

# UNISON *news*

North Somerset Branch of UNISON

November 2020

## WELCOME...

Welcome to the Autumn Edition of our North Somerset UNISON newsletter. We catch up with what's been happening in and around the branch, what's coming up and how you can get more involved.

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## Welcome to your newsletter



### Greetings from North Somerset UNISON branch!

Whether you have been with us for years, whether we've supported you individually or only collectively, whether you know us well or have no idea who we are; you are a valued part of the UNISON family. If you are a new member – a very warm welcome to our branch!

We are run by a dedicated group of volunteers who work in public services across North Somerset. Our office is in North Somerset Council's Town Hall, but we represent members in many different settings; including care homes, housing associations, schools, outsourced services and the voluntary sector. We are ably supported by UNISON's regional office and legal teams.

All our work is dedicated to supporting our members; that might be individually through

a grievance, sickness absence or redundancy or it may be collectively around team restructures or policies and conditions.

Please be aware that a union is a membership organisation and we cannot support you if you don't support us!

We know that not everyone has the time or inclination to become a representative or branch officer, but we are always keen to talk to you about how you might like to get involved. That might be by becoming a workplace contact, responding to a survey or through simply attending our AGM (please see details later in this newsletter).

We never put pressure on people to do more than they have time for. So, if you are interested in supporting your union, please let us know.

We would love to have a chat!



## Changing times

**We have been busy supporting members during these difficult times.**

People have asked for our help around issues such as shielding family members, worries about individual health concerns, being asked to work unsocial hours, being told to carry out new tasks (such as cleaning), not being paid enough sick pay, being notified of redundancy... the list goes on.

We have also supported people around “regular” union issues such as disciplinaries, capability and sickness absence.

If you have any worries about

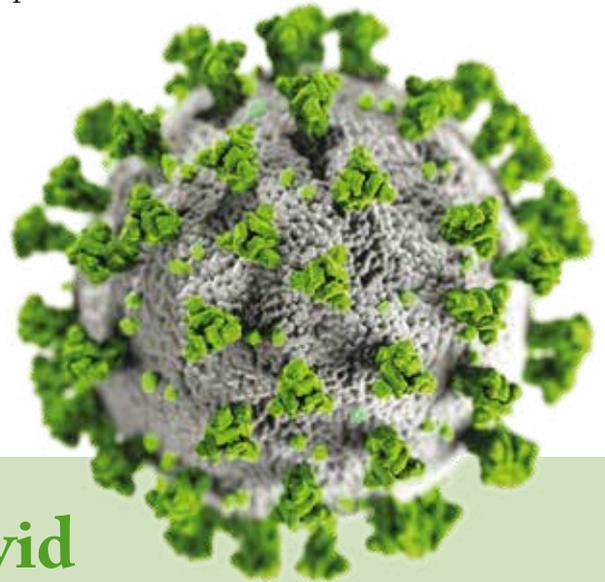
anything at your place of work, please get in touch. We will be pleased to support you.

It is important to hold onto the fact that we have all been coping during a time of national crisis and we should congratulate ourselves for that! Work situations have changed for most of us and this is often acceptable in the short term.

However, for management to impose permanent significant changes they will need to consult properly with staff. It is not clear when things will go back to normal (if ever) but, at

some point, if your working life has significantly changed, you must be consulted about this.

If you have any concerns about any changes at your workplace, in the first place, it is best to talk to your manager but do let us know too. We will be pleased to give advice.



## Working safely during Covid

**Our employers have a duty to ensure that we are safe at work.**

If you have any concerns about your health and safety at work, you should raise them with your manager. Managers should have carried out a Covid-19 specific workplace risk assessment, you should have been consulted on this and you could ask to see it.

There is lots of information on what employers are supposed to do on the Health and Safety Executive website [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) (click the link on the front page or search for Covid).

UNISON also has lots of guidance on risk assessments and Covid-19 and we are here to help you. So, if you need any advice, support or just want to ask our opinion, do get in touch!

Union Health and Safety Representatives have an important role to play in the workplace.

Health & Safety reps:

- talk to members about their health and safety issues and work together with management to resolve them.
- investigate potential hazards

- raise concerns with their employer to improve safety in the workplace and deal with specific problems that arise at work
- promote better health and safety in the workplace and encourage everyone to get involved.

There has never been a better time to become a health and safety rep! UNISON provides full online training and support for this important role.

If you are interested, please let us know.

# Caring for the carers

*“Spending cuts are having a severe effect in many parts of the UK. That means lower quality services for the vulnerable and poverty wages for hard working care staff.”*

**Christina McAnea, UNISON Assistant General Secretary**

North Somerset UNISON branch has over 300 members who work in the care sector, both in residential care homes and for domiciliary care providers. From our members, we are aware of many examples of bad practice including lack of appropriate employment policies, inadequate sick pay, instances of bullying and poor practice around management of rotas.

