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City of Sheffield Branch

November 2020

Sheffield City Council Update

We hope that everyone is keeping as fit and well as is possible in these extremely difficult times. Whilst the Branch Office remains closed please be assured that we are still working on your behalf.

If you need help or advice you can email us at lgbranch@sheffunison.org.uk or contact Convenors directly, details can be found on the last page of this bulletin.

Our Twitter page is being updated frequently so why not follow us @UNISONSheffiel1.

Working From Home

As working from home looks like being an ongoing feature for some members, you may be anxious about increased utility costs particularly over winter. We thought it might be timely to remind members that you can claim back some costs of working from home, the claim can be backdated to Monday 6th April.

Apportioning additional heating, electricity and water costs can be very difficult to work out fairly. Therefore, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) states that from 6 April 2020 employers can agree to a flat-rate payment of **£6 per week or £26 per month** for monthly paid employees to an employee working regularly at home without the employer having to justify the amount paid. If the £6 guideline rate is paid the employee does not have to keep any records to demonstrate the additional expenditure. HMRC expects that £6 per week would be sufficient for most cases, particularly where the additional costs are only for heating and lighting the work area.

To receive it, members need to claim tax relief on this expense. Employees can check if they can make a claim by completing details requested via www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home

£95k Public Service Exit Payment Cap

Some of you may have picked up in the news that on 30 September there was a final vote in Parliament to restrict all public sector exit payments at £95k. You might think that £95k is a lot of money and not many UNISON members would have a redundancy package that would be of this amount, however you should be aware that £95k includes the pension strain cost. This is money that the Council pays to the LGPS to release your pension early without you suffering an actuarial reduction as a result of the redundancy. This is money that the employee never receives but it is to be included in the pay restriction calculation. The result is that many members on very moderate salaries could be affected, particularly if they have long public service. UNISON has published a briefing for members and you can view it here -

http://msgfocus.com/files/amf_unison/project_131/UNISON_briefing_-_Restriction_of_Public_Sector_Exit_Payments_Regulations_2020.pdf

As many members will know, the £95k exit payment restrictions have been a Government plan for several years. The draft regulations on an absolute cap of £95k on all public sector exit payments, including pension elements, were consulted on last year and, as with previous consultation rounds on this topic, UNISON responded robustly on the many concerns this punitive measure raises. UNISON's consultation response to the Government can be viewed here -

http://msgfocus.com/files/amf_unison/project_131/Consultation_on_Exit_Payments_Cap_-_Draft_Regulations_-_UNISON_response_2019.pdf

Despite this, and despite many of you raising this issue with your MPs, alongside many employer organisations including Local Authorities, to highlight the very real concerns affecting our members, none of the concerns were taken on board by this Conservative Government. The MP for Penistone and Stocksbridge, Miriam Cates voted for these restrictions on public sector exit payments, you can see this here-

<https://votes.parliament.uk/Votes/Commons/Division/862>.

Additionally, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has also tabled broader regulations on other changes to exit payments for local government. We are very concerned about this, and by the confusion caused by two separate sets of overlapping changes. Pension's officers from the local government unions will be meeting with MHCLG very soon to discuss this and make clear our concerns. Here is the link to UNISON's most recent circular, and a link to a model letter for you to send to the MHCLG:

Link to circular -
http://msgfocus.com/files/amf_unison/project_131/LG_71_2020_-_Reforming_local_government_exit_pay-.pdf

Link to model letter –
<http://msg.unison.org.uk/c/1e39XxBPwOOn5kw9CoTG7>

Moving Home

Moving or moved home?? Then don't forget to update your details with UNISON, either by emailing Branch Office lqbranch@sheffunison.org.uk with your details or go to <https://www.unison.org.uk/my-unison>

Legal Victory

You may have seen in the national media that UNISON has won a significant legal victory for a group of homecare workers commissioned by Haringey Council in London. The case has massive implications for thousands of home care workers all over the country.

The ruling in the Haringey case follows a four-year battle by the ten employees and highlights major failings in the care sector. The care companies involved in the Haringey case were Kaamil Education Limited, Diligent Care Services Limited, and Premier Carewaiting Limited and they have been ordered to pay more than £100,000 in backdated earnings to the homecare staff.

The dispute against the three care firms was chiefly over their failure to pay staff a legal wage. Time spent travelling between people's houses was unpaid, despite the staff having to get from one home to the next to complete their work. This meant that the workers could earn well under half the legal minimum hourly rate, despite working for as many as 14 hours a day.

The judgment said that travelling and waiting time of up to 60 minutes between appointments should be treated as working time. This will now provide other homecare staff with a clear method of calculating how much they are owed.

The decision involving these ten workers has implications for thousands more across the UK who look after vulnerable people by visiting them in their homes. Those denied their full wages could now bring cases against their care employers to reclaim what they are owed.

You can read more about the four year legal battle here –

<https://magazine.unison.org.uk/2020/09/29/the-best-of-trade-union-empowerment-the-story-behind-a-decisive-homecare-legal-victory/>

Emergency Petition for All Education Workers

UNISON has launched an emergency petition calling on Secretary of State Matt Hancock for all education workers to be included as one of the groups named for priority COVID-19 testing.

It takes a whole team to keep schools, nurseries, colleges and universities running, but when the Health Secretary announced the list of workers that will be eligible for priority testing in England, in education, only teachers were mentioned.

Please support the campaign by signing the petition here –

<http://action.unison.org.uk/page/68165/petition/1>

Thank You Social Workers Virtual Celebration

UNISON is supporting an online 'Thank You' event for social workers, taking place on 26 November. Social worker members are encouraged to contribute and register for the event.

Link for more details -

http://msgfocus.com/files/amf_unison/project_131/LG_69_2020_-_Social_Workers_virtual_celebration.pdf

Keeping In Touch With Members

It is important that as a Branch we keep in touch with our members and the most effective way to do this is via email, not only is it quicker but it will also cut down on postage costs.

To do this we need to make sure that we hold up to date email addresses for everyone. If you have received this bulletin but your colleagues who are UNISON members have not, then ask them to either email lgbranch@sheffunison.org.uk with their preferred email address and permission for us to use it, or go to <https://www.unison.org.uk/my-unison> where they will be able to log in and update their membership record.

General Secretary Election 2020

The City of Sheffield Branch has nominated Roger McKenzie for UNISON General Secretary, Roger has plans to bring our union closer to members and Branches like ours.

The despatch of ballot papers to individual members began on 28 October 2020.

If members have not received a paper by 10 November 2020, they should contact the ballot helpline via UNISONdirect on 0800 0857 857. The latest that members can request a ballot paper is noon on 20 November 2020. The deadline for receipt of ballot papers by the scrutineer is 5pm on Friday 27 November 2020.

The result of this election will be announced on 11 January 2021.

All members, including retired members (but not honorary members), who are on the union's membership register as of 28 July 2020, will be entitled to vote in this election.

Contacting SCC Convenors

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UNISON – Together we are stronger!