

NEWS AND INFORMATION FOR NOTTINGHAMSHIRE FROM 'NOTTS UNISON'

UPDATED: Nottingham pensions march 30 June, Nottingham, I am Forest Recreation Ground

Notts Tories slash jobs and services. Now Govt. moves to cut pensions too!

Do you pay into the LGPS (Local Government Pension Scheme)? George Osborne wants to increase your monthly pension contributions by up to 50%, so that he can raise £1 billion. He also plans to change the way pension benefits are calculated, increase your retirement age, replace the final salary scheme with a career average one, and make it easier for private firms to take over council services and cut your pension.

Industrial action by sister unions on 30 June: Advice to members

The PCS, NUT, UCU and ATL will be taking industrial action on 30 June over pensions and other issues. Much of this industrial action will happen at workplaces where UNISON members also work (most likely it will be teachers striking in schools).

The action being taken by our sister unions is the first step in a wider campaign to defend our public sector pensions. UNISON members are encouraged to support rallies and demonstrations where taking part does not place members at risk of disciplinary action.

What is UNISON doing now?

As we went to press, UNISON negotiations on pensions were still taking place with the Government. These negotiations are expected to end later this month. UNISON has yet to ballot our own members, so we are **not** included in strike action on 30 June.

What to do on 30 June

UNISON members should report for work as normal, unless prior arrangements have been agreed with the employer for authorised absence such as annual leave.

If the workplace is open, then members should only undertake their normal duties

and should decline any requests to carry out duties normally done by colleagues on strike. For example, teaching assistants should not cover the work of teachers unless it is already part of their existing contract.

An employer may attempt to argue health and safety grounds for making the request. If they do, this should be reported to an accredited UNISON representative or call the branch on 0115 981 0405. If the strike compromises health and safety standards, then the employer should be urged in advance to consider whether a site can be safely operated.

Members wishing to show solidarity with striking colleagues by attending demonstrations or standing on picket lines may do so providing it is on their own time - before or after their contracted working day or during their lunch break.

Any member who chooses to join the strike will be taking part in unofficial action and consequently will not enjoy the usual protection against dismissal afforded when taking part in official action. Such members may risk disciplinary action from their employer.

UPDATED: Notts unions pension march in Nottingham on 30 June now assembles I am at Forest Recreation Ground. Rallies will then take place at both Trinity Square (12.30pm) and the Albert Hall (1.30pm). If you are not at work on 30 June (eg if your child's school is closed due to strike action) please support these events.

Details on the outcome of UNISON talks with the Government will be announced soon. We're defending pensions. Why not join us? Call us on 0115 981 0405 today.

We're supporting colleagues from the NUT, UCU, ATL and PCS who are taking strike action on 30 June to defend pensions for teachers and civil servants.

Attacks on the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) are also planned by the Government.

UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis confirmed in May that he will continue talking to the Government to argue why their pension plans are wrong. But that UNISON would ballot if talks failed at the end of June.

UNISON has been preparing the ground to update membership records, so that we could go ahead with a ballot ourselves later this year should we need to do this.

Not a member?
Call 0115 9810405



Tory leader says we're "peddling myths" about Notts cuts

Joint Branch Secretary: **Martin Sleath**
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Nottinghamshire County Council
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Nottinghamshire UNISON
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Thursday 12 May 2011

Dear Cllr Cutts,

IMPACT OF NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICE CUTS ON FUTURE COUNCIL TAX RATES

You will recall that earlier this year UNISON questioned with you how the scale of service cuts and privatisations planned by your administration would impact on council tax charges the County would levy in the next few years.

Specifically, we have a fear that the Conservative group plans to implement cuts to such an extent that will allow them to manufacture a 'slush fund' situation so that council tax charges are reduced ahead of the 2013 County Council elections.

I posed the question again at a public meeting where Cllr Cottee was a guest speaker this week. His response was along the lines of "the election is some time away, and nothing has been decided yet". Given that your Administration determined well in advance to freeze council taxes during the last two years, this rather undermines the stance that "you haven't yet decided" a policy direction on where you plan to be with council tax charges over the next two years.

We intend to keep asking the question of Cabinet members at public meetings until we get a simple "yes" or "no" response to our question. In the hope that we can resolve our concerns more speedily in this age of greater efficiency I therefore pose the question direct to you in this letter: Does the Conservative administration plan to reduce council tax charges ahead of or at the time of the 2013 County Council elections, or not?

I feel sure council employees, faced with being sacked, would expect the basic courtesy of a direct answer and unambiguous reply. I look forward to your answer, preferably before the Council AGM taking place on Thursday 19 May 2011.

Yours sincerely,

Martin Sleath, Branch Secretary

Readers of *Notts UNISON News* will recall we wrote to Cllr Kay Cutts last month, asking her to come clean about our claim that Notts Tories will use service and job cuts to lower council taxes at the 2013 County Council elections. We had been demanding some honesty since she started axing services and sacking staff.

Well, we now have an answer. Of sorts. Her personal reply is reproduced below. We do take offence at the seemingly delusional view that UNISON is "peddling myths" about service cuts. Welfare Rights has gone, library hours are cut, adult day care centres will close, everything from Learning Disabilities to Elderly Peoples Homes are planned to be sold off, and vital funds to support local voluntary services have been cut for good.

The cuts are real, are impacting on Notts voters, and it looks ridiculous and uncaring to suggest otherwise. Mrs Cutts reply talks about "back offices and bureaucracy", but none of the services cut back this up. Vital, front-line services have simply gone.

Nationally, the Tories have raised VAT and cut central council funding. Inflation and fuel prices are climbing. So even if Notts Tories cut council tax at the next County elections it is doubtful many will genuinely feel better off — and valued, vital, well delivered council services would have been cut in the process of paying for it. That's the Big Society, Notts-style.

UNISON would prefer talks about protecting services in Notts instead, and we'll keep concentrating our efforts in trying to protect members from risks of compulsory redundancy, as well as helping community groups to campaign to save their local services.

If you want to join a campaigning union, and one determined to protect your pensions, then join UNISON.

Call us on 0115 981 0405
or join on-line at
www.unison.org.uk/join

31st May 2011

Mr M Sleath
Unison
39-41 Loughborough Road
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NG2 7LJ

Dear Mr Sleath

Thank you for your letter of Thursday 12th May 2011, which continues to peddle the myth that Nottinghamshire County Council is pursuing a programme of "service cuts".

In reality, the Council's revenue budget continues to increase. The efficiencies we are achieving through new ways of working release more money for our most critical frontline services to children and adults.

The previous Labour administration consistently failed to implement fully the advice of their own consultants that the authority should move towards modern, less labour-intensive electronic working practices and systems. Too much taxpayers' money was tied up in back office functions and bureaucracy and did not reach those most in need.

The previous Labour administration left Nottinghamshire with the highest council tax rates of any shire county in the country. We were elected on a clear pledge to freeze county council tax. Our policy direction has been, and remains to provide Nottinghamshire residents with better value services and to bring our council tax more into line with other similar authorities.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Mrs K Cutts
Leader of the County Council