

Why Mental Health Social Workers Are Making a Noise Outside the Council



Mental Health Social Workers are challenging the **lack of a safe service** and the **unreasonable and increasing waiting lists** which puts the residents of Barnet at risk of harm. We are asking for a **recruitment and retention payment** to maintain a stable and permanent workforce of experienced staff.

Staffing levels:

- **42%** of social workers within Mental Health Social Care have **left within the past year** and **more have formal plans to leave shortly**.
- **100% of remaining staff** report that they are **considering leaving** (Unison survey).

Impact:

- A reasonable wait for an assessment is 4-6 weeks (The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman), yet the **waiting time in Barnet is now up to 15 months**.
- This time last year it was up to 6 months, demonstrating the significant detrimental impact that not retaining experienced social workers is having on the service.

Why does this matter?

- Barnet Council is **not providing their residents with a safe service** nor is it in line with their responsibilities under the Care Act 2014.
- Mental Health Social Workers work with some of the most vulnerable members of Barnet who, owing to significant waiting lists, are not receiving the care and support they need to remain well and live in the community in a reasonable time. This means **people are left at significant risk of harm** and it can result in otherwise **avoidable admissions to mental health hospitals**.

What do Mental Health Social Workers want?

A **Recruitment and Retention payment, to promote a permanent and experienced workforce**. This is already in place for Family Service social workers due to a similar, historic, retention crisis.

But why strike?

Disappointingly, Barnet Council continues to dismiss our concerns and has left us with no other options. The regulatory body for Social Workers sets out that Social Workers should raise concerns about unsafe practice and should challenge

practices, systems, and processes where necessary. We see industrial action as a necessary extension of our responsibilities to advocate for those we serve and to **take steps to protect them from harm and promote their wellbeing**. We will continue to take this responsibility seriously and are **committed to continuing our 32 days of action unless Barnet Council negotiates**.

What You Can Do

- Say hello to the strikers on the picket line
- Donate money to the branch so we can fund the strikers and campaign
- Share our articles on social media
- Attend any meetings online and in person
- Write to the leader of the Council, Barry Rawlings and to the CEO, John Hooton

London Living Wage Week: Barnet UNISON message to employers is: “Pay Up Now!”



As soon as Barnet UNISON heard the new rate had changed from **£11.95 to £13.15** an hour we contacted the Leader of Barnet Council, Chief Executive of Barnet Council and Chief Executive of The Barnet Group to ask what they are doing to ensure that all contractors adopt the new pay rate.

Last week we heard that the Chief Executive of The Barnet Group has sent a message to staff stating:

“We have made a commitment to pay the London living wage if we can afford to, to comply with the Living Wage Foundation accreditation it needs to be implemented by 1st May 2024.”

We already know from a survey of our members that pay is the one biggest issues. We are in the worst Cost Of Living Crisis in 76 years, things are not getting better, they are getting worse.

Barnet UNISON will shortly be conducting a mass consultation pay ballot with our members which will ask two questions.

- 1. *Do you think you should wait until 1 May 2024, or should you be given the new pay rate now?***
- 2. *If you want the pay now and management refuse to pay, are you prepared to take strike action? Yes or No?***

The choice of what we do next will be from our members. We are a branch that does support its members as we saw last year with the Barnet Ten strikes and now, we have social workers on strike about pay.

Whatever happens, you the members will decide what we do next.

We will be organising meetings in workplaces and a big online meeting to discuss this issue.

If you want to book a meeting on pay or would like more information about the mass consultation pay ballot email us at contactus@barnetunison.org.uk

UNISON is standing up for social workers and their profession

Four new films illustrate why social work is important and why being in a union is vital too

Social workers play an important role in supporting the most vulnerable in society and make a real difference to individuals and families by helping them live their lives more successfully. This could be helping to protect vulnerable people from harm or supporting people to live independently.

But it's a job that is often either hidden or portrayed negatively in much of the media – social workers help thousands of vulnerable citizens along with their families and carers, yet many publications and reporters are only interested when something goes wrong.

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