The Government has revised police funding for 2016-17 which will mean many forces will have their budgets slashed in the coming months. The scale of the funding cuts means that police forces across the North West are considering huge reductions to the services they provide.

Amongst the valuable roles that are under threat is that of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). PCSOs are crucial to effective neighbourhood policing. They are active in our communities and build good relationships with local people. They attend schools and children’s homes to talk to young people about issues such as crime and drug abuse. They help make our public transport safe to use and they address anti-social behaviour on our streets.

PCSOs are the main point of contact for the victims of crime. They help to prevent, deter and resolve crime.

A failure to properly resource neighbourhood policing will take us back to the 1970s - with police in panda cars chasing crimes that have happened already. There would be less support for victims of crime, the public would feel more vulnerable, and our communities would be less safe.

PCSOs are accessible frontline staff and they are there for people to turn to. They are trusted by their communities and we cannot afford to lose them.

Please show your support for police staff and your opposition to Government cuts by signing our petition at: unisonnw.org/policingcuts
National Probation Service

Withdrawal of DOCAS

DOCAS — the deduction of contributions at source — where people pay their union subs direct from their pay - has been stopped by the government for members working in the Probation Service. In response the region created a team of staff to work alongside the regional branch and national support to ensure members were fully informed and that they retained their membership by switching to Direct Debit.

84% of the 300 members affected understood the issue and switched their payment arrangements over a four month period.

The key to the success rate was that members were spoken to, face to face. Concerns were addressed and the explanation of how easy it was to do were carefully explained and consequently understood and accepted by members.

Forward planning and tactful but effective communications were also very important and these, amongst a range of other lessons learnt from our campaign, will be used to plan how this issue will be addressed for the whole membership should the Trade Union Bill be passed by parliament early next year.

All branches know the importance of having a local rep in as many workplaces as possible – one who members know and trust.

Maria Moss Regional Organiser for North West Probation and Cafcass Branch said, “It was very apparent from the campaign that branch reps made a difference when approaching members, sometimes on several occasions. In the North West, especially in the Lancashire area the participation of branch reps made that difference in the overall result.

This attack on individual rights is not going away. If the Trade Union Bill is passed in 2016 the government’s goal to undermine our membership levels and therefore our ability to oppose the austerity agenda will be one of the biggest threats our members and organisation will face. Branch officers, reps, and contacts will be vital to ensuring this does not happen”.

United Utilities, the company that operates and maintains the water supply in the North West has just announced plans to close its Defined Benefit (DB) Pension scheme to all staff on 31 March 2016 and move them into the lesser Defined Contribution (DC) scheme.

The DB scheme has over 2,200 active members who stand to lose out from the proposals. The DB scheme was closed to new entrants in 2006. The Joint Trade Unions (UNISON, UNITE, GMB and Prospect) are holding an emergency Joint Trade Union Forum meeting to discuss their response to the proposals which were put forward by United Utilities despite an understanding from the recent pay talks that there would be meaningful discussion about the pension scheme.

In presenting the proposals United Utilities have pleaded poverty as it is predicted that employer contributions will increase to a cost of £30million per year which coincidentally is the employer’s most recent jump in profit up to £664million. Not bad considering water falls out of the sky for free.

Every time it rains, it rains...

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Dave Prentis recently spoke at a meeting of all branches within Cumbria about the Trade Union Bill. He was particularly concerned about the implications for members paying their subscriptions by salary deduction, also known as ‘check off’ or ‘DOCAS’. Although members would be willing to change their payment method to direct debit, it would no doubt be seen as yet another job on the ‘to do’ list in our busy lives. Activists would also have to spend time reminding members and helping them with the changeover.

After the meeting I discovered my local MP Tim Farron was holding a drop in session the following week. I went along and explained the problem to Tim. Despite what I said, Tim said that he wanted to check the facts for himself before committing himself (and his party) to a particular course of action. He told me that he would get back to me.

About a week later I received an email from him saying that ‘the Liberal Democrats will oppose the move at the point that amendment is made – which could be in the Commons or the Lords. As you are aware, providing this service doesn’t actually cost employers anything and makes everyone’s lives easier, so we believe that stopping it is pure nastiness.’

In my capacity as a workplace representative I have met more than 10 MPs from different political parties over the years. The purpose of my visit has always been to try to influence legislation passing through parliament. Sometimes the MPs have been in government, sometimes in opposition. In general I have found that:-

- MPs often have some knowledge about the situation
- They will expect you to have some knowledge too, but there is no need to be an expert
- Be honest with them and tell them what you would like them to do and why
- Ensure that any caseworker etc. who is present is fully included, it is they who will be doing the research under the direction of the MP.

