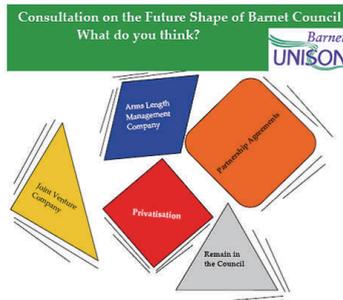


*Barnet* **UNISON**

*Voice*

September 2009



# Pensions, Pay, TUPE PLUS

and lots more!

## A call to Alms or Arms?

UNISON have announced that after joint trade union consultation the members of all the main trade unions have voted to accept 1% National pay offer.

It is clear from the media circus that politicians across the mainstream parties are queuing up to show how they would cut public sector spending if they were elected to run the government.

The vote to accept 1% is a critical moment for public sector trade unions. They need to quickly develop a coordinated, joined up strategy to defend public services in a way that members can feel confident that their leaders really means business.

Our members and members of other trade unions need strong leadership, it needs to go beyond rhetoric and sound bites. Members need to be inspired, they need to believe that they can make a difference.

White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel said to President Obama to 'never let a good crisis go to waste.'

I believe the same applies to the trade union movement. We need change. The change has got to come from our members and our stewards, they are the key to the future of trade unionism in the next decade.

The government is committed to breaking up public services. Easy Council is not a Barnet only concept, it is government policy to encourage the move from a provider to a commissioner. This change will gather momentum if we don't stand up and fight. There are those who prefer appeasement on the basis that people are not prepared to fight.

I point to positive reaction of the British public to the attacks on our NHS from right wing fun-



**Our Council is Not for Sale**

damentalists in the USA (what planet are these people from?)

Next week sees the start of TUC conference. In my day it marked the beginning of televised politics, the mainstream party conferences would follow and we would watch and listen to the speeches. Nowadays it hardly raises a mention in the media.

This non engagement is a **'wake up call'** for the trade union movement. Potential members of trade unions need to be convinced of the need to belong to a trade union. The hard won terms & conditions that people take for granted were not handed over willingly. They were hard fought, there were casualties. We need to show these potential members why we need to fight and why they need to be part of the fight.

I would ask members to note **Motion 49** entitled **'Defending public services'** going to TUC conference from the PCS which I am hoping will be adopted. It opens with *"Congress re-*

*jects the notion that the solution to the economic crisis, and the resulting national debt, must be found in public spending cuts which damage services, freeze public sector pay, increase privatisation, or cut pensions and benefits. Congress rejects the divisions that are being encouraged by the media and politicians between private and public sector workers in order to justify cuts....."*

Rank & file members understand unity, they understand the need to stand together, they have an expectation of the leaders of the public sector unions to work together for the survival of public services and their members.

**We don't want members put on the dole, we don't need ALMS we don't want benefits**

We need jobs, wages, we need dignity and self respect in the work place.

## DON'T FORGET TUPE PLUS!

Future Shape seems to be heading towards bundling or packaging of services with a view to seeing how they can more efficiently perform to a higher standard. We are told this does not automatically mean privatisation, but we have no commitments to us on this score. Members are asking:

**"Why should staff commit to a process which does not commit to us?"**

Last year the Trade Union reports argued that the Council was gearing up for mass privatisation, furthermore the Unions were accused of winding staff up with fears of privatisation. However our fears were realised when the report to Cabinet on 3 December 2009 was published.



The Trade Unions presented our Employment Charter in October 2008 to our Employers. We said that if the Council adopted TUPE Plus staff would be more reassured about the possibility of working for another employer. Amongst other things this would mean :

- A guarantee that TUPE would last the life of the contract
  - new starters would be on the same/ very similar terms and conditions and the company will not operate a two-tier workforce.
  - Annual local Government pay awards would be implemented in full unless otherwise agreed with the recognised trade unions.
- All TUPE transferred employees and new staff must have the option of remaining

within the Local Government Pension Scheme.

- The contractor gives an undertaking not to offshore work and not to transfer jobs out of the Borough.

We know staff are worried, they have asked us why our Employers have not given an a commitment to TUPE Plus.

