

# Why decent homes for all is a trade union issue

Millions of households pay more than one-third of their income to a private landlord. Private rents in London are more than twice as high as the national average. In the last 5 years, local authority rents have increased by around 30%, and housing association rents have increased 26% in London and 19% across England.

Private renters have almost no security of tenure and Section 21 of the 1988 Housing Act allows no fault evictions at two month's notice. The average deposit is £1,000 and the average month's rent to be paid in advance is £900, making finding a home to rent next to impossible and driving many renters to take out high interest loans.

120,000 children live in temporary accommodation; that is five for every school in the UK. Homelessness has risen 78% since 2011 and rough sleeping has doubled since 2010.

Meanwhile house prices have continued to increase, with the average property being eight times

the average wage, and in London the average property is 13 times the average wage. The definition of 'affordable' can price homes at £450,000, and fix rent at 80% of local market rate.

At the same time, workers have suffered an 11-year wage squeeze, the worst in 200 years, making rents and homes even more unaffordable, especially with the increase of precarious employment.

UNISON has said that housing is amongst the biggest issues for its members. In fact, research done across public sector unions show that whether you are a fire fighter, postal worker, civil servant or teacher, it is impossible to afford to live anywhere near your work, resulting in recruitment and retention problems.

In response, several unions have launched housing charters or campaigns. Unions are eager to work more closely with umbrella campaigns such as Defend Council Housing and Homes for All. They are also keen to work at a more granular level, offering practical support to estate-based campaigns seeking to maximise genuinely affordable social and council housing, including the use of ballots in all proposed regeneration schemes. They have also welcomed the formation of the London Renter's Union.

If a family does not have a decent home there is an increased probability that their educational



outcomes will be harmed, health outcomes damaged, employment outcomes worsened, and their family members will need more support from the state. A decent home is not just a foundation for a family or a household, it is an investment that benefits society. Quality homes for all should not just be a right, it is a wise social investment.

Is there another way that trade unionists, and indeed everyone who cares about decency, social justice, effective public services and a thriving economy can support? Yes. We need to adopt a 'national homes building strategy' as a central plank of an active industrial strategy and launch a renaissance for low-cost, public sector housing. Build a better and fairer Britain for all.



# Join the campaign to save collective passports

The Passport Office has announced its intention to undertake yet another review of whether it will continue with its provision of collective passports.

The collective passport is a document which allows parties of children to travel abroad on a single document. They are a particularly important tool to ensure that all school children are able to experience the education benefit of travelling abroad, regardless of their economic background.

A previous review in 2016 resulted in a decision to retain the collective passport service after a strong, cross union campaign.

The 2016 review saw limited consultation with schools, and other interested parties, with just 31

selected stakeholders being contacted via a questionnaire. However, the PCS-led campaign worked with the NUT and NAHT unions who helped us reach out to their members to put their name to a letter calling on the collective passport service to be retained.

350 responses were received and included in the PCS submission to the Passport Office and the Immigration Minister.

The level of consultation on the 2018 review is non-existent. The Passport Office have indicated that they do not intend to consult with any other party on this occasion other than with the Department for Education.

We urge all trade unions,



particularly teaching unions, to support the campaign for the retention of collective passports by writing to the Immigration Minister, Caroline Noakes, to ask why wider consultation has not taken place and to reiterate their opposition to ending this valued and important service.

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## Union win: PCS Met Police ex-Carillion contract

The collapse of Carillion at the beginning of the year brought real uncertainty for many UK workers.

PCS members working on the Metropolitan Police's PFI contract



at Lewisham, Bromley and Sutton found themselves caught up in this employment disaster.

For months, PCS members continued to work normally, fulfilling the terms of the contract even though they were without an employer and employment contracts of their own. In late March, Bouygues, the French facilities management company, was eventually temporarily appointed to run the contract. Soon after, followed reports from members that the outsourcing company intended to impose detrimental changes to their terms

and conditions.

PCS's attempts to engage collectively on behalf of our members on this was strongly resisted by Bouygues until we sought the intervention of the Mayor of London's office who has direct responsibility for the contract.

Bouygues have now been awarded the contract on a permanent basis, withdrawn plans to impose worse terms and conditions and most importantly agreed to voluntarily recognise PCS on this contract and PCS are in the final stages of finalising the agreement.

# PCS stops union busting

The Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) has achieved a huge victory after forcing the government to pay £3 million to the union in damages for withdrawing check-off, the process whereby members have their union subscriptions paid directly from their wages.

Ministers agreed an out of court settlement, entitling the union to damages of £3 million for abruptly stopping the system of direct deduction of union subs from government workers pay packets in 2015.

