

ACTIVE!



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Interviewed in this edition: General secretary Christina McAnea (top left) regional convenor Wendy Nichols (top right) and hard-working activists from around the region



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DECENCY AND DIGNITY

Every day we seem to be facing a new crisis. Covid-19 still continues to claim lives and places a terrific strain on public, health and social care services and inevitably on our members. And then we have the impact of Brexit, causing food and fuel shortages. And the Government is, once again, found wanting.

I don't believe that the British people will forget that Boris Johnson and his government cared more about giving huge contracts to their mates, than looking after health and social care workers. Billions of pounds were squandered on worthless PPE and a useless test and trace experiment. Residents and workers in social care, in particular, were abandoned, resulting in huge numbers of needless deaths.

There must be a public inquiry into that.

I believe we are at a crossroads. We know the Tories cannot be trusted and after all we have been through as a nation, it's time for a new deal. We need a new deal for our public services and for our members who kept us going with their dedication and commitment, sometimes risking their lives.

All my efforts in the coming months will be focused on securing that new approach. We should have a better deal that sets up a National Care Service, that ends profiteering in our public services; that gives us a fair society; that gives workers fair pay and provides decency and dignity in work and in old age.

**CHRISTINA
MCANEA
GENERAL
SECRETARY***Christina McAnea*

WE'RE THE TARGET

It is clear that public sector workers are being directly targeted by the Government.

Forget the insincere public displays of gratitude for our members from Boris Johnson's henchmen and women.

To cut through their cynical rhetoric we must look at the brutal financial damage they are inflicting on dedicated public sector workers who they once clattered pots and pans for in Downing Street.

The Government is offering around three per cent as a public sector pay rise.

Like so much of what they say, they want to impose the absolute opposite of their public statements. They want to impose a pay CUT.

And when they spout about "levelling up" society, what they really mean is "levelling down".

As inflation continues to rise and wages fall, it will be UNISON members who will have to endure the hardship and heartache of simply trying to survive this cruelty.

The scandal that the Government failed to regulate the greedy private sector energy companies or anticipate the fuel crisis is one more scam to add to their list of shame.

As our general secretary has written, bringing these companies back into public ownership is now more urgent than ever.

Our members are angry but they know UNISON will campaign for and protect them as we all unite against this vicious and hypocritical attack on their lives and livelihoods.

**WENDY
NICHOLS
REGIONAL
CONVENOR***W. Nichols*

PERFECT STORM FOR LOW PAID



UNISON members throughout the region - but especially the low-paid - are facing a "perfect storm" causing a massive increase in the cost of living and driving tens of thousands into poverty.

The lasting impact of the pandemic, the Government's vicious austerity measures and mean-minded pay cuts are causing huge problems for working families.

Boris Johnson's insistence on cutting universal credit and increasing National Insurance payments together with expected increases in council tax and energy costs are adding to their misery.

Removing the boost to universal credit alone will mean an estimated 4.4 million households in Britain, with 5.1m adults and 3.5m children, will see their incomes fall by £1,000 overnight.

Ruth Askwith, secretary of Rotherham local government branch, said the impact in the region will be "huge".

She said: "Those who have

been lucky enough to get pay increases are finding that they are not really increases at all when you take the cost of living into account. They are pay cuts.

"Our members in the front line jobs during the pandemic have had to work extremely hard in terrible conditions and when it comes to repaying them, where is it? They are not rewarding people's commitment.

"On top of everything we have the increases in energy prices which will have a massive impact. It's the wrong time to cut Universal Credit. Everybody knew the £20 increase was temporary, but no-one knew what was going to happen. In fact a lot more people will have to claim benefit.

"A lot of people have built up debt during the pandemic. All this taken together inevitably means a strain on mental health, which in turn puts an extra burden on services."

NewsInBrief



It is hoped the region will be able to run its annual event at Doncaster races next summer, provided it is safe to do so. Keep the date in your diary - Saturday July 30, 2022.

Information will be available on the regional website from February onwards with details of how and when to purchase tickets. <https://yorks.unison.org.uk/>

During lockdown CareTech tried to force Adam Ridley back to work caring for autistic children despite his serious lung conditions and his vulnerability to covid. With UNISON's help he won a claim for disability discrimination against a company whose founder received an OBE for services to specialist care. Adam now hopes others will be encouraged to fight unfair treatment.

P22 My job, or my life?



Your voice at the Labour conference – from left to right: Marian Jarvis vice chair, Yorkshire and Humberside Labour Link, regional convenor Wendy Nichols and Pam Sian, secretary, West Yorkshire combined authority and transport branch

BIG CHANGES IN NORTH YORKSHIRE

North Yorkshire is facing the biggest changes to local government in the county for nearly 50 years as the seven district councils merge with the county council to become one new authority.

From 2023, this new unitary council will deliver all services, working with the existing City of York council.

Regional convenor Wendy Nichols pointed out that it will have a massive impact on the 60 per cent of UNISON members in the region who work at the authorities concerned. They are North Yorkshire county council, Selby district council, Hambleton district council and Richmondshire district council. UNISON branches in Craven, Harrogate, Rydale and

Scarborough also have around a thousand members in total. More than 23,000 staff are affected.

Local government branches have agreed their priorities, on behalf of members, are to:

- Protect jobs and avoid compulsory redundancies
- Level-up terms, conditions and pay
- Minimise disruption to staff and services

After the Government decision to go with the proposal from the county council, the UNISON North Yorkshire branch met the branch secretaries from Craven, Harrogate, Rydale and Scarborough along with the regional

organiser and a regional manager.

Wendy said the union had recently concluded agreements with all eight chief executives, about working together on recruitment in the next 18 months, so that as many current staff jobs as possible are preserved.

"We want to reassure members that there will be little change for the majority of staff until the new council comes into existence on April 1, 2023. No decisions will be taken until after the election for the new authority next May.

"We will continue to work with our colleagues on behalf of all UNISON members in the local government branches."

LEGAL ACTION OVER CARE PAY

The union is taking legal action on behalf of members at Valorum Care alleging they were forced to accept significantly worse terms and conditions; including lower holiday, sick and maternity pay.

Under the new pay regime, care, domestic, maintenance, catering and nursing staff who become ill will have to survive on statutory sick pay

of just £96.35 a week.

The company, which took over the services from Leonard Cheshire Disability in 2019, is accused of conducting a "defective and ham-fisted consultation process".

The union alleges that many staff have been bullied into accepting the inferior contracts. A dozen members, who mainly work in

the Kirklees, Sheffield and Leeds centres, bravely decided to put their heads above the parapet.

Alleging a breach of TUPE rules, the union took the dispute to the conciliation service Acas without success, but is now offering to take the cases to employment tribunal.

P14 'A kick in the teeth'



BEST OF THE BRITS

The Olympic and Paralympic Games went a long way to relieve the doom and gloom – and the best of the British athletes came from Yorkshire and Humberside, says **Mary Maguire**

Don't we all just need a break from the remorseless intensity of long-running news stories, such as the global pandemic or the Afghanistan tragedy? Day after day our screens, social media newsfeeds and newspapers are filled with the statistics and the horror. We are not alone. Editors and journalists, too, become battle weary.

Thankfully, riding to the rescue were the Olympic and Paralympic Games, saved up from last year to, temporarily, dispel the gloom. Tokyo 2020 burst into our lives with an amazing visual ceremony that remembered those who died from coronavirus and honoured the workers. A healthcare worker carried the Olympic flag. And as is the norm these days, spectators had to watch the spectacle via their TV or internet.

Team GB's 376 Olympic and 228 Paralympic athletes benefited from a 360 degree virtual environment featuring key venues at the Games, created by the University of Hull, to help "propel" them to win gold, the Hull Daily Mail reported proudly.

Yorkshire & Humberside media went to town looking for local links with the athletes. Expectations were high as the Post, along with other papers, wished the athletes luck and listed the 10 potential Yorkshire medal heroes. They weren't disappointed.

As the Examiner declaimed: "In Yorkshire we have produced some of the best athletes in the whole country. And now those stars from God's own country are showing off what they have got in the Olympics." And they all reported with glee Leeds mountain biker Tom Pidcock and diver Matty Lee winning gold and taekwondo fighter Bradley Sinden with silver kicking off the medals haul. The Daily Telegraph, for once sounding delighted, said: "Yorkshire was being hailed for its extraordinary pedigree at the Olympics ..."

And it got better and better.

The BBC helpfully provided a medals league table of how the regions had fared. Yorkshire & Humberside had 27 Olympic athletes, won five gold medals, one silver and two bronze. According to the BBC: "Four of West Yorkshire's five athletes were born in Leeds, making it the single town or city with the most medallists in the country." Well done Leeds!

Not to be outdone, team GB Paralympians clocked up 124 medals, with Yorkshire athletes leading the field. Sheffield City active travel champion, Sarah Storey, clocked up gold in track cycling as the team won six golds on day one. BBC North enthused: "The opening day belonged to Storey. After her blistering qualifying race, she started the final at the Izu Velodrome in determined fashion. She has now won medals at each of the eight Games she has attended."