We represent our members around these individual issues but now want to address the wider picture. We surveyed our members in 2020 to ask about their experiences and we identified the following issues:

1. Variable Training. Some new staff may have little relevant experience and aren't always given adequate inductions and ongoing support and training. This has an impact upon service users, colleagues and the worker's own confidence and career progression.
2. There are some poor employment practices – some members have been bullied at work. Unfortunately, some employers do not have decent employment policies and clear processes for grievances and disciplinaries which makes it difficult to deal with bullying and other issues.
3. Many members receive inadequate sick pay – most care workers do not have an occupational sick pay scheme. Some do not qualify for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) as they do not earn an average of £120 a week. Even when people can get SSP, it is not paid on the first 3 days of illness and may not be enough to survive on. As a result, people have a limited financial safety net and may be forced to attend work even when ill. This increases the risk of Covid-19, and other infections, being passed to service users and colleagues.
4. Many domiciliary care workers are losing pay when a task doesn't take the allocated time as they are only paid for the time they actually spend with a client. This means that their pay varies through no fault of their own.
5. Many workers are on low pay; most do not get the Real Living Wage, which is the amount necessary to cover the cost of living (currently £9.30 an hour, see [Livingwage.org.uk](http://Livingwage.org.uk) for more information).



*“I get £8.72 an hour, that's more than any of my colleagues. I get SSP but most of them don't. They just can't afford to take time off sick”*

North Somerset care worker.

Centrally, UNISON is calling for a national care service. Locally, our branch is working to influence these issues with employers, commissioners and local policy makers.

If you work in the care sector, we would love to hear your views on how things are going for you. If you email us or leave a message, we will call you at a time convenient to you.

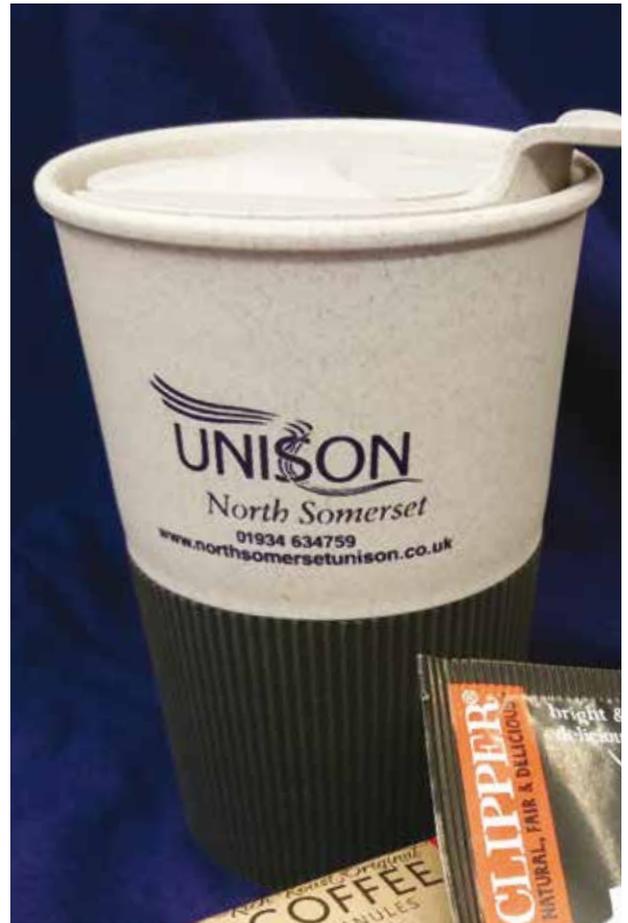
All information will be treated in complete confidence (unless there is a safeguarding issue in which case, we will discuss this with you). If you need our support around any issue, please get in touch.

## Going green at work

Saving the planet is a union issue! Most of us are taking some action to reduce our environmental impact, whether that's simply using a bag-for-life or taking up cycling. However, is there more we could do at work? We are keen to recruit Green

Representatives who will look out for ways to improve their workplace's approach to helping the environment.

There is a free bamboo re-usable UNISON coffee mug for anyone who gets in touch to find out more!



## Tips for staying happy and healthy

*It's important to make sure that life isn't all about work. We have pulled together some ideas for things to do during these uncertain times.*

## Get healthy!

You might have seen some TV ads for a new, national health campaign called Better Health.

For almost everyone, life has had to change due to COVID, but it's also prompted many people to reflect and think more seriously about their health.

