

UNISON

Oxfordshire Health Branch

An injury to one is an injury to all

Organiser

December 2025

Strikes are the best medicine

By Ian Mckendrick, branch communications officer



Striking resident doctors on the picket line at the John Radcliffe hospital

Picture courtesy of Dr Tom Corkery-Bennett

The latest government recommendation to the NHS Pay Review Body is for a measly 2.5% rise in 2026 for staff on the Agenda for Change contract which covers the majority of workers directly employed by the NHS.

This offer is below inflation and adds to the huge wage losses NHS staff have already suffered over the past 13 years.

It is an insult to NHS staff who are being pressured to deliver more than ever before.

It will make the recruitment crisis worse, and undermine efforts to bring down NHS waiting lists.

Doctors have also been offered 2.5% despite the BMA making it clear they are still committed to their goal of full pay restoration to reverse the real-terms pay cuts that have occurred since 2008.

Resident doctors have an additional grievance, that of the failure of successive governments to invest in enough training places to

ensure the NHS has enough much needed specialist doctors.

Currently there is a bottleneck of speciality training with 30,000 doctors applying for just 10,000 places this year.

The Secretary for Health and Social Care Wes Streeting has offered just an additional 1,000 places to accompany the miserable 2.5% pay rise.

It is clear that change is only going to come from taking action like doctors.

Inside this issue:

- Notice of AGM and branch elections
- Low pay, NHS, fire, and school cuts - migrants are not to blame
- 2.5% is not enough

How low can Labour go?

by Ian Mckendrick branch communications officer

The Labour Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood has announced the latest revamp of immigration laws.

The plans, if voted through, are designed to make Britain a more cruel and unwelcoming place – somewhere to avoid at all costs – even if you are fleeing war, torture or persecution.

It will increase hostility to migrants working and hoping to build a life here.

Labour's plans are a cynical attempt to claw votes away from racist Reform UK, and to stop the growth of "dark forces" – a nod to the fascists lurking in the wings.

Yet millionaire racist Nigel Farage and millionaire fascist Tommy Robinson have welcomed the changes, knowing that the Labour

government is endorsing their lies that migrants and refugees are to blame for NHS waiting lists, crumbling public services, lack of affordable housing and low wages.

A general rule of thumb is that if racists and fascists are cheering you then you are in the wrong.

The Labour government wants to copy Denmark's immigration system

that strips asylum seekers of their rights.

Yet, despite implementing some of the most draconian anti-immigrant laws in Europe the Danish Social Democratic party this week lost support in the elections.

Labour's plans means refugees will be left in near-permanent limbo, the threat of deportation hanging over them, and their lives torn apart should the government decide after 19 years that they can be sent back to their country of origin. Children are liable to being uprooted from schools.

Labour's plans will also make it harder for migrant workers to settle in the UK, doubling the waiting time to ten years for many people before they can apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain. Some will be forced to wait 20 years.

Migrant workers will have to meet other stringent criteria to be considered suitable to stay in the UK, including remaining debt free, and speaking English to "A" level standard.

Labour's plans threaten to undermine the NHS and social care workforce as people decide to build their lives where they are more welcome.

UNISON has launched a Migrant



Workers' Network to defend rights for migrant workers (see back page)

Labour's arguments will only embolden racists. Farage and Robinson want to go much further. Farage has called for 150,000 deportations a year – he would like to see the kind of immigration raids being carried

out in the US under president Trump.

Like Trump, he wants to help the rich grab more while blaming migrants and fugees.

Robinson is working hard to bring more mobs of racist thugs onto the streets with a view to smashing democracy for all.

Labour plans to keep Tory stealth tax

One underhand way that pay has been cut in the past 4 years was the freezing of the personal allowance – the amount we are allowed to earn before being taxed.

Usually, the allowance increases in line with inflation every year. But the previous Tory government froze them—in effect, a stealth tax on working class people.

The freeze means that workers are pushed into higher rates of tax sooner, despite their incomes being hammered by inflation.

Now Labour wants to keep the freeze beyond 2028 to raise around £8 billion. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) says that keeping the freeze is “roughly similar” to increasing tax by 3.5 percentage points.

