

COM-UNISON

The Convenors'
Communications Channel To
Branch Members

October 2016



Unison Stoke



@ Unison Stoke

<http://stokeunison.wordpress.com>



**Friday 25 November
2016 is the time of
year to celebrate
“Stars In Our
Schools”**



Every year Unison looks to work with the local schools to promote the invaluable work that the School Support Staff in schools do day in day out.

Schools will soon receive the information pack to ask if their school wishes to participate in the event, which involves schools holding various events ranging from special assemblies, tea parties and award ceremonies to say thank you to the unsung heroes of the school day. Let's make the Support Staff feel like a VIP for the day.

Everyone can get involved including the children and the teachers themselves can talk about the great contribution the Support Staff make. Any members who feel the school their children attend should get involved should contact the school to encourage them to take part or to help them to promote or hold the event.

If any members need more information they can contact me, Brian Tomkinson, Schools Convenor at Brian.Tomkinson@stoke.gov.uk Tel:- 01782 235452



All Things Social

The main focus of this edition of Com-Unison is to try and inform you of some of the current issues affecting the wider social work world. It won't cover everything as that would be nigh on impossible in this area of work so apologies if it doesn't specifically cover your particular service area. None the less I hope you find it informative. Any comments good or bad are welcome to Justin Ashton, Convenor. Tel 01782 235453/07880 966510 or e-mail justin.ashton@stoke.gov.uk

Is Munby right, is the care system facing crisis?

Sir James Munby, the head of the family courts has issued a dire warning about court, barrister and local authority ability to cope with rising numbers of care cases. He describes the system as “at full stretch” and facing “a clear and imminent crisis”. This warning followed another record month for care applications. In the past 10 years, the number of care applications going through the courts have doubled and 2016-17 already looks to be another record year for case numbers. “Everyone – everyone – is working as hard as they can, we are facing a crisis and, truth be told, we have no very clear strategy for meeting the crisis” Munby said.

Sir James also added that there is a need to cope with existing caseloads without the prospect of increased funding. He went on to congratulate people working in the care system for first managing to drive down the time it takes to complete care proceedings and then holding time periods for cases steady in the past year, in the face of increasing demand. “To keep the [time it takes to complete proceedings] level as the caseload increased by 14% is an astonishing achievement.” However, he believed that achievement could not be maintained “as caseloads continue to rise”.

Turning his attention to the causes he said that more research was needed and that, in principle, there were three possible causes: increasing amounts of abuse or neglect; local authorities becoming more adept at identifying abuse or neglect, or local authorities “lowering the threshold for intervention”. He didn’t believe abuse and neglect was rising enough to account for the rise in care applications and so local authority behaviour “must be playing a significant role” in the rise of cases. This was supported by statistics showing a wide variation in the scale of the increases in cases in recent years. Munby said research was needed into changes in the breakdown of cases by types of abuse and in the profile of children or families, and also into the relative impact of short-term factors, such as specific judicial rulings in relation to Section 20 of the Children Act.

Now I don’t profess to be an expert in this field, in reality I’m no more than a novice and like the wider public, an observer. It does though concern me greatly that the ‘care system’ is facing its toughest challenges in well over a generation and quite possibly ever. So what is driving the increase in cases? Well as I say, I’m no expert and so I bow to the greater knowledge of people like Sir James. I do though wonder if such events as Baby P and other tragic occurrences of abuse and neglect have had a major impact upon the rise of care cases. What I am pretty sure of though is the funding to cope with the increases Sir James speaks of falls way short of what is required. It is therefore admirable that care professionals are able to cope under such conditions. To read the full article please go to: [Munby: ‘The system is facing a crisis, and we have no clear strategy’](#) or visit <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2016/09/20/munby-system-facing-crisis-clear-strategy/>

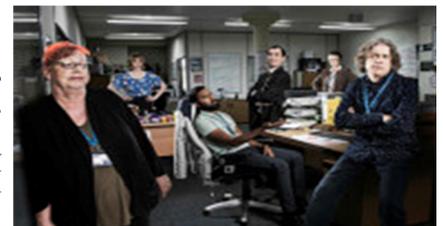
HCPC renewal: 10 tips for getting your CPD profile ready

The [Health and Care Professions Council](#) (HCPC) (<http://www.hcpc-uk.org/>) registration renewal period for social workers runs from Thursday 1 September 2016 to Wednesday 30 November 2016. The HCPC should have written to all registered social workers at the beginning of September with information on [how to renew](#). At the beginning of this period a random sample of 2.5 per cent of the profession will also be selected for an audit of their [continuing professional development \(CPD\) profile](#). Those selected for audit will receive a separate letter after the renewal notices are sent out. If you’re selected to participate in the CPD audit, there is a range of [guidance and information](#) available on the HCPC website, including sample profiles, activity types and [video guides](#).

For ‘Community Cares’ 10 top tips for completing your profile please go to <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2016/09/01/hcpc-renewal-10-tips-getting-cpd-profile-ready/>

“Damned” Channel 4’s new Social Work Comedy

Jo Brand and Alan Davies star in a new comedy about Social Workers as Rose and Al, two social workers employed by the children’s services department of a county council. Commenting on the new comedy Jo said “When you write, it’s a good idea to write about what you know. So I wouldn’t write a sitcom based in a nuclear power station. And social



services haven’t been on the telly that much, apart from in the odd documentary.” She goes on to add “Damned is an attempt to portray the tragic-comic lives of social workers – always under pressure, always in possession of a grim sense of humour and always wrong in the eyes of the public.” Its first episode aired on Tuesday 27th September but fret not if you fancy watching it as it’ll be available on catch up TV.