Whatever the result of your visit, make the most of your contact with the MP. To be effective, trade unions need to build relationships with people of all political views. Knowledgeable, locally-based workplace representatives are in an ideal position to do this and you may be surprised how often you are contacted in the future when an MP is seeking information or wishes to check information supplied through official channels. This presents another opportunity for UNISON to influence important matters.

John Stirling
South Lakeland Branch Chair
March Against Austerity

They came in their tens of thousands to Manchester’s biggest demonstration for generations. Up to 100,000 ordinary folk demanding that the government ends its policy of austerity, ends its attacks on the weakest in our society and ends their vindictive assault on trade unions.

North West UNISON branches and their placards were much in evidence at the TUC and People’s Assembly march in Manchester on Sunday 4 October 2015. The sun was out and festival of colour and noise assembled along the entire length of Oxford Road from All Saints Park as far as Manchester Royal Infirmary and beyond.

Lancashire Care, Rochdale, Sefton, Manchester, Cumbria and North Lancashire Health, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester University, Knowsley, Salford City, Central Manchester Healthcare, Lancashire Ambulance Service, Tameside – all were there. So many purple and green banners and placards it was difficult to catch exactly who was there.

Placards and slogans aplenty there were too. “Defend the Right to Strike”; “A picket line is not a crime”; “Refugees welcome here”; “No racist scapegoating”; “Cut WAR not Welfare”; “Defy Tory Rule”; “Don’t Bomb Syria”; “NHS not Trident” and so many more. The chants were also more inventive…”Who Let the Pigs Out? Oink, Oink and Oink”… “Cammy, Cammy: Snout! Snout! Snout! Hundreds of protestors wearing pig masks reflecting Prime Minister Cameron’s alleged behaviour in a university initiation ceremony. Placards proclaiming “We’re pigsick of austerity” to the sublime “Pig Brother is Watching You” all the more sinister given the revelation that Police Snipers were “observing” the demo from surrounding rooftops.

All of society was there. The very old to the very young. In wheelchairs and mobility scooters to prams and buggies. Many more young adults seemed to be taking part. People of all colours and religions, political and non-political groups were out in force. Union placards and balloons were bolstered by some splendid home-made banners including a massive crocheted banner. “Pigs against Poverty” “Corporatism George Orwell’s 1984: The wars are not meant to be won they’re meant to be continuous”; and the extraordinary painted bedsheet proclaiming “I WILL NOT HAVE CONTEMPT FOR IMMIGRANTS. I WILL NOT FEAR REFUGEES FLEEING BOMBS BY MY OWN GOVERNMENT. I WILL NOT PASSIVELY WORK 9-5 ON MINIMUM WAGE, PAYING FULL TAX WHILE BILLIONAIRES RECEIVE TAX BREAKS. I WILL NOT LET THIS TORY/MURDOCH PROPAGANDA MANIPULATE LOVE & COMPASSION INTO FEAR & HATE.” And you can’t say fairer than that.

The Tory Party Conference was taking place in the Manchester Convention Centre – the old Central Station. But they were a world apart from the protestors – both intellectually and physically as the conference centre was defended by an eight feet tall steel barrier. And judging by the police presence pretty much every one of their vehicles and officers appeared to be on duty in an extraordinary show of force around the city and above it in helicopters.

Those on the march enjoyed a wonderful feeling of common purpose and comradeship. It confirmed what we already knew: people matter. We are people who want to protect the old, the young, the vulnerable and the weak. And it is clear that the government wants to dismantle the welfare state, setting people at each other’s throats, blaming the sick and the needy while the bankers and the billionaires get even greedier. There’s much to do. If you’re not in a union join one. Write to your MP and Councillors. Write to the papers and tweet and e-mail your friends and family. Let’s not let them get away with dismantling all we hold dear…
Social housing finances get the sharpened axe treatment

The Tories have placed a ticking time-bomb under the finances of social housing in England. New rules mean that tenants, social landlords and workers will suffer while central government saves a fortune in benefit payments.

Chancellor Osborne recently announced that social housing rents would be reduced from current levels by 1% per annum each year for four years beginning in April 2016. This so-called “good deal for tenants” will actually cost the majority of social tenants, directly and indirectly, when the rest of the script is read.

In 2013 Government announced a new formula that rents could rise by Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus 1% for the next ten years to provide stability for both social landlords and tenants. Yet this was ripped up unilaterally in the July budget.

While a 1% reduction each year doesn’t seem much the cumulative real value — when compared to anticipated income under the previous formula it amounts to a 12 -15% loss of rental income for social housing providers by 2020. It’s a ‘black hole’ in their finances in much the same way as the Council Tax freeze for local authorities.

