

The latest news and announcements from Derbyshire UNISON

Workforce retention in adult social care

Derbyshire UNISON's letter to the county council leader about the local media reports.



UNISON seeks answers from council over payments to home care workers

Derbyshire UNISON has written to the leader of Derbyshire County Council seeking further explanation of the decision reported in the local press last week of a £500 payment being made to non-council homecare workers.

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These reports have caused anger from social care workers apparently excluded without explanation with UNISON being unable to answer their questions as we weren't informed.

The text of the letter to the Conservative Party leader of the council, Barry Lewis, reads:

"Derbyshire UNISON are writing to protest about the way the council has just handled the

announcement regarding the payment £500 to private home care staff and the lack of consultation with UNISON (and other unions). Formal consultation could have meant the council avoiding a backlash from its own staff and, potentially, residents who take 'as gospel' what has been reported.

"We do think that whoever the council spokesperson that was quoted in newspapers and other

media sources, has made an enormous error
“Firstly, in not explaining what the money is. Secondly, in putting out factually incorrect statements to back up a decision only to allocate funding to non-council staff.

“As we haven’t been contacted or allowed to formally work with the council on consultation, we are now having to fend off angry enquiries from members with guesswork. Rest assured, though – we will not be shouldering any of the blame for this; the failure is the councils and you have further lowered morale by your poor handling of the matter.

“We are having to presume that the money being discussed is the government’s Workforce Recruitment and Retention Fund for adult social care although the press reports that it is from the NHS Derby and Derbyshire Clinical Commissioning Group adds to the confusion. Can you confirm where the money is from, please.

“If it is from the government fund, it is wrong for statements to be made by the council to reporters stating it will cost the council over £2m, as the money is only in council coffers to pass on. Quite why the council hasn’t made this clearer in press reports is strange.

“We would also be interested in knowing how the council came to its decision to use the money for home care workers. UNISON, representing hundreds of private sector home care workers are pleased they may get some money but there needs to be an explanation also given to our members in the council’s adult social care workforce why some of the money wasn’t used to address the crisis in care homes which has led to the council calling for workforce volunteers, and has caused the temporary closure of some day centres.

“This is hardly dissuading our members from their opinions that the county council is planning for wholesale privatisation of adult social care work.

“There also needs to be an explanation given as to why the council claim directly employed home care workers couldn’t benefit from this fund. There is no stipulation from government that this must be the case and arguments we have heard that it is ‘because of equal pay’ are

wide of the mark. This could be a one-off market supplement which will not cause equal pay issues, just as the much-reported pay rises for drivers (including within local government in Derbyshire) haven’t caused any issues.

“We also need further details from the council about how they are going to ensure the grant reaches the pockets of private sector home carers and not just the employers. Our whole experience during Covid have been that government grants – passed through councils – have not reached the majority of our members.

“We would appreciate answers on these questions and urgent discussions before there is any further fallout and lowering of morale.”

Derbyshire UNISON branch secretary

Jeanette Lloyd said: “It is really frustrating when the council exclude us from their deliberations. Not only do we believe we have a right to be consulted, we could have saved the council from making misleading comments to the press and prevented a further lowering of morale in the council’s own adult social care workforce.

“Furthermore, we would have warned them about the folly of being divisive in only recognising one specific group of the whole social care workforce.

We would like them to sign up to UNISON’s ethical care and residential care charters to keep a permanent eye on the pay, terms and conditions of outside providers used by the council.”

Derbyshire UNISON adult care convenor

Danny Treacy said: “It is unacceptable that the council’s own employees only find about this payment in the press.

“This news has caused upset and division within the care sector and many members will feel Derbyshire County Council have knowingly sent out a communication that could antagonise its work force.

“The council need to apologise for this mess and talk to us immediately.”

Derbyshire UNISON area organiser for private and independent social care Dave

Gorton said: "We certainly are not complaining that our home care members working for small private and other organisations look like they could be benefiting from a government grant. They are poorly treated over issues like traveling time, are mostly on the minimum wage and too many zero hour contracts and deserve recognition.

"But so do the thousands of other social care workers employed in private care homes or employed by charities.

"We want guarantees the money is getting to intended recipients and not 'diverted' by employers into other expenditure."