Leeds-born Kadeena Cox, followed by breaking a world record to take her first gold, then as C4 recorded: "Great Britain's gold rush at the Izu Velodrome showed no signs of slowing down as Kadeena Cox edged out China in a pulsating final to win" And the Halifax Courier claimed its own "Hebden Bridge based rider Steve Bate with partner Adam Duggleby" winning silver in the tandem race. Those great athletes have certainly put Yorkshire & Humberside on the world stage.

Closer to home, though, Hessle was vying to get on the map. Residents were reportedly "furious" at Channel 4 presenter George Clarke, who during his Remarkable Renovations programme, repeatedly mispronounced the name of the East Yorkshire town. "Stop saying HESSSSS!" said one tweet, with another saying: "It's Ezzull". "Good job he didn't try pronouncing Boyes," sighed another. Good job, indeed. □



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Mary Maguire

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INSULT TO INJURY!

The Government has introduced new rules for road accident claims. They severely limit the access to justice for the low paid - and further enrich fat cat insurance bosses. **Natalie Harvey** explains



IT MEANS
MOST
CLAIMANTS
CAN'T
AFFORD
TO ENGAGE
A LAWYER

In May a set of “reforms” came into force, changing the way a person injured in a road traffic accident (RTA) can claim compensation. These changes were dressed up as a response to the “whiplash culture”.

But what do they mean and why have UNISON and Thompsons been so opposed to the changes?

Injury claims in the civil courts are assigned to one of three “tracks” - the

small claims track, the fast track or the multi-track. The small claims track is supposed to provide a simple and informal way of resolving disputes.

In fast track and multi-track cases, the guilty party pays both compensation and the claimant’s legal costs – a principle known as “the polluter pays”.

This is not true in the small claims track where if a defendant loses they pay only the compensation, not the cost of bringing

the claim. It means most claimants can’t afford to engage a lawyer.

The small claims limit in all personal injury claims used to be £1,000. This meant that where a judge valued the “general damages” at less than £1,000 (the amount awarded for pain and suffering - which is separate from any compensation for losses and expenses) the case went through the small claims track.

Since they came to power

in 2010, the Government has been working with the insurers to whip up a storm about a so-called “claims culture” with the ultimate aim of increasing the small claims limit in as many injury claims types as possible.

Faced with statistics that showed that overall accidents have been falling year on year, they narrowed their campaign down to road accidents and last year they pushed through a fivefold increase in the small claims limit in such cases – increasing the small claims limit from £1,000 to £5,000.

We estimate the changes will mean 80 per cent of injured road users will lose free legal support.

Meanwhile the changes will save insurers £1.3 billion – a saving, they say, which will be passed on to policy holders. The Government, however, refused to put them under a legal obligation to do so.

Thanks to pressure from UNISON and Thompsons Solicitors, the Government did agree to exempt vulnerable road users from the 500 per cent increase in the small claims limit. They include pedestrians, motorcyclists, cyclists, horse riders, children and protected parties. But that will be scant consolation to those who have to drive to work or drive for a living. They will, in claims with a value of up to £5,000 in general damages (which means on average £6,000+ when losses and expenses are added in) be left taking on well-funded insurers on their own with no free legal help.

Before the new rules came into force, the Government launched an Official Injury Claim portal for claims from injured road users. At the same time they published a 64-page guide to the new scheme that the Association of Consumer Support Organisations described as “legal treacle”.

The reality, as the Government and insurers know full well, is that most claimants will give up on the deliberately complicated guide after page two, and those who persevere will be left to fight the insurance industry on their own. At best, they’ll be browbeaten into taking what they can get, rather than what they deserve.

Guess who this is likely to impact the most - those already facing the greatest challenges. People living in less affluent areas already face higher motor premiums. Their chances of being involved in an accident are also increased because they are more likely to work long hours in frontline roles, often without the luxury of working from home or near to home. And if they do get hurt in an RTA they are likely to have the least time or confidence to take on a claim.

The outcome of these reforms, together with the new complicated portal, is a completely lopsided system, inhibiting access to justice and favouring hugely profitable insurers who just happen to be mates with the Conservative Party.

We fear the Government

will use these reforms as a test case. If they can make a lawyer-less system appear to work here, why not elsewhere.

They could, for example, increase the small claims limit for employers’ and public liability cases. This is why, with the continued support of UNISON and the labour movement, Thompsons will be working to:

- Demonstrate that the new scheme has an adverse impact on genuinely injured RTA claimants;
- Collate and profile employer and public liability cases with general damages between £1,000 to £1,500, to show that an increase in the small claims limit would impact people who need professional help and proper compensation;
- Find out if insurers reduce their premiums, as they promised, and crucially if those reductions are sustained. We suspect any reductions will be short lived and the insurers will find an excuse to keep their gravy train rolling by pocketing their £1.3bn a year savings.

The reforms are certainly not positive or progressive, but a much worse outcome was on the cards had it not been for the concerted campaign led by UNISON and Thompsons.

You have our word that the fight continues for as long as the Conservatives seek to deny access to justice for working people and their families and line their mates’ pockets.

To get help speak to your UNISON representative or visit www.thompsonstradeunion.law. □



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Natalie Harvey
senior lawyer,
Thompsons’
Solicitors



TEA AND SYMPATHY

Karen Birch combines kindness with a dogged determination to get things done. Feature writer **Helen Hague** speaks to an activist, qualified nurse and grandmother who has caring in the family gene pool

Caring, kindness and connecting with people have always informed the way UNISON rep Karen Birch approaches her work – and her union duties. It's all part of getting the job done as best you can – and being there for people when it matters.

As a teenager Karen started caring for the elderly in old people's homes, before moving across to help them cope at home. She went on to qualify as a nurse and now

works well away from the hands-on front line of health and social care. Or perhaps not that far...

Karen may no longer put pensioners to bed or change ten dressings on leg wounds in a day. But as senior appeals nurse for Doncaster Clinical Commissioning Group dealing with the needs of old and vulnerable people, she knows the hurdles they can face in getting the help and support they require.

When vulnerable people – or their relatives – believe

needs are not being met, or an eligibility decision is incorrect and want to appeal decisions over funding, Karen is one of the first points of contact. Her approach, after a career in caring and nursing, is to listen, hear people's stories, "tell them how the framework is implemented and support them throughout the appeal process".

There are, of course, policies and guidelines in place and certain criteria that must be met. And



WHEN YOU MEET IN THE SAME ROOM, YOU GET MORE OF A GIST OF A PERSON

Karen takes time out in her garden



whilst health care is free through the NHS, social care often has to be paid for after a financial assessment. Appeals look with fresh eyes at assessments, supporting families and elderly people. The assessment is not diagnosis led.

During the covid crisis, face-to-face conversations have been replaced with Microsoft Teams meetings. Karen had just had her first face-to-face meet since last March when she spoke to Active! and was hoping

things may get back to normal soon. "When you meet in the same room, you get more of a gist of a person. I have really missed that".

She has also missed the camaraderie that comes from working alongside the team in the office – the tea breaks, the informal chat which forms part of the daily routine as crucial and necessary work gets done.

That same urge to help that led Karen to build a career in caring and nursing prompted her to get active in the union – first as a union steward in a care home when she was young and now in her office-based role, representing UNISON members who work for Doncaster CCG.

Formal union training for the role she took on just before the pandemic, was derailed like so many other things. But she's risen to the challenge, supporting members facing financial and emotional pressures in these extraordinary times – with UNISON staff side rep Kate on hand if needed.

You could say caring is very much in the family gene pool. Karen's mother and father were both psychiatric nurses and her sister has retired from nursing. Even Karen's husband, who spent most of his working life as a brickmaker, was a carer in an old people's home for five years, retiring when covid struck the country.

It is hardly surprising it has taken Karen, mother of four and grandmother to two boys, a while to reconnect with learning after qualifying as a nurse more than a decade ago. When the children were young, her husband worked

in the day, and she worked in the evening in crucial and demanding roles that the covid pandemic has made many people appreciate more.

Towards the end of her stint nursing old people in their own homes – a role she found very rewarding – Karen realised she'd bandaged "nine or ten sets of legs" in a day, helping elderly patients cope with bedsores, fractures and ulcers. "I loved the job, but I just thought 'I can't do this till I retire'".

So, she moved to her current job. And when an email offering Return to Learn courses popped into her inbox at work, she decided to sign up, refreshing existing skills, learning new ones and making what felt like "good friends for life". The course – free to union members – was run by the WEA - and included weekly sessions after work and a weekend away, learning and bonding.

Because of lockdown Karen and her new Return to Learn friends received their certificates through the post rather than at the end-of-course celebration. Keen for more, she has already had an online "taster course" for Women's Lives.

Karen can't wait to get back to those face-to-face meetings at work and start studying Women's Lives with others in a room after work. Microsoft Teams and Zoom have played a vital role in lockdown, but as Karen sees it, you can't beat having a chat in the office with colleagues over a cup of tea and a bun. After all, it's those little routines that help us connect. And get what needs to be done, done. □



**YOU CAN'T
BEAT
HAVING
A CHAT
IN THE
OFFICE**



KEIR'S NEW VISION

Labour leader Keir Starmer has set out a 'much-needed and serious plan for change', says UNISON general secretary Christina McAnea. Mirror political journalist **Paul Routledge** reports

Keir Starmer stamped his authority on the Labour Party at the first conference he could speak directly to the faithful. Freed from pandemic restrictions, he rallied delegates in Brighton with a "Yes we can!" call to go for government.

