

The need for a ballot...



...or not

UNISON is just one of the public sector unions that are still in dispute with the Government over pensions. We'd all like to see the matter resolved and that's why UNISON is involved in these important negotiations.

In the meantime, some members have been asking if we will have ballot members again if there is no agreement between the unions and government. The answer to this is, "No!" The last ballot, which saw action being taken throughout the UK on 30 November, is still valid. So, if talks with government break down, or if there is no agreement on pensions, further action can be taken without a ballot.

If there is agreement on some changes to the pension scheme, UNISON will ballot its members on the final proposals that are on the table to see if they are acceptable. So the future of the LGPS and how it is structured will be a decision for members to make and we'll ballot our members accordingly.

The negotiations will follow an agreed plan and timetable, and the documents relating to this will be posted on LGA's LGPS website and on UNISON's websites in the near future. The outcome of the talks with government should be known in early April and, until then, we'll keep everyone posted on progress.

24th February is...

Work Your Proper Hours Day

The average amount of **unpaid** overtime worked during the last year amounts to over £165Million.

It's a staggering amount, which employers never consider when they're doing their Cut Calculations.

£165Million equates to 900,000 full time equivalent jobs, which is the same as each person working over 7 hours overtime per week, amounting to a no-pay contribution, of £5.300pa.

On 24th February, Work Your Proper Hours

What's happening now?

Negotiations between government and unions have begun in earnest. From now until April, there will be weekly talks with the Local Government Association (LGA), and Chris Tansley, Chair of the Local Government Service Group Executive will be involved in the negotiations. There will also be a lay member group with representatives from each of the LGPS Service Groups to support and advise the negotiators.



The time table up until April may seem short but we believe that an appropriate amount of time has been set aside to allow us to consult with members about the progress being made.

There will be regular communication between members and pension contacts, which will include this newsletter, Service Group Executive committees, sector committees, the UNISON website, regional forums and committees.

It is obviously important that people are kept up-to-date on progress and we'll be encouraging all UNISON activists and pension contacts to talk to members, and non-members, about the negotiations and to continue to recruit new members into UNISON.

LGPS principles being followed by our negotiators

1. No contribution increases for all, or for the majority of LGPS members
2. Retention of Admitted Body Status. This is crucial since 25% of existing LGPS members are employed in Admitted Bodies and there will be more in future
3. The LGPS should retain its current value, and its value relative to other public sector schemes

Although linked to the State Pension Age, the LGA agrees with UNISON that the early retirement factors should be improved in the new scheme from 2014, and should reduce the impact of a later Normal Pension Age

What did the UNISON Ballot and the 30 November Action achieve?

1. They had major impacts on the outcome of talks with government on the 'big ticket' issues, and with the LGA on the principles and timetable for LGPS negotiations
2. They resulted in government coming forward with the 'Reference Scheme', which contained full protection for those within 10 years of retirement, plus a further 3.5 years tapered protection. This is in addition to the protection of a pension, based on final salary, at the date of retirement in existing schemes
3. They led to a consensus within the LGA that there should be no change in the LGPS until 2014
4. They led to a commitment by the government to the LGPS unions and employers, allowing for negotiations on a 'single solution' to savings, and to start the new scheme from 2014

Our ballot and subsequent actions laid the groundwork for an agreement with Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), that the £900 million 'savings' the Coalition wants to make will be suspended while negotiations take place. If this had not been agreed, we would have had changes to the contribution and accrual rate from 1 April 2012 and an imposed framework for the new scheme from 2014

Getting the views of members not in the LGPS

UNISON intends to carry out a short, on-line survey of members who are not part of the LGPS. We want to understand why they haven't joined and what would make them join.



Keeping membership of the pension scheme will be critical to in retaining the scheme and keeping members' contributions as low as possible in the long-term.

We will let you know when the survey is ready. Please encourage non-LGPS members to complete it.



The importance of organising

Although we have a positive framework for the negotiations, they are just beginning and we need to show the government and the LGA that we are still angry, and still in dispute.

