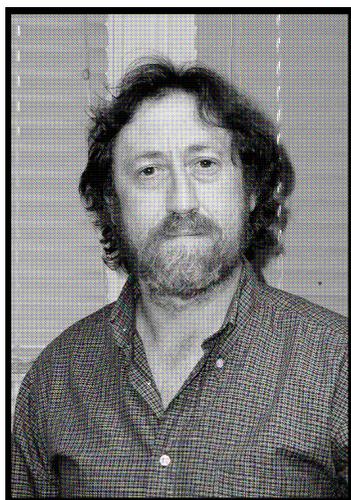


UNISON News

PENSION & CUTS EDITION



This is a special newsletter that we've produced to keep you up to date with the many crucial issues we're all facing. Nationally, the Government seems hell-bent on pursuing their attack on our pensions. At a local level, Croydon are shutting services (Coleby Court and Stroud Green Lodge Old People's Homes, Crosfield, the Home Care Service) and making people redundant both in those services and many other areas such as Passenger Transport. Well over 200 people face unemployment.

They also seem to think that it's OK to distribute "information" to all staff about the closure of Crosfield that is completely distorted. They didn't include our point of view (such as outlining that we weren't consulted in any way before the so-called review came up with the recommendation to close Crosfield).

When I asked that this "information" should be withdrawn, or at the very least we had the opportunity to also put our point of view to all staff, this was refused. How fair is that?

Furthermore, the Council is now taking a shameful attitude to consultation. They seem to be saying that the Local Agreements aren't really agreements – they say that they want to bring in changes after consultation "and hopefully agreement" with the trade unions. In particular their proposals regarding Sickness Procedures are quite unacceptable and we will resist them.

All of this adds up to the fact that we all need to stand up for our right to be treated decently and fairly. We will shortly be balloted for industrial action regarding our pensions. We must vote "Yes" and be prepared to take that action – if we don't, the pension arrangements we have now will be lost forever for vast numbers of current workers and everyone in the future.

Malcolm Campbell
Branch Secretary

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**PENSIONS**

Following our threat of industrial action early last year, the Government revoked

the new Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) regulations they had introduced.

However we now face new proposals that are very similar and we must resist the Government's intention to impose them.

As you will no doubt be aware, other public sector workers (including teachers, lecturers and those in the Civil Service and NHS) have been the subject of a separate agreement which, although unacceptable in terms of arrangements for future employees, does protect the current workforce. We are not being offered that protection.



**Rule of 85**

The proposals include the removal of the "Rule of 85". This means that staff will no longer have the right to retire with an unreduced pension if they are aged 60 or more and the sum of their age and years of service is 85 or more.

Nor will they be able to ask their employer to consider allowing them to retire before the age of 60 Rule of 85.

Protection will only be offered to current staff if they will reach the age of 60 on or before 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

**Increasing the Lump Sum Option**

The draft Regulations propose the option to increase the tax free lump sum to 25% of the value of retirement benefits.

The proposed exchange rate of £12 cash for £1 pension is poor and does not reflect the increases in life expectancy which the Government and employers use as the argument for changing pension schemes! An exchange rate of 19:1 or higher would be needed to reflect life expectancy.

**Survivors' Benefits**

Members will no longer have the option to surrender up to one third of their pensions to a surviving dependant beneficiary in the event of the member's death in retirement.

**Flexibility to take Pension & remain in Work**

It is proposed that with certain conditions, a member from age 60 can stay in employment and draw the pension earned up to that date with any early payment reductions that apply. This will require both employer consent and the member to agree to reduce hours/grade before this is allowed. *This proposal will mean that this otherwise welcome flexibility will not benefit many members.*

**Industrial Action – Buying Back Service**

The draft Regulations propose to link the cost of buying back service lost in a trade dispute to 6% plus the employer's contribution rate at the last

valuation. Currently there is a fixed rate of 16% which represents the full cost of buying back service. ODPM say the intention is to exclude any scheme deficits from the employers' contribution rate for the purposes of calculating the cost. If this is right then employer contributions added to the employee contribution of 6% would make the cost of buying back service significantly more expensive. *This is a vindictive proposal which is clearly designed to deter LGPS members from taking industrial action.*

It will increase the cost of buying back service to 25% in the funds with the highest employer contribution. It will lead to unequal treatment, depending on the employer contribution rate

**Some Good News .....**

There are no proposals in the Draft Regulations to increase the minimum retirement age from 50 to 55. The Finance Act 2004 requires all schemes to increase the minimum retirement age to 55 by 2010.

The Employers originally wanted this change to come into effect from April 2005.

Despite heavy employer pressure there is no proposal to increase employee contributions above 6% (5% for those on protection) following the Trade Union Side's opposition. The draft Regulations can be found at:

<http://www.xoq83.dial.pipex.com/refdsi.htm>

We hope to hold as many workplace meetings as possible to discuss the issues with members. Let us know if you don't have a steward to organise this.

Come along to the AGM and bring your ballot paper with you.

Also, write to your MP and Councillor telling them your views, Glenda has circulated the latest model letter and you can visit this website, which will give you details of your MP, MEP and local Councillors:

[www.writetothem.com](http://www.writetothem.com)



**HAVE YOU MOVED?**

Please contact the Branch Office if you have recently moved and not informed us of your new address – we want to ensure you get your ballot paper.

**RECRUITMENT OFFICER**

We are looking for someone to take on the role of Recruitment Officer. UNISON has set recruitment as one of its main priorities for the coming year.

We recognise that recruitment is part and parcel of the steward's role but we would like a Branch Officer to take responsibility for this activity, to encourage and chivvy along the reps.

