As this issue of the UNISON bulletin was being written the firefighters were still in dispute over their campaign for a decent living wage. Whatever the conclusion, we owe a big debt of gratitude to the FBU for putting the issue of public sector pay right at the top of the political agenda.

Wherever firefighters have spoken they have said clearly this isn't just about us, we're making a stand on behalf of all public sector workers who are struggling to get by on wages that simply haven't kept pace with inflation. Nowhere is that problem more acute than here in south London.

Latest research from Battersea and Wandsworth TUC shows that average property prices in the Boroughs we serve vary from just under £200,000 in Sutton up to a massive £350,000 in Richmond you'd need a household income of £100,000 a year to be able to buy at the kind of price.

If you're looking to rent it's no easier. The cheapest one bed flats are on the market for between £550 and £650 a month, and for a family house you'd be looking at between £850 and £1000.

These are the harsh economic realities in South West London and in this Trust they mean that services have had to be closed down because we cannot recruit enough staff on the wages currently on offer.

\[\text{£6k for Met}\]

That's why we need a significant increase in London Weighting. The Met police recently had their London allowance increased to over £6000 with free travel on top - and it has made a real difference to their recruitment. That's the kind of level of London Weighting that we need across the public services.

And we need it to be applied fairly. As we point out in this bulletin, it's a nonsense that some of our own Trust staff get over £700 less London Weighting than others despite the fact that the cost of living is high across our whole catchment area. Recruitment problems are having an impact on our services right now but if we don't get some decisive action on pay we will be facing much more dangerous problems in the future.

UNISON supports Ken Livingstone's demand that all new housing developments should have 50% affordable accommodation as a matter of course. The problem is that the developers themselves are resisting this, and even if it does happen it will take years to make any kind of difference.

Our Agenda for Change

We need some decisive action on pay now. Agenda for Change - the long-running talks over the restructuring of NHS pay scales is being hyped up, but it's hard to see how 3% a year for the next three years - which is what the Government are proposing - will fill our 30% vacancy rates in Tooting, Tolworth and Sutton.

We will also have to fight hard to make sure that mental health services aren't marginalised in the whole Agenda for Change process.

There will be limited cash available, and the political pressure will be on for it to be allocated to high profile areas of medicine - with the services we provide shoved to the back of the queue.

The firefighters have proved an important point you can bang on all you like about fair pay but nothing changes without pressure.

If public sector staff stand together to apply that pressure we've got a real chance of winning fair pay for all.
UNISON launches petition on London Weighting

A petition has been launched by UNISON calling on the Trust to pay the same level of London Weighting to all staff regardless of where they work.

As it stands, SWAG staff working in Sutton, Kingston and Richmond get over £700 less per year than the rest. This is a non-starter and it may be illegal.

Under the equal pay legislation staff working for the same employer, doing a similar job are entitled to the same pay. This isn’t happening here.

We know of staff who live in the same street with the same living costs – one works in Tooting and a nurse and the other one works in Sutton doing the same job but for £700 less. Work that one out.

The Trust have said that it would cost £3.4 million to harmonise London Weighting and they say they haven’t got the cash.

When challenged to play fair they have turned the argument on its head and have asked what services they should cut to find the difference.

The fact is that the government should be asked to find the money – it shouldn’t come from service budgets.

UNISON would be quite happy to join the Trust in pitching the case for an equal rate of London Weighting to the government ministers.

The overwhelming majority of staff have been signing the UNISON London Weighting petition and the RCN have given it their support.

We intend to hand it in at a meeting of the Trust Board. If we don’t get any joy we may have no choice but to follow the legal route.

We’re already paying a heavy price. Asotc Ward in Sutton has been closed due to staff shortages.

The extra £700 quid on London Weighting isn’t the be all and end all but it would help and it would certainly show that the Trust are taking the staffing crisis seriously.

Of course, what’s really needed is for London Weighting to be levered up for everyone to the kind of rate that the police currently enjoy – over £600.

Then we might start making some serious inroads into the recruitment and retention crisis.
Wandsworth Council turns screw on CMHTs

Reports from Wandsworth Approved Social Workers seconded over to the health Trust have confirmed that the Council are turning the screw on budgets as part of a political drive to hold down the Council Tax.

