

ACTIVE!



MAGAZINE FOR MEMBERS IN YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE
SPRING 2023 | ISSUE 39 | £3 WWW.UNISON-YORKS.ORG.UK



WE ALL STOOD FIRM



P14

DEFENDING THE NHS



there for you

supporting UNISON members
when life gets tough

- **Financial assistance**
- **Debt advice**
- **Wellbeing breaks**
- **Support & information**

Please make sure our members are aware of the help that is available in these difficult times.

UNISON members struggling through an unexpected crisis can get help from 'there for you' by:-

- ☑ Contacting their
Branch Welfare Officer
- ☑ Calling us on 020 7121 5620

You can also find out more information by visiting our website

www.unison.org.uk/get-help/help-with-problems-at-home/there-for-you/

Registered charity number 1023552


UNISON
the public service union

OUR UNION

GENERAL SECRETARY

Christina McAnea

REGIONAL CONVENOR

Wendy Nichols

REGIONAL SECRETARY

Karen Loughlin

UNISON Yorkshire & Humber
Regional Centre, Quayside House, Canal Wharf, Leeds, LS11 5PS
T 0113 218 2627 or freephone
textphone 08000 967 968
W www.unison-yorks.org.uk

Lines are open 6am-midnight
Monday-Friday and
9am-4pm Saturdays

EDITOR

Barrie Clement

CONSULTING EDITOR

Mary Maguire

CONTRIBUTORS

Peter Carroll, Claire Donnelly, Helen Hague, Natalie Hunt, Peter Lazenby, Mary Maguire, Ruth McGuire, Paul Routledge, Neil Todd

Published on behalf of UNISON by
Century One Ltd.
Alban Row, 27-31 Verulam Road
St. Albans, Herts AL3 4DG
T 01727 893 894
F 01727 893 895
E enquiries@centuryone.uk
W www.centuryone.uk

ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES

Jonathan Knight
T 01727 739 193
E jonathan@centuryone.uk

DESIGN AND LAYOUT

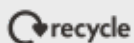
Caitlyn Hobbs
T 01727 739 189
E copy@centuryone.uk

PRINTED BY

Unison Print

Copyright reproduction in whole or part by any means without written permission of the publisher is strictly forbidden. UNISON and the publisher accept no responsibility for errors, omissions or the consequences thereof.

© UNISON 2023



WE SAW IT THROUGH

Over the past few months of strike action, I've been privileged to stand shoulder to shoulder with our members on picket lines across the UK. In this region, I was able to visit UNISON ambulance picket lines at Sheffield, Rotherham, Wath and York. They've been an inspiration to me for their courage and determination to stand firm.

And after months of refusals from the government, eventually the steadfastness of our ambulance members bore fruit and ministers came to the negotiating table.

UNISON and other health unions eventually dragged an offer out of them, enhancing this year's pay and also covering next. We're recommending it to our hundreds of thousands of members in the health service.

It's a real shame it's taken so

long to get here. Health workers had to take many days of strike action, and thousands more had to threaten to join them, to get their unions into the room and proper talks underway.

The offer will give people a much-needed lump sum for this year and a 5 per cent rise from April. Ministers had offered 3.5 per cent for 2023-24 and it's clearly more than the government had budgeted for.

As we speak, health workers are having the chance to look at the full detail of what's on offer and decide whether it's enough to end the dispute. While that process takes place any planned industrial action has been paused.

The government had been behaving like all bad employers. They hoped we'd get fed up and go back to work, or that the public would turn against us. That didn't work.



CHRISTINA MCANEA
GENERAL SECRETARY

Christina McAnea

THE ONLY WAY

There's no doubt about it. Our NHS members didn't want to go on strike, but it was the only way to win an improved pay offer - and the only way to show this government they were determined to defend our health service. The union is recommending the two-year package, but clearly the final decision will be for members.

Let's put it bluntly. The government was forced back to the negotiating table to make an offer by the commitment shown by our ambulance branches.

I know from picket-line conversations with our members in higher education, the environment agency and the NHS, of the difficult decisions and spending struggles many of them have been facing, day-in

day-out. None of us in the public services go into it for the money, but that doesn't mean we should accept second best. All we ask is for decent pay and decent conditions. Our NHS members were fighting, not just for themselves, but for the good of their patients. They've told me loud and clear that the dispute wasn't just about pay, it was also 'about the destruction of the NHS' with paramedics having to queue with patients for hours outside hospitals. Our members in this dispute were fantastic. They didn't want miracles. They just wanted to get on with their jobs and care for others with a bit of dignity.



WENDY NICHOLS
REGIONAL CONVENOR

w.nichols

UNIVERSITIES PLAN MORE ACTION

Fresh industrial action was in prospect at the University of Leeds and Leeds Beckett University after staff overwhelmingly rejected a pay offer worth between 5 and 8 per cent.

Despite an 82 per cent vote against the pay offer for the academic year starting in August, but backdated to February, management has imposed the new terms.

The unions' pay claim for 2023/2024 is a flat-rate rise of £4,000 – or an increase that matches the highest measure of inflation plus 2 per cent.

Administrators, cleaners, library,

security and cleaning workers at the two universities have already been involved in three waves of strike action in protest at a 3 per cent increase covering the current year from last August, which was also imposed.

Mobina Begum, secretary of Leeds Beckett branch, said UNISON and five other unions were in talks with conciliation service Acas in an attempt to resolve the dispute. Mobina, who is also chair of UNISON's national service group for higher education, said that after nearly 15 years of below inflation

increases, members were struggling: "Many can't afford the basics. Food has gone up 17 per cent over the last year and management offered a 3 per cent pay increase.

"The figures don't add up. Leeds Beckett had reported an operating surplus of £17million in 2021-22. Clearly the money is there to do more on pay," she said.

Angela Blackburn, secretary of the branch at the University of Leeds, expected balloting to begin this month and industrial action to start in June. "Members are extremely angry," she said.

HONORARY STATUS FOR WENDY

Regional convenor Wendy Nichols was awarded honorary alderwoman status after standing down on March 31 after 24 years as a councillor on Selby District Council.

Wendy followed in the footsteps of her late parents who both served on

the council.

Selby along with seven other councils have merged into one unitary authority. The authorities were: North Yorkshire County Council and the district and borough councils of Craven, Hambleton,

Harrogate, Richmondshire, Ryedale, Scarborough and Selby. The vast majority of council employees were transferred to the new authority following talks with UNISON.

[P18 We got there](#)

Family celebrations: Pictured left, Wendy Nichols with her granddaughters, Aimee and Libby Carlton Nichols. Pictured right, Wendy with her niece Joanna Cunliffe and son Shaun Nichols



CARE WORKERS WIN PAY DISPUTE

Specialist care workers at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals Trust have won a long-running pay dispute after working to rule.

As Active! went to press a deal was being finalised which means that more experienced rehabilitation assistants, who help to keep people out of hospital and in their own homes, will no longer lose out after a regrading exercise.

The NHS staff were due to take

strike action if the issue had not been resolved. 100 per cent of the staff were in favour of action short of a strike, and more than 90 per cent for taking strike action.

UNISON steward Mick Todd said the regrading exercise should have meant an equitable deal for all 130 rehab assistants, but there was a problem over backpay calculations. "In fact what happened was that people who had been there longest, didn't get

as much as new recruits. It was morally wrong. It punished the people who had put their safety on the line during covid. It felt like a kick in the teeth.

"Even though the new staff were financially better off they recognised how senior and longer service people had been affected and were willing to stand by these members." Mick paid tribute to UNISON officials Ashley Harper and Jack Hemingway for negotiating a successful outcome.

FURY OVER 2 PER CENT OFFER

UNISON members at the Environment Agency are balloting on fresh industrial action in protest at a 2 per cent pay increase in response to a 10 per cent claim.

The offer, which also includes a £345 consolidated rise and some increases in allowances, has already led to two days of strike action on January 18 and February 8 and weeks of working to contract and bans on overtime.

Kevan Rushton, secretary of the Environment Agency, Yorkshire

and North East branch, said: "By nature we are not people who take industrial action. We chose this career because we care about the environment. It's almost vocational.

"We've always accepted pay offers in the past. I suppose you could say that this latest offer is the straw that broke the camel's back. But people are really struggling and that's why we're not prepared to accept it this time. Staff who have been with the agency since 2010 have seen their real pay cut by at least 20 per cent. Since

2016 it's gone down by 10 per cent.

"Staff have been forced to leave the agency to get decent pay. It employs about 10,000 people nationally and they are 2,000 short of what they should be. In some areas there are 50 per cent shortages.

"Within the last four or five months they've been involved in the biggest recruitment campaign they've ever undertaken. All that's happened is that they have stopped losing staff. That cannot be sustained."

ODDS-ON GREAT FUN

Why not join other UNISON members, their families and friends at our union's Doncaster Raceday on Saturday August 5.

It's a great day out and there's a special deal for UNISON members. You can get two grandstand tickets for the price of one at just £13. Promo code will be UNISON2023MEMBER. Members can upgrade to the county stand – two tickets for a total of £30 (usually £32.50 each). To book call 01302 3042000, quote UNISON RACEDAY OFFER, your membership number or UNISON branch code. Tickets are on sale now – offer closes on July 28. Please gamble responsibly. For more information visit www.gambleaware.com or telephone 0808 8020 133.





Amid the destruction of the earthquake in Turkey and Syria there were heart-warming rescues, one of a baby still attached to her dead mother by her umbilical cord. **Mary Maguire** reports

Nobel prize winner Daniel Kahneman once remarked that the “brains of humans contain a mechanism that is designed to give priority to bad news”. Not surprising because, as humans, we are always on the look-out, for fear something bad will happen. Bad news travels fast. News of a massive killer earthquake cutting through an area of south east Turkey and Syria, much the same as the distance between Northallerton and Brighton, swept rapidly through the world’s media.

