

## Prepare for Strikemas!

You could be forgiven for thinking next week (4<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> December) is Mental 'Elf Week as our **Mental Health UNISON members get stuck into Days 13-17 of their strike**. We will be theming our protest outside the Colindale offices around the Christmas traditions. Please see below one of the Christmas songs we'll be singing.

Please do feel free to practice at home and come in full voice ready to join in:

### Jingle Bells

Social work, social work  
Every night and day  
It's no fun in social work  
With very little pay

Social work, social work  
Every night and day  
It's no fun in social work  
When Santa stays away

It's a job we love  
and go the extra mile  
Now it's hard to laugh  
Or even raise a smile

Bells no longer ring  
To make our spirits bright  
It's no life to work like this  
When all we do is fight

Social work, social work  
Every night and day  
It's no fun in social work  
With very little pay

Social work, social work  
Every night and day  
It's no fun in social work  
When Santa stays away

Now the choice is made  
We have to stay and fight  
Make our voices heard  
And stand up for our rights

Soon the bells will ring  
Lets hear your voice tonight  
Spirits will be high  
When we win this fight

Social work, social work  
Every night and day  
It's no fun in social work  
With very little pay

Social work, social work  
Every night and day  
It will be fun in social work  
When Santa comes to stay

[Click Here To Read Further](#)

### Join Santa on Barnet UNISON Picket line



[Click here to watch video](#)

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### **School Support Staff Ash Field Academy Win Up To 25% Pay Rise!**

Barnet UNISON has been supporting the strike by school support staff at Ash Field Academy where they have taken some 43 days of strike action. We were thrilled to hear of their victory and **it just shows what determined action and solidarity can deliver.**

[Click Here To Read Further](#)

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### **School Support Staff to Receive Backdate Pay Claim?**

Council staff will receive their back-dated pay rise at the end of November. We are hearing that some schools will not be paying the backdate at the same time. We are writing to all Head teachers and our school support staff members to find out what the situation is in their schools. **Please feed back – [contactus@barnetunison.org.uk](mailto:contactus@barnetunison.org.uk) . Do not assume Barnet UNISON knows what is happening in all schools.**

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## London Living Wage and The Barnet Group



The lowest paid group of workers in The Barnet Group are the workers who will go through the whole of 2023 without an increase in pay. This is thanks to a decision by The Barnet Group to pay the London Living Wage increase in May 2024. Barnet Council could end this terrible state of affairs by agreeing to make payments to The Barnet Group which would enable the London Living Wage to be paid immediately. However, between two employers which can afford 2 Chief Executives, duplicate staffing of directors and support services, they have decided to withhold this money to balance the books.

It's good to know Barnet Council is continuing a well-trodden path of making the poorest pay the most for a crisis.

Barnet UNISON is meeting with members over the next couple of weeks to hear the views of our members. If you want to be involved in a meeting and don't know where to go, please write to [contactus@barnetunison.org.uk](mailto:contactus@barnetunison.org.uk).

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## Invitation to House of Commons debate on why social workers are voting to strike

**Barnet UNISON invites you to**



**Debate: Why are  
Social Workers  
taking strike action?**

**House of Commons**

**Tuesday 5 December 2023, 6.30 pm, Committee Room 17**

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**Why are Barnet Council Mental Health social workers taking strike action?**

Mental Health Social Workers in Barnet have taken **12 days of strike action** and another **14 days are planned** in the coming months. But Barnet isn't the only local authority in which social workers are saying enough is enough. Earlier this year **South Gloucestershire** social workers became the first branch to successfully ballot for strike action with **Barnet, Brighton, Swindon and Leeds** social workers all having declared strike action in the following months.

Similar issues are being raised by strikers across the country including **high caseloads, under-staffing, unsafe services, and unfair pay policies**.

13 years of austerity have resulted in huge cuts to local authority statutory services while the impact of covid has contributed to increases in referrals to social care that are forecast to continue for years to come. In such an environment and with no clear political priority being placed on fixing social care, this panel discussion considers topics like the role of social workers in championing better public services and fair pay for workers.