## Local Government Pension Scheme under attack

### The LGPS is under attack

Public Service Pension Schemes are under almost daily attack in the press. Statements like pensions 'Black Hole', pension apartheid, unsustainable perk, crop up with familiar regularity. Both Conservatives and Liberal Democrats want major reform and some politicians have called for the immediate closure of the schemes to new entrants and replacing them with cheap money purchase schemes for future service. Despite the virulence and regularity of the attacks there does not appear to be a consensus let alone a firm policy from either of those parties. So the next year is crucial if we are going to refute the attacks and stop the politics of envy firming up policy of poverty for all.

### Myth Busting

The LGPS is not a 'perk' it allows nearly 2 million workers to save for their retirement.

The LGPS is affordable. Funds can pay back any deficits over more than 20 years. The Trade Unions and employers are developing a fair basis for monitoring future changes in costs

Other workers do not subsidise it. Over 50% of the cost is met by employee contributions and investment returns. Only around 5.4% of the total income generated for Local Government including Council Tax goes to the Pension Scheme.

Cheap money purchase schemes that sadly are being introduced in the private sector are not

the answer. All the risk is with the member and there is no guarantee that benefits will even be above the poverty line when they retire.

### Fighting Envy

The LGPS Normal Retirement Age for most is now 65. The average LGPS pension in payment is still only around £4000pa and the average for women is around £2000pa.

Worsen future benefits and many will end up on the State. Worsening pensions so people no longer save for their retirement is the real time bomb for the Taxpayer. The minimum income for the means tested Pensions Credit is now around £130 per week.

It is not that public Service Pension Schemes are getting more generous it is private sector schemes getting worse. Employers who switch to inadequate money purchase schemes are throwing many workers on to the State.

Doing the same for the LGPS would mean that a high proportion of the nearly 2 million workforce would stop saving and become reliant on the taxpayer.

The real pension 'apartheid' is not between public and private sector workers, but between the fat cats in the board room who secure outrageously generous pensions for themselves with low retirement ages, and their workforce who at the same time are suffering cuts to their future pensions.

# “2P or not 2P”

## Pensions & Pay

More headlines in the newspapers and air-waves about our supposed “gold plated” public sector pensions. Over the next 8 months we are going to see an increase in scaremongering from the media about our pension scheme.

The latest UNISON report states “The average LGPS pension in payment is still only around £4000pa and the average for women is around £2000pa that’s hardly gold plated!

If members [not just in Barnet] working in public services want to keep their pensions then they need to start defending them now. The government are making plans now, hence the press releases which will increase the nearer we get to the general election.

In the past the union has provided pro forma letters for members to send to their MPs, if members want to stop this attack on your future then you need to approach you MP now. If you can’t make it to one of your MP’s surgeries, email your MP with your letter. Ask the question:

### **“Will they vote to dismantle our pension scheme?”**

Don’t be fooled by the alternatives, they are not acceptable and if implemented will not be sustainable for the future. Younger workers will see no benefit in joining such a scheme.

You might feel you are living quite comfortably now, but if the pension scheme is dismantled it will push millions of families into poverty and increase the burden on the state. How crazy is that?

Unfortunately, until we can have a grown up conversation about pensions we are going to have to deal with ‘headline grabbing sound bites’ from politicians seeking votes at the next general election.

### **What you can do**

- Contact your MP
- Become a UNISON rep in your team
- Start discussing the pension scheme in your work place

## Pay

Our response to this years pay ballot has not been great, but having a ballot in the middle of the summer doesn’t help. There are two ways pay can improve, nationally and locally for example in a restructure your grade may increase.

National Pay ballot is looking at 1%, according to UNISON report most councils budgeted between 2- 2.5%. Our council budgeted for 2%. Amongst the London Councils there appears to be strong feeling that there should have been no increase except for the lower grades (no details). There were reports that London councils were considering pulling out of the national pay talks machinery.

*“Merrick Cockell (Con), chairman of London Councils, said the decision, worth 1% to most staff and 1.25% to the lowest paid, was likely to prompt the capital bloc to consider joining the 40 or so other authorities which set their own pay and conditions.”*

Whilst this is unlikely to happen this time, it is something for ALL members to note as there is clear government policy for more local negotiation thus undermining national bargaining.