The Local Government Association has calculated that the overall impact of all the housing measures in the budget will equate to a loss of 60% of housing funding for local authorities with retained council housing. It will likely lead to calls for more housing stock transfer and certainly do away with local authority plans to any income from the sale of council houses to build new ones.

Social landlords in England received a total social rent income of £20.78 billion in 2014/15. Some £13.3 billion of this was by way of Housing Benefit (HB), as around 70% of all social tenants are in receipt of HB. This is paid by the Department for Work and Pensions. So those tenants whose rent is paid by HB will not see a single penny of the reduction in rents. Instead, that reduction becomes a direct saving to the DWP welfare bill and a direct cut to social landlords’ income.

Even the remaining 30% of social tenants who don’t receive HB won’t gain either. Although on the face of it tenants will save around £5.50 per week cuts to other benefits will more than outweigh these temporary savings.

The vast majority of people in receipt of Working Tax Credits will be quite substantially worse off, even with the Statutory ‘Living’ Wage when these reductions come into force. A significant proportion of social tenants who do not receive HB do receive WTC. For a great many of them this loss will wipe out or be greater than the average rent saving.

Continued on page 6
FE and Sixth Form Colleges Pay

Resounding rejection of 0% “offer”

The Association of Colleges (AoC) 2015 recommendation not to pay a cost of living rise or move to the current Living Wage has been angrily rejected by UNISON members. In workplace consultation 95 per cent of those voting rejected the offer, with twice as many colleges participating as last year.

This is the first rejection of a pay offer since 2002.

UNISON believes that a number of alternatives should have been considered. Was the offer inevitable, given funding cuts? NO, there are always options and alternatives.

The AoC could have:
- met our claim, knowing that colleges which can’t pay, won’t pay;
- offered a lower flat-rate increase than £1 an hour;
- given a pay-rise to those on spot salaries, without increments;
- moved the bottom of the scale to the 2014 Living Wage;
- awarded a non-consolidated lump-sum;
- recommended a range of non-pay rewards;
- made NO recommendation rather than sanction a pay freeze.

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Social housing Continued from page 5

Add the reduced maximum amount of benefits a household can receive (from £26,000 down to £20,000 per annum) and this cut in rents is wiped out.

Another recent change sees social rent for households with more than £30,000 per annum income rise to “market/near market” levels – estimated to be a rent rise for these tenants of around £70 per week!

But what does it all really mean?

Looking at the wider picture on benefits, tax credits and other changes there is a broad consensus that the cumulative saving to DWP will be around £6.2 billion in HB payments but a total income loss of around £9.7 billion to social landlords.

That £9.7 billion loss has to come from somewhere and, as we are seeing across the region, the first stop as the till empties is significant job cuts. Beyond this it is inevitable that non-essential maintenance and replacement programmes will be pared back and new-build social housing will be seriously affected. At least 25,000 planned new-build social homes are unlikely to be built with some commentators predicting the longer term consequences could be ten times that.

Meanwhile for the first time in more than 30 years private rentals have become the main residential status. And it is private landlords who are the main recipients of Housing Benefit subsidy. Somewhat surprising then that the Tories have not sought to drastically curtail private rent levels and impose a similar reduction target in an effort to reduce the HB bill! The average private rent in England is now £816 per month, some 40% higher than the average social rent. Between 2014 and 2015 the average private rent rose by 8.5%.

So behind the headlines are some difficult facts. It’s bad news for social housing providers and their staff. And for social tenants the overall picture nails the self-proclaimed myth of this Government as “the party of the people” and truly damn them as the peddlers of poverty they really are.

We have a pressing and immediate job trying to protect our members working in social housing. To ensure that job cuts are not over-inflated and that our members, as in local authorities, are not being singled out to soak up the cuts to protect the public face of the service.

Aside of representing our members in the social housing sector workplace this pernicious attack on affordable housing should become a key campaign issue for UNISON. One in which we should try to be a catalyst to unite our members, the social landlords, housing based organisations, the voluntary sector and community groups with progressive campaigners across the spectrum.

And let’s be under no illusions that targeting the social housing sector is a random act in isolation. It is all part of this Government’s ‘austerity’ smokescreen to dismantle our social fabric.
Chancellor George Osborne has declared an ambition to make the UK a “high wage, low tax, low welfare” society. On tax, he has announced plans to lower taxes for the wealthy, through cuts to inheritance tax and corporation tax. On welfare, we know he wants to reduce the tax credits of millions of people, including over 340,000 working households in the North West containing over 640,000 children.

But what about wages?

Osborne’s much-trumpeted National ‘Living’ Wage is best understood as a re-branding of the National Minimum Wage. The increase to £7.20 per hour is welcome, but it is insufficient to make up for the effect of his tax credit cuts, does not help those aged under-25, and is not at a level that can be properly described as a ‘living’ wage (currently £7.85 outside London). And let’s face it, the National Living Wage hardly constitutes a plan to make Britain a ‘high pay’ economy.

