

UNISON NEWS

February 2021

Southend-on-Sea
Local Government Branch

Covid-19: Stay Safe at work

What is Section 44 and how can I use it to help me?

You have the right to safety at work. Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 gives you particular rights.

It says that **if after you have told your employer about your concerns**, a 'serious or imminent' danger still persists, you and your colleagues **have the legal right to leave the unsafe workplace** (or propose to leave).

Getting advice from your union first is always recommended! A number of our members have already successfully used this law to make a big difference to their workplace safety.

The precise sections of the Act say:

"(d) in circumstances of danger which the employee reasonably believed to be serious and imminent and which he could not reasonably have been expected to avert, he left (or proposed to leave) or (while the danger persisted) refused to return to his place of work or any dangerous part of his place of work, or

(e) in circumstances of danger which the employee reasonably believed to be serious and imminent, he took (or proposed to take) appropriate steps to protect himself or other persons from the danger."

Should I be leaving home to go to work?

Stay at home wherever possible - employers should be supporting you in this. The government website states:

"You can only leave home for work purposes where it is unreasonable for you to do your job from home. This includes, but is not limited to, people who work within critical national infrastructure, construction or manufacturing that require in-person attendance."

How do I make sure I am safe if I do have to go to work?

Where we have to 'go to work' we should all be working to individual and workplace Risk Assessments.

If you haven't seen yours and had a say in it or it is old and possibly out of date, speak to your manager and let UNISON know your concerns.

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Health and Safety Law comes first!

Your employer's duty to ensure a safe workplace outweighs anything else.

Your employer may be working to government guidelines but if in practice they are not keeping you safe you still have the right to take action.

For instance at one school in Southend, all support staff were being asked to attend work at the same time despite reduced pupil numbers. Government advice to schools allows this.

However, staff realised that this was actually increasing the risk of transmitting the virus.

UNISON members sent a Section 44 letter to the school - and a result were swiftly put on rotas which reduced the numbers of staff in at any one time.

We've got a right to work safely - and we can and will take action where members are at risk!

UNISON National Women's Event 17th-20th February

As a result of COVID-19, many national UNISON conferences and meetings have had to be cancelled.

With this in mind, UNISON's national women's committee is organising a series of virtual events in place of the usual national women's conference – online and live!

Empowering women in UNISON – Live! will take place over Wednesday 17 and Saturday 20 February 2021. Online sessions will include keynote panels, webinars and workshops.

We want to make this event as accessible as we can, so all members can participate fully. If you are disabled, please let us know of any adjustments you will need to

allow you to take part in a virtual event.

There will be a variety of online sessions that you can participate in during these events. These events are only open to UNISON women members.

To attend Empowering women in UNISON – Live! you must be a female member of UNISON. You will then be registered for the event.

Once registration closes, you will be sent details of the programme. You can then sign up for the various Live! sessions individually. You can attend as many or as few as you like. So, let's get Live and let's get active!

Please email us at conferences@unison.co.uk to register your interest in attending as follows:

Subject – Empowering women in UNISON – Live!

In your email – please provide:

- Your name:
- Your membership number:
- Your branch name:
- Any reasonable adjustments you need to participate:



The registration deadline is 5pm on Thursday 4 February 2021

More Health & Safety Information:

- *Unison*
www.unison.org.uk/coronavirus-rights-work
- *The Government:* www.gov.uk/coronavirus
- *The Health and Safety Executive:*
www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely
- *National Hazards Campaign:*
www.hazardscampaign.org.uk

Your Covid Redeployment Rights

Many of our members are being asked to redeploy from their normal job to help meet the demands of the pandemic. This includes staff in museums, day centres, libraries and more.

Most of us are happy to help in whatever way we can but at the same time we want to ensure members know their rights. Our goodwill should not be abused.

We know for example of staff who were given the impression that they could be compelled to carry out shifts in residential homes.

Many people also have contracts that say 'any other duties' – but this is not a 'catch-all'. Your Employment and Health and Safety rights will always override this!

Anything you are asked to do must be reasonable and it must be safe.

For instance, you have the right to refuse:

- if you are asked to do shifts which are impossible because of transport or childcare;
- if you are asked to do a job for which you may have no training or experience;
- if you are asked to work in a way which is unsafe for you;
- if you cannot do the duties because of your own vulnerability for health reasons.

The Covid pandemic is now worse than ever. We all want to support vulnerable people in our care – but this must be done as safely as possible. If we are not safe then neither are service users and neither is our whole community.

If you have concerns about what you are asked to do or how you are asked to do it then the law is on your side and you will get the full support of UNISON.