It was truly a big news story. The horror of death and destruction filled pages upon pages of newsprint and TV and radio news channels. Pictures taken by survivors on their phones showed the initial aftermath, with people desperately scraping through the deadly rubble to try to unearth those trapped underneath. Early coverage failed to predict the full extent of the devastation unfolding in the two countries. The Daily Mirror’s first day coverage was typical: “Fears death toll will rise to 10,000” amid a “race against time to save trapped after hundreds of buildings collapse”. But it had a “moment of hope amid the horror” as a young boy was pictured being rescued from a “pancaked” building. That picture was used by others with the Mail describing the “desperate rescue of the innocents... children pulled from the rubble”. “Catastrophic”, said the Guardian, as “most powerful tremors in the region for a century reduce cities to rubble”.

Very soon, British TV news reporters with their crews arrived on the scenes to broadcast the full extent of the disaster and how UK rescue teams were aiding the effort. Drone footage and scientific analysis filled the airwaves, with experts trying to explain how 6,000 buildings had collapsed.

The Wharfedale Observer was quick with the news that Turkish authorities had issued 131 arrest warrants for building contractors linked to “faulty” collapsed buildings, as the death toll rose to nearly 35,000.

Editors sent out their reporters to get a Yorkshire & Humberside angle on this international story. Hull Daily Mail reported on Hull dad Lemi, who was in Istanbul at the time, but his “blood froze” when the earthquake struck where his wife and baby were visiting family. They survived, many thousands didn’t. Yorkshire Live and Sheffield News found a “distraught Yorkshire boy”, who had launched a “desperate plea” to find his family who were trapped under the rubble of their 10-storey building in Kahramanmaraş.

BBC North reported from the region’s Syrian and Turkish communities who spoke of “their horror as family and friends were caught up in the deadly earthquakes”. One man’s relatives who were forced to flee their home in Turkey described it as “like Armageddon”. More than 80,000 of the injured were in hospital, but millions were homeless, many housed in tents, according to the Independent, among others. And all agreed that hope was fading to find more people alive.

But the media was also able to show a glimmer of hope – with “miraculous” rescues days after the earthquake. A picture of a newborn baby girl pulled from a collapsed building, still attached to her dead mother by her umbilical cord, was printed and broadcast all over the world, with the video of the rescue dominating social media. BBC North, Gazette and Herald, the Yorkshire Post and the Telegraph & Argus reported how thousands of people had offered to adopt the little girl, called Aya – meaning miracle in Arabic.

You can donate via dec.org.uk. □



THE MEDIA WAS ABLE TO SHOW A GLIMMER OF HOPE



Mary Maguire



Join
today

NHS DENTAL PLAN

Do you have a NHS Dentist?

Would you like all
your NHS dental
bills repaid
in full up to

£500
per year?

The UNISON NHS Dental Plan gives you money back each time you visit your NHS dentist, so no more costly treatment bills.

What's more, as a special offer:
Join today and get immediate cover!

Get covered for £500 per year towards:

- ✓ Examinations, scale & polish and x-rays
- ✓ Fillings, root canals & extractions
- ✓ Crowns, bridges, dentures & repairs
- ✓ Dental-related prescriptions

Each policyholder also gets cover for

- ✓ Oral cancer (upto £6,500)
- ✓ Accidental impact injury (upto £750)
- ✓ Hospitalisation, dental related (£25 a night)

Monthly premium, £11.50 per person

Join today on freephone

0800 161 5844

or online at **www.unisondental.co.uk**

UNISON
Living

IMPORTANT INFORMATION: In order to make your first claim, you must have been to see your dentist within the last twenty four months for a full examination. Any pre-existing condition or ongoing treatment is not covered; only new dental conditions that occur after joining are covered by this plan. Cover is for NHS dental charges only as per the English banding charges and no cover is provided for any private dentistry charges on this plan. You can join the plan if you are aged between 16 and your 70th birthday; there is no age limit to stay on cover. Policy terms and conditions apply. © Protego Group 2021.

UNISON Dental Plan is designed and administered by Protego Group Ltd. Registered Office: 260 – 268 Chapel Street, Manchester M3 5JZ.

Authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (registration number 304363).

TORIES PUT THE BOOT IN

British workers are already hamstrung by the most restrictive laws in Europe, but for many UNISON members it's about to get much worse. **Neil Todd**, analyses the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill – the latest in a string of anti-union attacks from the government



The Government is about to introduce a law severely weakening the right of workers to take industrial action.

The Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill, laid before Parliament on January 10, would allow employers to serve 'work notices' on trade unions organising industrial action in 'relevant services' where the government has set minimum service levels.

If a union does not take 'all reasonable steps' to ensure that its members identified in the work

notice comply, it will lose its current legal immunity in respect of the industrial action. That means it can be sued and the non-complying workers will also lose their protection from dismissal.

The only requirement of the Secretary of State on making 'minimum service regulations' is that they consult 'such persons as they consider appropriate' before reaching a decision.

There is no limitation on what minimum service might be required, no requirement to agree it with other stakeholders and no mechanism by

which it has to be referred to a third party if no such agreement can be reached. It is therefore clear, if there was any doubt, that this is a thinly veiled vindictive political act by the government to grab headlines, to limit the power of unions and restrict a vital right of working people. There is also no mention of 'safety' anywhere in the Bill, despite the Government repeatedly claiming that this was the reason for the proposed legislation.

Minimum service regulations - which could have effect in relation to strikes taking place from the day the

Act comes into force - can be made for services within any of the following categories:

- Health
- Fire and rescue
- Education
- Transport
- The decommissioning of nuclear installations and management of radioactive waste and spent fuel
- Border security

There is seemingly no limit on the services, within those broad categories, which could attract minimum service regulations. For services that are multi-disciplinary such as health and education all aspects of the service would be covered, including non-essential and even ancillary services.

Where the government has made minimum service regulations and a union has given notice of industrial action relating to that service, the employer can serve a 'work notice' on the union at any time up to the seventh day before the first date specified in the action notice.

The work notice would identify the persons required to work and the work to be performed during the strike in order to meet the minimum service level. Before giving a work notice, the employer is required to consult the union about the number of persons to be identified and the work to be performed, but they only need to 'have regard to' the views expressed by the union.

A union will lose its immunity from being sued

in respect of strike action if, having been served with a work notice, it 'fails to take reasonable steps to ensure that all members of the union who are identified in the work notice' comply with it.

Any worker identified in the work notice as being required to perform work to meet the minimum service level who fails to do so would lose the protection of section 238A of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act - which provides that any dismissal for taking part in protected industrial action is unfair if it takes place within the first 12 weeks of taking protected industrial action, and may be unfair if it takes place later.

The proposals in the Bill ignore international labour standards the United Kingdom has signed up to. Instruments such as ILO Convention No.87 on Freedom of Association apply and the European Court of Human Rights use observance of those standards to determine if the UK is complying with Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights. These are nothing to do with the European Union so we remain a signatory to them despite our withdrawal from the EU.

The ILO's committee on freedom of association has already given decisions on the standards to be observed in relation to minimum service levels and these include:

- They should only be applied in essential services or services of fundamental

importance

- Determination of the minimum service level, must involve not only the public authorities, but also the relevant trade unions
- The restrictions must not be so great as would render the strike ineffective and any disagreement as to the extent of the minimum service should be settled by an independent body.

There are significant questions marks as to whether the current Bill complies with the international standards we are signed up to as a country and the proposals, if the government uses its majority to force them through unamended, are vulnerable to legal challenge.

As part of any legal challenge unions will want to emphasise that they are already subject to the most restrictive legislation in Europe.

It should also be pointed out of course, that UNISON already ensures emergency cover in essential services when taking industrial action.

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



UNISON ALREADY ENSURES EMERGENCY COVER IN ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Neil Todd: senior member of Thompsons trade union group



“ THIS IS A THINLY VEILED VINDICTIVE POLITICAL ACT BY THE GOVERNMENT TO GRAB HEADLINES, TO LIMIT THE POWER OF UNIONS AND RESTRICT A VITAL RIGHT OF WORKING PEOPLE

Easier To Get Support

During the COVID-19 crisis, UNISON changed its processes to make it easier for members to get legal support, as part of their union membership and at no extra cost.

Here's a simple guide for branches to help members get the support they need, when they need it: <https://yorks.unison.org.uk/2020/05/12/new-ways-for-members-to-get-legal-help>

HERE WE GO!

Nothing is certain in politics, but the latest evidence shows the Tories will lose all their seats in Yorkshire and Labour will form the next government, says Mirror columnist **Paul Routledge**

I haven't been so cheered up for years, politically speaking. When Rishi Sunak plucks up the courage to go to the country, possibly on May 2, 2024, all the evidence points to a Labour landslide on the scale of Tony Blair's victory of 1997.

The latest poll shows Labour so far ahead that the Tories would lose every one of their twenty-four seats in Yorkshire. Even the prime minister would be ousted in his hitherto ultra-safe Richmond constituency, along with a clutch of former ministers and the entire gang of so-called "Red Wall" MPs elected in the Brexit election of 2019.

Of course, this survey carried out for campaign group 38 Degrees by pollsters Survation – which has an enviable record of accuracy predicting outcomes – is only a snapshot of how voters would behave if there was an election tomorrow. But, as top number-cruncher Sir John Curtice points out, no government has ever gone from so far behind to win at the ballot box.

We'll get a clearer picture in May, when real votes are cast in

local elections on the eve of King Charles' coronation. Labour is set to retain control of Barnsley, Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees and Leeds, and potentially win back York, Sheffield and Hull.

Tory MPs can sniff the way the wind is blowing. More than twenty have already announced that they won't be standing. And that's not just the old lags like Boris-fan Nigel Adams (Selby) and ex-Northern Powerhouse minister Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) who have had enough of lounging on the green benches at Westminster.

