

# UNITY

Branch Members' Magazine: Spring/Summer 2015

**It's thumbs  
down to poverty  
pay as UNISON  
launches its  
2016/17 pay  
claim for local  
government  
workers** PAGE 5

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## Message from Branch Secretary

Welcome to this issue of UNITY. Well, what an eventful few months it's been since I last put pen to paper. And not in a good way either! Unfortunately, last month's general election saw the Conservatives get into power again for another five years. I not only object to the Tories running this country, I also object to the manner in which they 'won'. Did you know that

just 24.4% of the electorate voted for them BUT (and here's my 'One rule for you, another rule for us' rant) the two-faced Tories want to bring in new laws meaning that union members will be banned from going on strike unless 40% of ALL members - not just those who turn up to vote - approve the action. I'm no mathematician but I don't think the Tories would have got into power if the same rules that they are trying to force on us applied to them! (Let's just hope Cameron's 12 seat majority means those rebellious back benchers give him hell!)

Moving on, UNISON has launched its pay claim for 2016/17 to scrap NJC pay points below the Living Wage

and for a flat rate increase of £1 per hour on all other pay points. UNISON will now meet with the Employers to negotiate, so keep an eye on the Branch website for updates.

Speaking of our website, school support staff can now find top tips on dealing with pupils' challenging behavior via a new UNISON guide called *Managing difficult behaviour in schools*. I know we've got thousands of school support staff members across Devon so hopefully you'll find this guide helpful.

Staying with schools, UNISON has launched its school uniform grant, so don't forget to apply for the one-off payment of up to £120 if you're on

a low income.

Lastly, Branch stewards have recently been busy supporting members who have been made redundant from Exeter Pluss and Careers South West. Redundancy brings many pressures so I wanted to flag up UNISON's welfare charity set up to help members and their families in financial difficulties. It includes a debt advice service provided in partnership with Payplan, credit unions and wellbeing breaks. Of course, this won't make up for the fact you've lost your job, but it might help you make ends meet in the short-term whilst looking for new employment.

Yours in solidarity  
Steve Ryles

## UNISON flies flag at festival



UNISON was flying the flag at Exeter's Respect Festival on 6-7 June.

Darienne Flemington, the Branch's Adult Convenor, said: "We're proud to support Exeter's Respect Festival which celebrates diversity and equality. As the South West's largest UNISON branch, having a stall at such a fantastic event provides us with a great opportunity to meet members and promote the benefits of joining the union to non-members."

UNISON is committed to achieving equality for all

and it actively campaigns for equality in the workplace and in the wider world.

One of the ways UNISON promotes equality is through self-organisation. The Branch has an active Black Members' self-organisation group which meets regularly and provides an opportunity to discuss issues affecting Black Members in a supportive and caring environment. To contact the Branch's Black Members Group, call: Asif Mohammed on 07790926285.

## Members gather at AGM



A big thank you to all our stewards and members who came to the Branch AGM back in March at County Hall, Exeter. It was great to see old friends and some new faces!

## Direct debit preferred for UNISON subs

UNISON is encouraging members to pay their subscription by direct debit rather than via payroll.

If you are an existing UNISON member, please contact the Branch on Tel: 01392 382530 if you'd like to change to direct

debit. However, if you would prefer to pay via payroll, this remains an option.

If you're about to join UNISON please consider selecting payment by direct debit when filling out the UNISON membership form.

# County Hall Chronicle



**Andy Bowman, Lead Steward at Devon County Council and Branch Chair, updates us on what's happening at County Hall.**

As I sit on the train to work reading about further cuts to public services the question of balance comes to mind. In the same paper the latest Rich List is published and lists of non-dom leaders of industry and commerce.

The famous trickle down concept where the wealthy are protected and the rest of us pick up the crumbs appears to have failed. Cuts in public services continue with privatisations and

mutualism. One hiding the element of profits and the other hiding future cuts.

In the documentation accompanying the advert for a chairman of the proposed library mutual for Devon it is stated that the authority cannot afford to run the existing library service.

Staff morale continues to fall with concerns over office moves and car parking distracting attention away from more important issues such

as changes to terms and conditions, including further savings on redundancy terms.

Elsewhere you will read about 26% cuts to Further Education which will affect the ability of people to retrain.

One wonders where it will all end with the forthcoming emergency budget predicted to make further cuts.

At least the weather appears to be improving!