One IFS research economist reported that this would result in an increase in tax paid “on all employees working full-time, most working part-time, most minimum wage workers and many low-income pensioners”.

How we can win more than 2.5%?

by Ian Mckendrick branch communications officer

The current level of the Oxford Living Wage, what Oxford City Council states is the the minimum needed to meet the real cost of living and working in Oxford, is set to rise to £14.06/hour in 2026.

With the current proposal of only a 2.5% rise for NHS pay anyone paid below band 4 will be paid less than the Oxford living Wage. This is completely unacceptable, but

as the doctors have learned, waiting on a decent offer is a futile endeavour.

The government is bowing to pressure from the rich to keep their taxes low rather than take the necessary actions to raise the money needed to fully fund public services (see page 7 for how tens of billions of pounds can be raised).

They are also committed to increasing arms spending

at the expense of public sector wages.

The government will only move if a greater pressure is brought to bear through our own action, and we should start to prepare for that now.

A new layer of pay stewards across local Trusts to organise members for action.

They will need to carry the arguments about why we

should take action, and to ensure our union organisers mobilise the resources to win a ballot.

We also need to win the argument within our own union that coordinated action with the doctors gives us all a better chance of winning.

If you are interested in being a UNISON pay steward to fight for a decent pay rise then email: admin@ouh.org.uk

Stopping the racist attacks

Sunday 16th November saw a brilliant show of anti-racist solidarity and campaigning when 350 people joined a Stand Up To Racism community march supported by over 20 organisations including our union branch.

The march, backed by Oxfordshire UNISON Health branch, was called in response to a sharp rise in racist activity nationally and in Oxford – a reflection of the national wave of racist protests being pushed by the far right, and fuelled by Reform UK.

A recent RCN report showed nurses reporting of racism had increased by 55% over three years.

One of the main targets of the racist protests has been hotels where refugees have been forced to live.

In Epping the fascist Homeland Party seized on an horrific rape by one refugee and used this to incite a mob that threatened not only every



resident in the hotel, but also anyone of colour in the surrounding area. They hoped to unleash the same kind of racist riots seen last summer.

Inspired by Epping other far-right groups launched similar protests across the UK, including a series of protests

organised by the "Oxfordshire Patriots" who have targeted refugees sent to live in the Holiday Inn near the Kassam stadium.

They are also the people behind the racist "Raise the Colours" campaign which has put up dozens of St George and

Union flags at prominent road junctions around Oxford.

Their Facebook page is littered with Islamophobic and racist posts.

Thousands of anti-racists organised by Stand Up To Racism have mobilised to challenge these racist protests against refugees – outnumbering them in the main.

But the scale of the threat we face from this rising tide of racist hate was evident when over 100,000 people attended the biggest fascist lead rally in British history in September to hear fascist organiser Tommy Robinson and a host of far-right and fascist speakers, including Elon Musk, stoke up racism against Muslims, migrants and refugees.

We need a much bigger anti-racist movement to be able to stop to turn the tide against the racist scapegoating.

Branch elections and Annual General Meeting

Oxfordshire UNISON health branch members are invited to attend the branch Annual General Meeting. A well attended and vocal AGM gives the branch officers a clear view of the concerns of members and allows members to take part in the democratic process and make decisions on branch policy for the year ahead. To round off the night we have a meal and party paid for by the branch.

6 pm Friday 30th January 2026

VOCO, Oxford Thames Hotel, Abingdon Rd, Oxford, OX1 4PS

Free entry to £500 cash prize raffle for all members who come to the meeting before 7 PM

Followed by party to 11.30pm
music, bar and hot and cold buffet

To book your place and meal at this year's AGM please register for the event on the branch Monday 26th January.

Members are entitled to bring one guest for £5.

