

## 1. Use of Volunteers

The Coalition Government have been speaking about volunteers getting more involved with public services. Many local authorities seem to be considering whether this will allow them to take tasks away from their employees, give the work to volunteers and make staff redundant. UNISON oppose this approach as it puts our members jobs at risk and risks the provision of quality public services delivered by accountable employees.

### What is Acceptable?

Norfolk County Council have used volunteers for many years in some departments. Whilst not welcoming this UNISON did not oppose this if the volunteers were undertaking tasks that clearly could not be done by employees. This continues to be our position. We accept this can sometimes be a grey area. In such circumstances we are guided by the work place stewards and the members they represent. We have previously contested the inappropriate use of volunteers and senior management have been willing to accept our position and modify proposals.

### What to do?

If you hear that volunteers are to be used in your workplace it would be helpful if you could find out as much information as possible. For example is there a start date, a risk assessment, induction programme and crucially, what tasks would volunteers undertake? Notify your steward or the Branch Office as soon as possible. We would want to act early to prevent an unsatisfactory scheme being implemented

### What Can UNISON Do?

We have regular dialogue with senior managers and would raise any concerns through our normal departmental or corporate structure. Hopefully this would resolve any disputes.

If volunteers are used in breach of our policy position we could instigate a Dispute with Norfolk County Council and/or instruct our members not to co-operate with volunteers.

The exact nature of such an instruction would vary depending on the type of work being undertaken and how this dovetails with the work of our members. We would not give any instruction that could be deemed as unofficial industrial action.

In such a situation we would consult our members in the normal way and conduct an industrial action ballot.

### Why is it so important?

We have to take a stand against the thinking that public services can be done on the cheap. This thinking is behind the cuts that have already resulted in many high quality workers being made redundant. The use of volunteers could be seen as a way to plug the gap left by these redundant workers.

There is no or little accountability with volunteers. What happens if they don't attend work or ignore advice on how to undertake particular tasks? They are not covered by an employment contract so they have no obligations what so ever to the organisation they are working for or the people receiving services.

If we allow volunteers to undertake tasks that should be undertaken by employees we are allowing Central Government to get away with their programme of cuts. Stopping such misuse of volunteers saves jobs, saves services and shows the Government we will not do their dirty work for them.

## 2. Covering Other Jobs

If you are asked to pick up work of a recently redundant post speak to your steward or senior steward. Every situation is different but as a general rule you cannot be expected to undertake additional duties if they are at a higher level of responsibility than your grade, if they are outside the remit of the role you are employed to undertake (ie, a receptionist cannot be asked to cover for a cleaning supervisor) or if you do not have sufficient time to undertake additional duties. In certain circumstances UNISON can advise members not to undertake particular tasks if for example we are in dispute with Norfolk County Council over the legitimacy of a redundancy. Every situation is different and the judgement as to what is and is not reasonable can be fine. So do not act without first getting advice from UNISON.

## 3. Unpaid Overtime

UNISON have consistently advised members not to do unpaid overtime. Sometimes it seems unpaid overtime is expected of you so call on UNISON for support. If following this advice causes you any difficulties let us know.