Kevin Hollinrake, MP for Thirsk and Malton and a minister in the enterprise and markets department, has announced he's standing to be elected metro mayor of North Yorkshire next May. A well-off estate agent and property landlord in York, he once owned Crayke Castle in the county.

Some young, up-and-coming members like Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) are going too. They know that in today's climate, with a cost of living crisis, millions in fuel poverty and the NHS in dire

straits, there is no such thing as a safe Conservative seat.

The outlook is bright, but in politics, nothing can be taken for granted. And is Sir Keir Starmer ready to take over, after the crushing defeat of Jeremy Corbyn in 2019 and fourteen long years in opposition? Sunak has posted his five pledges, and Starmer has issued his manifesto of five missions. It's becoming a game of political five-a-side.

Apart from his promise to halve inflation by the end of the year, Sunak is desperate to retain Labour voters in Red Wall seats who voted Conservative to get Brexit done by cutting "illegal" migration. This could well become an unsavoury "stop the boats" election, scraping the barrel for support.

There are other unknown unknowns. The Tory party's self-imposed psychodrama shows no sign of disappearing. Boris Johnson's supporters conspire to bring back their lost leader, while MPs on the commons standards committee investigate his misleading of Parliament during the pandemic:





“
THE
OUTLOOK
IS BRIGHT,
BUT IN
POLITICS,
NOTHING
CAN BE
TAKEN
FOR
GRANTED

was it inadvertent, reckless or old-fashioned lying? Most people have already made up their minds.

The Tories will not go without a fight and they intend to leave behind a scorched-earth public service Britain. Even before the current pay war, the chancellor ordered spending ministers to keep wage rises for the year from April below 5 per cent.

Labour has its own internal problems, not least the “Corbyn Question”. Starmer has ruled that the former leader cannot stand for the party in Islington North, his seat since 1983. Winning as an Independent – an outside possibility – offers little for either. If I were Jezza, I’d call it a wrap and find something better to do.

Starmer believes that Sunak is weak. He believes

his disciplinary treatment of Corbyn makes him strong in the eyes of voters. That may be true, but he should still remember the old maxim that at its best Labour is a “broad church” of decent, progressive people.

Whatever the outcome, the electoral map of Yorkshire and Humberside will look completely different after polling day. Boundary changes alter all but four of the county’s 54 constituencies. Ten are renamed, and some famous names like Batley and Spen disappear. In fast-growing Leeds, a new seat, Headingley, is carved out of wards from adjoining constituencies.

Three local Labour MPs are standing down this time. Barry Sheerman, the longest serving Labour MP, ends more than forty years

representing Huddersfield. Dame Rosie Winterton, who rose to become deputy speaker of the Commons, retires from Doncaster, and Paul Blomfield calls it a day in Sheffield Central.

And the deaths of the first woman speaker, Baroness Betty Boothroyd, and Thatcher’s spin doctor Sir Bernard Ingham, aged 93 and 90 respectively, have removed two other strong voices from our county.

But the party is in good heart. I attended the Yorkshire region dinner in Bradford the other day. The mood was upbeat, raised by a powerful speech from shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves. I chatted with John Grogan, former MP for Keighley and Ilkley, who is standing again this time. He should get it back. It just feels like we are on our way. □

“
THE
TORIES
WILL NOT
GO
WITHOUT
A FIGHT

Photo: Mark Harvey

A PASSION FOR WORK

Sheba Tabani-Shaikh suffers from hidden disabilities, but she makes a massive difference to other people's lives through her work at Sheffield council and as an academic, says **Ruth McGuire**

As a teenager in the 70s Sheba Tabani-Shaikh dreamed of becoming an air hostess. It was a 'high altitude' job that would take her from Sheffield, the city of her birth, to far flung destinations. Fast forward 43 years however and Sheba's profession could not be more different. But she has no regrets. As a team manager for MAST (multi-agency support team) with Sheffield city council, registered social worker as well as an associate lecturer with Sheffield Hallam University, Sheba thoroughly enjoys all her roles. The common thread running through her academic and local authority jobs is her commitment to sharing her knowledge and expertise with others. She is also keen to make a positive difference to the lives of families.

As she reflects on some of the highlights of her work over the years, Sheba picks out managing a Black women's refuge in Sheffield as one of the most challenging roles she has held. "The refuge was set up to protect black women who were domestic abuse survivors.

“Privacy and confidentiality were therefore crucial to keeping women safe. This included making sure that as much as possible we only asked female traders such as plumbers to provide services we needed. I also had to be careful about where I parked my car and was very guarded whenever I was asked about my job. Both me and my family had to be careful not to disclose anything that would compromise the safety of the women.”

Safety and safeguarding continue to be key aspects of Sheba’s work with MAST. The team provides ‘a whole family approach’ to working with other agencies to support families. The work is varied and includes supporting parents whose children have school attendance problems, helping families affected by domestic abuse and children at risk of entering/re-entering social care. Being multi-lingual is a huge asset for Sheba, because she has worked for a long time with families who come from BAME backgrounds and sometimes do not speak English as a first language. Sheba’s ‘mother tongue’ is Urdu but in addition to English, she also speaks Punjabi and Hindi.

Despite her professional achievements, Sheba recognises that throughout her life she has lived with what she characterises as a ‘triple jeopardy’. US-based sociologist Dr Deborah King, is credited with devising the term ‘multiple jeopardies’ to reflect the barriers black women face. Sheba describes her “jeopardies” as her gender, her ethnicity and her disabilities. Although she is of mixed Asian parentage –

Indian and Pakistani, she self-identifies as ‘politically black’. Her disabilities are however much harder to define. Sheba explains: “I’m neurodiverse. This means that I have severe dyslexia, dyspraxia, problems with short term memory and audio processing. It means I am very slow at processing and retrieving information and have to do things in a certain way. Also, my short term memory is not good.”

Where some people might be reluctant to disclose their hidden disabilities, Sheba does the exact opposite. She explains: “I’ve found that being open about the disabilities I face encourages other colleagues to be open about theirs. It means that like me, they can get an assessment done and then get reasonable adjustments put in place at work.”

After being diagnosed with dyslexia and other disabilities, Sheba received support with her academic studies and at work. For example, through the Access to Work scheme, ‘reasonable adjustments’ have been made for Sheba and she has been allocated a support worker who assists her in processing and retrieving information at work.

When she’s not focussed on her work, mother of three Sheba enjoys travelling and has visited various countries in Africa several times, different states in the US, as well the Middle East. At home, she enjoys creative hobbies such as cooking and gardening and confesses to having zero interest in TV. She said “I much prefer to be

doing things rather than just sitting and watching television. I also enjoy learning and have been on several UNISON courses such as a course in creative writing. I learnt more about poetry from the course which wasn’t something I was really into, but I thoroughly enjoyed the course and think I’ve gained transferable skills from it.”

Sheba’s connections with UNISON go back to the early days of her career when she joined the union’s predecessor NALGO. When NALGO morphed into UNISON, she remained a committed member and is an ‘activist’ with a small ‘a.’ She actively promotes the benefits of the union to staff and encourages non-members to join.

Sheba’s faith as a Muslim is very important to her. “It helps me with my mental health and my well-being,” she says. She finds great comfort in prayer and meditation and believes her faith has helped her get through some of the most difficult times in her life. This includes dealing with the tragic loss of her baby grandson who died last year, ten days before his first birthday.

As she looks to the future, 57-year-old Sheba has decided she is not ready to join the increasing number of over 50s who have retired early. She said: “I could have retired at 55 but love my work far too much to give it up.” Given the range of skills, experience and expertise she has to offer and given her sheer passion for her work, Sheba has definitely made the right choice. □



I PREFER TO BE DOING THINGS RATHER THAN JUST WATCHING TELEVISION



I COULD HAVE RETIRED AT 55, BUT I LOVE MY WORK FAR TOO MUCH

Photo: Steve Morgan



UNISON BACKS NEW NHS OFFER

As Active! Went to press, UNISON paused industrial action in the NHS while members considered a new pay offer. The union is recommending a package which includes an additional one-off lump sum for 2022/23 of between £1,655 and £3789 which rises in value up the pay bands. A permanent 5 per cent rise is on offer for 2023/24. **Peter Lazenby** spoke to striking ambulance workers before ministers finally agreed to negotiate after months of refusals'

“There’s parping horns, there’s people that have nothing to do with the picket bringing us snacks and treats, telling us how we’ve helped them.”

Simone Morgan (facing page), who is 50, works at Yorkshire Ambulance’s headquarters call-handling centre at Wakefield. She was taking her fourth day of strike action when she spoke to Active! – the first strike she’s been involved in since joining the ambulance service 15 years ago.

The headquarters is off a busy dual carriageway between the M1 motorway and Wakefield. On strike days the staff mount their picket by the roadside to gain maximum public attention.

As a call handler Simone may not be part of an on-the-road ambulance crew, but she experiences trauma just the same.

“Obviously we do a job that’s sometimes very upsetting. When we answer that call we do not know what is going to happen. When it hit its peak and calls were stacking up, staff got burnt out – mental health – it is heart-breaking.”

Another aspect of the public’s response to the strike is the fall in the number of calls for an ambulance on strike days.

“When the public was told there was going to be a strike people only called when they needed to,” she said. “The workload eased because we were only dealing with life-threatening emergencies.”

There’s total support from her family at home of course, but it comes from elsewhere too.

“My family stands behind me 100 per cent,” she said.

“And neighbours will have a word outside, give me a hug. It’s lovely. And they think we should be rewarded for the job we did during the pandemic. The government clapped. Now they won’t talk to us.”

The hypocrisy of the government clapping as ambulance crews and many others risked their lives during the pandemic, and now refusing to even talk to negotiators about pay, has made Simone and her workmates determined to win the dispute.