We also need to send clear messages to government to say that we expect a positive outcome for our members. We will be asking sympathetic MP's and councillors to keep up the pressure in Parliament and within the LGA.

Politicians are look for mail

Councillors and MP's are telling us that they have received very few letters or emails on the LGPS during the dispute. To counteract this, we will be producing model letters, which will make our position clear to these politicians. We'd like you to help the branch organise letter-writing sessions and to get as many members as possible to make UNISON's position clear during the negotiations.

Carry on organising

We will also be making links between our pay and cuts campaigns and the LGPS. Less pay means less ability to pay for pensions, and fewer jobs means reduced costs for employers, so there is a clear link.

There is still a massive opportunity to organise and recruit members and stewards to UNISON. We need more and more members to show public sector employers that we have the industrial strength to resist attacks on pensions, pay, jobs and conditions. So carry on organising! Carry on recruiting!



Busting the Single Narrative

You must watch this film if you are concerned about the economic crisis and the cuts. It highlights the truth behind the financial crisis challenges "crisis and cuts" debate. I could say a lot more about it but you really must watch this presentation. Produced by Bristol Indymedia and friends, it's a must see.

<http://blip.tv/bristol-indymedia/watch-this-film-the-debt-crisis-as-just-another-story-challenging-the-need-for-cuts-4837246>



The Pensions Interview

Our roving reporter (RR) recently met up with a Coalition MP, who agreed to an interview as long as we kept his name under wraps.

RR: What's your main role as an MP?

MP: I provide public services to... er... the public.

RR: Is that something similar to all the other public sector workers?

MP: Yes. That's a good way to put it. We're all in this together you know.

RR: So, your pension scheme will be the same as the Local Government Pension Scheme? Yes?

MP: No! It's better. Much better. Much more flexible.

RR: Is that not a little unfair? After all, you said that you were just like any other public sector worker, delivering public sector services. It's pretty unfair if you have a different, and better, pension scheme.

MP: I didn't say that MP's pensions were fair. I said they were better.

RR: Does that kind of hypocrisy not bother you?

MP: Don't be silly. Of course it doesn't. Look, the pension schemes are both linked to a price index

RR: Yes, but yours is linked to the Retail Price Index while everyone else is linked to the lower Consumer Price Index

MP: What's the difference? An index is an index. They all look much the same to me. I just hope I'm linked to the right one; the highest one; the one that will allow MPs to be more hypocritical and still end up with more money than anyone else?

RR: Is that the objective?

MP: Of course it is. Rip everyone off before they get wise to us... but don't quote me on that.

A petition has been started, which needs 100,000 signatures to force a debate in Parliament about MP's pensions. We're asking all members to sign either one or both of these petitions, which can found at:

<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/14997>
<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/22456>

Privatisation has nothing to do with savings

UNISON remains deeply concerned about the privatisation of public services as part of plans to allegedly save money. It's something that could affect almost any one of us, in virtually any department.

Two Dorset hospital trusts tell us that plans are afoot to put their transactional finance services out to tender in a bid to save money. If that's not worrying enough, the contract could be awarded to a company outside the area, putting twenty two jobs at risk.

Which one do you believe?

A spokesman for the hospitals, the Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals (RBCH) and Poole Hospital, was quoted as saying that every effort will be made to support staff who are at risk and to redeploy them within the organisation. Since savings are meant to be reinvested into frontline patient services, it's difficult to see how staff in transactional finance might be redeployed to frontline patient services.

The spokesman also seems to contradict the Chief Executive of the RBCH, Tony Spotswood, who claimed that Dorset hospitals could save £6.4 million by sharing or privatising administrative teams, but admitted there would be job losses.

A warning from Rochdale

As these two hospital trusts, and Bournemouth Council, put jobs and services out to private sector tender, there's a warning from Rochdale Council, which found that it was being charged £2000 for £600 laptops after contracting out some of its services in a £180 million deal.

Rochdale then made £millions worth of savings by taking almost all of the services back in-house, proving that private sector deals do not equal savings and could well cost a fortune, not to mention the job losses and the impact on people's lives.

