

# UNISON Union eyes

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## Southwark & Lambeth PCTs slash £8m in "disinvestment" from vital SLAM services

# A kick in the teeth for mental health

UNISON is to mount a major campaign in an attempt to beat back the savage package of cuts in SLAM's services being driven through by Lambeth and Southwark PCTs.

The cuts – totalling £6 million this year with another £2m next year – will fall on emergency services, rehabilitation beds and services, community and home treatment teams, day hospitals and in-patient beds for older adults, dual diagnosis and addiction services, specialist beds and care for personality disorders, learning disabilities and child and adolescent mental health.

SLAM's Chief Executive Stuart Bell has stated quite clearly that the cuts are being imposed upon the Trust by the PCTs.

To its credit, the Trust has made clear from the outset that each of the threatened cuts will have a negative impact on the quality and quantity of patient care, and roll back progress in many areas where services have been developed.

The Trust has demanded that the PCTs themselves decide which services should suffer the impact of their cash cuts ("disinvestment"), and correctly insisted that the PCTs themselves take on the task of public consultation over the impact of the closures and service cuts.

Indeed most of the cuts seek to make short term savings through reductions in staff numbers, but in many cases this will only be at the expense of a longer-term knock-on impact in increased (costly) hospital admissions.

Cuts in highly effective and



Demonstration during UNISON's Health Conference in Gateshead, which toughened union stance against NHS cuts and privatisation

high quality services, many of which have only been put in place in recent years as part of an expansion of mental health care, will strike a body blow at staff morale, and increase stress and pressure on remaining front-line staff.

The Trust has made clear that it wants to minimise any redundancies, and to handle the reduction in staff numbers through natural wastage and redeployment.

However it is obvious that the cash savings in a labour-intensive service depend on loss of jobs, and UNISON is concerned that many sections of members are facing uncertainty over their future employment.

Union policy adopted at this year's UNISON Health Conference in Gateshead is to ballot for industrial action where compulsory redundancies are threatened, and we will do everything possible to fight redundancies.

But since the Trust surprisingly does not currently know the number of vacancies it has available to enable redeployment of affected staff, we still do not know how many jobs are actually at risk.

Our main concern is that these cuts will do serious and lasting damage to mental health care in SE London – and undermine years of work on developing effective alternatives to hos-

pital care and specialist services, for which there is no alternative available.

And in fighting these cuts we are not primarily fighting the Trust, but fighting the short-sighted policies of the two PCTs, which face a cash crisis that has been compounded by government policies and the decision of London's Strategic Health Authorities to "top-slice" PCT budgets to help cover deficits run up by many acute hospital trusts.

That's why we will be mounting a campaign which aims to publicise the scale and impact of the cuts, to pile maximum pressure on local MPs and councillors, and on health min-

isters to step in and persuade the PCTs to think again.

The policy of "disinvestment," being adopted by PCTs around the country, threatens to push mental health services back to the dark days of neglect and under-funding as a "Cinderella" service.

The Branch is issuing thousands of postcards which we urge Trust staff and concerned members of the public to send to their MP or local council.

We will also be working with campaigners London Health Emergency to issue press releases, write to local politicians, urging the two borough councils' Oversight and Scrutiny Committees to intervene,

approach local groups representing service users and the local public in Lambeth and Southwark, and linking up with other UNISON branches and other branches of trade unions in SE London to step up the pressure.

We are urging all UNISON members across the Trust to do what they can to support this campaign: the cuts in Lambeth and Southwark, along with the Trust-wide "efficiency savings" of 2.5% will have a knock-on effect on many areas of the Trust.

We will not give up on our effort to change the PCTs' damaging and ill-conceived decisions, and to save the services that our members, along with the Trust, have worked so hard over the years to put in place.

But we will also be giving immediate support to members who find that their jobs have been singled out for cuts and require urgent action.

We will be doing everything possible to ensure that staff are treated fairly, and that those who want to go, go – while those who want to stay are protected.

Of course we can only represent people who are members, and we are only as strong as our membership base – so the more people join, the better we can represent everyone.

Anyone who is not already a member of UNISON – especially anyone who fears they may be facing the prospect of cuts – is strongly advised to join now.

- More details: centre pages
- Editorial: page 3
- Membership form - see back

UNISON fighting to defend jobs and services