“People don’t want to strike,” she said. “But if we don’t act now, five years further down the line it will be worse for patients. The delays, the staff – over the last year almost half those that have joined have left, so though we are recruiting staff we cannot retain them.”

Across the NHS there are fears that underfunding and gradual privatisation of the service - and its shocking treatment of staff - is a precursor to full privatisation and the introduction of a US-style, insurance-based, profit-driven healthcare system.

“It makes me angry,” said Simone. “This is Great Britain and we are proud of our NHS. It looks like they’re wanting privatisation. If they privatise it, how are people going to get basic health care?”

“We can’t get to the bottom of what their intentions are. There’s no movement, no conversation. They’re not showing any signs of wanting to have a discussion.”

Rob Maxted, a 43-year-

old ambulance practitioner picketing at Leeds central ambulance station, fears for the future if the exodus of experienced staff for better-paid work continues.

“We can’t count the number of senior colleagues who have moved on to other jobs because the pay is not enough,” he said. Coupled with problems spread across the NHS – including lack of social care beds to discharge patients, loss of GPs, delays in getting to patients – he fears for the future.

“I joined the ambulance service to help people, but most days I go on a job the first thing I say is ‘sorry we’ve been so long,’” he said. “We’ve been losing colleagues right, left and centre. If we don’t have those senior colleagues how are we going to progress?”

“A pay rise is good but we want the government to look at the whole picture. Why are ambulances having to wait? If people can’t get into

“WHEN THE PUBLIC WAS TOLD THERE WAS GOING TO BE A STRIKE, PEOPLE ONLY CALLED WHEN THEY NEEDED TO

Simone Morgan

“WE CAN’T COUNT THE NUMBER OF SENIOR COLLEAGUES WHO HAVE MOVED ON TO OTHER JOBS.

Rob Maxted



Photo: Neil Terry Photography

their GP they dial 999. Now there are fewer GPs. We get people saying they have had a chronic problem for three weeks and they want an ambulance.

“An inflation-rate pay rise would be good, but I’d take less if I thought they were going to put money in across the board, including improving social care.”

On the same picket line at Leeds central was Lyndsay Jephson, 53, an ambulance practitioner clinician for eight years. She works at Manor Mill in Leeds and is a UNISON rep.

Like so many others, it’s her first strike.

“It’s not something that ambulance staff really want to do,” she said. “We’ve been left without a choice really. For the last 10 years there’s been inadequate pay rises.

“With inflation particularly over the last few years people are struggling. There are other jobs with less responsibility, non-ambulance jobs with wages that keep up with inflation. This has caused a retention problem in the ambulance service and the NHS as a whole.

“It affects patient care within the whole NHS. Patients are having to wait for ambulances, wait for appointments. In recent months patients have been waiting in the back of ambulances outside hospitals. We’ve not been able to take patients into hospitals because there are not enough staff. We wait our turn to go in.

“Me personally, I’ve waited six hours, but I’ve heard of some waiting 16 hours to discharge a patient.

“Obviously we are giving patient care, but as an ambulance service we are there to give emergency treatment. When you are

waiting with a patient for six hours that is not emergency treatment.

“The answer is a wage rise to meet inflation. It will help with retention. It will help with staff. If our pay meets inflation – which is what should have been happening over the last 10 years – it will help.”

Like her colleagues, she too sees the spectre of privatisation behind the government’s position. “If you are withdrawing funding it makes it look like the service is failing,” she said.

“There are some people that are NHS patients who are already going private. Some sectors are already privatised. It’s already creeping in.”

For some patients it is too late to stop the government.

“It is a known fact that people are dying waiting for appointments and the government is not even prepared to talk about it,” she said.

That makes the success of the strike even more important – and widespread support is a key factor. “We’ve got support from the public – people parping horns, people talking to us,” said Lyndsay. “It’s good support. And obviously we support each other.”

Bryn Webster, 54, has been with the ambulance service all his working life. He is a paramedic at Wath in South Yorkshire and is a rep on UNISON’s national ambulance committee.

“The ballot was over pay,” he said. “But it has morphed into being more about funding the NHS. It includes pay but it also includes patient care and that has come to the forefront during the strike action.

“What it has done is highlight all the issues, especially in emergency and

primary care, patient flow through the hospitals. It has become more about patients waiting hours in the back of the ambulance.

“That is a simple fix. We need more social care beds and support for people once they have left hospital.

“Public support has been outstanding,” he said, “and we want to keep public support. It’s not the public’s fault that the government won’t sit down and have a discussion with us over pay. The biggest thing is that we want the government to talk to us.

“I want to thank the public for their support. It has been immense – it really has.”

Back in Wakefield, Active! asked Simone Morgan if she and her colleagues will stick it out if the government continues to refuse to even negotiate?

“Definitely!” she said. “We’ve got huge support. Going forward it is still as strong.” □



WE’VE GOT SUPPORT FROM THE PUBLIC – PEOPLE PARPING HORNS, PEOPLE TALKING TO US

Lyndsay Jephson

Photo: Neil Terry Photography



Lyndsay Jephson



www.yorks-unison.org.uk



unisonyh



unisonyh



unisonyorkshumber



WE GOT THERE!

After two years hard graft, UNISON struck a deal to protect members' jobs and improve terms and conditions at the huge newly-merged North Yorkshire Council. **Mary Maguire** talks to regional convenor Wendy Nichols who was in the thick of the negotiations

The biggest change to local government organisation in Yorkshire in 50 years is complete as more than 10,000 directly employed staff from eight former councils transferred to the new North Yorkshire Council on April 1. UNISON has scored major successes over the past two years in protecting members' jobs and improving their terms and conditions. Intense negotiations led to a new package of terms and conditions that benefit the majority of staff. In a formal ballot, 98 per cent of North Yorkshire County (NYCC) staff voted to accept them. District and borough staff did not need to ballot, but will transfer with their

current terms and conditions protected by TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) regulations.

Regional convenor, Wendy Nichols, who's been in the thick of the talks, is pleased with the outcome. She says: "It's been a busy set of negotiations, but we've got a deal that the members have voted for decisively." In the eight branches, Wendy represented members in NYCC, Hambleton, Richmondshire and Selby districts, and worked with Craven district's Neil Braham, Harrogate borough's David Houlgate, Scarborough borough's Andy Adamson, Ryedale district's Serena Williams, supported by regional officer, Dean Harper.

Said Wendy: "Our priority was to make sure that staff remained in their jobs, had their conditions protected and experienced the least possible disruption, so that they could continue to deliver high quality and reliable public services. It's not been easy at times; we had some disagreements and difficulties around severance payments to very senior managers, but we worked together to get a good deal, and thousands of hard-working staff will now transfer to the new council with their terms and conditions protected."

Final plans for the abolition of North Yorkshire's two-tier councils in favour of a unitary authority were agreed by the



WE'VE GOT A DEAL THAT MEMBERS VOTED FOR DECISIVELY

through vacancies and retirement. It was accepted that there may be some impact on very senior management posts. The new council would be a “continuing authority” of the old NYCC, but the eight councils agreed a “partnership” approach with the union.

UNISON first succeeded in getting all the councils’ chief executives to stop recruiting externally and fill vacancies through internal recruitment across the eight organisations. Existing staff were able to apply or take part in secondment opportunities, but their substantive posts with their original council remained in place. Wendy pointed out that this helped “reassure staff that they were valued and demonstrated that there was a genuine desire to look after the current staff who had worked so hard throughout the pandemic”.

Wendy is proud that UNISON stood its ground on the huge area of how pay increments are applied. At NYCC an increment, worth between £370 and £1,500, could be withheld or removed if you had a live disciplinary warning, were on a formal capability plan or if you had an ‘unsatisfactory’ level of absence. But, said Wendy: “Almost all decisions to remove or withhold increments were based on absence. ‘Unsatisfactory’ meant more than seven days in the year – including all sickness absences. So if you had a serious illness, or operation or cancer treatment, you could be affected and that was not right”. UNISON was adamant that that policy

should be withdrawn. The union made it absolutely clear that no-one joining the new council from the district and boroughs would choose to have that policy applied, so it should go.

Management were eventually persuaded to remove sickness from the increment policy, after some very uncomfortable online sessions where members outlined their experiences of the policy that punished them for being ill. “Management heard shocking examples of women diagnosed with cancer who had increments removed after time off for serious operations and treatment, and staff who lost increments after hip and knee replacements – operations that helped them to stay at work. District and borough staff listening could not believe such a policy existed”, said Wendy.

The union also won guarantees that the new council would honour long-service awards that district council staff had earned, even if they chose to move onto the new terms and conditions.

Wendy added: “This has been a great example of how UNISON branches can work together, supported by regional officers, to make our members their number one priority. We are now preparing to merge our branches over the coming months so that we can continue to look after our members.” □

“
THIS HAS
BEEN
A GREAT
EXAMPLE
OF HOW
UNISON
BRANCHES
CAN WORK
TOGETHER

Wendy Nichols



government in 2021. Elections for the new authority’s councillors were held in April last year in readiness for this year’s start date.

UNISON achieved its three objectives in its negotiations: protecting jobs; levelling up pay and conditions and minimising disruption to staff and services. The five branch secretaries collaborated well; the union produced a regular newsletter for members and held 40 roadshow sessions for district and borough staff to explain how they were protected by TUPE. A range of work streams were set up by the eight councils to bring together staff and services. UNISON was well represented on all the human resources work streams to look after members.

One principle established early on was that the “one council” concept would be based on all staff transferring to the new council, with any post reductions coming

Photo: Vicky Matthers

A woman in a historical uniform, including a black tricorn hat, a grey coat with red cuffs and collar, and white gloves, is blowing a large, light-colored horn. The horn is mounted on a wooden stand. The background is a blurred green field.