**5 September 2015**  
Totnes Pride Festival

**6-7 October 2015**  
Retired Members' conference  
Brighton Centre

**14-15 June 2015**  
Local government conference  
Glasgow

**24-26 October 2015**  
Disabled Members' conference  
Manchester Central

**16-19 June 2015**  
National Delegate conference  
Glasgow

**13-15 November 2015**  
LGBT Brighton Centre

## Octopus Draw



Play Octopus, UNISON Welfare's monthly prize draw.

- £1000 first prize
- £500 second prize
- £250 third prize
- And 50 prizes of £25 each

www.unison.org.uk/octopus/

## Branch's new double act champion members' health and safety



Photo: Rachel Price

Meet John Bryant, the Branch's new Health and Safety Officer, based at County Hall, Exeter. He'll be job sharing with Nik Brock, our Health and Safety Officer at Crownhill Fire Station, Plymouth. Together they'll be championing health and safety across Devon.

### What's your background?

I'm a qualified secondary school teacher and was also in adult education for many years. I currently work at Devon County Council as a Children's Centre Advisor for Exeter, East, Mid and North Devon.

### What made you join a union?

I joined in the mid 80s whilst teaching adult education classes in Sheffield during the miners' strikes. How the miners were portrayed on TV was so different to what was happening on the ground. It was unjust and I felt strings were being pulled up high. That was the moment I had my calling to get involved in a union.

### What's your interest in health and safety?

Good health and safety policies which are regularly checked and updated can make such a huge difference to an employees' working environment and an organisation's productivity. I first became involved in the early 90s just after Labour came into power. Back then there were particularly high levels of stress among public sector workers due to the Tory cuts (so not much change there!).

### What's involved in your role?

Health and safety is not just about accidents. It also includes stress, violence and injuries at work. My role is to provide guidance and support to our health and safety

reps so workplaces are as safe as possible for our members.

### What do you hope to achieve?

To raise the profile and importance of health and safety in the workplace - amongst both employer and employee. I'm looking forward to job sharing with Nik Brock - together we'll do our best to champion health and safety in Devon's workplaces.



Nik Brock, Branch H&S Officer

## UNISON launches 2016/17 NJC Pay Claim

UNISON launches local government pay claim to scrap NJC pay points below the Living Wage and calls for a flat rate increase of £1 per hour on all other pay points.



**It's thumbs down to poverty pay as UNISON launches its pay claim for local government workers.**

UNISON, GMB and Unite have agreed the following NJC Trade Union Side pay claim for 2016/17. It includes:

- Deletion of NJC and all local pay points which fall below the level of the UK Living Wage (and deletion of GLPC pay points below London Living Wage) and a flat rate increase of £1 per hour on all other pay points
  - Retention and protection of Green Book Part 2 terms and conditions
  - Fair treatment for school support staff through a joint review of term time working
- The agreed claim is based on UNISON's main proposals, on which the union consulted members. The UNISON NJC Committee

is also revisiting the pay claim for 2015/16 and the committee will meet on 8 July to discuss the next steps.

### What happens now?

UNISON will meet with the Employers to negotiate on the union pay claim for 2016/17. So, keep an eye on the Branch website for updates as the negotiations unfold. In the meantime, the Branch would like to know what members think about the 2016/17 pay claim. You can email us your thoughts at [branchoffice@devoncountyunison.org.uk](mailto:branchoffice@devoncountyunison.org.uk) or post a message on our Facebook page or via Twitter to @UNISONdcbranch

## Top tips for tackling difficult behaviour in schools

Support staff working in Devon schools can now find helpful advice on dealing with pupils' challenging behaviour in a new guide commissioned by UNISON called *Managing difficult behaviour in schools*.

Author of the guide, Tom Bennett has visited over 100 schools to coach and mentor staff in basic behaviour techniques. He's also the

behaviour advisor for the TES, and a teacher himself.

His guide, which is aimed specifically at support staff, includes sections on diffusing difficult situations, improving communication style, talking to parents, dealing with accusations made by children about each other and Mr Bennett's top 10 behaviour tips, chief amongst them being

the need to understand a school's behaviour policy.

UNISON Head of Education, Jon Richards, said: "Managing behaviour is one of the main areas that school support staff raise as a major cause for concern. They often find themselves overlooked in behaviour management strategies and training programmes."

