

The latest news and announcements from Derbyshire UNISON

UNISON conference 2021

Speaking online, general secretary Christina McAnea thanked delegates for attending one of the first major UNISON online conferences since the pandemic struck.



Serious about levelling up? Let's see the evidence

Thanking members for the great work they've done in difficult circumstances, Ms McAnea said: "At UNISON we've always known that council, school, college staff and all our other members in the sector always go the extra mile. Delivering day in and day out for people, for families, for communities up and down the UK."

"But COVID has also meant that the crucial role local government workers play has been clearer than ever to the public. This essential work was happening before COVID, and as we know will continue after it.

"Every time I see or hear of a crisis or emergency, whether a flood, a fire, a food poisoning outbreak, whatever it may be, I know the people at the heart of it will be UNISON members. You are the

ones getting the call in the early hours, supporting communities and finding solutions.

"But the pandemic has also deepened the financial crisis in our councils. It's clearer than ever that we need a bold new approach to providing local government services. One in which the services are properly supported, along with those who deliver them.

"Such an approach needs proper

Contacting Derbyshire UNISON

01629 582266

branch@unisondc.co.uk

derbyshireunison.com



funding, not billions of pounds of cuts. It means a sustainable future based on the actual needs of local communities, not one skewed in favour of richer areas by Tory funding policies.

"It means safeguarding local services and jobs, not closure and redundancy threats, or fire and rehire tactics to drive down pay and conditions."

Where there is a will

Drawing on the alternative approaches to funding local government services taken by other UK nations, Ms McAnea drove home the point that if there is political will, change can happen.

"Governments have a choice. In some of the devolved nations there's already a different approach. There's a commitment to social partnership, to working with trade unions. There's a commitment to develop a fairer social care system, and of course the fair work agenda in Cymru/Wales. I know our activists in those areas will be keeping those governments to those pledges.

"But sadly, we're still having to fight for decent pay across every part of the UK. A decade of pay cuts and freezes have devastated the take home pay of members. The 1% pay offer to staff in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is simply not good enough.

"Even in Scotland the employers' offer, although much higher than 1%, still falls far short of what our members need and deserve. We will be doing all we can to get a 'yes' vote in our ballot for action in Scotland.

"There needs to be investment in the people delivering our essential services if they want to keep workers from voting with their feet and leaving.

"These are the same key workers ministers were so keen to praise when it suited them, but who are forgotten when there are tax cuts for the wealthy.

"If the prime minister and the chancellor mean what they say about levelling up, let's see the evidence. Let's see real action. Let's see an end to the discrimination and racism we see all around us, and that was so evident during

the pandemic. Let's see a real commitment to workers' rights, not a clampdown on the freedom to protest. Let's see an end to poverty pay."

Dedication is what you need

Delivering a broadside to ministers for their initial refusal to provide free meals for hungry children during school holidays, Ms McAnea said: "This government should be utterly ashamed that it took the actions of a brave young footballer to force them to do the right thing on free school meals.

"But I'm encouraged by the strength of our campaigning and the commitment and dedication of our activists and reps.

"That energy has been taken into our campaigning on social care, which has been a top priority for me, both before and since being elected general secretary. Social care is an area where the need for reform has become obvious to everyone.

"That energy to campaign is also in the work we do on a range of other issues. Whether raising safety concerns in schools, highlighting burnout among social workers, or the mental health crisis affecting so many public sector workers.

"During the general secretary election, I campaigned on the need to ensure the voices of all members were heard, and power and influence shared. To be able to do that, we first must listen to all our members.

"I want to make sure we're listening to members to find out what the issues are, and what they want us to do about them. I want proportionality and fair representation to be a reality at every level. I want a stronger voice for our regions and devolved nations.

"As soon as restrictions ease, I will be coming to talk to branches and regions to find out how we make that a reality.

"We face many challenges. We're still dealing with COVID, you're still dealing with COVID. The current issues as well as the long-term consequences. We have a Tory government in Westminster that because of their majority will feel they're invincible.

"But conference, we are UNISON. We're the

biggest union in the country. We're the biggest women's organisation in the UK by a mile. We're the strongest voice in this country for Black and disabled workers, to name just a few groups.

"But it's not just our size, it's the commitment of our activists, it's the vibrancy of our branches, it's our self-organisation at the heart of what we do, that gives us our strength and our credibility.

"We need to keep going, we need to stay strong and we need to take on the many challenges that we face.

"As the new general secretary, I look forward to working with you all to make this happen."