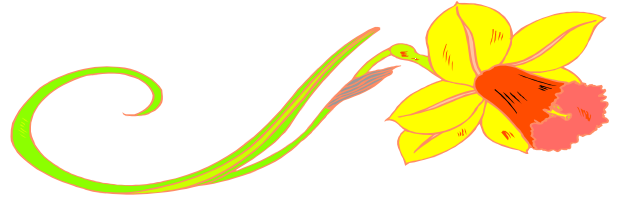


# UNITY



DEVON COUNTY BRANCH  
March 2008

## PROJECT STRATCOM – THE END..... ...OF THE BEGINNING



Some of you will be aware of an amorphous beast called 'The Entity', the 'child' of Project Stratcom. This is/was a project set up 'to see if there is a better way of securing the most vibrant, responsive and effective services to improve school improvement'. (Management's words, not ours).

It has been proposed that 'The Entity' (apparently another name could not be thought of) would take the form of one of four proposed business models to deliver certain services to schools.

It is not clear which business model would be used but what is clear is that there would be the scope for other parts of the Children & Young Peoples Services directorate could be 'bolted on' in months/years to come. This fits with the government's directive for local authorities to become commissioners rather than providers of services.

UNISON strongly opposes this, believing that public services should be maintained in the public sector and not be turned over to private companies for them to make a profit.

Since the New Year, a series of meetings with staff from the potentially affected areas was held to ascertain their views – and it is fair to say that the proposals were not met with any great enthusiasm. Quite the reverse in fact.

These views have been communicated to Councillors, some of whom were shocked at the proposals on offer and who were keen to highlight the grave concerns expressed by staff over the moral and ethical points raised.

To that end, Stratcom is no more. However, it is not going to go away. The authority is regrouping and will be looking in the months to come at different ways of implementing changes to the way services are provided and the way we work.

UNISON has been involved throughout this initial process and will continue to take a stance of keeping public services public whilst protecting in full the terms and conditions of its members. Rest assured that as soon as we know something, we will let you know.

## WE DON'T NORMALLY BUT.....

We all know there is a lot going on – no matter which directorate you work in. It's never ending. As soon as one thing is implemented it feels like management wants to change something else.

Of course, this involves a seemingly endless rounds of meetings, briefings, and such like. Let's take Adult Community Services as an example.

In its wisdom, the authority is externalising its residential care homes and domiciliary care business. SHAW Healthcare is the preferred provider for the residential homes.

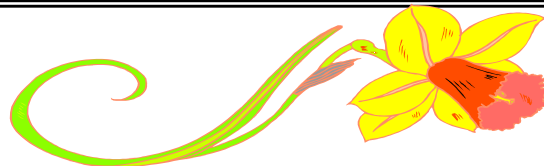
Recently, SHAW has visited all 26 of the homes over a two week period, explaining their plans to the staff. All recognised trades unions were invited.

Guess what ?

Only UNISON visited **every single home**, ensuring that our members heard the real facts and so being in a position to fully support our members.

So, it really is quite simple. If you want the best service, the best support, the best advice and the chance to meet a real person face to face, there is no option.

**It has to be UNISON every time.**



## YOUR HEALTH YOUR SAFETY



You are free  
to do what  
we tell you

In 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain, Health and Safety seems to be a watch word for all the things we can no longer do – egg and spoon races, pancake races, playing conkers to name but three.

Obviously, some of these 'rules' have been taken, in this editor's opinion, far too literally – but in the workplace it is an entirely different matter.

If you have an accident at work then these often derided rules and regulations can help you out.

Devon County Council has an excellent system in place where **every** workplace can have an elected union Health and Safety representative.

These reps are there to check the workplace, with management, ensuring that it meets legal health and safety requirements, picking up on any defects that need to be rectified. Reps are there to give a trained view on safety standards and, where necessary, to enforce the rules.

