

Branch Newsletter Summer 2021

Croydon UNISON

Message from Yvonne Green,
Branch Secretary



I hope this newsletter finds you and your family well. Despite government guidelines being updated on Monday 19th July, COVID 19 is still with us and we would still advise caution in social distancing and wearing masks on public transport and other crowded places. The vaccine has helped protect us from the virus but cases are still being recorded and are currently rising again as there is still a section of the population who are yet to receive their vaccinations. We urge our members to get vaccinated as soon as possible if you have not already done so to protect yourself and others.

UNISON updated their **Coronavirus: your rights at work** web page on the 19th July so please refer to this if you have any specific queries. <https://www.unison.org.uk/coronavirus-rights-work/>

In June, Croydon Council sent out a survey to all staff about working preferences as many staff are still working from home at present. <https://intranet.croydon.gov.uk/news/have-your-say-planning-new-ways-working>. Croydon UNISON are working closely with the council to achieve the best work balance going forward as government restrictions are relaxed.

From the 1st January we are officially now no longer a member of the European Union, however UNISON will continue to safe guard worker's rights, pay and conditions.

Following the publication in October 2020 of **the Report in the Public Interest** concerning the Council's financial position and related governance arrangements, on the 11th November 2020 Croydon Council issued a **Section 114** declaring themselves bankrupt. A **second Section 114** was issued on the 2nd December as the 21 days deadline had passed without the council being able to balance its budget. The council could only spend on essential services with a daily spending control panel ensuring this happens. Croydon was only the second local authority in England in 20 years to issue a Section 114. However, in March 2021 the council's finance director advised that the **section 114 had lapsed** as the council was now able to balance the 21/22 budget. This was a result of the council receiving additional finance of £120 million from the government in early March to cover their budget deficit in 20/21 year of £70 million and £50 million for this financial year 21/22. A further £25 million for 22/23 financial year has also been agreed.

The issuing of Section 114 was very upsetting for staff who had just been through one **Staff Review** during the summer of 2020 resulting in job cuts as part of a 15 per cent cut in all council spending. Staff then faced a **second restructure** with further jobs and services under threat. The cuts affected all departments from children's and adult services through to a proposed closure of one of the boroughs three recycling centres and the closure of five of our libraries. The second review ended on the 29th January 2021. The branch held an **online joint rally** via zoom for members of UNISON, Unite and GM on the 26th January to discuss this second restructure. It was attended by Sarah Jones, MP for Croydon Central.

As a result of the two staff reviews/restructures over 500 jobs were lost from the council with all departments now under pressure to deliver services with reduced staff. Some departments including Gateway were closed completely. There was bad publicity for the council when Regina Court appeared on the London news as residents complained about the lack of repairs in the building.

It has also been brought to my attention by members that cases of bullying in the work place, lack of career progression and staff favouritism my managers over others are still important issues to be addressed. Redeployment issues have also arisen as a result of the restructures.

In April, the new **Guardians Programme** announced by management to address some of these issues is being reviewed by Croydon UNISON. However, it is still important that you continue to address issues to Croydon UNISON directly as well.

Due to the second staff review we are sad to announce that two of our reps left at the end of December 2020 – Lynne Roberts and Beverley Swain. As Branch secretary I would like to thank them for all their hard work supporting the branch and wish them well in their retirement.

I would also like to thank the branch committee for their hard work and dedication throughout the pandemic as the number of members cases have increased considerably and reps have been under pressure dealing with a range of work related issues including COVID.

The results of the **election of a new UNISON General Secretary** took place on the 11th January 2021.

The winning candidate was **Christine McAnea**, the first woman to head the UK's largest union.

Christina took up her post formally on 22nd January and replaced Dave Prentis, who retired after 20 years. Christina said: **"I'm so grateful to everyone who voted for me and for the trust placed in me.** I become general secretary at the most challenging time in recent history – both for our country and our public services.



In February 2021, the **Croydon UNISON Branch AGM** was unable to be held at Ruskin House but we held an on-line AGM on the 24th March instead.

Brick by Brick the council's housebuilding subsidiary, has played a large part in the borough's current downfall, as despite the council borrowing £ 260 million since its creation in 2015 and then loaning this money back to them, there has not been any interest or dividend payments made back to the council. This now amounts to over £35 million.

The buying up of various properties by the council have also created financial disasters. These include the purchase of the Croydon Park Hotel which has since gone bankrupt and the Colonades in Purley Way.

Croydon council now plans to take a decision on the future of Brick by Brick in July after it emerged that Homes England has been brought in to assess the value for money of a recent bid to buy it from the council.

