

Standing up for public services

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Report from UNISON South East Regional Women's Forum

On 28-30 September Marija Jogun and Sofiya Skachko attended 14th UNISON Regional Women's Forum at the View Hotel in Eastbourne as part of their training as Equality Office and Women's Officer for Hampshire branch respectively. The Forum is organised annually by South East Regional Women's Committee, currently headed by the Regional Women's Officer Fiona Roberts. Here is what they have to say:

Sofiya Skachko, Women's Officer: Before sharing my impressions from this year's Women's Forum, let me emphasise that ANY woman member from the branch can attend this type of event. It does not matter if you play an active role in the Union activities (yet). The aim is to allow women members to meet, discuss our shared grievances, as well as various ways of moving forward, helping each other, and campaigning on important women's issues together.

Among the key note speakers, **Holly Rebeiro, Organiser for Nurses and Midwives**

Association, New South Wales stood out with her impassioned talk on her union, their campaigning for ratios in elderly care and general ratios for staffing in hospitals. She also covered the history of struggle for equal pay in Australia, and talked about the current nation wide campaign with a bold motto *Change the Rules*. It's useful to learn from other Unions, their focus and tactics.



In the year that marks centenary of some economically privileged women getting a vote in Britain, it was really sobering for me to hear **Katherine Connelly**, historian and activist, talk about her heroine Sylvia Pankhurst.

Sylvia Pankhurst's work is largely overlooked in the media, since her position and activism do not sit well with "feminism that is only

interested in who sits on the boardrooms, and not who cleans those boardrooms," according to Connelly.

Sylvia Pankhurst was consistent in her support for women's suffrage, but rejected the elitist argument of her mother Emmeline Pankhurst, and older sister Christabel, WSPU leader, that 'the very strongest women' (those with money and property) should fight for women's vote and dissociate themselves from other movements (Labour and trade unionism).

She was also opposed to terrorist tactics of WSPU, and instead focused on helping working women organize for better pay and conditions through peaceful strikes and campaigning.

It's certainly the history worth studying and remembering, since the problem of low-paid working women and the lack of representation for them remains, and as Katherine reminded us, according to Common's own figures from 2017, women bear 86% of austerity burden.

“If on our own we may be struggling, together we can be stronger”

Report from UNISON South East Regional Women’s Forum *Continued*

During a seminar on Union learning opportunities one important issue was raised again and again with women talking about the time constraints caused by staff shortages in their work places.

How can we become more informed and active as Union members, if we don’t get any breathing space and each day collapse from exhaustion from juggling multiple roles?

It’s become clear to me after the Women’s Forum that the

only sensible way forward is to organize a Branch Women’s Group to overcome this hurdle. If on our own we may be struggling, together we can be stronger through sharing those minimal resources each of us has (e.g. someone may have a car to give another member a lift, someone may have a spare hour to mind a child, someone may have useful IT skills, or can secure a venue for a meeting or event etc).

To gauge the interest, a

survey will be soon sent out to UNISON women members in Hampshire. The more responses we get, the more will we know if there is sufficient need for the Women’s Group in our region, as well as what shape it should take and what issues to address.

In the meantime, feel free to send me an email at *Sofia. Skachko@hants.gov.uk* as I look forward to meeting other women members and hear from you directly.

Labour Party Conference 2018

Our union works directly with the Labour Party to ensure the voices of workers are heard and our interests are represented. Members who choose to sign up to the Affiliated Political Fund enable the union to help fund the party, something which is vital in a world where the voice of big business and the super-rich is loudest in the corridors of power. The party itself was founded by trade unionists although the union movement has always included people of a wide range of political beliefs, with UNISON being no exception.

At this autumn’s Labour Party conference our voice was evident. Union welcomed Labour’s commitment to halt and reverse the privatisation of our public services. Privatisation has only served to put wealth and power in the hands of the few, whilst those who rely on services cease to be a priority, and workers’ pay and conditions come under attack. Corbyn declared that Labour will “call time on this racket”. Meanwhile austerity, which has wreaked havoc on working class communities

and brought misery to our members across the public and private sectors, was declared an act of “social vandalism” by the Labour leader.

Labour has also re-affirmed its commitment to reverse the anti-trade union laws of the Cameron government. These made it harder to go on strike; made it easier for employers to win industrial disputes; made it harder for unions to fund political campaigns; and were a naked attempt to crush our movement. We look forward to the repeal of the Trade Union Act and we must also call for the repeal of the Thatcher era laws which did so much to intimidate and divide workers, and which have helped lead to the staggering inequality which exists today.

Radical measures were introduced at conference aimed at giving workers in large companies a say in how they are run and greater share of the wealth they create. John McDonnell has proposed that Labour would introduce a law that would give a third

of seats on the boards of the largest companies (those of over 250 employees) to the workers of those companies.

This would give the workers a voice on the boards, if not a deciding vote, and crucially it would give workers information on how the companies are being run and on the plans of management. 10% of all dividends would be siphoned off into a fund, from this up to £500 would go to each employee annually, with the rest going to fund public services.