### Local Pay

The average council worker goes through a restructure almost on an annual basis in which case there is an opportunity for an increase in pay. The LBB procedure for all restructures is covered in Managing Change. Staff should be consulted at the beginning of the process and given opportunity to comment on the content of role profiles. It is only after agreement on the RP's will HR grade the posts, afterwards the Trade Unions grade the posts and compare with the HR scores. It is becoming increasingly the case that the trade unions grading scores are different to HR scores. In such cases we sometimes have to carry out a consultative ballot of the members concern to see how strongly members feel about what could be an increase of one or two increments. In these harsh economic times who can afford to lose a possible small increase in pay?

### Accept it or you will be privatised!

This is not something new, but it is something that all public sector workers will have heard before but I predict something similar will be heard across public sector workplaces across the UK. I believe that the 2010 version may read **"accept it & be privatised"**, despite the fact that it is generally accepted privatisation does not save the public purse!

### What about Barnet?

Despite media headlines which were simply quite mad, the future is still very uncertain, the sooner we have something concrete for staff to consult on the better.

I expect something much more transparent than in Phase 2 which saw a chosen few discuss the future for public services, whilst in the background, consultants were busy providing the financial case. By that I mean the efficiency savings, it is clear from looking at the contributions on the intranet that the groups were not party

to the figures given for the Cabinet report in July this year. The Trade Union concern still remains that these figures were crude estimates with little or no substance.

**Nationally** one of the biggest criticisms of councils going into strategic partnerships has been the poor analysis of actual savings. Exaggerated claims are made to councillors quite understandably worried about the next poor financial settlement from central government. A consultant comes in and promises them the **'Golden Fleece'**. Is it no wonder that they agree to these sort of poorly conceived remedies to the increasingly poor state of public sector finances.



The only winners are the consultancy companies such as KPMG, Deloitte, PwC who grow fat on fees from the public sector organisations desperately looking for the magic pill to solve all ills.

When are public bodies going to learn? When are we going to tap the experience & expertise within our own organisations? When we use consultants, we should do so using robust performance monitoring of their contributions to the project.

## “Don’t get old!”

That’s the message after watching Panorama programme "Gimme Shelter" on Monday 24th August. Listening to 89 year old Fred O’Donnell you could help but admire his optimism and fight after everything he has been through. Sad to hear him refer to council as the enemy, for a soldier who survived imprisonment during WW2 it was a powerful statement. 500,000 people live in sheltered housing, I wonder which political party is going to wake up and see that votes at stake.

“500,000 people live in sheltered housing, I wonder which political party is going to wake up and see that votes at stake.”

I have spent many years working with older people, so it was great to see them standing up for their rights. Usually it is difficult to get older people to speak out for themselves, they often they fear services will be removed if they complain. In Northampton the Council attempted to marginalise the campaign Fred and his friends are organising by claiming there were 3,000 residents who are happy with the new service. When Panorama went out to meet these ‘happy’ residents it was all too clear they were not happy, they had accepted that there was nothing they could do, *‘so what is the point complaining?’*

If we know older people are frightened to complain why do we treat them like this?

Social Workers often claim their clients are not seen as a priority, with more focus on children’s services. It is hard to ignore these claims when you look at the state of services for older people. If Panorama had the time and money to go to every council what would they uncover in home care, residential & nursing home services?

If we don’t die young, we will all old get old, and in today’s society where we no longer live within walking distance from our parents, uncles, aunties etc so it is important we have services that reflect needs of the community.

What Councils & Commissioners are missing is the security aspect of a warden living on site. In Barnet and across the country it appears that this is not seen as relevant or important, yet in the consultation in Barnet it was one of the most popular issues raised by residents. We might all agree it is unacceptable, but people are increasingly frightened about going out in the communities they live. It is perfectly understandable that for residents this is a serious issue. On the programme a statement from the government was read out. I have an idea for the Government. Why not ask the 500,000 residents living in sheltered housing the following questions

*“Would you like a live in Warden Service?”*

*“Would you prefer a floating support service?”*

Once the results are gathered, you will know what services you need to commission. In Barnet, we are talking about a 'new relationship with residents'. These are bold, brave words, but I am not confident everyone understands what this means. What would happen if we take those words and applied them to older people living in Barnet?