### Tom's top 10



1. Understand the school behaviour policy
2. Calmly explain what you need students to do, using non-aggressive, neutral language and tone
3. Repeat the instruction more firmly, but still calmly
4. Repeat the instruction once more, reminding them that they are at risk of breaking a school rule, which will have consequences for them
5. Summon help/ record the incident/ escalate
6. Take away the audience
7. Know their names
8. Follow up
9. Don't walk alone
10. Don't freak out



Find Tom's guide at: <https://www.unison.org.uk/upload/sharepoint/On%20line%20Catalogue/22970.pdf>

# Are cuts affecting your health and safety at work?



**From poorly lit rooms which could damage eyesight to air contamination which could lead to respiratory tract infections, John Bryant, the Branch’s new Health and Safety Officer, looks at how the Government’s austerity cuts are affecting members’ health and safety at work.**

The Tory Government’s austerity agenda has forced Devon County Council to slash its budget. And whilst it may not be immediately obvious, health and safety hazards that would have previously been picked up, are slipping under the radar as pressure mounts to balance the books.

**“Even in offices...hidden dangers are lurking.”**

Even in offices, which let’s face it, should not be the most hazardous places to work, hidden dangers are lurking. For example, overcrowding has led to problems with air quality resulting in many members suffering

from dry eyes and respiratory tract infections. In one Council building alone there were five cases of pneumonia in just one year!

That’s why the Branch is pushing for the Council to set up a safety committee made up of management and union health and safety officers. The committee would be responsible for monitoring sickness absences across all buildings; so if a number of people working in a building were off sick with similar ailments the committee could investigate to see if there was anything in the running of the building itself that could have contributed to the employees’ ill health and, if so, look at what could be done to rectify it.

You may ask why this isn’t

being done already. The main problem is that the upkeep and safe running of the Council’s buildings is currently contracted out to different management companies - presumably in an attempt to save money - so no one person has a complete overview of what’s going on.

**“Inspections revealed a number of fairly serious health and safety breaches.”**

As a result, many dangers go unseen as evidenced by the Branch’s recent inspections at County Hall, Estuary House and Great Moor House which revealed a number of fairly serious health and

safety breaches including: flammable materials blocking stairwells; a lack of emergency lighting in corridors; air contamination and fire exit signs pointing in the direction of fire exits that could not be open due to on-going building works.

With the Tories recent election victory, and its pledge to continue its regime of cuts, the worry is that health and safety will slip even further under the radar as employers find themselves under increasing financial pressure to balance the books. But members can rest assured that the Branch will continue to work with employers to ensure our members’ health and safety is protected.

# Top 10 H&S tips



**Nik Brock, Branch Health and Safety officer, based at Crownhill Fire Station, Plymouth gives us his top 10 tips on keeping safe and healthy at work.**

1. Look after each other, health and safety is a team game
2. Think before you start work – know the risks
3. Act safely – follow safe working procedures
4. Keep your workplace clear and tidy
5. Wear correct safety clothing at all times
6. Report ALL accidents and near misses
7. Only undertake work for which you are trained and competent
8. Use the correct equipment for the task
9. Stop any work that becomes unsafe
10. Complacency kills – don’t cut corners!

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## UNISON school uniform grant



UNISON has once again launched its school uniform grant to help members on low incomes deal with the cost of school uniforms by way of a one-off payment of up to £120. Members wishing to apply for the grant should visit the home page of the Branch's website. Applications must be received by 10 July 2015.

## Branch members speak out at conference



Branch members took to the platform at this year's national UNISON Women's, Black Members' and Community conferences, discussing key issues and voting on union policy. Read on for a conference round up.

This year's Women's, Community and Black Members' national conferences saw UNISON members speak out on pay, pensions, equality, zero hours and cuts to public services.

Asif Mohammad, Shayeda Choudhury, Musarat Asif and Mrs Choudhury attended the Black Member's conference in Brighton where Asif spoke out on the dangers of UKIP and the EDL.



Southport was the venue for UNISON's largest ever Women's conference. Seven hundred and twenty women attended including Branch members Nikki Hill,

Musarat Asif and Welfare Officer, Pauline Roberts.

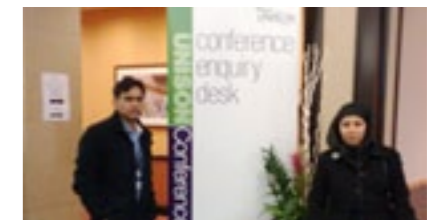


A total of 14 members from the South West gave a speech including the Branch's very own Musarat Asif who spoke about increasing black women's participation in UNISON's women's self-organised groups.

Ajmal and Kharun Shah travelled up to Bradford to attend UNISON's Community Conference on behalf of the Branch.

Kharun said: "Neither of us had been to a UNISON conference before so we both attended the

first time delegate's workshop. It gave us a chance to experience how it is to be on the platform making a speech and boosted our confidence."