FIRST WOMAN IN THE JOB AFTER 1137 YEARS

UNISON member Allison Clark is Ripon's first official female hornblower since the post was established in 886AD. **Claire Donnelly** reports

There aren't many UNISON members who can say their job dates back to the ninth century. But for Allison Clark, her unusual role has more than a little historical significance.

The 54-year-old is one of Ripon's three hornblowers - a ceremonial position in existence since 886. Part of the team since 2017, she's the first woman to hold the post.

Allison and colleagues Wayne Cobbett, 36, and Patricio Maglio, 43, make up a trio who take it in turns to

blow their horn in the centre of Ripon each evening.

Originally a night watchman duty, over centuries the hornblowers have evolved from being part of the city's security to becoming an historical tourist attraction - marking the end of the day and welcoming visitors.

Each evening, at 9pm, Allison or one of her colleagues makes their way to the centre where they blow their horn from the four corners of the market square. Dressed in an impressive uniform of black tricorn hat, black trousers, black polished

shoes, white shirt, white gloves, red tie and a formal coat, they round off duties by standing outside the mayoral residence, where they sound three blasts of the horn, doff their hat and announce: "Mister/Madam Mayor, the watch is set."

It's an archaic but strangely powerful ceremony - one that Allison and her colleagues take real pride in. "It's a great honour," she says, "It is so unique, you are part of a living historical tradition. Regardless of gender - I just feel very proud and privileged to do it."



moved to the city, from her home in Shipley, West Yorks, the sights and sounds of the watch became part of the backdrop to her life.

"I first got to know about the hornblowing tradition when, as a child, my grandparents brought me on a visit to Ripon from Leeds. I remember it being exciting - it was dark and we were out late, I didn't appreciate the actual significance of what I was seeing back then.

"Then I was a student at the teacher training college in Ripon for four years. I came down to the square with fellow students or visitors to see the hornblower - who at the time was a local postman called Alan Oliver."

After spells living and working abroad, Allison and husband, John, 57, settled in Ripon with daughter, Lilian, 19. Her keen interest in history led her to become friendly with the then watchmen and she joined the team in 2017.

Although there had been a female hornblower once before - a 13-year-old called Muriel Blackburn filled in for her father Harold when he became ill during the pre-war years - Allison became the first, official, female watch person.

Among the many skills she had to master was actually blowing the horn - something of which she had no experience.

Starting with an African Ox horn then moving on to the 2019 McHardy Quest Horn, crafted from the horn of a local bull called Setterington Quest, she soon got the knack.

"My practising terrified my cat," she laughs, "but other than that it was okay. Wayne, one of my hornblowing colleagues mentored me, he helped me run through everything and revise answers to common questions asked by members of the public.

"The most challenging

aspect is actually making sure you know when you are on duty and to be constantly aware of the time, so you are there on time and looking smart.

"All members of the team have alarms set on their phones and rotas printed off and displayed in the house for constant checking!"

So what do her friends and family think about her unusual evening job?

"When my daughter was younger, she wasn't sure whether to be proud or embarrassed of me being a Ripon hornblower," Allison says.

"Now she's older she will deign to come down and watch occasionally and is more understanding and appreciative of the uniqueness of the role.

"My husband comes down to the square with me more often than not. He talks to the visitors (and gives me marks out of ten for how well I blew) and takes photos for people.

"Local residents often stop by to watch if they are passing. Sometimes people come out of pubs and restaurants to see it. The reaction has always been positive and we are often thanked for keeping the tradition going so it is very rewarding."

During lockdown Allison and her colleagues adapted the ceremony to keep it going - blowing horns in their gardens and sharing it via Facebook.

A more recent highlight was helping celebrate the Platinum Jubilee. "The atmosphere was so joyful and special but quite nerve wracking - you just hope you are going to blow well in front of all those people."

Now she and the team are back on their regular watch - helping shape the future of this unusual role.



I LOVE TALKING TO THE VISITORS TO HEAR THEIR STORIES

She adds: "I enjoy blowing the horn on a cold winter's night when the sky is dark, the moon is out, there are lots of stars in the sky and the horn rings out really clearly.

"I love talking to the visitors to hear their stories about the reasons they have come to Ripon, their previous experiences of visiting the hornblower and their thoughts about the city - we often discover so many interesting snippets of information."

Allison, a former teacher who also works as a PA, had been aware of Ripon's unique hornblowing ceremony since she was a little girl. When she



WE ARE OFTEN THANKED FOR KEEPING THE TRADITION GOING

Photo: Vicky Matthews



PLANT, GROW, REPEAT

UNISON was created to defend and improve its members' terms and conditions, but it's also committed to protecting the environment and tackling the threat posed by the climate crisis. **Claire Donnelly** reports

I t's a beautiful, strangely misty morning in this rather genteel corner of Harrogate.

And as more and more people begin to emerge from the mist - wrapped up in big coats, wellies, gloves and bobble hats - it's clear something special is

happening here.

Wielding a muddy spade, UNISON's branch environment officer, Sam Perry, finds a pre-marked spot and starts to break up the heavy clay soil, smiling as he tells colleagues: 'Right then, let's get stuck in.'

He's heading up a group

“ THE CLIMATE CRISIS REPRESENTS AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT TO OUR MEMBERS

of activists and volunteers here to create Pocket Wood - something that will bring much-needed foliage to this part of town and signal the union's serious commitment to green issues and climate change.

They've raised more than £1,000 to fund the project in their bid to create 'green space and green thinking'.

UNISON has joined forces with Harrogate borough council to add the trees to a neglected area of The Stray, a strip of parkland that's well-used by residents alongside Regent's Parade.

It's a modest start - eight saplings are being planted today; two lime, three hop hornbeams and three elder - timed to mark National Tree Week but more planting is planned for 2023.

In time, the trees will grow into a new copse for future generations to enjoy.

As Sam explains: "The climate crisis represents an existential threat to our members' and everyone's way of life - we must raise awareness and act now before it's too late.

"As a public services union we're very conscious that climate change already is, and is going to continue to, affect us.

"We've been working closely with Harrogate borough council to 'green' council operations and ensure that environmental matters are top of the agenda.

"Our slogan is 'this union is a green union' and we want to take action to show people what we mean by that, what we can all do and how we are working with other bodies, like the council, to put climate

concerns at the heart of everything we do.

"Our new Community Pocket Wood is a gift to our wider community in Harrogate and an invitation to all who see it, to grow more green spaces in the world and more green thinking in their minds."

A plaque will be added later - telling people more about the project. And the effects of climate change are being felt during this process.

"We're adding wood chip around the base to keep the moisture in, in case it's a summer like last year," Sam explains.

Colleague, Patrick Carroll, 39, is one of the willing volunteers giving up a wet Wednesday morning to help.

An IT worker by day, he lives close by and had been looking for ways to do something to tackle what he sees as a climate emergency.

"Carbon capture and other measures are important. It's a drop in the ocean in some ways but it's about doing something, showing what we can do," he says.

Pausing to lug a spindly sapling over from the council truck, he adds: "It's very easy to be cynical when corporates do things like this, but because it's the union you know it comes from a good place.

"On a wider level it's good to be part of something, to be working together with people in your community.

"Unions aren't just about pay and conditions - for me it's about solidarity, coming together on issues that affect us all.

"We've all seen the effects

of climate change, extreme weather, this is something we can all agree on."

Wendy Walton, UNISON area organiser, is excited to be here too - and about showcasing the wider work of the union's community projects.

"It's important to show that green issues are a priority for us, for everyone," she says.

"And we're really proud that the Harrogate branch has been able to do this.

"It's a powerful statement and will be part of a wonderful legacy."

Beside them, Alison Clark has come dressed for the job - pulling on heavy duty gloves to lower the first of the saplings into the freshly turned soil.

The 60-year-old lives in Ripon and joined the union three years ago.

She takes a break from working to explain why this means so much to her.

"I just think it's really important to do something, to get involved in whatever way I can," she says.

"I'm just a volunteer gardener, my job is very desk-bound so it's good to get moving.


"But it's good to feel we can do something long-term.

"These trees will grow and be a very visible reminder of our environment - how much we all need these beautiful spaces and how important it is, for us all to do what we can to protect it."

Leaning on her spade, she stops to admire the team's handiwork before adding: "There is something very hopeful about planting trees isn't there?" □



"THERE IS SOMETHING VERY HOPEFUL ABOUT PLANTING TREES ISN'T THERE?"



SO MUCH TO LEARN, SO MUCH TO TEACH

Photo: Steve Morgan

UNISON ambassador for equalities Audrey Tweddle (above) loves her work finding jobs for disadvantaged people - and in her spare time organising knees-ups for her friends. **Helen Hague** reports

Audrey Tweddle has always relished helping people make the most of themselves – and she’s keen to take advantage of opportunities to develop her own talents. She’s also rather good at organising things – qualities which help explain her success both at work and ‘at play’.

At work, Audrey, who trained as a careers advisor, brings enthusiasm and experience to her role as an employment support and training officer with Calderdale council. Outside work she arranges trips,

outings and social events for friends. The latest was a themed ‘Flower Power’ party before Christmas.

But for the past four years, Audrey has been immersed in a council initiative aimed at helping 50 disadvantaged, unemployed people living in the area overcome barriers they face in the jobs market - and get paid work that suits them.

Because of the interruption of covid, it will continue this year. Eleven ‘clients’ were recruited just as the pandemic lockdown started, and Audrey interviewed them via Zoom, discussing aims, ambitions and

assessing existing skills. Those who went on to join were paid the national minimum wage for 16 hours a week for 26 weeks. Audrey was there to give support and guidance, including confidence-building, help with writing CVs and identifying a suitable four-week work placement, leading to a six months paid internship.