It didn't go down too well with a number of Corbyn supporters, who heckled the leader. But he dealt with them decisively, pointing out: "At this time on a Wednesday it's usually the Tories who are heckling me. It doesn't bother me now." He could afford to be dismissive, because he had just pushed through a

new party constitution that means it is highly unlikely we'll have another Jezza. Nor, hopefully, another election disaster on the scale of 2019.

UNISON played a stabilising role at conference, supporting the Starmer reforms and general secretary Christina McAnea welcomed the leader's "new vision" for the country. "With a focus on education, public services, rights at work and mental health, Labour is offering just what the country needs after 11 years of Tory mismanagement," she said.

"Communities across the UK are struggling on so

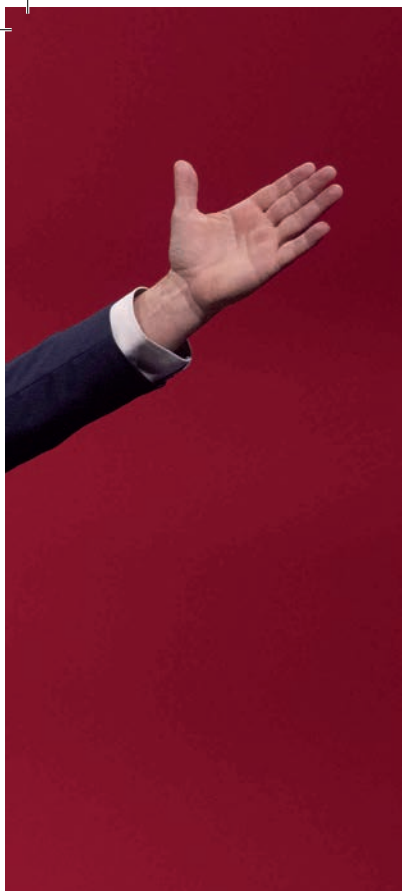
many levels. Keir's speech shows that Labour in power could bring hope to many families forgotten by this government. This is a serious plan for change."

Political commentators rated Brighton as a success for Labour, at a time when Boris Johnson was reeling from public anger over the petrol crisis. Staggering gas and electricity price hikes and the prospect of higher NI taxes, combine to drive the cost of living issue up the political agenda.

This can only be good for the Opposition, but with no parliamentary by-election on the horizon, the Government's lamentable



JOHNSON
HASN'T
GOT BREXIT
DONE.
HE
BOTCHED
THE JOB



performance won't be put to the test until next May during council elections.

Meanwhile Chancellor Sunak was due to present his Spending Review/Budget on October 27, when he was set to put flesh on the bones of Bojo's meaningless promise to "build back better". He was facing a rough ride from the new Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves, Labour MP for Leeds West and the new star of the Shadow Cabinet.

With an eye on the important Cop26 Climate Change conference in Glasgow this month (November), she vowed to be Britain's first "green

chancellor". In future years I'd put a bet on her becoming Labour's first woman leader, chosen by the new leadership election system that mixes OMOV with a greater say for MPs.

A general election might come sooner than you think. Johnson intends to abolish the fixed-term Parliaments Act, which means the Tories will be able to go to the country whenever they scent potential victory, aided by a parliamentary boundary review expected to hand them ten more seats.

Oliver Dowden, the new Conservative Party chairman, put his staff on alert for a possible poll in 2023, but Number Ten sources insist the Tories will go the full course. An election has to take place by December 2024, and by then the long-awaited inquiry into the pandemic will be under way, exposing the prime minister's catastrophic handling of the gravest crisis of modern times. An arrogant Johnson has privately told ministers he wants to be Prime Minister for "at least" ten years, aiming to overtake Thatcher's eleven-year reign.

And only now it can be told. An anonymous Bradford woman coined Johnson's election-winning catchphrase "get Brexit done", according to Aussie political strategist Sir Lynton Crosby. Those three words did more damage to Labour in the so-called Red Wall seats of Yorkshire than all the party broadcasts on the box.

"There is a lady somewhere in Bradford who in a focus group made the simple request, 'Can the

government just get Brexit done'," said the Oz guru.

"That phrase created the opportunity. It was relevant, the context was right and it was simple and clear." It may have been all of those things, but it wasn't true. He hasn't got Brexit done. He botched the job and at the time of going to press we were begging 5,000 European tanker drivers to come back.

He also made a hash of the war against Covid, dithering and delaying lockdown three times. Tens of thousands of victims, including many NHS and social care workers, perished because he couldn't bear to shut down the economy and upset his business pals. He had the brass neck to claim the successful vaccination campaign as his own, despite it being the work of the NHS and volunteers.

But they're still in power, and can do more damage. The Health and Social Care Bill going through Parliament sets up Integrated Care Boards, with powers to award and extend contracts of unlimited value, without advertising, to private companies. It's another step on the road to privatisation.

At local level Dan Jarvis has signalled his intention to stand down as Metro-Mayor of South Yorkshire, while remaining as Barnsley Central MP. I think that's a wise decision. He's needed down in Westminster. Council elections will take place across the region in May, against a backdrop of budget cuts and yet more redundancies.

Politics is rarely dull, but even by their hectic standards, it has been a turbulent year. And it's going to get even hotter. □



IT HAS BEEN A TURBULENT YEAR. AND IT'S GOING TO GET EVEN HOTTER



‘A KICK IN THE TEETH’

Staff working for Valorum Care Group in the region went through hell during the pandemic, but little did they realise what their reward would be. Active! editor **Barrie Clement** reports

To say it had been a tough time for the staff at Valorum Care doesn't begin to describe what they have been through.

The group, or more accurately its employees, look after vulnerable adults. The phrase “vulnerable adults” trips off the tongue, but it covers a wide range of profound mental and

physical disabilities and other complex health needs which present huge difficulties, primarily of course for clients themselves, but also to their families and those who are employed to look after them.

Valorum staff, who care for people at home and at centres across Yorkshire, clearly have highly skilled and extremely stressful jobs.

And then came covid.

Every difficulty employees experienced before the pandemic was multiplied a thousand times.

Patients in residential care were isolated from their families for months on end, some had no idea why their loved ones were no longer coming to visit. Social distancing was hit or miss at best because of



VALORUM
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CUTS

the special problems of the residents and many others were bewildered by carers' use of PPE (when it finally arrived).

Inevitably the care workers had family issues to address because of the pandemic as well as those they faced at work.

In short, staff were battered by the pandemic and their attempts to cope with it.

And what did Valorum do to reward their valiant staff?

A substantial bonus to say Thank You? An increase in pay? Shorter hours? I'm afraid not.

Last March the company gave their loyal employees what the union describes as "a kick in the teeth".

In all its wisdom, management decided to introduce significantly worse employment contracts, with a considerable reduction in terms and conditions; cutting holiday, sick and maternity pay.

Under the new pay regime, care, domestic, maintenance, catering and nursing staff who become ill will have to survive on statutory sick pay of just £96.35 a week.

To make matters worse, the company then embarked on a "ham-fisted consultation process", where there was little in the way of consultation, according to the union. UNISON argues that management had already made up its mind and believed that staff should be grateful for what they would get.

And this from an organisation which, in its returns to Companies House, declares that it is "committed to investing in people". In another passage it boasts:

"The group encourage involvement of employees in its management through regular meetings and feedback exercises."

The reality was somewhat different, say UNISON officials. Many employees felt intimidated by the attitude of certain managers who were "really aggressive". In one "consultative" meeting employees were reportedly warned that if they didn't like the new contracts they should go and find another job – an ultimatum the company subsequently denied.

Management even decided not to recognise an employee-nominated representative in meetings.

The union says that many staff have been bullied into accepting the inferior contracts, but a dozen members, who mainly work in the Kirklees, Sheffield and Leeds centres, bravely decided to put their heads above the parapet.

The union then took the dispute to the conciliation service Acas to see if there was a way of resolving it without legal action. That proved impossible and now UNISON is taking the case to an employment tribunal.

UNISON officials believe the consultation process was defective and unlawful and the reduction in terms was a breach of TUPE rules. The TUPE legislation protects the terms and conditions of workers who are transferred from one employer to another but who carry out essentially the same function. In this case Valorum took over the running of care services in 2019 previously operated by Leonard Cheshire Disability.

UNISON members at Valorum did not want to be quoted in Active! because they feared retribution from managers, so we spoke to regional organiser Ashley Harper. He urged management to think again: "Valorum must reverse these devastating cuts. Quite simply it's the right thing to do."

"The pandemic has clearly shown how valuable skilled, dedicated care staff are. Valorum would be making a terrible mistake by undermining the very workers who've more than proved themselves in the most terrible of circumstances."

"Driving through short-sighted, cost-cutting plans won't just alienate staff but could even compromise the care residents receive if care workers decide to get jobs with employers who better respect their workforce."