If you would like to know more about the role, contact the Branch Office on x 65435 Taberner House or 020 8760 5435.

**BRANCH AGM**

**Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February  
At 12.30pm in the Council  
Chamber Town Hall**

**Thursday, 23<sup>rd</sup> February  
at 4.30pm in the  
Unison Social Club  
Chatsworth Hall  
Chatsworth Road**

**Agenda to include  
Elections of Branch  
Officers & Conference  
Delegates  
Annual Report  
Pension Campaign  
(Bring your ballot paper)  
Croydon's Cuts**

**Members who are  
Croydon Council  
employees are entitled to  
one-hour paid time off  
to attend one meeting**

**THE CUTS**

**Crosfield**

Where does one begin? Despite the Trade Union Side's best efforts, through negotiations and mass demonstrations outside the Town Hall on Committee Meeting dates, and a recommendation by the Scrutiny Committee to defer the decision, the elected members chose to sanction the Officers' proposals to close Crosfield, whilst at the same time acknowledging the fact that the reason for the current lack of contracts may well have had something to do with the lack of investment and resources.

We discussed the procedure and formula that would be applied to the redundancies.

Following this we attended a staff consultation meeting with the management team of ECSS Department.

At that meeting we were given assurances by the Director and Assistant Director of Crosfield that they were committed to supporting the disabled light industrial unit's work at Crosfield.



They said that they were going to consider the different options that could be applied to make the Unit a viable concern.

This turned out to be, rather than the commitment promised by the Management Team to save the existing jobs with new ideas and projects, a clandestine subterfuge to hide the fact that all along their intention was to close the Unit.

The Trade Union Side has engaged in efforts with disabled organisations to come up with proposals which could be applied to the Unit thus saving jobs. This, however, was rejected out of hand for financial reasons.

The Cabinet Committee which oversees the decision to close chose to endorse the Officers' report and announced the closure of Crosfield.

To further compound this they also chose to impose a caveat that any projects brought by the Trade Union side or other interested parties would have to bear no financial cost to the Council.

Please make sure you attend the AGM to get a full report on what our options are to continue to support our disabled comrades at Crosfield.

**Old People's Homes**

On 30<sup>th</sup> January, the Cabinet will meet to decide the fate of Coleby Court and Stroud Green Lodge.

The residents face being moved from the place they call home, and the staff face redundancy.

The original plan was that these two homes, as well as 4 others that the Council runs, would be closed in a phased manner, whilst new homes were built.

This would have meant that the residents would have stayed in the same groups with other residents and care staff that they know.

The proposal means them being moved earlier than expected and the staff being out of a job.

The reason behind this is purely financial, as the Council is looking to make a short-term killing – an appropriate phrase given that research has shown that moving elderly people has a significant correlation with premature deaths of those people.

On Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> January the Scrutiny Committee heard submissions from Hannah Miller (Director of Social Services) and other senior managers in that department, Paula Shaw (Cabinet Member for Social Services and Deputy Leader of the Council), relatives of the residents and the trade unions.

After hearing evidence of the detrimental effect the proposals would have on the residents' health, and our view that the amount of savings predicted is very dubious, the members of the Scrutiny Committee recommended that the Cabinet should not take a decision to close the Homes.

Whether this influences the Cabinet to make a decision that respects the rights of residents and staff remains to be seen, Unfortunately the experience with Crosfield doesn't give us great confidence.

One thing is sure – the more of us that turn up to lobby the Cabinet on 30<sup>th</sup> January, the better the chances of averting the closures.

**Home Care**

On top of all the other cuts Social Services are making in a bid to save money, they are also attacking the Home Care Service.

This is the service that they devastated last time around in the cuts. They chose to do away with long term provision and continue with just short term provision. At that time they said this was the only way the service could continue on a viable basis.

They are now saying that it would be more cost effective to call in an agency to provide home care services. They say that staff are not prepared to be flexible enough to carry out the services.

Before making this decision they never actually asked the staff to be flexible, or even told them how flexible they would like them to be!

In an attempt to save jobs we have argued that if the services are to be transferred to agencies then the staff should be too. The Employer is telling us that because it is small chunks of short term work it cannot be considered as continuous provision service and therefore is not covered by TUPE regulations, so staff can be sacked! We disagree, we have told them so and we are seeking legal advice on this.

**YOUNG MEMBERS IN UNISON**

UNISON is trying to get members under the age of 26 more involved in the union. If you are interested in getting active in UNISON or want to know more about what UNISON has to offer young members, contact the Branch Office x 65435



It is hoped that a Regional social event will be held in March, we will provide details when we know more.

**SOCIAL CLUB AGM**

Don't forget, as a member of Croydon UNISON you are automatically a member of the UNISON Social Club.

**The Annual General Meeting will be held on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> February at 7.00 pm.**

**Agenda items will include:**

**Annual Report and Election of Officers and Committee Members.**

**BRANCH OFFICE NEWS**

**Office Cover**

During the week of 6 – 10 February inclusive the Branch Office will not be fully staffed. Skeleton cover will be provided by Tony Vass! Please bear this in mind and be patient if it takes a little longer to make contact with the Branch.

**Branch Website**

We have at last got the site up and running. It's still in its infancy but we hope to keep you up to date with all the latest news and events.

Please visit the site on [www.croydonunison.co.uk](http://www.croydonunison.co.uk)



**CALLING ALL DISABLED MEMBERS**

**Croydon Unison is holding a meeting for Disabled Members**

**Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> February 12.30**

**In the Council Chamber  
Town Hall  
Katharine Street**