As a result, Calderdale council now has 22 motivated new recruits on the payroll, 12 people got jobs outside the council and Audrey is still working with seven others to match their skills with suitable vacancies. No



I'M VERY
LUCKY
MEETING
SO MANY
DIFFERENT
PEOPLE

wonder the council is thinking of backing another three-year programme based on preparing people for work, beefing up their skills leading to month-long internships.

Audrey is pleased that the programme has delivered what it was meant to. "It seems to have worked very well supporting individuals and is also helping the council meet its inclusion targets," says Audrey. "It's a safe space for people trying to overcome barriers to work they have faced in the past. And it helps the council reflect the community we serve."

Those benefiting from the scheme so far come from a range of ethnicities and backgrounds – from white British to British Indian and British Pakistani to those with African and European heritage. There were seven who first came to Britain as refugees. Two have taken up part-time positions: one as a carer and one as a community outreach worker. Both have secured places studying for counselling degrees at Huddersfield University.

Audrey doesn't do half measures when it comes to her job supporting disadvantaged people

IT'S A SAFE SPACE FOR PEOPLE TRYING TO OVERCOME BARRIERS TO WORK

into the workplace. When clients were particularly distressed during lockdown, she would arrange for a 'socially distanced' meet in a park. She still hears from those she helped get jobs years back. "I love my work," she says and doesn't take its rewards for granted. "I'm very lucky meeting so many different people from different backgrounds who I can help achieve what they want."

The people she supports on the council initiative faced a range of 'underlying issues' that were holding them back – from bad experiences at work to adjusting to settling in a new country or the challenges of neuro diversity. One very able client who has now found work has high functioning autism – and Audrey could draw on her experience of supporting people on the autistic spectrum in an earlier job to help him succeed.

She has always been 'curious' about other people's experience, which suggests she is a good listener, able to identify strengths in those she supports. She has 'learned a lot' about the social impact of conflicts

from those who came to Britain as refugees. "There is always so much to learn."

Audrey was born in Guyana in South America and came to Britain with her midwife mother and athlete father when she was eight. She is a member of the BAME steering group, an ambassador for menopause at Calderdale council and is a UNISON ambassador for equalities. She has benefited from many UNISON courses – from public speaking to Women's Lives and would strongly recommend them to other union members.

She lives with her husband Bryan, a sculptor, designer and artistic director of festivals and events in the UK and abroad. Their home is not far from Hebden Bridge, well-known as a hub for artists and other 'independent creatives'. This suits Audrey very well. She loves art and music and back in the day, the grandmother of five was a member of a band called the 'Kitchen Mechanics'.

Her parents returned to Guyana as Audrey built a life England. On a recent trip back to the country Audrey learned something astonishing from her godmother. The area where she was born was called Cumberland - so both she and her husband were born in a place with the same name - though many thousands of miles apart. "It was a surprising co-incidence," says Audrey. Though it should be remembered that Guyana was once known as "British Guyana" before independence.

The 'Flower Power' event in December took place at the church hall in Sowerby Bridge. "There were a lot of hippies there that night," jokes Audrey who wasn't the only one to arrive with flowers in her hair. She's already organised a spring trip to Bolton Abbey – and is planning next December's social event. And if things pan out as hoped, there could soon be a new cohort of people getting the support they need to get into work – at Calderdale council and beyond. □

Audrey, second left, with the band 'Kitchen Mechanics'





I'M NOT POSH!

Active! writer **Claire Donnelly** interviews new MP for Wakefield Simon Lightwood, a man whose tough upbringing helps him connect with people and understand what they're going through

He's just moved house, he's just recovered from a nasty bout of tonsillitis and he isn't sure when he'll ever get a day off - but the smile on his face says Simon Lightwood couldn't be happier.

Labour's new MP for Wakefield has been in post for little over nine

months and he's already making positive changes in the neglected West Yorkshire constituency.

The 42-year-old fought a by-election based on promises to tackle anti-social behaviour, policing and, of course, the cost of living crisis. And he's delivering.

Appointed as a shadow transport

minister in October, he and his team have been quick to provide tangible help for constituents left without an MP for the best part of a year.

Working closely with the Labour-run Wakefield council and West Yorkshire mayor, Tracy Brabin, as Simon says: "Wakefield deserved better - and we want to deliver

it; we've hit the ground running."

Speaking on a dark, winter's afternoon, he looks tired but full of enthusiasm for the challenges ahead.

As he tells me proudly, he's just helped secure 60 additional police officers for the constituency, has set a £2 cap on bus fares and is setting up a child poverty taskforce.

It's a wide-ranging, ambitious agenda - one driven by Simon's own childhood, its constraints and humiliations.

As he says: "When I talk to people on the doorstep, I know what they're talking about, I've been through it.

"There's sometimes a presumption about politicians on the doorstep - that we're these posh people. Well, I'm not posh."

Growing up in South Shields, with a bus driver dad and machinist mum, his family lost their home during the recession.

"We were pretty poor. When we lost our house, there just weren't any council houses available so we moved in with my nanna", he says.

"There were seven of us in a two bedroom house. My aunty would sleep there, then me, my sister and my nanna.

"I was 13. That was tough. It impacts everything, your aspiration, your confidence.

"That background helped me connect with people. I understood what people were going through because it had happened to me.

"The awful thing is it's much worse now. I have never known it so bad. When the mini-budget happened last year people were really taken aback at the huge

increase in mortgage bills. Now everyone is struggling.

"Child poverty is a priority. Before the pandemic, we were already looking at 35 per cent of our kids living in poverty.

"That's heartbreaking and wrong. We're working with the council, unions, the third sector, businesses to create a child poverty taskforce.

"We're having to say, 'what can we do ourselves?' because the government aren't coming to our rescue. They're making it worse.

"That need drives me - I want to fight for people like my family."

A quiet, studious child, Simon's activism began at school - working with a union to fight a dinner hall closure.

"I thought they were treating the staff awfully," he says. "I was quite a shy, goody-two-shoes, but I knew it was wrong so I started a campaign, made a noise.

"I started working with the trade union and we won. That buzz of making a difference, of being heard, was really powerful. There was a little seed planted, that we CAN change things, working together."

Simon worked for Labour MP, Mary Creagh, and was head of communications at Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust before deciding to stand for the traditionally Labour seat.

Previous MP, Conservative Imran Khan, was in post from 2019, before resigning in May last year after being found guilty of sexual assault.

Simon's selection wasn't without controversy. He was chosen over trade unionist Kate Dearden, prompting the executive committee of the

local Labour party to resign.

Standing was a tricky personal decision too. He and his vet husband were busy juggling work with raising their two adopted children.

When he won - with a 4,925 majority - Simon knew the job would be all-consuming and says finding work/life balance is a challenge.

His holiday plans involve 'spending time on the sofa watching films with the kids'. "It's not a job, it's a commitment, 24/7," he smiles.

"When I was first elected I was off to London a lot. Suddenly my husband was a single parent, having to do school clubs, drop offs.

"The kids know I work in parliament which is on Peppa Pig so that's okay with them and thank goodness for Facetime.

"We've got more than 2,000 cases we're looking at right now," he adds. "I was quite poorly last week with tonsillitis, it finally caught up with me.

"It's taken me to this point to go, 'oh, slow down a bit Si' but it was so important that I recognised people's support and started delivering."

Some of that support came from union members and activists. "It didn't feel like it was just me standing," he smiles.

"I was there with the whole of the labour movement - we knew this was a line in the sand moment for the Tory government. I couldn't have done it without trade union members. Having the support of UNISON meant everything to me and now I'll continue fighting for them in parliament." □



I HAVE NEVER KNOWN IT SO BAD



HAVING THE SUPPORT OF UNISON, MEANT EVERYTHING TO ME

Photo: Vicky Matthers

MISTER TEN PER CENT

UNISON steward Eric Richardson (above) put his 50 years in the NUM to good use at Wakefield's National Coal Mining Museum, helping to win a pay rise of up to 10.5 per cent. **Helen Hague** reports

Ten years ago, just two weeks into 'retirement', former Yorkshire miner Eric Richardson decided to head underground again. He volunteered at the National Coal Mining Museum for England, based at Caphouse colliery near Wakefield.

It wasn't long before he was on the payroll – as an underground tour guide. And, as a union activist all his working life, Eric was quick to join UNISON and

get actively involved in the branch.

Caphouse didn't reopen after the year-long miners' strike. But three years later, in 1988, the museum - incorporating tunnels and mineshafts – opened, celebrating mining heritage for the next generation.

Worker solidarity is one tradition that persists on the site. Late last year, Eric was one of three UNISON stewards, the others were Wayne Deakin and Trevor Chalkey, heavily involved

in a pay fight that won a rise of up to 10.5 per cent for nearly 100 staff at the museum after a five-day strike. Appropriately, former miners' leader Arthur Scargill joined the picket line on the first day.

Management had to abandon its earlier stance that a government pay cap meant it couldn't go anywhere near meeting the union's £2,000 claim. They had offered less than half. After talks through the conciliation service ACAS,



WE DO IT
WITH
PASSION.
WE DO IT
WITH PRIDE



a rise of £1,650 was agreed, with pro rata rises for part timers and a one-off cost of living payment of £350.

Now 75, Eric relishes his second career underground as both tour guide and union steward. But the rise had to be fought for: "We didn't want to strike, though with rising energy prices and everything going up we had to make a stand," he says. "They'd gone too far this time. Through standing together, we got a result."

So, the pits are long gone, but now coal mining is on the national curriculum. At the museum, schoolchildren and others can get kitted out with hardhats and battery lamps, step into the 'cage' and descend 140m underground to discover the harsh realities of coal

mining throughout the centuries, from Eric and other tour guides. All 27 are UNISON members – and former miners, fitters, overmen, engineers, electricians or deputies. "We do it with passion. We do it with pride," says Eric.