"No-one wins if a care company starts putting profits before caring for people. Valorum should see sense and back down now."

Ashley said the cuts were "mean-spirited" and had "really upset people, but made them angry as well". Matters had been made worse by the "shoddy" way in which the company had attempted to conduct consultations: "There were mistakes in letters to staff. There were incorrect dates, notice periods were wrong and there were basic legal errors. They were pretty incompetent."

As we were going to press, UNISON was speaking to members who had objected to the new terms with a view to taking their cases to an employment tribunal. □



**NO-ONE
WINS IF
A CARE
COMPANY
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BEFORE
CARING**



Ashley Harper



THE UNION WON'T LET YOU DOWN

The last 18 months have been incredibly tough, but our new general secretary Christina McAnea and regional convenor Wendy Nichols point out that UNISON has stuck by its members. And it will continue to do so in the challenges ahead. Consulting editor **Mary Maguire** reports



MANY OF OUR MEMBERS ARE NOW UTTERLY EXHAUSTED

The whole world has been on a tragically sharp learning curve ever since the first case of the deadly and highly infectious coronavirus, covid-19.


UNISON members have been relentlessly on the front-line, saving lives and comforting the sick and dying, delivering food and medical supplies, keeping

the streets clean and safe. They have cared for our elderly, our children and vulnerable people, while some big businesses were cynically cashing in on the opportunities that a worldwide health crisis offered.

During the peaks of transmission, lockdown, daily death counts and social separation, Government and

public acknowledged the true worth of public service workers. That they were let down by ministers who dithered and delayed while people died, is unforgiveable. As is the way the elderly were discharged from hospitals into care homes, where workers had to watch helplessly, without adequate PPE or other support, as many died.

Says regional convenor,



workers, charity, voluntary sector and other front-line public service staff revealed many at the edge of burn-out through juggling work and home commitments during the crisis. A massive 80 per cent had to go into work worried they would bring the virus home and 40 per cent said they did not feel supported in their jobs. More than a fifth (21 per cent) had a caring role for partners or elderly parents. UNISON believes that better flexible working arrangements would help enormously.

UNISON general secretary Christina McAnea points out that women key workers helped keep the country running during the Covid-19 crisis - often while supporting sick relatives and caring for young families.

"The pandemic has hammered home how many women need more flexible hours to have a fulfilling work/life balance and deal with family commitments. The Government must step up to ensure employers give women a fairer deal over hours.

"But not only are they still expected to be the primary carer, society continues to put a low value on many jobs mainly done by women.

"This has to change. Women's voices must be at the heart of our Covid recovery."

In one of our key areas, the NHS, where members are facing burn out, UNISON has recently negotiated a deal on new flexible working rights to give a better work-life balance. Often cited as a reason for wanting to quit the NHS, poor work-life balance with long hours and rigid shifts, has left staff exhausted.

The deal means that

members can request flexible working from the start of their employment, rather than after six months' service. They can make an unlimited number of applications, instead of once a year, don't have to justify their requests or provide specific reasons and all possible solutions must be explored. Employers are expected to promote flexibility options for all jobs when recruiting and to discuss the subject regularly in staff meetings.

In social care, UNISON's key demands include a real living wage of at least £10 an hour. They also include a standard employment contract that includes sick pay, contracted hours, pay for all hours on duty and travel time. The union is calling for significant emergency government funding, professional standards with an upgraded Care certificate and a partnership working group of commissioners, providers, government and unions to "action solutions".

UNISON has called on the Government to ditch the "no jab, no job" rule for care home staff in the midst of a looming staffing shortage. Mandatory vaccinations are a massive distraction from the core job of care, staff are feeling bullied and voting with their feet.

Says Christina: "Vaccination remains the way out of the pandemic. But coercing and bullying care workers can never be the right approach. Ministers have been told repeatedly that using force instead of persuasion will fail. But they've not listened and now their ill-considered policy is backfiring.

"The Government is sleepwalking into this disaster by not acting. Care is already a broken and underfunded



WOMEN'S VOICES MUST BE AT THE HEART OF OUR COVID RECOVERY.

Wendy Nichols: "Our members in Yorkshire & Humberside, along with the rest of the country, were the ones who carried on diligently doing their jobs, despite the Government's criminal lack of planning, despite the PPE fiasco, despite their own fears for themselves and their families. Many of our members are now utterly exhausted, wondering whether they can carry on."

A UNISON survey of nearly 47,000 women key workers such as nurses, teaching assistants, social care



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WORKING
LIFE
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THE SAME

sector that cannot afford to lose any more staff. It must scrap the 'no job, no job' rule now. Widespread care home closures could be the consequence if they ignore the warnings. This would be disastrous for elderly people and those who cannot live without care support.”

UNISON leaders are also extremely concerned about the scrapping of safety measures in schools that can lead to further disrupted learning for pupils who've already lost out during the lockdowns. Amid warnings of a spike in covid cases amongst children in the new academic year, the union wants the Government to re-introduce safety measures in schools, including bubbles, social distancing and face coverings.

The union has been negotiating post-covid agreements and guidelines for all workers, whether working from home or on the front line, whether carers or cleaners, in schools, or in street cleansing or social work. UNISON has called for the timing and phasing of the return to workplaces to be discussed with union stewards. Risk assessments must be undertaken,

particularly for the clinically extremely vulnerable. Continued home working, social distancing measures, face coverings, changing workplace layouts, ventilation and screens/barriers should all be carefully considered.

Local government workers are covered by agreements that state any health absence relating to covid, including vaccination side effects, will be dealt with under the sickness scheme. Long covid should be treated with the same discretion allowed for any other long-term illness, and self-isolation due to contact with covid should not count as sickness, but be paid normally.

Social workers are expected to have adequate safeguards to continue direct work and clear guidance and training on virtual working and suitable electronic communications. Only critical face-to-face home visits should be undertaken, but they must have adequate access to PPE and hand sanitisers with specific guidance for “just in case” scenarios. Parking permits and essential car user allowances should be in place to minimise the use of public transport.

“Protect our workforce,

protect our food” is the approach the union is adopting to ensure slaughterhouse workers are safe and the country fed. UNISON wants adequate separation and sanitising throughout all stages, with correct segregation while on the “line” where the meat hygiene inspectors stand to make sure food is fit for human consumption. There should be no sharing of washing/sterilising facilities in the food processing areas, with adequate time and space available for washing down after shift end and break times.

Says Wendy: “Covid changed the way we work in many ways and, whatever happens, working life won't be the same. Under our new general secretary, our union has responded magnificently, in taking care of members, arguing the case for better PPE and working conditions, and more and more are joining us for that protection. I know that our union will look after our members' interests and will continue to fight for decent pay. Our members put themselves in harm's way to look after us all, and we won't let anyone, let alone the Government forget that.” □



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UNISON
the public service union

RIDING HIGH

Activist Aneliese Jackman says UNISON not only helps members with difficult workplace issues, it also provides training which helps boost your confidence. **Ryan Fletcher** reports



Photo: Vicky Matthews

Aneliese at Howden Equestrian Centre

UNISON learning rep Aneliese Jackman has got back on the horse ... literally and figuratively.

The 35-year-old, who works as an administrator at Leeds Beckett University, took a decade away from riding but is taking lessons again with the aim of owning her own horse by the time she reaches 40.

Aneliese has also got back in the saddle in terms of her work life after she became aware of the personal and professional development opportunities available to UNISON members.

"Like many other people, my contact with UNISON was because I had a grievance, but then I found out about all the other things the union offers. I was like 'oh wow you do so much more', like all the training and career development," said Aneliese.

During the first six months of the pandemic, Aneliese was on maternity leave at her home in Selby, with baby Ash and his three-year-old sister Kora. She returned in October last year to find her role had completely changed and not for the better.

Aneliese's workplace rep was on hand to take her concerns forward and the issue was satisfactorily resolved. The incident, however, served to remind Aneliese of the difficulties many mothers face either on their return to the workplace from maternity leave, or because they work part time.

"I found that my confidence had been knocked when I got back to work. I think it's made more difficult because suddenly you find that a lot of opportunities are not open to you. But UNISON training is available to everyone," said Aneliese.

"As a woman, with two young children who has just

come back off maternity, having that opportunity, which wasn't available through my employer, means that I can train in my own time. It has given me the confidence to say I can improve my career prospects and compete professionally."

Aneliese found UNISON's Women's Lives taster course particularly beneficial and is planning on taking the full course later this year. The Women's Lives course has been designed to make it easier for women to get back into education.

The aim is to build confidence as well as to develop study skills, so the emphasis is on co-operation and mutual support. It focuses on women's experiences at work and in their personal lives.

"I think in a work environment a lot of the time you have to stand on other people to get where you want to go. But with UNISON, it's like 'no we can do this together. We can train together, and we can progress together,'" explained Aneliese.

Conversely, that spirit of cooperation, rather than competition, allows those taking part to spend more time thinking about themselves, as Aneliese found out.

She said: "You put yourself last because your family comes first, especially as a parent. Like with the horse riding, the training was something I was just doing for myself as an individual.

You can see yourself developing and you can say to yourself 'I did that off my own back'. It's great."