The session will be held on **5th December 2023 at 6.30pm in Committee Room 17, House of Commons**.

The **event is free**, and **all are welcome** but **please book your place** by emailing [contactus@barnetunison.org.uk](mailto:contactus@barnetunison.org.uk)

**Co- Chairs: John McDonnell MP and Kerie Anne**

**Panellists:**

1. Kristiana Heapy
2. Dan Smart
3. Corinna Edwards-Colledge
4. Nana Yabbey-Hagan.

**Kerie Anne**, Chair of UNISON National Social Care Forum, Branch Secretary, Tower Hamlets UNISON and Families social worker.

**Corinna Edwards-Colledge** is joint branch secretary of Brighton and Hove UNISON and has worked in local government for over 20 years. She is also a campaigner and a writer, and is currently leading adult social workers in Brighton on their very first strike action over pay parity.

**Kristiana Heapy** Kristiana is the Unison team rep in Barnet's Mental Health Social Work South Team which is currently undertaking strike action. Kristiana qualified as a social worker in 2022, prior to that she worked in the voluntary sector in a number of public policy, campaigning and service delivery roles. In her spare time Kristiana has held voluntary positions for charities focused on access to green space, equality and supporting people experiencing mental ill-health..

**Dan Smart** is Branch secretary, UNISON South Gloucestershire and an Adults social worker.

**Nana Yabbey-Hagan** is a Qualified Social Worker for Children and Families of

10 years. Nana is currently a Team Manager for a Looked After Childrens Team, previously a Team Manager for a frontline Children Protection Team. In addition, Nana is a Practice Educator for Bachelor's, Masters, Step Up Students/ASYE assessor for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQS), University Lecturer and Co-Host of the Social Worker and The Mentor Podcast.

**\*\*\*Please note** Barnet UNISON Mental Health Social Workers are taking a whole week of strike action starting **Monday 4 December to Friday 8 December.**

You are welcome to join our Festive Barnet UNISON Picket line, click below where details:

[Picket Line Details Here](#)

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### Open letter to Director of Adult Social Care – Mental Health social work dispute



Dear James Mass,

We are writing to you today, in the absence of any response to us so far, following our 9 days of strike action. We are deeply disappointed that you have chosen not to acknowledge the strike and, in many ways, feel that we are being treated with contempt. It unfortunately feels in keeping with a wider dismissal of the distress workers have voiced to you in the past 18 months of this dispute.

We have always appreciated that in Barnet, senior management regularly interact regularly with practitioners. However, when coupled with the contrast of complete silence during our strike action, the inevitable result has been a deep sense of alienation, frustration and undervaluation.

The past 18 months, and the 14 staff members who have left our teams,

demonstrate the dangerous potential of this undervaluation. 1 staff member has already handed in their notice since strike action began, more have formal plans to leave and anecdotally many others have expressed that the lack of response from senior management means they are seriously considering whether to stay. Put simply, your silence has led staff members previously very committed to Barnet to feel that they are in a service which does not make an effort to recognise their worth to the council or the difficulties they are bringing to your attention. We are incredibly concerned about the current recruitment and retention crisis spiralling out of control, leaving remaining social workers unable to provide a service at all, let alone one which is safe for service users and the social workers of whom we have been bereft of since the transformation of mental health social care in 2021. We are therefore urging you to commit to meeting with our representatives and engaging in meaningful dialogue about how we can resolve this situation.

The absence of any negotiation leaves us to reflect on previous responses from you to the conditions which led to this dispute.

We feel dismissed when you deny that our service is in crisis when it is us as practitioners who have to deal with the realities of an up to 15-month waiting list for individuals in mental distress. We are the practitioners assessing individuals whose needs have clearly deteriorated since their referral; who are either referring for Mental Health Assessments or undertaking these assessments at much higher numbers and who are putting in care as urgent hospital discharges for people who have been on our waiting list for months prior to their admission. We know first-hand that this means the care we need to put in place is much more significant than if we had been able to support them closer to their referral. We also know that we are in no position to regularly review and reduce this care, to provide least restrictive support, due to the number of service users needing acute, crisis interventions. Quite simply, unless individuals are presenting in crisis, we are unable to prioritise their care. It is subsequently difficult not to feel that we are in a failing service.