National Living Wage funding. How the poorest will miss out on care

Jane Townson the CEO of Somerset Care, the not for profit organisation formed by Somerset County Council when it out-sourced it’s adult care provision some 25 years ago recently wrote an interesting article on the effects of underfunding of the National Living Wage and how in her view care providers may well have to turn more and more to self payers to prevent care home closures and job losses.

Jane wrote “We welcomed the proposed increases in the national living wage. In fact, we believe we need to go further as a sector and treat our care staff as professionals. They all need full employment contracts, annual salaries competitive with equivalent roles in the NHS, and a clear career structure based on qualifications and experience. But right now, we’re caught in the jaws of a shark. Our income is falling fast in real terms and our staffing costs, which represent 60-70% of our total costs, are rising rapidly”.

She goes on to add “Underfunding by central government means local authorities can’t afford to pay the true cost of care, so providers are forced to deliver care at a loss – or charge self-funders more money than council-funded customers, in order to make ends meet”.

Somerset Care has 4000 employees. To increase the wages of its lowest-paid staff by 7.5% *and* maintain appropriate differential in salaries between job grades will cost them £2.5m in 2016-17 alone Jane believes.

To put that in context – Somerset Council estimates that the 2% increase in council tax will generate an extra £4m, so it’s clear the much-touted social care precept is wholly inadequate. Indeed, in Somerset there’s a £1.4m shortfall in meeting the national living wage commitments even after applying the precept.

On top of this, Better Care Fund monies are yet to reach Somerset Care as a social care provider from any commissioners they work with, despite political rhetoric to the contrary.

Jane concludes by saying “Without adequate state funding, we’ve no choice but to shift our focus on care of the poorest, who are funded by local authorities, to greater numbers of those able to pay directly for their own care. We have to do this to avoid further home closures, contract terminations and job losses for the very people who are supposed to benefit from the increase in the national living wage”.



Yet again, as with the earlier piece on the crisis in the care system, funding or in reality the lack of it, is crippling a valuable service ability to care for the most vulnerable members of society. I doubt that Somerset Care’s experiences as accounted for by Jane Townson are an isolated one. The truth is they’re not and the blame for that can only lie with the present government.

When George Osborne announced his ‘National Living Wage’ plans back in the summer of last year he did so to steal the thunder from his political opponents who had been pushing for a fairer hourly rate of pay for many millions of chronically low paid workers. Yet this government has an obsession with austerity or if truth be known, a smoke screen called austerity designed to roll back the state, strip public

services bare and sell off the most profitable parts to the private sector. There was absolutely no way that the government could back its words with actions given the desire to pull back further on public service spending; indeed the cynic in me says it’s a deliberate attempt to further undermine the public sector and force it to a position where in the likes of adult care for example, they have to either outsource further or as Jane sites, load the cost on to those who can afford to pay themselves and as a consequence potentially deny care to the poorest members of society.

For Jane’s full article go to [‘Lack of funding for national living wage means poorer people will miss out on care’ | Community Care](http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2016/05/20/lack-funding-national-living-wage-means-poorer-people-will-miss-care/) (website <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2016/05/20/lack-funding-national-living-wage-means-poorer-people-will-miss-care/>)

Sue’s Snippets



Have you moved house and not told us? HR Departments do not inform the branch of a member’s change of address due to Data Protection so we are reliant on members themselves to keep us updated. Are your colleagues receiving information by e-mail and you aren’t? This is likely to be because when you joined you opted out of receiving e-mail communications or no e-mail address was given on your joining form.

If you would like to update your information please ring me on 01782 236750 8am-1pm and 2-4pm Monday—Friday or e-mail ul-stokecity@unison.org.uk quoting your membership number, name and details of the changes .

Social Care Members—Does anyone fancy telling us about their day?



I'm coming cap in hand to you good social work folk to ask if anyone fancies telling us about their day for a future newsletter publication. As some of you may know Unison and Community Care ran a national Social Work Watch event on 21st September and asked all staff who hold casework to tell them about their experiences on that day so together we could highlight the pressures you face day in day out and to also tell one and all about the valuable work you do.

So it got me thinking perhaps the wonderful Unison member colleagues working in the social care field would do something similar which would give a far more local focus. I feel it would be of great value for us to advertise and educate our wider branch membership as to just what's involved working in this high pressure field. I'm really looking for two or three stories of a typical day, not just for social workers and social work assistants but for all our members working within the social care family. Please send me your stories (which will be anonymised) to justin.ashton@stoke.gov.uk



Personal Injury Payments Received By Members **July—September 2016**

One of the advantages of Unison membership is access to free legal support in cases of personal injury. For July 2016, members of this region received £175,719 in compensation for personal injury payments with members of this branch getting £9,000. For August, the figures for region were £341,946 and the branch £3,508 and for September £427,683 and £1,500. It always pays to be a Unison member!!

European Health & Safety Week



The week commencing 24th October 2016 is Euro Health & Safety week, which always takes place near the end of October each year and is designed to raise awareness of health and safety. The Wednesday of European Health and Safety Week (26th October) is traditionally National Inspection Day when all safety representatives are encouraged to inspect their workplace.

Although this event takes place each year we must remember that Health & Safety is an important part of day to day life at work as everyone has a right to return home safely at the end of the working day.

As part of this week, the branch would like to increase awareness of workplace stress and the varied effects this has on people. These effects are not just while at work, they affect a person's personal life as well and awareness of this is the first step to addressing the issue.

If members feel there is an issue with work place stress please contact your Workplace Health & Safety Representative or your Convener for more information on how to address the issue.

If any members wish to be more active and are interested in becoming a Workplace Health & Safety Representative please contact a Convenor or myself for information— Brian Tomkinson (Convenor/ Branch Health & Safety Officer—01782 235452 or email brian.tomkinson@stoke.gov.uk