ADULTHOOD

Aneliese is now taking riding lessons having last got on a horse over a decade ago. Before then she was a keen rider,

but the ever-accumulating responsibilities of adulthood meant Aneliese's presence at the stables became less frequent, until she stopped horse riding altogether.

But that is not the case anymore. Aneliese said: "My life goal is to be able to own my own horse by the time I am 40. You know when you're a kid and you have these dreams, well mine was to have my own horse. So, I'm going to pass my horse-riding exams and get myself up to standard so I can buy one before my 40th birthday."

Born-again equestrian Aneliese is also a pianist and has a degree in music from Sheffield. After university, Aneliese travelled solo to China, India and Nepal, before starting a family with her husband Dave.

"At the moment my little girl is really into Frozen, so right at the moment I play a lot of sing-along Disney tunes on the piano," laughed Aneliese.

EAGER

As well as passing on her love of music to her kids, Aneliese is also keen to help other UNISON members take advantage of the union's learning opportunities.

As the Leeds Beckett branch's learning rep, Aneliese is eager to highlight to other members that there is more to UNISON membership than resolving workplace disputes.

"I am really looking forward to getting people involved and for them to take advantage of the benefits I have had. I don't think people realise the training UNISON offers," said Aneliese.

"Everybody goes to the union with case work. It's great because your reps have got your back and you've got the confidence to go to your employer and say 'this isn't right'. But the training is there as well for members and it can be really helpful." □



I FOUND MY CONFIDENCE HAD BEEN KNOCKED WHEN I GOT BACK TO WORK



MY GOAL IS TO OWN A HORSE BY THE TIME I AM 40



Photo: Vicky Matthews

MY JOB, OR MY LIFE?

Adam Ridley's employer was trying to force him back to work during the pandemic despite his severe lung conditions. But then UNISON's North Yorkshire local government branch got involved. **Christine Buckley** reports

Panic gripped many people at the start of the coronavirus pandemic last year both because of the illness itself and also its impact on the economy and jobs. But for Adam Ridley fears about both health and work were inextricably linked because of his serious health conditions.

Adam, a former music teacher who lives in Northallerton, was a team leader in an autism residential home run by Cambian Autism Services. He worked with children who can't control their emotions and who certainly can't keep a physical distance.

He has pulmonary

sarcoidosis, a condition that can trigger shortness of breath and a persistent cough. He also has asthma and at the start of the pandemic he was warned by the NHS that he was at risk of severe illness if he contracted coronavirus. He'd seen his consultant just before the first lockdown and in a letter passed to his

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employer, the consultant stressed the general guidance to clinically vulnerable people that they should shield and avoid all social contact.

Initially, this was accepted by Cambian Autism Services and Adam, 34, remained at home on full pay. He tried to do some work online. But after the 14-week shielding period passed his pay was reduced and then as the first general return to work began last autumn Adam's pay was stopped because he didn't return to work. For him, the health threats were still too high.

Despite detailed discussions with his immediate boss, Adam learned about his pay in a blanket email from the home's parent company – CareTech, one of the UK's largest private social care providers. The insensitivity of the general email to an employee with a chronic medical condition ironically came as the founder of CareTech – Farouq Sheikh – received an OBE for services to specialist social care.

He said: "At that point I just freaked out. Luckily I had UNISON to turn to because I'd joined at the start of the pandemic because of the uncertainty about jobs."

Adam hadn't been offered any redeployment into a non-hands-on role despite requesting it.

Adam was frightened about losing his ability to provide for his children – Robin, his daughter, was then four and his son Rufus was two – and he was scared by the disease itself. He was worried that perhaps he could be forced back to work or that his job would be

taken away.

It was Helen Gray, of North Yorkshire local government branch, who really helped him see sense in the dark times. "She was empathetic and understanding and importantly made me realise that I wasn't losing my mind and that employers just couldn't behave that way."

They tried to sort out the situation informally with the employer and then through a grievance procedure, but their efforts were to no avail. The impasse remained. Cambian Autism Services viewed Adam as refusing to go back to work, although he was "ready and willing to work". Adam and Helen logged everything that had happened, sought legal advice through the union's solicitors Thompsons and then decided that the only way to get justice would be an employment tribunal.

When Adam had no income and the salary of his wife Caroline wasn't enough to keep the family going, he had to take out a loan to cover the household bills. He also started looking for another job.

It was at that time that his academic background and his love of music helped him to survive what was an extremely stressful period. A pianist, guitarist and vocalist, Adam says: "Music gave me solace. It kept me as sane as possible."

Adam had very much enjoyed his previous job. He'd got into the work because while teaching he found the most rewarding part was working with autistic children. He'd not been in the role very long before he was promoted,

and he had hoped that his career would develop further there.

The tribunal case was unusual in that employment contracts don't specify what action should be taken in the event of a pandemic. But Thompsons think that many more similar cases will be finding their way through tribunals.

Thankfully after all the stress he'd been through, Adam had a resounding victory. He won a claim for disability discrimination and was awarded all the pay he lost, with the total topping £22,000.

And he found a new job. He is now working for the probation service enjoying better hours and he is beginning the career climb afresh in a new line of work.

His finances are back to what they were before his pay was reduced and then stopped.

He now hopes that others will be encouraged to fight against unfair treatment following his success.

Adam says he felt incredibly empowered after the decision of the tribunal and now he encourages everyone to join a union. "If you're not in a union and this happens to you, where do you go? You must feel isolated and that you can't do anything. I pay about £15 a month to UNISON which is a drop in the ocean for all the legal and professional support you get."

He adds: "After all with the pandemic and the trouble with my employer, you ask yourself, would I rather lose my job or my life? And obviously there is no choice." □



I PAY
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WHICH IS
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THE OCEAN

Photo: Vicky Matthers

UP FOR THE CAUSE

Hilary Levitt has been through her fair share of trauma - including bereavement and divorce - but her fighting spirit is intact. **Ruth McGuire** interviews a 'strong character'

Just about two decades ago, Hilary Levitt faced a major crossroads in her life. Her much loved job as PA to a finance director of a bank, was relocating to Coventry.

If she chose to stay in Yorkshire where she was born and bred, she had no immediate prospects of a job commensurate with her skills, experience, and interests.

If she moved to Coventry, she would have job security but would leave behind family, friends, and life as she knew it in Harrogate. Hilary chose Yorkshire and after a two-year stint of unemployment, eventually found another job as a PA - but this time in the public sector, with Harrogate district hospital. The rest, as they say, is history.

Hilary soon adapted to a

completely different working environment to the one she was accustomed to in the private sector. She admits to experiencing some initial "culture shock" with the bureaucracy of the NHS.

However, once she settled into her new job, she developed an interest in workplace issues and in union activism. It began with a genuine concern for staff. "I saw staff being bullied and I

didn't like it. I also didn't like the way some of the managers talked to staff."

Where many people may have looked the other way or buried their head in the sand, Hilary was determined to make a difference and was "persuaded" to become a union steward.

"I learnt the hard way and although I did some initial training, I was very much thrown into the deep end, so I just got on with it." Hilary became well established in her roles as branch secretary and steward and 16 years later, now splits her time between work as a UNISON rep and as a trade union convenor which involves liaising with different unions as well as with management.

Looking back over the numerous cases she's dealt with over the years, some of the most memorable for Hilary have been those that have involved allegations of racism, fraud and gross misconduct but also cases where she has represented staff with mental health illnesses or disabilities.

Along the way, she's fine-tuned her negotiating skills and knows when to advise staff to "fess up" and admit to wrongdoing rather than pursue indefensible cases.

Outside work, Hilary shows the same determination and courage in her personal life as she does with her union activism. This is why six years ago, she called time on a marriage she believed had no future. Her younger brother Robin's death within four months of being diagnosed with

cancer, was the wake-up call that made her reflect on her life, her marriage and her future. While she could see a future for her work, she could not see one for her marriage so ended it.

Whatever the reason, ending any marriage is never easy. In addition to the obvious emotional cost, there are the practical considerations. In Hilary's case, her divorce brought with it a significant lifestyle change. "I had to downsize from living in a four-bedroom detached house to living in rented accommodation for a while before moving into a fairly compact two-bedroom apartment, but you have to cut your cloth accordingly as they say."

Despite making yet another leap of faith into the unknown, Hilary has no regrets about her decision to walk out of her marriage. She is clearly a survivor and in her own words "a strong character". This is a characteristic she believes she inherited from her mother who had her fair share of challenges to deal with. "At the age of 50, my mother had to cope with losing both her husband and her parents all in the space of eighteen months."

CAUSE

When she's not fighting her own personal battles or fighting to protect the rights of NHS staff, Hilary's other passion also involves a "cause" as a member of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). "I joined the RSPB because I love birds –

particularly Puffins," says Hilary.

JUSTICE

As a female activist, she has something in common with the often-overlooked female founder of the RSPB, Emily Williamson. She too had a strong sense of justice and wanted to protect birds whose existence she believed, were under threat due to the demands of the "fashion for feathers" back in the nineteenth century.