He joined the National Union of Mineworkers at 15, when he started as an apprentice mechanical fitter at Dodworth pit, in the mining village where he was born and brought up. He became the pit's craft rep in the mid-70s and was elected union branch president four years before the year-long miners' strike began in March 1984. He was at Orgreave, scene of a violent confrontation between police and striking miners, from "day one", says Eric. He also travelled with other flying pickets to pits in Nottinghamshire, Warwickshire and Lancashire.

Memories of the strike run deep: "It was really hard, but what got us through was togetherness and camaraderie. We got through as a community." Women, he says, played a vital role, both as members of Women Against Pit Closures and doing their best to see that strikers and their families were fed.

Dodworth pit shut two years after the strike ended. Eric moved to Parkmill, and after a series of mining contracts, to Maltby, where he worked until the pit shut in 2013.

He recalls the "teamwork and camaraderie" of working alongside "some magnificent miners" deep underground over decades. "My safety depended on them watching my back. And their safety me watching theirs. That's what we did. It was a great place to work."

Since the pits shut, many miners' welfare clubs have faced closure. Dodworth Miners Welfare – still home to its award-winning brass band - faced its own crisis four years ago. But it

now has a new lease of life.

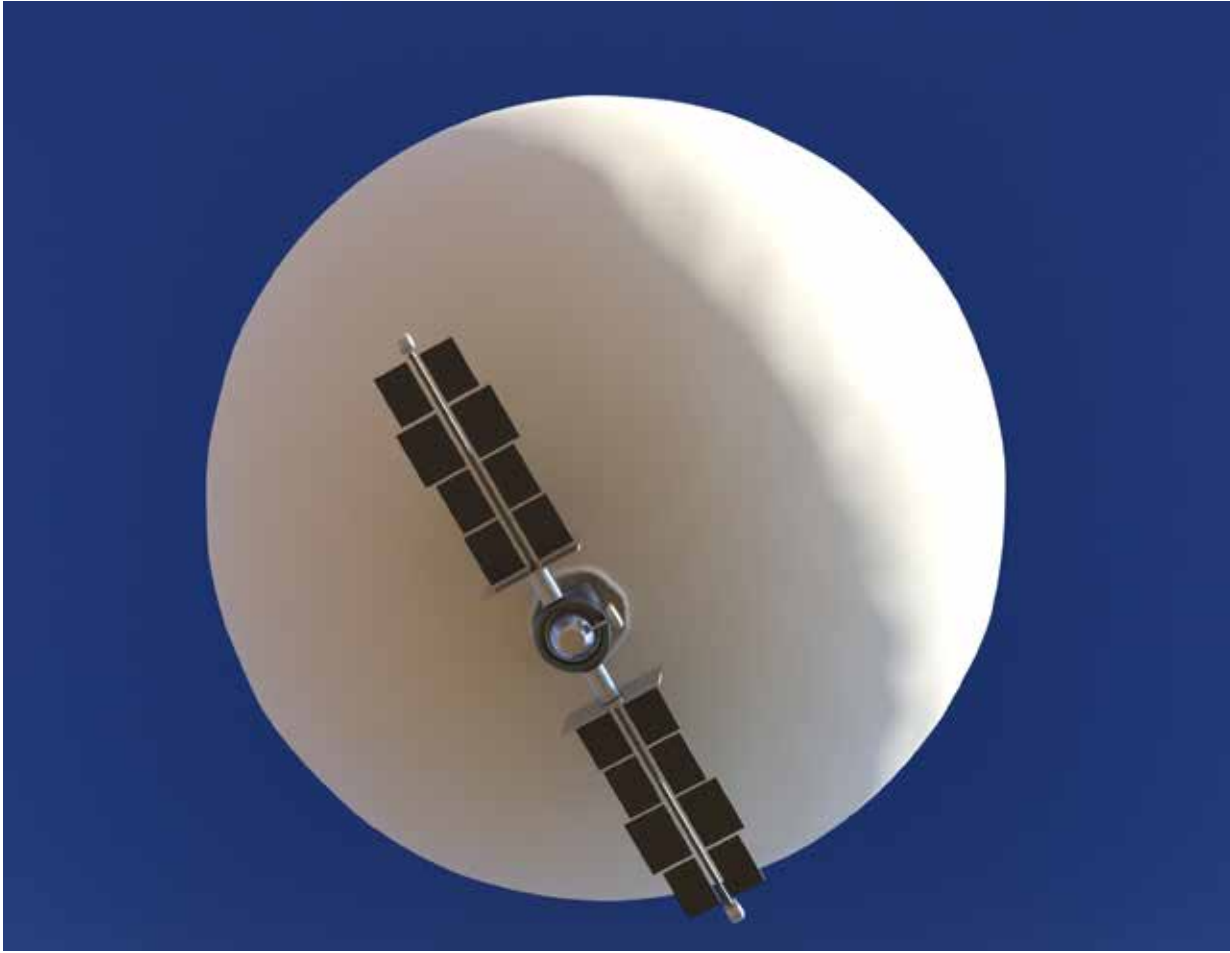
Eric, now club chairman and trustee, pays tribute to more people getting involved, bringing fresh ideas. "We've got different people from different backgrounds that sit on our committee and that makes us a lot stronger than we've ever been before." Recent renovations have transformed the club. "It no longer looks like your granny's front room." There's a new sports bar, TV screens and projectors which are helping attract younger members.

Eric is rightly proud of the sporting prowess of local people who use the club's many sports pitches. There's Dodworth Miners Welfare football club, a rugby team, six bowling teams, 13 junior football sides 'from six to 17', five junior rugby sides, junior bowling teams and amateur boxing. "If people want to play, we try and accommodate them," says Eric.

Eric's life has been steeped in mining. He can look back on decades of union activism in what was not so long ago a major British industry, with its rich and distinctive heritage. "I still pride myself on being an active trade unionist, and it's good to be able to pass on my experiences working underground to keep the history of mining alive. It was a very good life."

As part of the UNISON team that helped win a decent pay rise for co-workers at a time of rocketing living costs, Eric was able to draw on many decades of union activism.

He is certainly thriving in the three important roles he is proud to hold – underground tour guide, union steward and chair of the miner's welfare. And he certainly hopes to be around for a good while yet, delivering for union members, club members and underground tourists. Or as Eric puts it: "While I'm fit enough to do my jobs, I'll carry on." □



FACTS IS FACTS

Some things are indisputably true, despite the post-truth rantings of conspiracy theorists and clowns like Donald Trump. Active! columnist **Peter Carroll** takes a look at fact, opinion and utter twaddle

I was genuinely astonished when the story broke about China spying on the USA.

Of course, we all know that spying has a very long, sometimes distinguished history, but mostly not.

The Tudors, for example, were brilliant at intelligence-gathering.

They invented removable painted eyes in portraits that could be

temporarily replaced by real eyeballs that actually did follow you round the room. Even their walls had ears!

And their civil servants and judiciary knew very well indeed that the horrors of the Tower awaited anyone failing to demonstrate absolute loyalty to the King - whatever he did. Quite right too, your majesty.

And for those unwilling to confess

their transgressions, there was the rack, which usually encouraged them to put their hands up, so to speak.

(And as we know, the practice of torture did not die with the Tudors. As Amnesty informs us, it is used by the powerful in every part of the globe every single day.)

In our own age, the Cold War years have provided rich material for writers and film makers.

“ ONCE REVERED CONCEPTS SUCH AS FACTS, EVIDENCE AND TRUTH HAVE NO PLACE IN A POST-TRUTH WORLD

are sometimes diplomatically described) on a knock-for-knock basis.

But surely, like me, many of the world's TV viewers could not believe what these secretive, 'deep state' operatives were up to.

The inventors and sole owners of stupendous technology that will soon be able to take holiday-makers to Mars are not developing a new and improved death ray or an invisibility cloak or anything like that.

Believe it or not, they have been sending BIG WHITE BALLOONS to float serenely above their foreign targets and take pictures of oil refineries, nuclear missile bases and (who knows?) giant shopping malls.

It sounds like the sort of cunning plan Baldrick would offer to Blackadder on the brink of going over the top.

"We could float some big white balloons over their trenches and take pictures of them, Sir."

"I see, Baldrick, so we float these balloons at very, very low altitude so they can take really clear close-up pictures AND at the same time be clearly visible to the naked eye. Quite brilliant, Balders."

Is it true that such primitive means are being used?

The term 'post-truth' was coined during the Trump era.

It describes the way Trump relentlessly denounced most of the media, bellowing his 'fake news' slur, insulting and threatening journalists and mocking disabled reporters.

He and his advisors set out to undermine people's already shaky trust in all traditional information sources. The vacuum this created immediately sucked in rabid white supremacists – a moronic army of neo-fascists acting as virtual storm troopers in their attics.

Post-truth means there is no such thing as truth, there are only truths in the plural.

Your truth, my truth, her truth are

all individual matters and all equally valid. As personal as fingerprints.

Everything is relative, so go with whatever best matches your favourite prejudices.

If you believe white people are born superior to black people, or that the holocaust either did not happen or wasn't thorough enough, that's just your opinion.

And when I challenge your nonsense on the grounds that it is – demonstrably - factually and morally wrong, well, that's just my opinion.

Once revered concepts such as facts, evidence and truth don't exist and have no place in a post-truth world.

Vote for whichever political party makes you feel safest to hate anyone you want with impunity: then you can do thrilling things like attack the White House or firebomb a Church Hall.

But the earthquake which has killed and maimed tens of thousands of people in Turkey and Syria is not a matter of opinion.

The earth's tectonic plates ground against each other causing a massive tremor. There's nothing anyone can do about such natural events.

But as we now know, there is definitely something that can be done to safeguard citizens in these situations.

Hundreds of property magnates have tried to escape the country because they made vast sums by ignoring all safety standards designed to stop the collapse of millions of properties.

They built people's houses on the cheap, knowing that as and when there was an earthquake they would collapse onto them.