Standing as a UNISON workplace representative

All UNISON workplace representative are elected annually and all working members are entitled to stand. Workplace representatives are the most important link between the union and its members. They are organisers who talk to, recruit and organise members around workplace issues. If a group of union members have a joint problem they can call a meeting to help formulate a plan to deal with the problem. Reps work as a team to ensure members views are heard by their employers in consultations and

negotiations in order to try and achieve the best terms and conditions possible. They give members information about union issues by publicising UNISON campaigns, distributing leaflets and keep members informed about, and involved in, local negotiations. They can also arrange for the members to get advice or assistance from elsewhere in the union. Where they feel confident and have received appropriate training, they accompany members in meetings and

assist them in raising problems with managers before these get out of hand. For our union to be as effective as members wish it is vital that all areas elect someone they trust to represent them. A "Workplace representatives" handbook giving more detail on the roles can be found online in the "for stewards" section of the branch website www.ouh.org.uk and a brief description of each role is below. If you would like to stand complete a nomination form on page 6.

Conveners Are the lead steward within each of the major employers. They have the same duties as other stewards, plus additional coordinating. They are entitled to vote at the branch committee meetings.	carry out their legal responsibilities to workers and leading campaigns where improvement is needed and the law fails. Health and safety reps have legal rights to inspect and investigate workplaces.	• campaign for equality in the workplace and the union • Promote national campaigns such as International Women's Day, LGBT History Month and Black History Month • Work with other reps to ensure your branch is inclusive and accessible • Support people who want to join UNISON • Raise awareness of, and talk to members about UNISON's self-organised groups and forums
Stewards Organise union members in each work area. Working with other stewards they help members to respond to changes that affect them badly. This can range from supporting someone at a disciplinary hearing, helping members lodge a grievance, negotiating changes to improve management plans, up to leading in disputes and industrial action.	Are lead the steward within each of the major employers and entitled to vote at the branch committee meetings.	Union learning rep Help to raise awareness of learning opportunities among members, as well as negotiating with employers on learning issues. Union learning reps can help to ensure that less privileged workers do not get overlooked in the allocation of funds from training budgets.
Health & Safety reps Have legal powers to improve work conditions, ensuring employers	Equality reps Equality reps aim to make sure people are treated fairly at work and do not suffer from discrimination on the basis of sex, race, sexual orientation, disability, age, religious beliefs or because they work part time. They: • Work with their branch to improve a workplace and employer equality policies	

Standing as a UNISON Health branch officer

Branch officers are branch members who are elected to lead the branch. Like workplace reps they have to be elected annually and are accountable to branch members. Together they form the branch committee which meets at least monthly to coordinate union work between workplaces and organise the work of the branch. All members are entitled to stand for office. If you would like to stand as an officer complete the officers nomination form on page 6 for the role you would like to stand for. An election by postal ballot will be held for any contested post.

Chair Presides at all meetings of the branch and branch committee and advises the branch officers and branch committee in respect of matters relating to procedure and interpretation of rules.	members while ensuring their voices have an influence across the union. Must be under 27 years of age.	Social Secretary Promotes social events such as parties and trips out for the branch members.
Secretary The main contact person with the wider union who handles branch admin (may also be a senior negotiator).	Labour Link Officer Liaises with the local Labour Party and makes sure the views of UNISON members who pay the APF levy are heard.	Two auditors Our elected auditors do not have voting rights but do provide the important role of verifying the branches accounts by undertaking an annual audit of the branch financial records and providing a written report of the annual audit to the annual general meeting to help ensure branch funds are used properly.
Treasurer Responsible for managing branch finances, including keeping accounts.	International Officer Develop and lead on international solidarity activities including campaigns, twinnings and support for projects abroad.	Self Organised Groups These groups are aimed to help members of specific social groups to have any needs particular to their group addressed. Each is elected by members of the group they represent, with the elected officer having a seat on the branch committee.
Health and Safety Organises the health and safety reps in their role and co-ordinates campaigns on health and safety issues.	Environmental Officer To give a lead on environmental issues and campaigns that effect branch members.	Black members' Officer Organises meetings for black and minority ethnic groups to combat racism plus the promotion of a positive view of other cultures through events such as Black History Month and encouraging greater involvement of BAME members in the branch.
Communications officer Co-ordinates branch newsletters, website and other media. Supports production of branch campaign materials and engagement with local press.	Education Coordinator Helps arrange training courses and education programmes for members, stewards, health and safety reps and branch officers.	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Officer Organises meetings for LGBT members to take part in campaigns against discrimination of the grounds of their sexuality such as campaigns against homophobic bullying.
Equalities Officer Work on equal rights issues including leading campaigns against discrimination on grounds of gender race, disability, sexuality or age.	Membership and Recruitment Leads the branch's efforts to help the branch to bring more people into the union.	Disabled members' Officer Organises disabled members in the branch to ensure full access to work and improved social support and access for people with disabilities.
Women's Officer Organises meetings for women in the branch to help them campaign against sexism and on issues such as domestic violence, rape and breast cancer and promote women's involvement in the branch.	Healthcare students Are also entitled to have a representative on the branch committee.	
Welfare Officer Organises support from UNISON's welfare services. for branch members in need.	Lifelong Learning Coordinator Promotes access and members enrolment in life long learning opportunities.	
Young Members' Officer Advises and helps recruit young	BAOT OTs have their own professional organisation within UNISON and are entitled to have a representative on the branch committee.	
	Retired Members Officer Supports UNISON retired members by campaigning on their behalf and organising local activities.	