Now, 132 years after Williamson set up her charity, Hilary's interest in the charity's mission to protect birds, takes her around the country to bird sanctuaries like Saltholme in Stockton-on-Tees or to more local sanctuaries like Fairburn Ings in Castleford.

Like many people though, Hilary is looking forward to the post-pandemic freedom to travel further afield. In particular, she wants to visit her elder brother Martin who lives in Florida.

Meanwhile, back at work, changes are afoot. In July 2021, her branch became part of the northern health and community branch which was formed by the merger of Leeds & York community health, Harrogate health care and St Anne's community. Hilary feels very positive about the new branch structure but also about the new ways of working "remotely" brought on in a big way by the pandemic. Armed with a new laptop, she's getting used to the world of virtual meetings and is well prepared for any of the challenges that either life or work may throw at her in future. □



I SAW STAFF
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KEEPING IT REAL

Sister of murdered MP Jo Cox, Kim Leadbeater is fully aware of the legacy left by her sibling. But she's ploughing her own furrow as the newly elected member for Batley and Spen. **Claire Donnelly** speaks to a woman who understands the needs of her community

She's never been one to mince her words. And as the newly-elected MP for Batley and Spen, Kim Leadbeater is quick to admit she's as surprised as anyone to find herself sitting in Westminster.

As she says: "If you'd come to me ten years ago and said I was going to be an MP I wouldn't have believed it. Most days it seems a bit surreal."

Speaking over a hurried working lunch in her London office, she makes no bones about feeling like an outsider - or her commitment to doing the best she can for her constituents.

"I have lots of moments

of self-doubt," she says.

"Lots of them, probably several times a day, imposter syndrome is very real."

"I'm a working class, northern woman... I have to say to myself you've as much right to be here as anybody else."

She certainly does.

Known for her warm, personable approach, Kim's route into politics has definitely been unusual - shaped by unthinkable tragedy and loss and driven by a need to serve the community she loves.

The 45-year-old's life changed forever when her sister, Jo Cox, the then MP for Batley and Spen was murdered by a far-right

extremist in June 2016.

Her devastated family launched The Jo Cox Foundation, promoting unity in a time of great division. When Kim, a wellbeing coach and personal trainer, became an ambassador for the charity it marked a turning point in her life - propelling her into the public eye.

As she puts it: "I don't remember much prior to Jo's murder. Everything has changed so much."

When former MP Tracey Brabin stood down earlier this year, Kim, threw her hat into the ring. With her family's blessing she endured what turned out to be a gruelling, divisive



MOST DAYS IT SEEMS A BIT SURREAL



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campaign.

Subjected to homophobic abuse and attacked on social media, despite everything she never thought about stepping down. "There were times when I was having to contact my friends and family to let them know I was physically okay," she says.

"After what has happened to our family, that isn't something you want. It was tough and exhausting - physically and emotionally. I'm a ball of energy and stamina but I needed it.

"Some of those candidates wanted to make it a divisive campaign. We, and lots of people locally, had worked hard to overcome division, so to be subjected to that was very upsetting. We need civility in public life.

"When people see violence and that level of division it has a knock-on effect - it puts people off coming into politics. If I had been 25 not 45, it would have put me off too. But we had amazing support - including from the trade unions.

"I've not had huge amounts of abuse online but I try and respond, talk it through. I've got three panic alarms now - yes, that's sad but I'll take any help I can get."

Despite it all, she kept going - winning the seat by a nail-biting 323 votes. When the news came in - at 0430 - even she was surprised. "I was in the car park, in the car, when one of my colleagues came up and told me," she says, grinning at the memory.

"I contacted my mum and dad and my partner first. They said, 'no you haven't' and I had to say, 'I have, we're here.'"

Since then she's been working non-stop - shuttling

between her West Yorkshire and Westminster offices.

In a charged maiden speech in September she paid tribute to her sister, Jo - but explained she's here to make her own mark too.

"It's very emotional," she says. "There's a big issue for me around identity, there always will be. If I had a pound for everyone who called me Jo I'd be very wealthy. I am Jo Cox's sister and I'm extremely proud to be known for that and always will be. But I'm me too, I'm Kim."

As for all new MPs, this is clearly a hectic time. A fitness enthusiast, her new schedule means she's struggling to find time to work out and rest.

"I really need my sleep," she laughs, "and I'm not doing nearly enough exercise. I joined the Westminster gym and I've joined the women's football team so let's see if I get to do either..."

She adds: "Westminster can feel like a bubble, the fancy dinners and all of that.

I'm sure people are worried that it will change me - and I can see how that happens - but it won't.

"I'm not about to become something or someone that I'm not.

"You have to understand the needs of the people that have elected you and the system. Part of my job is to bridge that gap, make sure their voices are heard."

Now she's getting to grips with what she sees as the key issues facing her constituency - a place she's lived in all of her life - an urgent need for more investment and a focus on healing division.

"There weren't many good things about the pandemic but that sense of togetherness was one," she says.

"I feel strongly about continuing to build that sense of community.

"The government talks about levelling up - well part of my job is to make sure that every penny gets spent well locally." □

By-election results

• Kim Leadbeater (Lab)	13,296	(35.27%)
• Ryan Stephenson (C)	12,973	(34.42%)
• George Galloway (WP)	8,264	(21.92%)
• Thomas Gordon (LD)	1,254	(3.33%)
• Corey Robinson (Yorkshire)	816	(2.16%)
• Therese Hirst (Eng Dem)	207	(0.55%)
• Jack Thomson (UKIP)	151	(0.40%)
• Howling Laud Hope (Loony)	107	(0.28%)
• Mike Davies (Green Soc)	104	(0.28%)
• Paul Bickerdike (CPA)	102	(0.27%)
• Jonathan Tilt (FA)	100	(0.27%)
• Anne Marie Waters (FB)	97	(0.26%)
• Andrew Smith (Rejoin)	75	(0.20%)
• Oliver Purser (Soc Dem)	66	(0.18%)
• Jayda Fransen (Ind)	50	(0.13%)
• Susan Laird (Heritage)	33	(0.09%)

Labour majority	323	(0.86%)
Electorate	79,373; Turnout 37,695	(47.49%)



Photo: Vicky Matthews

GREAT OUTDOORS

UNISON convenor Diane Redmond knows how to relieve the stresses of her hectic everyday life. Specialist paramedic Diane prescribes a walk in her beloved Peak District, says **Ryan Fletcher**

As a specialist paramedic and a convenor and treasurer of UNISON's Yorkshire Ambulance branch, Diane Redmond is an extremely busy woman. So what does she do with her precious time off?

"I do a lot of walking," responded Diane. "I live at the edge of the Peak District, so I like to go off and do decent walks and enjoy nature and relax."

Clearly she faces huge pressures at work, which the pandemic made considerably worse. Not

just for herself, but also for the 3,000 members within the branch – which as well as ambulances cover a dizzying array of departments, including NHS 111.

"I've seen my colleagues change in front of me during the pandemic.



WEARING
PPE
EVERY
DAY
TAKES
ITS TOLL

I think a lot are probably unaware of it and we are yet to see the full ramifications of everything that has happened," the 47-year-old said.

"It has taken its toll. Wearing PPE everyday takes its toll. It was also difficult for staff who had to shield. They wanted to come to work and help and were forced to stay at home.

"Meanwhile the demands are exponential at the moment, there's huge pressure on the ambulance service as we return to day-to-day operations."

One positive to come out of the pandemic, Diane said, is that people seem to put more value on the service NHS staff provide.

"Public perception has been really nice this year. People have really appreciated the NHS and have said that to us," Diane said.

"I'm a paramedic prescriber and when I do a shift on NHS 111, the number of patients at the end of the call who have said 'thank you so much' has really increased since the pandemic began."

As someone who works for the good of others, Diane sees similarities between her role as a paramedic and her UNISON duties.

As well as an "overriding sense" of doing what's right, Diane explained that both union work and patient care require never making assumptions about people.

"With a patient you've also got to disclose all the facts that are relevant to their care. It's the same when assisting a member

– you've got to be realistic with their expectations but also try and push for what you can," said Diane.

Diane highlights her work with UNISON colleague Richard Bentley on holiday pay claims as one of the things she is proudest of at the branch.

It is thanks to Richard, who Diane describes as "a dynamo – always on the go, always thinking, very resourceful", that the branch has played a pivotal role in tackling the national issue of regular overtime being excluded from NHS holiday pay.

Diane has also brought about positive policy changes for staff with disabilities within the Yorkshire Ambulance Service.

"Quite a lot of things are reasonable adjustments, there's been some ignorance towards that. I'm quite passionate about disability and people being able to be on an even footing," said Diane.

"It's nice to change policy and influence the direction of the things that we do. I like to effect change and to be able to assist people. There's a great satisfaction from helping people, getting them what they need and what they want."

Diane joined the ambulance service in 1999 at the age of 25, having spent the first part of her working life as groom at a livery yard.

Her first job was in patient transport, where she was paid £3.46 an hour and worked 12 and a half hours a week.

"It was the only way to get in the service at that

point," recalled Diane. "After six months it went up by 50p and it felt like loads. Eventually I went full time and in 2003 I began training as a paramedic and qualified in 2005."