Osborne is often boastful about the growth in the quantity of employment under his chancellorship, but he has no answer to the problems of poor quality jobs and low wages. In recent years we have seen:

• A rise in precarious forms of employment – with 700,000 people now on zero hours contracts.
• Falling real wages in the public sector. After years of pay freezes and pay caps, Osborne now intends to continue the 1% pay cap for a further four years.
• The continuation of a long-term trend for UK employers to create low-skilled jobs. Dr Craig Holmes from Oxford University found a correlation between countries with strong union membership, such as Denmark, and higher growth in high-skilled roles.

For a Government that is supposedly pursuing high wages as a defining feature of the economy you might think that trade unions would be seen as having an important role to play as organisations that advance good quality employment.

Not a bit of it! Instead, the Government has introduced its Trade Union Bill, which will severely restrict the ability of working people to organise for their own rights and to campaign for a more progressive society.

The Bill makes the workers’ last resort – strike action – less effective through allowing employers to use agency workers to break strikes and undermining the right to peaceful protest on picket lines. It will be harder for workers to exercise their right to strike due to arbitrary new ballot thresholds, while the requirement on unions to only use postal ballots remains. Where employers do not believe that workers can take effective strike action it makes it less likely that they will provide higher paid jobs.

The Bill also makes it harder for trade unions in the public sector to function day-to-day as organisations. It will be more difficult to provide representation to union members because of new Government requirements on public sector employers to publish and then possibly reduce the amount of time staff spend on union duties. It will also be more difficult for unions to collect members’ subscriptions efficiently with the proposed ban on payment through wages (or DOCAS). A host of public sector employers have objected to this dogmatic and heavy-handed Central Government interference in local industrial relations.

All unions will be hit by greater red tape and surveillance by the Certification Officer, and new requirements about the administration of political funds which will make campaign work more difficult.

The Trade Union Bill subjects unions, especially public sector trade unions, to more barriers to their performing the function of championing the interests of working people. The Bill is intended to pave the way for future cuts and privatisation of essential public services, and is an attempt to silence opposition.

We should not be fooled by Osborne’s claim that he wants a ‘high wage’ society. It is no coincidence that Jeremy Hunt, the multi-millionaire Health Secretary, has recently talked in glowing terms about the culture of hard work in China and the USA. What the Government is actually pursuing is a low wage, low tax, low welfare society – where the things that protect our living standards – the welfare state, workers’ rights, trade unions – are all diminished. Osborne offers only a brutal future of precarious employment.

We must campaign to resists attacks on tax credits and trade unions. Tax credits remain necessary because of low wages. Trade unions need to be able to function as organisations to promote higher wages. It is necessary to resist the Government’s agenda on both fronts to protect and improve the living standards of working people.
Regional Council hears General Secretary hustings

**Yes it’s Prentis!**

The Blackpool illuminations formed an exciting backdrop for October’s Regional Council meeting. And for the first time Council was holding hustings to shed light on who we wanted to nominate for the post of General Secretary.

Five candidates had declared their ambition to stand and all were invited to attend to present their statements and answer questions.

Roger Bannister, John Burgess, and Dave Prentis were all present. Heather Wakefield was unable to attend because she was attending the Scottish Regional Council meeting being held the same day but Glen Williams agreed to stand in for her. Hayley Garner from Southampton Branch was unable to attend.

Lots were drawn to decide the order of speeches, the result being that Roger spoke first, followed by Glen, then John and finally Dave.

After this the candidates took questions that had been agreed by branches beforehand, the themes being – reasons for standing, priorities for UNISON, political influence, devolution and pay.

All candidates were asked the same questions.

At the end of the hustings a vote by secret ballot took place with the result being that Dave Prentis was successful in receiving the North West Regional Council nomination.

FE and Sixth Form Colleges Pay - continued from page 6

**Resounding rejection of 0% “offer”**

AoC could have proposed a menu of options including combinations of the above to be negotiated locally, with national leadership, on the basis of affordability and local circumstances.

Support staff have been facing redundancy; job losses that intensify work for those remaining; attacks on conditions of service, like sick pay following AoC’s unilateral withdrawal of the national scheme; chronic low and unequal pay; uncertainty in a sector riven by underfunding and political meddling. Colleges and learners need a motivated workforce to face instability in the fight to defend FE.

UNISON has written to AoC and its FE college members asking for a pay offer and the Living Wage.

Those who respond prior to 6 November will avoid inclusion in a national ballot for industrial action and other elements of UNISON’s dispute strategy.