It was therefore also a profound insult to be told that that there is no retention crisis after 14 valued staff members (2 more social workers have handed in their notice since the strike began) , many of whom have been in Barnet for years, have left and told us this resulted from intolerable stress of being part of such a struggling service. We know that current conditions lead to intense anxiety, low satisfaction with work and a pressure to overwork, as quite simply; this is our daily reality. We know this is a recipe for burn-out and that when faced with burn-out, practitioners vote with their feet and leave the service. Subsequently, it is bordering on offensive to dismiss these conditions during a time when the council wishes to prioritise employee well-being as demonstrated by the communication on Mental Health Awareness day. We know the jobs practitioners have taken when leaving Barnet: these are better paid and more adequately resourced/staffed both in and outside of the statutory sector. Barnet has been a big proponent of the Think Ahead graduate scheme as a means of training social workers and encouraging them to stay in Barnet. Yet in the last two years, half of one cohort and 2 out of 5 of the current cohort will have left less than 6 months after finishing their ASYE. This scheme is failing because participants do not want to remain in a service with the current level of stress and chaos. We urge you to listen and prioritise the voices of the social workers that you employ over your own statistics to understand this retention crisis and



the way out of it.

It was yet more disappointing to see that you felt our announcement of strike action was asking for special treatment for mental health social workers and pitted us against other social workers and Occupational Therapists in the council. This could not be further from the truth. We value highly the work of our colleagues in Adult Social Care, many of whom shared invaluable knowledge during the transformation to fill the gap of any targeted training for practitioners previously working outside of statutory teams. You are aware of the context for our organising and its genesis in this transformation which initiated our destabilising turnover and resulting spiralling waiting list. To deny this and again attempt to stoke division within social care perpetuates a sense that we have not been listened to. Throughout the dispute we have encouraged other social workers and OTs to take action if they are experiencing similar recruitment and retention problems and will continue to do and support them if they wish to organise. If this does take place, we urge you to learn from our current dispute and engage in the meaningful negotiation that we attempted over and over again prior to our strike action to prevent further disruption to social care.

Not one social worker out on strike wants to be in this position. The decision to strike, and to continue striking, is one which brings intense anxiety given that we know our own workloads, waiting lists and stress levels increase with each day that we are withdrawing our labour. We are in this profession because we want to support vulnerable people experiencing mental distress. You have seen how passionate we are about this work, in reviewing our care plans for panel and shadowing us on visits. You know then, that to take time away from this work is a last resort. However, it is this same commitment and value-base which has made us feel that striking is a necessary extension of our advocacy for service users who are not receiving the standard of care they need.

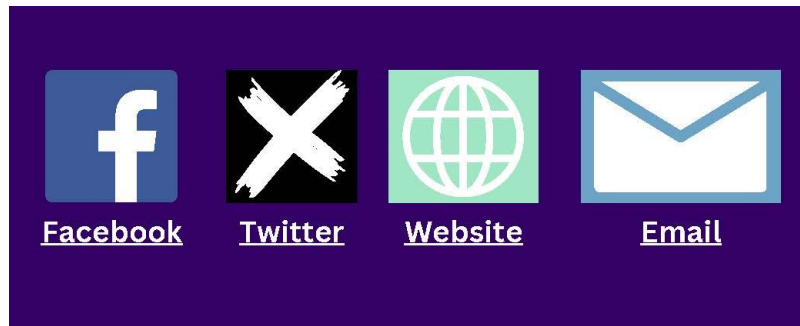
Each day we are out on strike we are hoping that you will meet with our UNISON reps in order to secure a resolution that will bring this dispute to a close.

Yours sincerely,

Barnet Mental Health Social

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