"A champion of diversity" In November 2020 the national UNISON web site ran an article on Yvonne Green entitled **"A champion of diversity."**

It concluded their **Black History Month** coverage, Yvonne was the **Nelson Mandela Award Winner** in 2020. The article talked about heroes, history, activism and bringing more Black people to the boardroom in the news article.



<https://magazine.unison.org.uk/2020/10/30/a-champion-of-diversity/>

Affiliation to Croydon TUC

Croydon UNISON are working to improve our links with the Croydon TUC. There was an online meeting on **Climate Change** that took place on 15th July 2021 with a number of guest speakers including Fliss Premru, Secretary of the **Campaign Against Climate Change Trade Union Group**. <https://www.cacctu.org.uk/>

The branch is in the process of affiliated to this group as well as we feel climate change is an important issue which has been put on the back burner due to COVID.

COVID19 Update

Visit www.gov.uk/coronavirus and <https://new.croydon.gov.uk/coronavirus-information-and-service-updates> for the latest government guidance and local information. Please continue to use the NHS COVID19 app on your mobile phone as part of **the Test and Trace Service** as restaurants and other places may still ask you to use it after the 19th July.

<https://www.covid19.nhs.uk/>

Also, as mentioned earlier please continue to refer to the UNISON web site where there are regular updates about COVID19 and its future implications.

<https://www.unison.org.uk/coronavirus-rights-work/>. There is sector specific advice for Education, Healthcare, social care, government and workers and police staff.

Libraries Consultation Update

Due to the council needing to make savings it was announced at the end of 2020 that five of the boroughs thirteen libraries were under threat of closure. These included Sanderstead, Shirley, Bradmore Green, South Norwood and Broad Green. However in May, after the end of Phase 1 of the public consultation the council decided not to close the 5 libraries after getting negative feedback from the public. However, savings of £500,000 still need to be found. Phase 2 of the consultation ends on the 26th July 2021. The three options are:

1. Reduce service hours by 21% across the borough
2. Outsource all libraries
3. Hybrid – reduction in service hours (two days per week) to eight libraries and five community run libraries.

Please visit <https://getinvolved.croydon.gov.uk/project/695> to complete the Phase 2 survey.

Branch Conference Updates

The **Black Members Conference** in January, the **Women's Conference** in February and both the **Local Government Conference** and **National Delegate Conference** in June all took place on-line.

Important Branch Update

Branch staff are continuing to work from home due to continued concerns around COVID 19 and have been unable to attend meetings face to face but we hope to meet members again using an **appointment system** only from September at the earliest, subject to room availability. However, the branch office will remain shut for now. If you are unable to get through on our branch phone, which is being redirected at present, please leave a message but also send an email to branchoffice@croydonunison.co.uk.

If contacting us by email with an enquiry please can you provide your membership number, workplace and job title and a contact telephone number.



Are you receiving?

Reminder: My UNISON – Make sure your details are up to date.

If you have not been receiving **any regular email communication**, it is important that you register an email address online with MY UNISON. If you have changed address or employer these can also be updated. <https://www.unison.org.uk/my-unison/>

Branch office Information

Visit our new web site for updates.

<https://croydon.unison.site>

If you need advice in the workplace please contact your local Representative in the first instance. You can find a list of all our representatives and their contact numbers and their email addresses listed on our local Branch website.

Branch staff will continue to work from home for now so please contact us by email if possible and we will endeavour to get back to you as soon as possible.

Email branchoffice@croydonunison.co.uk

The Branch office does have a voice mail but these messages are being redirected at present and there may be delays in getting back to you.



Don't get angry - get active!

Have you ever thought about being a steward? We are always looking to welcome new Reps into the branch and this could be a role you might be interested in pursuing.

The Branch will organise full training for you, both from UNISON and the TUC as a Rep you are entitled to time off to train. We would not expect you to carry out any representations or to support your colleagues until you have carried out training.

Our most experienced Stewards and officers are also on hand to support you. Whether you work in the public or private Sector we need you! If you would like to find out more about the role, please email the Branch Office.

The UNISON Year 2021/22

August 2021

Croydon Retired Members Re-Union and AGM – Ruskin House subject to their confirmation.
Monday 16th August 12 noon to 2pm

October – November 2021

Retired Member's Conference:
12th - 13th October – on-line

Disabled Member's Conference:
30th October to 1st November

LGBT Conference:
19th – 21st November

January 2022

Black Members Conference:
To be confirmed

February 2022

Women's Conference:
To be confirmed

Branch AGM:
To be confirmed

June 2022

Local Government Conference:
To be confirmed
National Delegate Conference:
To be confirmed

Proud to be in UNISON

Protect yourself and others

Vaccinate today!