Children hurt by school cuts

Years of government funding cuts have left schools in desperate conditions. Stop School Cuts campaign is run by the NEU, and is supported by ASCL, NAHT, National Governance Association and ParentKind. In the academic year 2024/25 74% of schools in England had less funding in real terms than in 2010. That's 14,112 schools that cannot afford the same staffing and resources as they could fifteen years ago. These are some of the effects we are seeing in our classrooms:

- Class sizes are among the highest in Europe - a million children are taught in classes of 30 or more.
- Educators are feeling pay cuts and sky-high workload. One in four teachers leave the profession within three years of qualification; and a third within five years.
- Classrooms are crumbling. The current state of school buildings presents a very real 'risk to life' as was recognised by the Department for Education.
- Whole subjects are lost to cuts, children are missing out on opportunities to study arts, sports, and music. Between 2010 and 2023

there was a 42% drop in entries to GCSE and A-level arts subjects – with fewer arts teachers recruited some subjects are no longer taught in all schools.

- The provision of education for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is a system wide crisis. Most local authorities are spending more than they receive from the Government.

George Buchanan, Assistant District Secretary of Oxfordshire NEU said "Children are not naive. They know when they are in a school which is lacking in funding. It damages their self-esteem, and damages their sense of place within society. Everybody deserves a first class education, let that be our fight."

"The Government has a clear choice. Reverse school cuts, or fail another generation of children."

Get involved in the campaign - sign up to the School Cuts: A Beginner's Guide:



NOMINATION TO BE A WORKPLACE REP
(please write clearly)

NOMINATION for the position(s) of (Please tick appropriate box(es)).

CONVENER ☐ STEWARD ☐

HEALTH & SAFETY REP ☐ LEARNING REP ☐

EQUALITY REP ☐

I hereby nominate

.....
(Name in CAPS please)

for the post (s) indicated by tick boxes above.

Workplace address:

.....

.....

Contact tel no:

Proposed by.....
(Name and Membership number of a current branch member)

Seconded by.....
(Name and Membership number of a current branch member)

Please return completed form to Unison Elections, c/o Unison Office, Warneford Hospital, Headington, Oxford, OX3 7JX, by midday on Friday 19th December 2025. Alternatively you can email scanned copies to jane.lacey@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk

Nomination for Branch Officer Position
(please write clearly)

I hereby nominate

.....
(Name in CAPS please).

For the position of:

.....

Workplace address:

.....

.....

Contact tel no:

Proposed by.....
(Name and Membership number of a current branch member)

Contact tel no:

Seconded by.....
(Name and Membership number of a current branch member)

Contact tel no:

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Solidarity with Oxon fire fighters

Oxfordshire fire services are under attack.

Firefighters are being told they will need to continue to risk their lives while the crews and equipment are slashed in cost saving measures by Oxfordshire County Council.

The danger fire fighters face became a stark reality earlier this year when local firefighters Jennie Logan and Martyn Sadler lost their lives when a building collapsed on them while attempting to put out a fire in Bicester.