Bournemouth ignores the signs

Bournemouth has signed a £150 million deal with the exact same company (Mouchel) to outsource 350 staff plus departments like facilities management and IT. And a second deal is on the cards to do the same with around 100 staff from other departments.

Cllr Lambert, leader of Rochdale said that he was "amazed" at Bournemouth going for a similar deal to the one Rochdale had just pulled out of.



**Don't forget to write
Send your comments
and concerns to:**

**Letwin's Postbag
UNISON office
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Colliton Park
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DES is back in the headlines

We're not quite sure why DES was ever out of the headlines but, as far as some councils in the South West are concerned, it's a bit of a mess.

An internal council audit report has shown how financial reporting problems continue – more than two years after SAP went live in three public authorities in Somerset.

Excuses

IT projects can run into difficulties but pinpointing where the problems lie isn't always clear. We're usually told that there's really nothing to worry about, it's just some teething problems, it'll be all right on the night! Last year, a spokesperson for Somerset County Council told the Guardian Newspaper that it was simply, "Early teething problems."

A more comprehensive explanation appears in a report from Somerset County Council's Audit Committee. It shows the depth of the council's financial reporting difficulties. It all attempts to outline the benefits and the problems of SAP but, unfortunately, the benefits take up half a side of A4 whereas the problems run to almost three pages.

Beyond excellence???

The council originally outsourced its IT and finance to Southwest One (an outsource company led by IBM) to achieve standards 'beyond excellence'. The idea was that police and local authorities in the south west would pool their back-office services to save money.

As well as Somerset County Council, Avon and Somerset Police outsourced to Southwest One, as did Taunton Deane Borough Council.

We're making savings... aren't we?

The full deal is so complex the council seems unable to say how much the deal is actually costing or saving.

IBM/SW1 link:

<http://ukcampaign4change.com/2012/01/31/ibm-struggles-with-sap-two-years-on-a-shared-services-warning/>

Caption Competition Winner

You will remember our Caption Competition from the last newsletter, the one that was billed as "A fun and challenging festive competition with a fantastic prize. Remember now? Well, well we have a winner and she is (drum roll)... **Clair Honnor**

Clair's entry is shown below the picture of Berny Parkes.



"Now listen comrades. If we all join together we can win!
With your support, Everton will NEVER be relegated again - Power to the people"

Thanks to all who entered. Some runners up were:

"Keep on keeping on"

"Lyons to Dawson to Latchford - 'GOAL' Up the Toffees"

"Is there anybody there"

"Can you hear me mother"

"Testing - Liverpool 1 - Arsenal 0"



Living standards fall in the SW

The South West has suffered one of the most dramatic drops in living standards in the country, with an 8% fall since 2007, while the UK as a whole is 5.9%.

Families shoulder the burden

If things weren't bad enough, families with children face another drop in income of 4.2% in the next five years due to tax and benefit reforms, which started to kick in during January last year, and will continue to bite in the years to come.

According to a report by the Institute of Fiscal Studies on behalf of the Family and Parenting Institute, a couple with two children will be £1,250 a year worse off by 2015 as families "shoulder the burden of austerity" while families without children will see a loss of less than 1% or £215.

Non-working lone parents will lose more than 12% of their income or the equivalent of £2,000 a year.

So, once again, the figures show that those with the most needs will carry the can for those who managed to get us all into this mess.

If you have children under five, or more than two children, or you're a lone parent unfortunate enough to be unemployed, you will face the worst of the Coalition's austerity crackdown.

Gloomy outlook for Dorset

The average gross earnings in Dorset, not just for those with families, have plummeted by 5% and are set to drop lower still.

According to one commentator, "Two thirds of the economy is consumer driven and George Osborne must be the only person who doesn't get it. Squeezing wages, pay freezes and cutting jobs will not restart the economy. By using the IMF measures, his cuts will reduce real private consumption by 4 per cent and gross domestic product by 3.4 per cent over the next few years."

How many jobs did you say?

He said, "I doubt if the electorate had any notion that a change of government would lead to a loss of 54,000 public sector jobs in the South West."


UNISON
the public service union

join
online

www.unison.org.uk/membership/

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