Gaining weight is a gradual process and modern life doesn't always make it easy, but it's vital to do something about it. Extra weight causes pressure to build up around vital organs, making it harder for the body to fight against diseases like cancer, heart disease and now COVID-19.

The great news is North

Somerset Council's Health Trainers can help! They can help you lose weight, eat healthier, get more active, quit smoking and reduce your alcohol consumption.

They offer tailored, non-judgemental, confidential support to help you achieve the goals you set and can provide information about other free support on offer like Weight Watchers, local health walks and exercise passes (criteria apply) and their support is completely free!

So, if you live in North Somerset or work for the council and would like to kick start your health to eat better, get active, and live a healthier life, get in



touch with the Health Trainers today and find out how they can help you enjoy Better Health:

- call them on 01934 427 661
- email [health.trainers@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:health.trainers@n-somerset.gov.uk)
- visit <https://go4lifens.wordpress.com/go4life-schemes/health-trainers/>
- follow them on social media and share their content - 'North Somerset Health Trainers' on Facebook and '@NSHealthTrainer' on Twitter

# Ideas for days out

Many of us will have recently made use of our local areas for recreation. However, it is nice to have the occasional trip further afield if possible. Some of these ideas are only possible when we're not in lock-down, so check websites to ensure they are open!

Have you visited Brunel's SS Great Britain? This makes a great day out with lots to see both inside and out. If you don't manage to see everything in one day, tickets are valid for return visits for up to a year. Please bear in mind that advance booking is essential at this time.

You can do this at [www.ssgreatbritain.org](http://www.ssgreatbritain.org). There is onsite parking or if you are travelling by bus, X1, alight at Anchor Road a distance of 0.8 miles (17 min walk).

Nearby is the extensive **Ashton Court Estate** with a variety of nature trails giving lovely views over the city of Bristol.

It is free to roam the estate you just need £1.20 for the car park and there is a nice cafe to the rear of the mansion. If travelling by bus, X1 or X2; alight at Bower Ashton (20 mins walk)

Another interesting place to visit at any time of year is the **Slimbridge Wild Fowl Trust** with the opportunity to observe a variety of migrant birds as well as the numerous residents including the comical Whistling Ducks and close-up encounters with otters (advance booking essential).



However, probably less well known but equally worth a visit is the nearby **boat graveyard on the River Severn**. For a lovely walk culminating at the graveyard take the M5 north bound following directions for Slimbridge. Drive through the village parking on the verge (this can be muddy) on the opposite side to the Tudor Arms Pub.

Walk over the canal bridge and turn left along the canal track signposted for Sharpness. After about 45 minutes you will come to the boat grave yard. Some of the boats started their lives in the 19th century and there are plaques giving a short history.

This is a beautiful walk with the canal and rural views on the left opening up on the right-hand side to views across the River Severn to the Forest of Dean. There is a wealth of wildlife on the canal with the chance to see kingfishers and hear cuckoos at the appropriate time of year. At low tide there is often a variety of waders on the mud flats of the Severn.



*Above: The boat graveyard on the Severn and the canal*

If you want to walk further, another half hour will bring you to a large circular tower. This is all that is left of a 19th century railway bridge that spanned the River Severn transporting coal from the Forest of Dean to Sharpness Docks.

In poor visibility in 1960 two petrol barges collided. A fire ensued resulting in loss of life however, miraculously, some of the crew made it to the shore. The cost of repair was too great, and the decision was made to demolish the bridge.

A plaque at the site gives more information. **In winter months you will need sturdy footwear as it may be muddy.**

# There for You

Don't forget that UNISON offers support for members outside work, including a confidential personal helpline. The number is 020 7121 5620 or email [thereforyou@unison.co.uk](mailto:thereforyou@unison.co.uk) UNISON can also provide financial assistance, legal advice and breaks. In the branch, we frequently support members who are suffering from stress. Often the hardest part is recognising the problem. So, if you are at all worried about your mental health, please do not hesitate to contact us and we can suggest ways to get you some support.

## North Somerset UNISON Annual General Meeting dates for 2021

We need to hold an AGM every year in order to function as a union. Next year, things might be slightly different than usual, but, don't worry, we will make sure that our meetings are safe! We'll also try to make them inclusive, informative and even fun!

We will confirm details nearer the time but, for now, please put these dates and venues in your diary (you only need to attend one).

- Wednesday, 24 February – Friends Meeting House, Weston-super-Mare
- Thursday, 25 February – Clevedon Town Council

Both meetings will be held from 12.30 – 1.30pm (refreshments and networking may take longer)



## Our contact details:

**Email:** [unison@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:unison@n-somerset.gov.uk)

**Phone:** 01934 634759

Our office is staffed on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

Please leave a message and we will get back to you. If you need help outside these times you can contact the South West helphub email [UNISON@help-hub.co.uk](mailto:UNISON@help-hub.co.uk) or call 0800 0857 857

Full details on back page.