### Get Involved!

UNISON's national conferences are a great opportunity for members to discuss issues and vote on union policy. And did you know that UNISON pays for travel and accommodation? So, if you're interested in becoming more active in UNISON, why not attend a conference next year? Call the Branch on 01392 382530 or email [branchoffice@devoncountyunison.co.uk](mailto:branchoffice@devoncountyunison.co.uk)

## Devon libraries become 'mutual'

Devon's library service is to be turned into an independent organisation in a bid to save £1.5m over the next two years. Councillors have approved plans for a community-owned "mutual" that would be commissioned by Devon County Council to run the service on its behalf.

Andy Bowman, Branch Chair, said: "Like many local library campaign groups, we have a number of concerns over the libraries being run by a 'mutual' organisation. For example, the Council could cut back the amount of money

it pays for the 'mutual' library service, forcing it to cutback on the number of libraries and staff.

"The Council is abdicating its responsibility to this new body and distancing itself from the bottom line decisions as to who has jobs and what libraries stay.

"As ever, we'll be closely watching how things progress to ensure our members' best interests are protected and any 'hidden' cuts further down the line don't translate into library closures or job losses for our members."



Photo: Rachel Price

## NEWS IN BRIEF...

### Tories plan to tighten strike laws

The Tories are proposing to bring in new laws meaning that union members will be banned from going on strike unless 40% of ALL members - not just those who turn up to vote - approve of the action.

This is typical double standards from the Tories who got voted in by just 24.4% of the electorate back in May.

Currently the law on strike action demand that backing is given by a majority of those who vote. But the proposed new laws - which would apply to strikes affecting essential public services such as health, education, fire and transport - would require the backing of 40% of ALL eligible union members. This means that certain public service strikes will be illegal even if the majority of union voters back them.

### New Care Certificate

From April 2015, all new staff starting work in healthcare support roles will be expected to gain the Care Certificate before they can work without direct supervision.

UNISON has continuing concerns about how robust the Care Certificate will be. But it does believe the certificate presents opportunities for UNISON reps to promote the value of high-quality induction training.

To help, UNISON has published a comprehensive guide for reps setting out good practice for working in partnership with employers. To read the guide, visit: <https://www.unison.org.uk/upload/sharepoint/On%20line%20Catalogue/23121.pdf>

### FE crisis as Tories cut budget by 24%

Tory plans to cut the adult further education (FE) budget by 24% could spell job losses for members at Learn Devon which provides adult and community learning courses on behalf of Devon County Council. Andy Bowman, Chair of UNISON Devon County Branch, said: "It's a travesty that further education is facing such savage cuts. These proposals will not only affect our members who stand to lose their jobs but also adults looking to retrain, reskill or simply get a foothold back into education. Once again, the Tories are dismantling another valuable public service."

### Union stewards boost job quality

Having a union representative in the workplace can reduce employees' stress levels, improve their work-life balance, and increase their well-being overall, according to academic research.

Professor Kim Hoque, of Warwick Business School, joint author of the report, said: "Having a union representative on site seems to help improve workers job quality; this could be an important finding for companies looking to improve productivity as well as conditions for workers. Job quality has been closely linked to job satisfaction, which in turn has been identified as an important element of higher productivity. It also leads to fewer workers leaving and lower absenteeism, both of which have an economic benefit to the organisation," Hoque added that previous research had shown that a higher level of collective voice inside an organisation had led to higher levels of job quality, and as such, any future moves to weaken the rights of union representatives inside an organisation could be detrimental.

### Shared parental leave: help is at hand

Parents of children born or adopted on or after 5 April now have a right to shared parental leave.

Under the new regulations, parents who have met certain eligibility qualifications mainly relating to length of service, have a right to share up to 52 weeks leave – and up to 37 weeks shared parental pay, paid at the same rate as statutory maternity pay.

If you are thinking of using the new right to shared parental leave, check out the dedicated pages on UNISON's website <http://www.unison.org.uk/get-help/employment-rights/sharing-parental-leave/overview/>

### UNISON reports on water poverty

Radical action from water companies and the government is needed to lift five million households in England and Wales out of water poverty, according to a new report published by UNISON.

The report – produced for UNISON by the New Policy Institute – looks at the help that the water industry gives its low income customers, the wages it pays its staff, and its financial set up for tax purposes to assess the industry's social responsibility credentials.

The research finds that almost a quarter (22 per cent) of households in England and Wales struggle to pay their water bills.

The report reveals that customers face a postcode lottery with their average annual bills, which vary from £330 per year for Severn Trent to £482 for South West.