The Grenfell fire showed the potential for disaster if fire safety is not prioritised. With many of our union members working in hospitals and care homes with

infirm people we would want to see a fully funded fire service able to respond if the worst happens.

John Shuker, rep for the Fire Brigades Union said, "On behalf of Oxfordshire FBU and its members, please can you take the time to read our leaflet and contribute back by filling out the public consultation."

"Our members feel blindsided by these proposals as we were kept in the dark until a few hours before it went out to the public."

"Many Firefighters, Stations and communities will be severely affected, and we ask that these current proposals be stopped so we can get round the table to discuss a negotiated way forward."

The money is there to fund public services

At the time of writing the details of the latest budget are not known, but there is a strong likelihood Chancellor Reeves will opt to continue making the working class pay for the countries economic woes.

It doesn't have to be like this.

The Tax Justice group highlighted a series of measures that could raise billions of pounds:

1. A wealth tax of just 2 percent would raise £24 billion a year Tax Justice says that levying a tax on assets worth over £10 million would hit 20,000 of the richest people in Britain.
2. Equalising "capital gains tax" with income tax would raise £16.7 billion a year. This would hit the super-rich who profit from selling shares and property—gains from owning capital. Earned income, such as working class people's wages, is taxed at rates of 20 to 45 percent. But unearned income in the form of capital gains is taxed at rates in the range of 10 percent to 28 percent.
3. Applying National Insurance Contributions to unearned income would raise £10.2 billion

a year. Currently, National Insurance Contributions are only levied on earned income. But why shouldn't rich people pay it on income from dividends from shares, rent from property and interest on savings?

4. Closing loopholes in inheritance tax could raise £1.4 billion a year Inheritance tax rules allow the rich to pay as little tax as possible. For example, an estate worth over £10 million should pay 40 percent—but on average pays a rate of just 17 percent.
5. A tax on share buybacks could raise approximately £2 billion a year. Some of Britain's biggest corporations use a method known as "share buyback" to boost profits. This sees companies buy their own shares, which reduces the total number of shares on the market and inflates the value of shareholders' assets. It enriches shareholders, board members and top executives. A tax of just 4 percent—a very limited measure—could raise £2 billion.

SUPPORT FIRE BRIGADES UNION LOBBY OF COUNTY COUNCILLORS AGAINST CUTS

December 9th
9AM County Hall, Oxford, OX1 1ND

The UNISON Migrant Worker Network

The UNISON Migrant Worker Network is an informal network of UNISON members with a first generation immigrant background including overseas and migrant workers, EU settled status workers and workers who have subsequently naturalised as British citizens or who have indefinite leave to

remain.

The goals of the network include:

- Support members to uphold existing rights.
- Encourage union participation, activism and leadership
- Share organising key lessons and best practice
- Build solidarity across the union
- Campaign for fairer visa rules

To find out more about the UNISON Migrant Workers Network scan here



Separate pay scale for nurses is a recipe for divide and rule

The government has launched a call for evidence on proposals which would create separate pay arrangements for NHS nurses in England, splitting up the NHS team.

Our nursing and midwifery committee, made up of elected nursing representatives from across the UK, opposes this policy; and UNISON health conference 2023, the largest national gathering of NHS staff, voted unanimously to campaign against this divisive move.

The current Agenda for Change pay scales were supposed to address the problems of the separate pay scales that came before.

Agenda for Change did introduce the idea that there would be equal pay for equal work - though in fact it levelled pay down to the lower rates women were paid at, rather than elevating women's wages to that of male employees.

Separating out the pay scales again will not address the problem of low

pay.

What it will do is allow the government to play divide and rule, playing one section of the NHS workforce off against another, weakening any disputes that arise over pay.

UNISON has raised the following objections to the proposal:

- Would not increase the overall commitment to spending on NHS pay, nor would it necessarily mean a greater share of overall funding going to nurses.
- Would lead to greater inequalities in NHS pay. Current arrangements ensure equal pay for equal jobs. Separate, complex arrangements for nurses could lead to unjust and unequal pay between different staff groups.
- Would collapse collective pay bargaining in the NHS. Other occupational groups would likely also demand separate arrangements, ending our One Team approach to pay and dividing the workforce irreparably.