Let UNISON know your concerns and we will support you.

Council Votes on Cuts Budget

10 years of austerity for public services have seen Council finances cut to the bone. Council income is also now not keeping up with the cost of dealing with the Covid pandemic.

We have a government that wants to roll back public services and replace them with the private sector, to push down wages and conditions in the name of profit.

We can see the impact in the private care sector in Southend where care workers go without full sick pay and are too often on or near the minimum wage.

Services Struggling

Southend has used the 'permitted council tax increase' to fill the funding gap left by cuts in central funding (councils received 77% less per person in central government grants last year compared to 2010). Even this will not be enough to meet demand and residents are increasingly struggling to cope with council tax rises that are above inflation.

Threat to Business Support

Now we face a further 38 FTEs (Full Time Equivalents) being axed, mainly in the business support function. We fear that new posts may be created on worse terms and conditions.



Behind the savings announced in the budget, there are people who will be losing their jobs, people with family and friends to take care of. I believe the savings are just a short term benefit as the knock on effect will be catastrophic to local families - many of the Business Support staff are women who support their families. We have seen how the pandemic has impacted particularly on women and the council would do well to remain mindful that it should assess equality in all of these decisions.

Louise McDermott
Equalities Officer



Council should oppose cuts

Further cuts to services are not acceptable to Southend residents and employees and we urge councillors to oppose the cuts rather than just voting on which cut to make.

Is your job or service under threat? We need your help in understanding the detailed impact of these cuts. This could be jobs going or it could be cuts in services. For example, will there

be less placements in residential homes or charges for services where there were none before?

We want you to let us know so we can organise together to raise questions and challenge harmful proposals. We are clear we will continue to oppose cuts.

Get in touch with UNISON straight away. We will support you to fight these cuts and tell the truth about the effect on services for our community as well as trying to protect every member.

Email us on unison@southend.gov.uk with your name and details of the issue.

We need a collective voice - make sure you and your colleagues are UNISON members - you can sign up online at join.unison.org.uk



Claire Wormald
Branch Secretary

Important date for your diary

Southend UNISON Annual General Meeting 2021

5:15pm, Thursday 23rd March

We can't meet in person this year - but we will be seeing each other!

All members are invited to join us at a Zoom meeting where we will elect branch officers and stewards, discuss our activities and hear from speakers.

Unfortunately we can't offer the usual buffet, but we are planning to make the event as friendly and accessible as possible!

All members will get an invitation by email or post with details of how to join the Zoom meeting and access to reports from the branch. Look out for your invite!

**AGM
2021!**

UNISON NEWS

Welcome to UNISON's e-learning site:

<https://e-learning.unison.org.uk/>

This site hosts a number of online learning resources for UNISON members. You will find a variety of short activities which you can complete as well as directions to where you can find other useful union learning resources.

Activate!

Wondered about getting more involved with UNISON but not sure where to start? Play our new 'Activate!' game and get some ideas!

For UNISON members

This section gathers together learning resources for UNISON members on a range of subjects including: 'Moving On: job applications, CVs and interviews', Stress Management, Maths and 'Your Skills, Your Future'

Getting more involved in UNISON: activist roles

Find out more about some of our popular roles, including: steward, learning rep, branch welfare officer and branch treasurer; You'll find them all in this section.

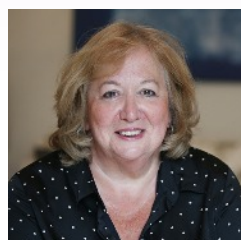
More for activists

Keep up to date with new developments and best practice for UNISON activists. In this section you'll find resources on: dyslexia; menopause; apprenticeships; 'data protection and the GDPR' and more!

General Secretary Election Results

Results of the election of a new General Secretary for UNISON came out on 11th January.

The winner was Christina McAnea, with 47.7% of the votes.



Christina McAnea

Christina will be UNISON's first female General Secretary and replaces Dave Prentis, who retired as General Secretary after 20 years in office.

In second place was Paul Holmes, the candidate who Southend branch had nominated. We are pleased that Paul did so well, with the best vote ever by a 'rank and file' candidate.

Thanks to all our members who took the time to look at the candidates' manifestos and used their vote! UNISON's democracy is important and we want all members to take part.

Christina McAnea	63,900 (47.7 %)
Paul Holmes	45,220 (33.76 %)
Roger Mckenzie	14,450 (10.79 %)
Hugo Pierre	10,382 (7.75 %)

Contacting UNISON during the pandemic:

The Covid 19 pandemic means that our UNISON office is closed to visitors. To contact UNISON, 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



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