Read the report at: <https://www.unison.org.uk/upload/sharepoint/Toweb/Water%20industry%20NPI%20final%2006%2004%2015.pdf>

### Branch calls for long term solution to save school lollipop attendants



Funding for school crossing patrols has been secured this financial year after Devon County Council found an extra £100,000 through their budget consultation process.

The Council made the announcement back in February after hundreds of people had signed a petition against axing Devon's lollipop men and women.

Word from the Council is

that it is keen for crossing patrols to continue but it no longer has the funds to support all of the existing patrols so it needs to work in partnership with schools and communities about how it might fund and support the service in future years.

The Branch had earlier called on the Council to urgently clarify its position.

Steve Ryles, Branch Secretary, said: "Although it's great that the Council has found the money to keep Devon's lollipop attendants for another year, a long term solution needs to be found which will ensure that our much-valued lollipop attendants are a permanent fixture and children's safety is not compromised."

### Talks continue over redundancy pay cut



The Branch is still in talks with Devon County Council regarding its proposal to cut redundancy pay by 25%.

The union is looking at the detailed figures with management to establish the reasoning behind the proposal.

Andy Bowman, Branch Chair, said: "We are doing our utmost to ensure members get the redundancy package they are entitled to after years of loyal public service."

Keep an eye on the Branch website for updates.



Normally this causes an eruption from Mrs Hughes who takes great interest in affairs of the day – this time all I got was a whispered 'Thanks'.

So a month or so on, where are we?

Up to our collective necks in it I reckon. Five years of cuts, cuts and more cuts, the public sector decimated, the NHS being sold off in bite size chunks, benefits slashed and social housing sold off. Whilst all the time the rich get richer the poor .....what do you think ?

In twenty or thirty years' time, if any blue blooded idiot tries to get a monument/statue/pointless bit

**10pm May 7th 2015. The day that my radio was hurled across the kitchen as Dimbleby's dulcet tones informed the nation that EXIT polls were stating that Cameron had won. Couldn't listen any longer. I went into the front room to be confronted with a slack jawed Mrs Hughes staring at the TV screen, in obvious shock, as the true horror of the day's events were relayed to the great British public. I turned over to another channel.**

of modern sculpture dedicated to David Camoron , don't bother. His legacy will be clearly seen in every high street in England (by that time Scotland will have long gone with Wales and Northern Ireland not far behind) – Food banks.

Quite possibly Clothes Banks by then as well – in fact, why not go the whole hog and bring back the Workhouses?

With a bit of luck it will all unravel before five years is up – the Tories do have a very good track record of imploding and disappearing up their own well fed backsides.

However we cannot rely on that, we can't just hope that things will only get better (!), we can't sit back

and let ourselves be kicked again and again.

Fight back. Complain at every opportunity to your local councillor.

Write letters of complaint about any issue you care to name on a weekly basis to your MP. Join a trade union, attend local rallies against cuts to services, write letters to your local rag.

Please just do something, anything, anything so we don't sleepwalk into another disaster like we did on May 7th 2015.

*The views expressed in this column are not necessarily the views of the Branch - but they are very close.*

# Join UNISON – your friend at work

DCSS15

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First name	<input type="text"/>	Other initial(s)	<input type="text"/>
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Surname/Family name	<input type="text"/>	Date of birth	<input type="text"/>
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Home address	<input type="text"/>
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Postcode	<input type="text"/>
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National insurance number (from your payslip)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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How would you describe your ethnic origin?

<input type="checkbox"/> Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Black UK
<input type="checkbox"/> Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/> Black	<input type="checkbox"/> Black Other
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Your job title/occupation

Department/section

Workplace name and address

Postcode

Payroll number (from your payslip)

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Weekly pay	Annual pay	YOUR SUBSCRIPTION—WHAT YOU PAY per week	per month	Band
Up to £38.47	Up to £2,000	£0.30	£1.30	A
£38.48–£96.16	£2,001–£5,000	£0.81	£3.50	B
£96.17–£153.84	£5,001–£8,000	£1.22	£5.30	C
£153.85–£211.53	£8,001–£11,000	£1.52	£6.60	D
£211.54–£269.23	£11,001–£14,000	£1.81	£7.85	E
£269.24–£326.92	£14,001–£17,000	£2.24	£9.70	F
£326.93–£384.61	£17,001–£20,000	£2.65	£11.50	G
£384.62–£480.76	£20,001–£25,000	£3.23	£14.00	H
£480.77–£576.92	£25,001–£30,000	£3.98	£17.25	I
£576.93–£673.08	£30,001–£35,000	£4.68	£20.30	J
£673.08+	over £35,000	£5.19	£22.50	K

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