redundancy
- Up to £500 housing costs grant – towards rent, mortgage, or council tax arrears that have accrued since March 2020

Applicants must be a UNISON member with savings of less than £2,500 and have paid at least two months' subscriptions. We want to make this fund go as far as possible and help as many members as we can. Therefore please only apply if you are in financial difficulty as a result of COVID-19.

You can apply online (or download a form) here:

<https://www.unison.org.uk/covid-19-response-fund-2>



Into 2021 with our new activists!

UNISON depends on our network of stewards and representatives, who organise and communicate with members in their workplaces.

Full training on the role is given to all stewards.

We are delighted that going into 2021, we are welcoming a number of new stewards across this branch including:

- Michael Westwick - Temple Sutton School
- Karen Bainbridge - Southend High School for Boys,
- Nicholas Newman - Milton Hall Primary school
- Margaret White - Belfairs school catering staff
- Ronnie Rattner - Early Help and Family Support
- Jackie Byram - Mental health social work teams
- Tina Woodham - Dementia Team

If you think you may be interested in helping organise in your workplace, contact UNISON for a chat about what's involved.

Health and Safety - not just a load of red tape!

I'm not sure Health and Safety has ever been more in the news than this year! Some people call us 'jobsworths' for insisting on health and safety risk assessments as if it's just red tape. As a health and safety rep for some 25 years I would disagree with this accusation – and never more so than now!!

The Pandemic

Covid-19 will remain a live health and safety risk for months to come. Many of you are on the frontline, from hardworking LSAs supporting students in school to residential and home care workers looking after vulnerable people. At times you will have been feeling anxious and concerned about both your own health and the health of those you live with.

How's your Workplace?

Claire (our Branch Secretary) has done an amazing job together with stewards and Health and Safety representatives supporting workers in Southend and would welcome information from you about working practices (both good and bad) to help us target UNISON's efforts and share best practice across all our members.

Risk Assessments

I encourage you to work to your risk assessment guidance. Make sure you have read (and had a say in) these assessments, particularly your individual one. They should be regularly revised and updated as the information and issues out there are constantly changing!

If you haven't had sight of your Risk Assessments, please speak to your manager and if they don't supply them, contact Southend Unison.

Could you represent Health & Safety?

If you care about Health and Safety in the workplace, why not become a UNISON Health and Safety representative? There's full training and support and you can make a real difference to in your workplace. Contact the UNISON office for details.

Finally - please be safe out there and contact us if you require help and support.



Steve Cooper,
UNISON Health
and Safety Officer

Useful Information to help you Stay Safe

- Unison websites, both national and local:
<https://www.unison.org.uk/coronavirus-rights-work/> and
<https://www.unionsouthend.org.uk/>
- The Government website <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>
- The HSE website:
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/index.htm>
- and if you work for Southend Borough Council please see
<http://seattle/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>

Fighting 'fire and re-hire' at Southend Council

The government have been cutting council funding for years. As a result, further attacks on jobs and services are now coming down the pipeline at Southend.

Southend council has shown its true colours in the way our members are being treated in a torrent of restructures.

The approach has been based on 'firing and rehiring', which means that all jobs are up for grabs.

This gives the employer 'carte blanche' to pick and choose who will stay and who will go through competitive interviews for every post. This method makes the process much more stressful for all staff. UNISON has now received a '188 notice' from the council warning of further potential job losses and we believe at least another 20 posts may be threatened.

Collective Fightback

Members in a Commissioning and Contracts team are battling a restructure that unfairly tried to push through change without meaningful consultation and without giving staff correct information.

Our members have made a stand which has halted the restructure while a collective grievance is investigated, and we await the outcome. We should all applaud their action – this is the way to make a difference.

The Council are aggressively pushing through these cuts and deliberately trying to sidestep proper scrutiny - just when we are all trying to do our job to support our community. It feels like "thanks for your efforts, now on your bike"!

They talk about 'Southend 2025' but there won't be anything left!

Adding Insult to Injury

To add insult to injury the government plan to cut the pay and pension you may get if you are made redundant at 55 or over. Both your contractual redundancy and pension protection may be cut!

This cap on 'exit payments' is being challenged in the courts and UNISON will be asking members to help the campaign in the New Year - watch this space for further details!



Local Government Pay Claim 2021

Southend Local Government members took part in a national consultative ballot to decide what we will claim as part of the National Joint Council pay negotiations in 2021/22.

Our members voted for the highest option of a 10% claim for all staff.

This shows that our members believe they are worth more than the government's pay cuts and support a rise that will benefit all local government workers.

Southend's views will be fed into regional and national decisions.

I was pleased to see our members having the confidence to argue for the pay rise we all deserve!

Claire Wormald, Branch Secretary