What would their response be to the above questions? I already can hear some scoff at my naivety, we don't have the funding. But that

should not stop these questions being asked. If we have funding issues let's deal with them knowing what our residents want. We can't have a new relationship with residents if we change the rules or don't make it clear what the parameters are. All this does is 'turn off' residents from bothering. Apathy is the biggest enemy of democracy, politicians have an opportunity to re-ignite local democracy,

**"But will they?"**



## 5.73p per hour!

**(The name of the worker has been changed for this article)**

Gloria is a cleaner and earns **£5.73p** per hour. **£5.73p** is the legal national minimum wage, however it has been long recognised that cost of living for London residents means that there should be a London weighting added. On his election as London Mayor, Boris Johnson has honoured & championed ("Johnson said pay below this rate meant people were living in poverty even after benefits and tax credits were taken into account.") **the London Living Wage** which stands at £7.60p per hour for all contracted staff. If Gloria was earning £7.60p per hour it would have a significant impact on the quality of life for her and her family.

Gloria rises each day at **5 a.m.** in order to catch a night bus into Barnet to begin what will be a 14 hour day which will see her work in a number of public sector buildings.

Her first job is in a school before the school

opens, children start drifting into school while she is still working. The only person who will speak to Gloria is the caretaker. He will speak to Gloria about any changes to her normal duties and take up any issues about the standard of work she has done. No one else will notice or speak to Gloria, she is part of the school, yet she is not. She is in a school but has not had any training. In the event of a child making a disclosure, Gloria has no idea what she should do. In the time before privatisation the cleaning staff were part of the schools staff team and Gloria would have taken part in the Safeguarding training.

After finishing her shift Gloria has a few hours to kill as her next job is as a catering assistant in another school. She lives too far from home to return and so has to find somewhere to go to have something to eat as it is 5 hours since she left home.

A quick change into her uniform and Gloria is

at work in the school kitchen. The catering service was privatised five years ago she is on the minimum wage and working for the next four hours. The work is hard and physically demanding. She is on her feet for most of the time, the work never seems to end.

Gloria is leaving the school and heading for a college where she works for a different cleaning contractor, but still on **£5.73p** per hour!

For the next three hours she is cleaning classrooms, toilets, hallways....despite the fact she has been working there for a couple of years nobody says hello, she is invisible. ....

It's **7 pm** and Gloria is off her home it will be almost **9 pm** before she arrives home.

In eight hours time she will be leaving for work!

### **What are the branch doing?**

Barnet UNISON is part of the North London Citizens steering group, which is working towards the launch of North London Citizens. Lobbying both the private and public sectors to ensure that staff are at least on the London Living Wage is likely to be one of the aims of the organisation.

In Barnet our cleaners were privatised several years ago and unfortunately TUPE Plus was not

on the negotiation table. The former ex council staff have been replaced with new staff on the minimum wage.

Our branch recently formally raised the issue of the cleaners pay & conditions with our employers and expect an update at our next meeting with our employers on 14 September.

Our branch believes cleaners should at least be on the London Living Wage and we are going to help make that happen.

We agree with the Mayors statement in the Guardian on 22 May 2009

*"During these testing times, it is vital that we invest in order to pay Londoners a fair and decent wage," Johnson said.*



*"It also brings wider social benefits, tackling poverty, making work pay, and improving the quality of life for families.....City Hall is leading by example, and we will certainly be paying the new London living wage across the GLA group as appropriate ... I urge all London businesses to invest for the future by paying it too."*

**"What do you think? "**

### **Barnet UNISON Contact details**

If you have a work problem or query, get in touch with your UNISON workplace representative.  
Alternatively, you can ring:  
UNISONdirect on 0845 355 0845

If you have a membership or any other query, please contact the Barnet UNISON office at:  
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