The unlawful withdrawal of check-off from members in the Department for Work and Pensions cut the union's income overnight, although PCS went on to successfully sign up the majority of members to direct debit payment of subscriptions.

The union took the government to court and won. PCS is continuing to pursue pay-outs from other government departments for



damages following the withdrawal of check-off.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said: "This is an unprecedented, multi-million pound compensation payment by a government to a trade union. The removal of checkoff was politically motivated, aimed at undermining the union's ability to defend its members'

jobs and to effectively oppose the Tory government's devastating austerity programme.

"Instead of negotiating with the union properly, Ministers thought it more expedient to unlawfully target us financially. We will continue to pursue claims for damages in every major government department going forward."

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## Union win: UNISON Basildon hospital cleaners

Hospital cleaners in Basildon have been celebrating after winning their two-year battle for a pay rise,

The low-paid domestic staff at Basildon University Hospital had been on the minimum wage after being transferred back into the NHS from private contractor OCS two years ago. But following pressure from UNISON, the cleaners have won a 3% pay rise backdated to April, and will be put back on full NHS contracts in December.

This will give the 300 staff the same pay as other directly employed hospital cleaners, as well as the same holiday, sick pay and unsocial hours payments as their co-workers.

This is great news for the hundreds of domestic workers unfairly denied a decent wage despite being directly employed by the NHS.

The agreement doesn't just mean more money in the pockets of staff who are vital to maintaining a safe and clean hospital environment,

the sick pay means they won't be forced to come into work when they're unwell. Above all, it shows the importance of being in a union if you want to win and be treated fairly at work.

A domestic at the hospital said: "It's brilliant. Everyone was really negative and didn't think this would happen, or that would at least take years. "It's definitely boosted morale. Staff deserve this."



# Three years of health campaigns together

Our NHS is facing the most sustained and dangerous attack in its history. Since the 2010 election, while the population has grown, along with social inequality, and the numbers of ageing people who tend to need more access to health care have increased, we have seen the meanest ever increases in NHS spending, falling well behind rising cost pressures, leaving hospital trusts with inadequate funding, reduced numbers of beds, and facing ever-worsening crises each winter.

Years of below-inflation pay increases and workplace pressure have brought tens of thousands of vacancies for doctors and professional staff.

The situation was further worsened by the disastrous 2012 Health and Social Care Act which required local commissioners to carve up services into contracts to be put out to tender to NHS trusts or private sector providers. Despite all the subsequent language about “planning”, “integration” and “working together,” this poisonous legal framework acts as a barrier to proper and efficient health care, and allows unscrupulous companies to profit from our NHS.

To fight back and win against these conditions we need the most

powerful, unified alliance of trade unions, campaigners, pensioners and communities.

That’s why Health Campaigns Together (HCT) was formed three years ago by Keep Our NHS Public and a range of other campaigns as a fighting coalition, with support from the health unions. We are a broad, inclusive non-party campaign that combines strong local action with national-level support to pile maximum pressure on politicians.

Since 2016 we have campaigned effectively to expose and discredit “Sustainability and Transformation Plans”, organised regional and national conferences, and worked with unions and allies to mobilise three massive national demonstrations – the 200,000-plus on March 4, 2017 which helped swing the election, the 60,000 strong February 3 march against winter pressures this year, and the June 30 march for the NHS 70th anniversary.

Three years on, HCT has established itself as the biggest broadest and most effective alliance fighting for our NHS, with national support from trade unions, good links with opposition parties, well over 100 affiliates in all, and a growing list of achievements.

We are fighting every NHS plan for cutbacks, closures and privatisation, and also building a conference in Birmingham on November 17 seeking to kick-start campaigning on social care.

For details of this, how to affiliate, our quarterly newspaper and much more, see our website [healthcampaignstogether.com](http://healthcampaignstogether.com).  
**Join us: the stronger we become, the more we can win.**



## DIARY DATES

**Saturday 17 November 2018**  
**National Unity Demonstration Against Racism and Fascism**  
Assemble at 12 noon, outside the BBC, Portland Place

**Saturday 17 November 2018: 11-16:30**  
**Health Campaigns Together: Reclaim Social Care Conference**  
Carrs Lane Conference Centre, Birmingham

**Saturday 23 February 2019: 13:00- 17:30**  
**Show Culture Some Love - Future of Arts & Culture Conference #4**  
TUC Congress House

**Wednesday 27 February 2019: 18:00 to 20:30**  
**TUC London, East and South East LGBT+ Network: LGBT+ History Celebrations**  
TUC Congress House

**Tuesday 20 November 2018: from 5:30 pm**  
**Enough is Enough: March for Education**  
Westminster Cathedral, Ashley Place, London SW1P 1LT

## Editorial team

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