## UNISON courses for free

UNISON offers lots of online learning for members. This includes courses for people who want to learn more about issues such as **stress management, coping with changes at work, money management, the care certificate and dealing with health needs in schools.**

To find out more about what is on offer visit the UNISON e-learning website at **e-learning.unison.org.uk**

The site also provides links



to other online learning opportunities. You will need to log in to My UNISON to access courses and you will need your UNISON membership number to sign up for this. This will be on your membership card, contact us if you can't find this.

# Recipe – Cheese and Tomato Pie

*We have been sharing recipes in the UNISON office. Here's a delicious one which was handed down by Val's grandmother, it's a filling pie which goes well with some green vegetables (or chips if you must!)*

## Ingredients:

### For the Shortcrust Pastry:

225g (8oz) self raising flour  
115g (4oz) cold butter or margarine (cut into small pieces)  
Few tablespoons of cold water  
(or use ready made)

### Filling:

Full flavour Cheddar cheese (sliced)  
4 – 6 tomatoes (sliced)  
One large onion (diced)  
2 eggs (beaten)  
Black pepper  
Torn basil leaves (optional)  
Milk for brushing the pie  
One tablespoon of olive oil



## Method

### For the pastry:

1. Place flour and butter/margarine in a bowl and rub together until the consistency of bread crumbs.
2. Add sufficient water to make a stiff dough (take care not to add too much water) and sprinkle the dough lightly with flour. Chill in fridge.

### For the pie filling:

1. Fry the onion in the oil until it is translucent.
2. Lightly dust a pastry board with flour and roll out half the pastry to line a pie dish.
3. Cover the pastry with slices of cheese.
4. Spread half the onion over the cheese and then cover this with slices of tomatoes.
5. Sprinkle the tomatoes with black pepper and torn basil leaves (if using)
6. Repeat steps 3 – 5 and then pour over the beaten eggs.
7. Roll out the remaining pastry and cover the pie, sealing the edges.
8. Brush the pie top with milk and bake in the centre of a moderate oven (Gas 5; 190C; 375F) for approximately 45 minutes or until golden brown and cooked through.



## Women's issues

Some of our most active UNISON members are men and our current (albeit retiring) General Secretary is a man. However, most of our members are women.

Of course, we have nothing against men, (in fact, some of our favourite people are men!) and we represent all members alike, regardless of their gender.

However, sometimes it is good to share some common experiences with people who have been there too. We are therefore holding some Zoom meetings for women about the following issues:

- **Domestic abuse – it can happen to anyone**  
Weds 9 December  
2-3pm

- **Menopause and me**  
Weds 16 December  
2-3pm

- **Juggling life and work**  
Thurs 17 December  
2-3pm

All women members will be getting an invitation by email soon. If we don't have your email address, please let us have it.

If you can't make these meetings or just don't do Zoom; please contact us for a chat. We will be organising other women's events and want to make sure all women are included.

If you are feeling left out – do get in touch and let's talk about what issues we can discuss with you!

## We need more reps

Without reps there is no representation so no-one there to support you and your colleagues at grievance, sickness or disciplinary hearings.

We are especially short of reps in the council and in schools but need reps across all areas. Don't just wait for someone else to do it.

**As a member of UNISON you are not just IN the union – YOU ARE the union!**

**To volunteer now, please contact the branch (see below)**

## Are you up to date?

It is important that the details we hold about you are correct as we may need to contact you or represent you urgently. You can check what details you gave us by visiting [www.unison.org.uk/my-unison](http://www.unison.org.uk/my-unison). You will need your membership number, this will be on your membership card or contact us for this. Otherwise, you can just call or email us with your new details.

## Stay in touch

**Post:** North Somerset UNISON,  
Town Hall,  
Weston super Mare, BS23 1UJ

**Phone:** 01934 634759

**Email:** [unison@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:unison@n-somerset.gov.uk)

**Branch Admin office hours:**  
*may change due to staff leave/sickness*  
Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday  
9:00 – 4:30pm  
Monday and Friday: Closed

Alternatively, you can ring UNISONdirect on 0800 0857 857

**Branch Website:** [www.northsomersetunison.co.uk](http://www.northsomersetunison.co.uk)

**Regional Website:** [www.unionsouthwest.org.uk](http://www.unionsouthwest.org.uk)

**National Website:** [www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk)

**Twitter:** @nsunison

**Facebook:** search for North Somerset UNISON

**Blog:** [www.northsomersetunison.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.northsomersetunison.blogspot.co.uk)