They are not paid by the employer for this role and are not expected to do any work towards putting right any potential problem.

UNISON provides first class Health and Safety training. The ten day course that UNISON pays for to train its reps is varied and interesting - a course is currently running and the feedback from members on it has been excellent.

If you cannot attend for the whole ten weeks in one go (one day a week) there is the option to train in modules of several days.

Our employer usually allows time off for this training as they realise how valuable it is, and recognise its benefits both for staff and the organisation as a whole.

Trained reps are issued with books for reference; no – one is expected to become an expert overnight. UNISON needs more Health and Safety reps – ideally, one in every workplace.

To find out more, call the Branch Office on 01392 382530 or visit the website – [www.devoncountyunison.org.uk](http://www.devoncountyunison.org.uk).



## **SLIPS, TRIPS & FALLS—YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED**

***Slips and trips are the most common causes of workplace injuries, with almost 11,000 major accidents each year. This month the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) launched a new initiative aimed at reducing the number of slips, trips and falls in the workplace.***

***Q These types of accidents are usually trivial, so what's the big deal?***

***A The potential for slips and trips in the workplace should not be under-estimated. Circumstances giving rise to such incidents are varied and, therefore, the precautions needed to prevent them are wide-ranging. The HSE estimates that 38% of all major Injuries arise through slipping and tripping, at a cost of £512m a year. It is now launching its 'Shattered Lives' campaign to highlight the risk and hopefully minimise the occurrence of such accidents. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/shatteredlives/index.htm> It is likely that the HSE will be inspecting the working practices of more employers as a result***

**Q What can give rise to slips and trips in the workplace?**

*A There are innumerable potential causes. Employees can trip over obstacles left by others on walkways, slip in spillages of things like food or oil, or have an accident because the flooring or stairways are poorly constructed or maintained. Employers should ensure that stairways are fitted with high-visibility, non-slip edging and handrails, and make sure there is sufficient lighting. Also, employee footwear may not be appropriate for the work environment, and the employer has a duty to provide suitable clothing if there are any hazardous risks of slipping at work. While cleaning slippery areas can remove potential hazards, care must be taken to ensure that wet floors are not accessible at all, and that any polishing does not leave a slippery film.*

**Q Where should an employer start when considering the potential for slips and trips in the workplace?**

*A The cornerstone for ensuring the safety of their premises is a risk assessment. The purpose of this is to prevent or, if that is not possible, to adequately control any potential hazards. For each possible risk, the risk assessment should, as a starting point, highlight how these risks can be avoided or at least controlled as far as possible.*

**Q Even with the most stringent systems, slips will occur, isn't it unfair to make the employer liable?**

*A There is some comfort for employers here, depending on the nature and frequency of the hazard. In general, all floors must be kept free from obstructions and substances that may cause a person to slip, trip or fall, so far as is reasonably practicable. Therefore, if reasonable measures such as cleaning, matting and cordoning off have been taken, then an employer may escape liability.*

**Q What actions must an employer take to minimise such risks and defend claims?**

*A In extreme cases, floors or stairways may need to be replaced or redesigned, but employers should seek the HSE's advice before doing so. Generally, it will be enough to display documented systems of, for example: staff training regular inspections, cleaning and maintenance of machinery and premises and accident reporting and investigation. Workers must be encouraged to report all accidents immediately to ensure useful investigations can be carried out.*

**Q Are employers liable if obstacles are left dangerously by their employees and someone falls over them?**

*A Generally, yes. That is why the culture at work in relation to health and safety is pivotal, and employers really need to educate staff on general 'housekeeping'. This will encourage greater compliance and can be useful if an individual injured in a fall seeks to claim in respect of a tripping hazard that they should have cleared themselves. It is unrealistic to expect to prevent accidents altogether, but preventing or controlling the foreseeable hazards in the workplace will help to create a safer working environment and protect employers from potential liability, while helping them to defend themselves against expensive compensation claims.*

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