The current direction of the Labour Party should be encouraging for trade unionists. If you are interested in getting involved in our joint work with the Labour Party, contact our Labour Link Officer, Leanne Jones through our branch office at *unison@hants.gov.uk*

Callum Williamson



Save Orchard Close Care Home!

Take part in the consultation

Orchard Close is a 13 bed respite care home on Hayling Island which is facing closure.

It provides a service that is much-loved by both service users and their carers, many of whom have been visiting for years. It has a dedicated, well trained and experienced staff team and some have worked at the home for decades. The home is unique in that it runs two vehicles to take service users out on trips every day. It offers a range of activities, has landscaped gardens, and has a new sensory cabin.

Many of the service users look forward to regular stays at the home which has a very social ambiance and many friendships have been formed between individuals, and also with the staff. Carers and parents know from previous visits that they can take respite time away knowing that the ones that they care for are well looked after and enjoying activities of their choice.

The council have decided that in-house respite care should be for complex care and will have only 24 beds available for the whole county. It proposes that more able people are to access the few Shared Lives places that are available, or make their own accessible holiday arrangements. Some of the service users with autism or anxiety who take a long time to settle in to new environments will find these changes particularly difficult to deal with.

Many service users have elderly carers who rely on the continuity of care that Orchard Close provides and will struggle to make alternative arrangements.

It is proposed that more Shared Lives providers will be recruited to cover this increased requirement, but there is concern that these will not have the years of experience to adequately provide the medical, physical and emotional support that the service users require.

Many users of Orchard Close have complex needs and may need overnight monitoring and some need rescue medication.

Orchard Close supports people with a great variety and level of disabilities and presently 170 service users access the unit from across the county. It has also provided crisis beds and long-term accommodation for people who could not be placed elsewhere within the Adult Care Service the county currently provides. Where will these people be placed when there are no beds available then and will be even less should this proposal be carried out?

The council has advocated person-centred planning but what if people want to continue to use Orchard Close in its present form? On the consultation document this option has already been discounted so one wonders, what is the point of this exercise?

The council has to save money but the closure of Orchard Close will cause a lot of distress and is likely to end up costing them a lot more.

There is a petition running on Change.org by the mother of one of the service users and her story can be read at the News, *Portsmouth.co.uk*, Friday 5th October so

please sign it and show your support.

There is also a response form to the consultation which can be found at AS.Consultation@hants.gov.uk/orchard close.

In order to have your voice heard it is important that as many of these forms as possible are returned.



Retired Members

We encourage you to give the new website a visit where the latest news from the retired members section can be found.

I know not all of you have computer access or indeed are familiar with their workings.

However, I feel sure staff at your local library will assist you to visit the site, many of them are fellow UNISON members.

The website address is:
hampshireunison.org

Diana, our inspirational Chair, is currently in Singapore attending her son's wedding. Will she be visiting Raffles for a Singapore Sling – probably! We look forward to her return.

Chris O'Neill
Vice Chair of Hampshire UNISON Retired Members Section

“The council has to save money but the closure of Orchard Close will cause a lot of distress and is likely to end up costing them a lot more.”

Get Involved!

I'm really pleased to be able to tell you that, following on from our last newsletter, our workplace stewards base is growing!

This is great news. If you'd like to learn more about this role drop me a line on *emma.howden@hants.gov.uk* or call me on 01962 824094, thank you.

At Hampshire UNISON we encourage member participation as broadly as we can. UNISON offers many and varied forums, seminars, conferences and workshops that you can get involved with.

We have a number of delegates attending upcoming events: Higher Education seminar (Nov), Black Member's conference (Jan) Women's conference (Feb).

Our retired members delegation have recently attended their annual conference and our Women's Officer and Equality Officer, have just returned from Regional Women's Forum brim full of ideas to support our members, you'll have read their report.

Our branch continues to prioritise its support

to our members, from chatting through an issue, to representing members at workplace meetings, in consultations, with individual or collective issues and by campaigning about the issues that matter to you.

Please see our article on the proposed closure of respite care home Orchard Close on Hayling Island which provides respite across all of Hampshire, thank you.

Emma Howden
Branch Secretary

Events Coming Up...

UNISON South East Suffragette Bus Tour

Museum of London Docklands, 24th November, 10:15 – 1500

UNISON have organised a brilliant opportunity for women members to learn more about the history of the suffragette movement with a guided bus tour of suffragette London.

If you wish to attend please fill in the application form below, if you need more information about the event please email Fiona Robert, UNISON South East Regional Womens' Officer *f.roberts@unison.co.uk*



National unity demonstration

Central London, 17th November, 12:00

Unions and community groups are mobilising to oppose the rise of racist and fascist activity across Europe.

Stand up to Racism, Unite Against Fascism and Love Music Hate Racism have together called for a national unity demo against the fascist and racist right on Saturday 17 November

See the facebook event for more details.