A UNISON member since 2000, Diane became more active in the union in 2010 due to the efforts of her local convenor who talked her into becoming a rep.

Now as a convenor herself, it is Diane who is taking on a leadership and mentoring role within the branch.

Membership is flourishing says Diane, who puts some of the increase down to people "feeling less secure and needing more support" following the travails of covid. Pay is also looming large on members' minds.

"People would like a decent pay rise. I think that'll be the next thing on the agenda. We could do with some recognition of the hard work we've put in during the pandemic," said Diane.

Outside of work, Diane enjoys looking after her 16-year-old horse Ellie, who has been with Diane since she was two years old. The pair often competed in affiliated dressage before injury forced Ellie into early retirement.

As well as walking, Diane also enjoys circuit training and is determined to enjoy the outdoors as much as possible now that lockdown has ended.

She said: "Obviously, last year we had to spend a lot of time indoors, so my mantra for this year is to spend most of it outside." □



I LIKE
TO EFFECT
CHANGE
AND
ASSIST
PEOPLE



A WASTE OF SPACE

Amazon owner Jeff Bezos and Virgin boss Richard Branson looked down on us while orbiting the globe. **Peter Carroll** expresses his contempt for their gross expressions of greed

As exhausted public sector workers are rewarded for their efforts with a pay cut, climate disasters multiply across the world and benefits cuts plunge millions into even more desperate poverty, the question on everyone's lips is: What does all this human misery look like from space? Well, here's the good news!

We can now ask two of the world's richest capitalists what they saw when they were looking down on us whilst orbiting the globe a few months ago.

Jeff Bezos and Richard Branson (owners of Amazon and Virgin respectively) have conducted their own miniature space race to see who could achieve lift-off first.

It was the American who just shaded it to take Gold, but both finalists were agreed: All of us - all humanity - are winners from this "to boldly go", can-do attitude towards colonising other worlds.

(If beings from other galaxies are reading this, which is probable, I strongly advise them to wake up to this threat before it's too late.)



THE MEDIA,
ESPECIALLY
THE BBC,
DROOLED
OVER
THIS STORY

The media, especially the BBC, drooled over this story for a while. It was “thrilling” that these two titans of the free world had paved the way for bespoke package holidays in space for other obscenely rich people.

So there you have it – billionaires are at the cutting edge of efforts to improve life on earth by finding ways to get as far away from it as humanly possible.

A grateful Bezos even took the trouble to thank Amazon workers and customers who had enabled him to squander billions on his mad vanity project.

These are the workers sacked for taking toilet breaks or attending medical appointments, who are on entirely insecure temporary contracts and who live in constant fear of destitution at the brutal hands of their masters.

But just look at the benefits of running companies like they were Victorian workhouses and so accumulating vast personal wealth.

Did his workers rejoice when they heard their boss had outdone other billionaires for gross and insulting displays of greed by holidaying in space? (massive luxury yachts and stately homes are so yesterday).

We haven’t been told yet if the workers have organised street parties or religious services and the like. One can only hope that this wondrous adventure into the unknown brought at least a glimmer of happiness amidst all the heart-breaking abuse and exploitation these workers suffer every day.

That there has been such muted outrage about this

flagrant display of excess is not surprising.

Outrageous greed has become routine. David Cameron breezily dismissed claims of misconduct when it was revealed he lobbied senior Tories on behalf of a hedge fund for a massive Government handout.

The firm went bust but fortunately Cameron’s £7.5 million was already safely in his eye-wateringly enormous bank account. Where is the condemnation of this in the media?

Of course there are people across the political spectrum who believe the accumulation of wealth is a fundamental right that all citizens have in free market, liberal democracies here and elsewhere.

As Lord Mandelson told the world, he was “entirely relaxed” about people being “filthy rich”.

He did add the rider, “as long as they pay their taxes”, but that now sounds like a smug, sarcastic sneer, given the world-beating tax evasion and money laundering paradise that is the City of London.

This so-called “right” to exploit other human beings, is, of course, not a “right”.

The battles people fought to abolish the slave trade, often at huge personal risk, eventually ended this inhuman business.

The slavers were compensated with billions of pounds (in today’s currency) for being deprived of their blood money.

This monstrous trade in human beings which enriched elites and funded the British empire was believed to be a “right”.

We even have statues

which celebrate these monsters from the past.

Our “free media”, owned by off-shore billionaires, loves to savage those who believe the slave trade and its beneficiaries should not be immortalised in stone until the end of time.

And more recently, the great Labour politician Aneurin Bevan was forced to overcome the greed of medical consultants in order to establish the NHS. Bevan said he had to “stuff their mouths with gold” to win their agreement.

In their respective eras, the rich vested interest groups argued that it was not possible for slavery to be abolished and the NHS would bankrupt the country.

But the champions of humanity were relentless in their efforts.

They dramatically proved the truth of the progressive maxim that we will never know how inevitable the inevitable really is unless we challenge it.

And there endeth the lesson.

But just to be clear - and to get back to the self-indulgent extraterrestrial antics of Messrs Bezos and Branson - I would like to correct any suggestion that I am some puffed, ascetic - I am definitely up for a much-needed break.

But I would rather join the senior Tories like the Foreign Secretary in Crete or Matt Hancock in the Alps, or the Johnsons in the Maldives. They know how to enjoy a luxury holiday.

Even if I can scrape the money together, I will not be holidaying in space either now, or at any time in the future. There’s no atmosphere... □



THERE HAS BEEN SUCH MUTED OUTRAGE ABOUT THIS FLAGRANT DISPLAY OF EXCESS



PAUL ROUTLEDGE

MIRROR POLITICAL COLUMNIST

INTENSIVE CARE NEEDED FOR NHS

There is a unique opportunity to address the health service crisis. We have an ambitious new Health Secretary and a new NHS boss Amanda Pritchard – the first woman chief executive of an organisation with 75 per cent female employees. But will the Chancellor let them get to grips with the problems?

Boris Johnson promised to “put the NHS back on its feet” with a tax-and-spend package worth a handful of billions. This is rich, coming from the very same Tories who put the health service on its back with years of under-funding.

His dramatic betrayal of an election manifesto pledge not to increase National Insurance payments won't solve the deepening crisis of the NHS and the social care sector.

It's also a cruel hit on public service workers. Those on the lowest pay who can least afford it will lose £130 a year if they earn £20,000. Those on £30,000 will take home £255 less, and anyone on £50,000 will be £500 worse off.

The NIS surcharge virtually wipes out the three per cent pay rise for many NHS staff, and is a real-terms pay cut for those like police support staff subject to Chancellor Sunak's wage freeze.

The wrong people are paying for this incompetent Tory attempt to put things right. Instead of putting 1p or 2p on income tax, they load the burden on working families on low and middle incomes.

Even former Conservative Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt, admits that the NHS is short of 18,000 nurses and if there was an attempt to get waiting lists

down to pre-pandemic levels, it is 40,000 short.

Yet the Government insists that NHS England, under its new boss Amanda Pritchard, must still deliver 1.1 per cent yearly “efficiency gains” - ie jobs - under an obsolete long-term plan agreed in 2018.

The levy won't solve the crisis in social care, because it's “just a tweak” when wholesale change from top to bottom is required, says UNISON general secretary Christina McAnea.

And even the inadequate £5.3 billion set aside for the sector is at risk because the NHS could swallow the whole £13 billion expected to be raised by the surcharge - spent on Covid and reducing the 5.6 million waiting list.

The Queen awarded the NHS the George Cross, recognising the “courage, compassion and dedication” of loyal staff. It seems a distant memory, but it was only in July.

HONOUR DR JOHN

York Minster is to have a new statue of the Queen in time for Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee next summer.

It will stand in an empty niche on the west front of the 800-year-old cathedral, overlooking a new plaza to be named Queen Elizabeth Square.

One of the Minster's own stonemasons, Edward Cossons,

has sculpted the figure, depicting the Queen in her Garter robes with the orb and sceptre.

Minster clergy hope the statue will “inspire the city and be a cause for celebration when we recover from the pandemic.” It is intended to act as a “symbol of hope” in the aftermath of the pandemic.

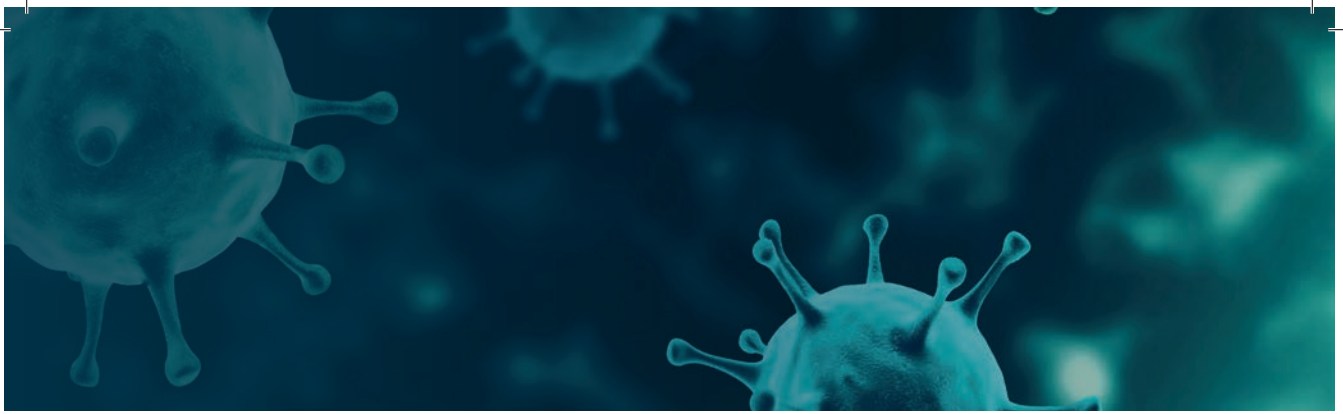
And I hope HRH is happy with her likeness, which makes her look a tad severe.