Is it debatable that such crimes (like the Grenfell Tower tragedy) are unforgivable?

Isn't it a fact that the authorities could have saved thousands of lives if they wanted to?

That's not just my personal, relativistic opinion. It is the truth and everyone knows it. □

The fictional spy James Bond and his glamorous escapades are etched deep in the national imagination. Fights have even broken out over who really 'owns' the role: Connery, Moore or Craig. (Brosnan rarely features in these clashes.)

In 'realist' spy fiction, Le Carre's creation Smiley (unlike his people) is a household name. The role belongs to Alec Guinness, of course.

And in the real world, we memorably had our very own Cambridge-educated upper class double agents who worked for the Kremlin.

Burgess, Maclean and, as was much later revealed, Sir Anthony Blunt, have all secured a permanent place in our island history.

The UK and Russia have long bargained for the release of their foreign spies (or 'diplomats' as they



PAUL ROUTLEDGE

MIRROR POLITICAL COLUMNIST

THE PEOPLE HAVE HAD ENOUGH

The current nation-wide industrial action in public services ranks equally with major strikes over the last 50 years in terms of political and industrial significance, says **Paul Routledge**. Former labour editor of The Times in the 70s and 80s, Paul says the Tories have misread the mood of the people

Go back as far as the great miners' strikes of 1972 and 1974 – the ones they won – and the so-called Winter of Discontent in 1979. But this year's conflict in the public services, ranks just as high in my estimation. It has been fought on so many fronts, and it has equally profound implications for society, politics and the world of work.

The Tories can't have imagined that one more year of real wage cuts could produce such a revolt in hospitals, schools, universities, the civil service, fire stations, the railways and many other workplaces.

After all, they'd got away with 12 long years of austerity under a bewildering, and accelerating, succession of prime ministers and chancellors. The unions didn't react, the workers were resentful, but scared of losing their jobs and the laws had been tightened to make industrial action even more difficult. What could possibly go wrong?

They could, and did. The

Tories misread the mood of the people. This time, they said 'enough is enough,' and invoked their right to strike. The public backed them, by as much as 80 per cent in polls of Daily Mirror readers. Naturally, the Tories' response was to introduce fresh laws making action even more difficult, and compelling workers to provide 'minimum service' on pain of dismissal. In future, the government will tell you when you go to work. Unless it is a Labour government, committed to fairness.

Sir Keir Starmer has to repeal these unjust laws, as part of a wider review of employment legislation. Tony Blair only tinkered with Thatcher's draconian anti-union legislation. He had the Commons majority, but not the political will. This time, it has to be different.

A TREK TOO FAR

The epic TV series Happy Valley ended in an emotional finale of love, violence and plot-twists that we have come to expect from genius

Yorkshire screenwriter Sally Wainwright. Sgt Catherine Cawood (Sarah Lancashire) solved all the crimes, and villain Tommy Lee Royce (James Norton) met a bloodthirsty end. Viewing figures topped 11 million, testifying to its nationwide popularity.

But perhaps the real winner was Calder Valley itself, happy to see the spotlight on its gritty beauty in a way that no amount of tourist advertising could buy. Hebden Bridge was already a magnet for trippers, and I can see the area becoming like Heartbeat country, a must-visit for fans of the drama.

Only one complaint: Sgt Cawood starting retirement trekking in the Himalayas, swapping Hardcastle Craggs for Everest base camp? Hardly likely.

DOWN TO EARTH

Alice Mahon, the former Labour MP for Halifax who died in a Halifax care home on Christmas day aged 85, was a good friend when we both worked at Westminster.

A former nursing



SIR KEIR
STARMER
HAS TO
REPEAL
THESE
UNJUST
LAWS



auxiliary in the NHS and a rep for UNISON forerunner the National Union of Public Employees, she was sometimes known as 'Red Alice'.

The nickname was over the top, but she certainly disapproved of New Labour and Tony Blair's wars, and never really aspired to ministerial limousines and red boxes.

I liked her forthrightness and spirit, born to working class parents, she was 'happy but poor' in her own words, in the town she went on to represent in parliament for 18 years.

Alice was a serial rebel during the Blair government years, and eventually quit the Labour party after 50 years, complaining that its leaders had betrayed the principles that inspired her to join as a teenager.

She came back into the fold in 2015, when Jeremy Corbyn became leader, and never lost her wry sense of humour. Long after her retirement, she remarked: "I seem more popular in Halifax now that I'm no longer its MP."

We could do with more like Alice at Westminster; sensible, committed and down to earth.

AN INNOCENT MAN

Statues are going through a bad time reputation-wise, as we rethink our imperial past.

But at least some commemorate men and women who have done something for the community, like the one of cricket umpire Dickie Bird in Barnsley.

Rarely, however, can there

have been a better idea than the dedication of a new footbridge across the River Aire in Leeds to honour the victim of unforgivable and ultimately fatal racial harassment.

David Oluwale, who had travelled to the UK from Nigeria, was targeted because of his homelessness and race. He was drowned in the river in a racially-motivated incident in 1969 and his death resulted in the first successful prosecution of British police officers for involvement in the death of a black person

The bridge, between Sovereign Street and Water Lane, is brilliantly illuminated at night. It literally shines a light on past injustice, and, say its founders, acts as a physical emblem of the city's commitment to confront historic institutional failings and prejudices that lead to the death of an innocent man.

Amen to that.

'OW MUCH?

Tetley bitter I understand, even if it's no longer brewed in Hunslet. And wine from nearby Woodlesford.

But Yorkshire whisky? You're having me on, surely. Not so. The single-malt spirit is being distilled on an industrial estate in Hunmanby, from barley grown locally.

Filey Bay whisky, with a logo of gannets that nest on nearby Bempton Cliffs, is the latest must-drink for connoisseurs of the hard stuff.

You'll have to dig deep in

your sporan to sup it. A bottle costs around £60, prompting the immortal Yorkshire lament: "Ow much?"

A WORTHY WINNER

The search for The Greatest Living Yorkshireman goes on. Sir Gary Verity, dropped out – as did his Welcome to Yorkshire outfit. And Sir Michael Parkinson is 'absolutely' sick of seeing his former TV clips. "I don't recognise this person, it's a disguise, all of it."

Well, best leave him to one side. Anyway, the whole idea of GLY is sexist. Why not a woman, like award-winning football champion Beth Mead?

But she's already BBC Sports Personality of the Year, and has years more to go for honours, so on balance I'd have to jointly nominate Rob Burrow, winner of the Helen Rollason Award for his work raising awareness of motor neurone disease and his former Leeds Rhinos teammate Kevin Sinfield who has raised more than £7m for MND research and awareness.

Kevin has gone the extra hundreds of miles running for charity, a worthy winner.

THANKS AGAIN!

Since the last Active! I have been treated in Leeds General Infirmary's intensive care for Type B aortic dissection. Last May, the staff saved my life with a 10-hour operation for Type A. This year they kept it going. Heartfelt thanks and best wishes to all who work there. □



DOING A DEAL

Top employment rights lawyer **Natalie Hunt** of Thompsons Solicitors explains the key points about settlement agreements, used when an employee and employer part company

Settlement agreements, formerly known as compromise agreements, are legally binding contracts used to end an employment relationship on agreed terms.

The process of approaching and negotiating settlement agreements can be tricky. Receiving expert advice on the terms of such an agreement is also a legal requirement for it to be binding.

For a settlement agreement to be legally binding in England and Wales, the following conditions from Section 203 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 must be met:

- The agreement must be in writing.
- It must relate to a specific complaint or proceedings.
- An independent legal adviser must have informed the employee of the terms and effect of the proposed agreement, and the impact it would have on their ability to pursue that complaint or proceeding before an employment tribunal.
- The agreement must identify the adviser and their advice must be covered by insurance.
- It must state that the conditions regulating such settlements under the Employment Rights Act have

been satisfied.

An employee cannot be forced by their employer to sign such an agreement. Obtaining legal advice will help you decide if signing is the right choice for you and can help you negotiate the best possible deal.

This is very important as agreeing to, and signing a settlement agreement means you will no longer be able to sue your employer in a tribunal or court for any ongoing, potential or future claim, individually or as part of a group unless the agreement specifies otherwise.

There are limited rights that should still be protected within the agreement and when going through the process, specialists like those at Thompsons will ensure these are included before anything is signed.

Settlement agreements usually include a confidentiality clause which prevents the agreement and terms being disclosed to third parties. A legal expert can ensure that the clause is not overly restrictive and that it is balanced in your favour to ensure you can discuss matters with relevant parties, such as prospective employers and your professional advisors.

So are the payments

included in a settlement agreement tax-free? This depends on what payments you are receiving and how these are defined within the agreement.

Generally, the first £30,000 of a payment made as compensation for loss of employment or redundancy (both statutory and contractual) will be tax-free. However, how the payment is defined within the agreement is crucial and can make a difference as to whether it is tax exempt. Thompsons' settlement agreement specialists can review this with you and make the necessary amendments to your agreement.

The cost of legal advice is usually covered by the employer and stipulated within the agreement. Your legal service supplied by Thompsons Solicitors will not charge you more than your employer's contribution to costs and you will receive 100 per cent of the payment.

Thompsons Solicitors has a dedicated team of specialists who deal solely with advising and supporting people through the settlement agreement process.

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



THE COST OF LEGAL ADVICE IS USUALLY COVERED BY THE EMPLOYER

Natalie Hunt:
A senior member of Thompsons' national settlement agreement unit





**INEQUALITY
IS THIS
GOVERNMENT'S
POLICY**

**TOGETHER
WE RISE**



UNISON
Living

Great deals for work and play

If you're a member of UNISON, we won't just look after you at work, we'll be there for evenings, weekends and holidays too. We've chosen a range of fantastic deals to make your down time the best time.

For more information on UNISON Living visit **benefits.unison.org.uk**