A year on from the secondment of the ASW’s angry front line staff have confirmed that:

- There is no money for residential care placements.
- Staff are being encouraged not to request placements.
- The housing register is effectively frozen.
- There is impossible pressure on beds.
- Wandsworth are refusing to create any new ASW posts.
- Clients are being lost as they transferred out of the Borough to B&F’s.

Staff are asking serious questions over whether Wandsworth are meeting the statutory obligations under Section 117 which hold them “legally responsible for a long term package of care.”

Wandsworth council’s policy of privatising home care services has been exposed in “Penny Pinchers”, a report for the council unionised Battersea& Wandsworth TUC.

It’s a scandal that staff are being advised not to request placements in the community because their requests will be turned down on the grounds of cost.

“We will do whatever we can to expose this vindictive, penny-pinching approach and will work with other local politicians to force through a change of policy.”

BWTUC is keen to find out if there have been similar problems in the other Borough’s covered by the Trust.

Meanwhile, all is not rosy in the wider world of the Private Finance Initiative.

Private Finance Initiative continues to dog the new development on the Queen Mary’s Hospital site with latest estimates suggesting that the project might be completed by the spring of 2005 if everything goes according to plan.

Meanwhile, the new Queen Mary’s remains nothing more than a hole in the ground nailing the lie that the private sector have got solutions to all of the problems in the NHS.

From the most recent reports it is clear that the Trust are concerned about the ability of the private companies involved in the new hospital to deliver quality support services that recognise the specific needs of mental health services.

“The Board emphasised the importance of both Catalyst and the PCT being sensitive to the particular needs of the mental health services, and to the importance of contractual means to ensuring acceptable performance over the full life of the contract.”

The answer to these concerns is simple – keep the support services under direct NHS control with staff on decent terms and conditions and cut out the middle men and women from the private sector who are almost guaranteed to make poor decisions in their drive to screw the maximum profit out of the new hospital.

Meanwhile, all is not rosy in the wider world of the Private Finance Initiative.

Many of the big companies involved in the projects are in serious financial trouble and one or two are facing the real possibility of going bust.

UNISON always warned that this was one of the central dangers of PFI. If a company goes to the wall in the middle of a new development who will pick up the pieces?

You’ve got it: it will be the NHS. It would be a total nightmare.

Wandsworth TUC has been exposed in “Penny Pinchers”, a report for the council unionised Battersea & Wandsworth TUC. Reports from Wandsworth Approved Social Workers seconded over to the health Trust have confirmed that the Council are turning the screw on budgets as part of a political drive to hold down the Council Tax.
Reports from all areas of the Trust confirm that the pressure on our services, against the background of severe staff shortages, are combining to increase the daily risk of assaults on our members.

We have warned before that there’s a risk of violence, harassment, and assault becoming institutionalised and we must take steps to stop that from happening. The union can only do that if staff take action to protect themselves.

First off we need more health and safety reps, more risk assessment and more continuous inspection of safety issues. If you become a Health and Safety rep the Trust are obliged to provide time off for training and we will get you onto a course.

Secondly, we need you to take action to protect yourselves. If you’re a victim here’s what you have to do to protect your interests:

- Report the incident in writing in the incident book and inform your line manager.
- Report the incident to the police and get a crime number.
- Report the incident to the DSS and register it as an industrial injury (UNISON can help).
- Report the incident on the UNISON legal application form available from the branch.

This might sound like heavy stuff – but you have to do it. Even a minor incident can end up having long term implications and by following the four step procedure you will be fully covered. It will also be invaluable for any insurance application or any claim to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

Protect yourselves and your colleagues and don’t let violence become part of the job.

If you are assaulted UNISON will support you legally and we have recently won compensation for members here in South London and St George’s but again, you have a crucial role to play.

Let’s start using our rights to get the safety issue sorted out.

If you are, or have been, a member of the Trust are obliged to provide to UNISON information to keep my records up to date.

If you or, are, have been, a member of the Freemasons you must declare this in writing when completing this form.

Please tick one box only

If you wish to join UNISON and accept its rules and constitution

I authorise deduction of the following Political Fund payment as part of my subscription:

Tick one box only

For UNISON use

Please return to:
UNISON Office, Springfield Hospital, 61 Glenburnie Road, London SW17 7DJ.

Published by UNISON South West London & St George’s Branch, Springfield Hospital London SW17 7DJ. Published by PrintSelect, London E3. Designed by John Lister 07774 264112.