I have no quarrel with this celebration, but I'd also like to see a statue of the much-loved former Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu, in front of his old Minster.

He was on the side of working people, and progressive political action in Yorkshire. And he opposed the dictatorial rule of Robert Mugabe in his native

“
KIND
WORDS
DON'T
PAY
WAGES



Zimbabwe, refusing to wear his clerical collar for years until the brute of Harare was forced out of office.

Honour royalty, by all means, but never forget leaders like Dr John.

GET IT RIGHT!

A new version of the 1970 classic movie, *The Railway Children*, has been filmed on the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway.

The Railway Children Return, again starring Jenny Agutter, was shot in key locations including Oakworth station and the Bronte Parsonage in Haworth.

The original was a magical evocation of Yorkshire. I'd better not be disappointed by the new version, which opens in cinemas next April.

SUPER RISHI

Chancellor Rishi Sunak, scourge of public service workers, didn't know Yorkshire from batter pudding before he went into politics.

He only came here for the ultra-safe parliamentary constituency of Richmond vacated by William Hague, the Tyke Tory leader who never made it to Number Ten.

But he's settled in nicely in the Grade II listed country estate of Kirby Sigston Manor, in the village of that name near Northallerton.

It's still not comfortable enough for the country's richest MP, an ex-banker with a personal fortune exceeding £200 million. He's "upgrading" his palatial pad with a swimming pool (plus changing and plant room) and a private tennis court, and a wildlife area.

Surprise, surprise, Conservative Hambleton Council gave him planning permission, despite there being no "exceptional circumstances" normally required for change of use from agricultural purposes. One law for....?

The pool will have big picture windows, prompting one Tory member to grumble: "It doesn't look like an agricultural building to me. It looks like a rather large bungalow."

The Chancellor already has the use of an official country residence, Dorneywood, in Buckinghamshire. John Prescott once played croquet on the lawn there, so maybe it's a bit common for the man-who-would-be-Prime Minister.

PUNCTURED

We hosted the Tour de France, but it looks like we're falling out of love with cycle racing.

The Tour de Yorkshire was cancelled in 2020 and 2021 because of the pandemic, and next year's event has now been scrapped. Cash-strapped councils were reluctant to fund the £2 million cost.

I suggest it's also a form of "long Covid" hitting Welcome to Yorkshire because of the expenses scandal during Sir Gary Verity's controversial reign.

DEMON DRINK

As I expected, indeed predicted in the *Daily Mirror*, there was no baby boom during pandemic lockdowns.

But there was a surge in marital breakdown. Home consumption of alcohol surged. I wonder if these two facts could be connected?

CRICKET SHAME

YORKSHIRE County Cricket Club, a bastion of old-fashioned county privilege, is embroiled in a nasty racism row.

Former player Azeem Rafiq complained that he suffered racist abuse during his time at the club between 2008 and 2018, which left him feeling suicidal.

Club bosses apologised to Mr Rafiq, admitting that "the club could, and should, have supported him better". They called in a law firm to conduct an inquiry, which upheld seven of the 43 allegations, and concluded that he had been "the victim of inappropriate behaviour".

Inappropriate behaviour? How weak can you get? It sounds more like institutional racism, but the club insists there is "insufficient evidence" of this, while admitting that Mr Rafiq was the victim of racial harassment and bullying.

MPs challenged YCCC to publish the report in full, but the club has released only a summary and won't even give their former player a complete copy. "Atrocious", he says, and he's right.

The club owes Mr Rafiq, the current side, and the county's loyal supporters, a duty to publish and be damned. Only transparency will clear the air.

CRYPTIC

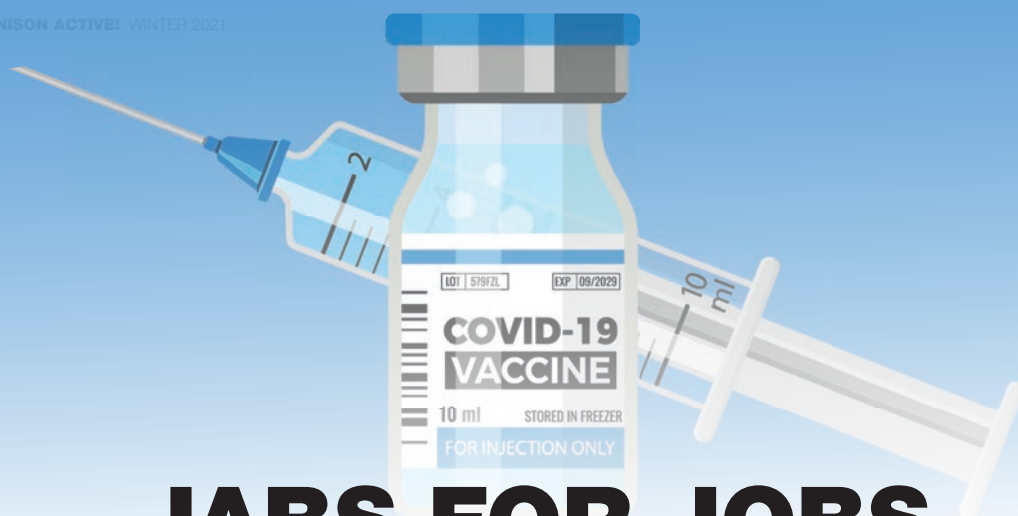
Fangs for the memory! So many people have been asking to see Count Dracula's grave in the cemetery of St Mary the Virgin's church, Whitby, that the vicar put up a notice:

"Please do not ask staff where Dracula's grave is, as there isn't one."

Bram Stoker's Gothic novel is partly set in the resort, which welcomes thousands of Goths for pilgrimages twice a year, but the bloodthirsty Count is fictional.

No-one knows where the real villain on whom he is modelled, Vlad the Impaler of Transylvania, is buried. I've been to the Romania town of Bistrita, where his castle is now a tourist attraction.

And he wasn't there either. But there is a statue of Bram Stoker, if you like that kind of thing. □



JABS FOR JOBS

Jo Seery, a senior employment rights solicitor at Thompsons Solicitors, assesses how the new law on mandatory vaccinations in care homes will affect UNISON members.

After working with poor PPE and coping with staff shortages at the height of the pandemic, care workers – have been “thanked” with some clapping but no pay rise. And now they are facing a new challenge.

They are the target of a new legal requirement which could see some of them being stopped from working in a sector already struggling with staff shortages.

From November 11, care workers working in residential care and nursing homes registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in England will have to be fully vaccinated against COVID -19 unless they are exempt under the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2021 which were published on July 22.

The Regulations only apply in England. However, some registered care home providers have said they will also make it a condition of employment for care workers in Scotland and Wales.

Apart from being a health and safety measure, mandatory vaccinations amount to a radical change to terms and conditions in the workplace. Operational

guidance on how the regulations are intended to work in practice, which was published by the Department of Health and Social Care on August 4, 2021, advises employers to consult with the recognised trade unions or employee representatives before the regulations come into force.

The prospect of dismissal looms large for those workers who are not exempt and who are not fully vaccinated. The last date for a care worker to have had their first jab was September 16.

Where a care worker is not vaccinated or cannot provide evidence that they are exempt for clinical reasons, the operational guidance recommends that the employer should explore all options including putting the worker on paid or unpaid leave where there is a delay in getting evidence of a medical exemption, or where the worker intends to be vaccinated but has not completed the full course by November 11, 2021. Redeployment to another role where vaccination is not required is also recommended (but in practice given the care home setting this is unlikely to be an option).

If a care worker is dismissed, what options do they have?

Only those employed on a contract of employment with two years’ service can claim unfair dismissal. Even then dismissal is likely to be considered “fair” because their continued employment would be in breach of the statutory duty to be vaccinated. Nevertheless, the employer must still act reasonably before any dismissal – warning and consulting with employees and considering alternatives to dismissal.

The regulations have a knock-on effect on other workers who attend nursing and care homes as they will also be required to be fully vaccinated – such as maintenance workers, volunteers, hairdressers and trainers.

That means that local authorities and other employers whose workers attend care homes should also be consulting with the union about putting in place arrangements to ensure the workers are not penalised. And in those employment situations redeployment or alternatives to dismissal may be more realistic.

To get help speak to your UNISON representative or visit www.thompsonstradeunion.law. □



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TO TERMS
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