



Surrey County Branch



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# PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

4<sup>th</sup> September 2019

## TRADE UNIONISTS SUPPORT SCHOOL STUDENT STRIKERS IN GUILDFORD

Surrey UNISON members to rally alongside school students on 20<sup>th</sup> September

Members of UNISON in Surrey will be holding a rally – a ‘Picket for the Planet’ – on 20<sup>th</sup> September at 12pm outside Guildford Railway station. UNISON Branch Secretary Paul Couchman said:

‘We are in full support of the action these courageous young people have been taking. Month after month, across the world, school students have taken strike action against climate change inspired by Greta Thunberg. This time, they are asking for the trade unions, the workers of the world to come out and support them – calling for a Global Earth Strike. Unfortunately, UK law will not allow us to actually take strike action on this issue but we are calling on all our members to come and support a one-hour protest rally on the day in their lunch breaks or by taking annual leave etc.’

School students will be walking out of (or picketing outside) a number of schools in Surrey and meeting up at 10.30am outside Holy Trinity Church in Guildford High Street. They will then march through Guildford to the Borough Council Offices and deliver letters to the councillors, before marching up to the train station to join with the UNISON rally at 12pm.

Surrey County Council are supporting the action on the day:

*“We’re fully supportive of work underway regionally, nationally and internationally to draw attention to the detrimental effects of climate change. This extends to the upcoming Day of Action on 20 September, which is planned to allow people to demonstrate their support for this”.*

(extract from staff memo - see full text of staff memo in notes below).

Paul said:

‘UNISON nationally are having a UNISON Green Week from 16-20 September. We have been championing the green agenda for many years and the school student strikes have really brought the issue to the fore. We believe we need a government which will take this issue seriously and take over those huge, profit-hungry companies which are destroying our planet. We need socialist change – not climate change. Currently politicians are arguing over deal or no-deal, Brexit or Remain, but in the real world the Amazon is burning, our oceans are dying, energy companies continue to profit from fossil fuels and in Surrey our

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General Secretary: Dave Prentis   Regional Secretary: Steve Torrance   Branch Secretary: Paul Couchman

airports continue to expand, incinerators are being brought online and fracking is causing earthquakes. I hope that the energy and commitment of these young people can be a spur, part of a massive movement of the trade unions and working people to transform society in the interests of the many, not the few.'

'The Trades Union Congress is meeting week beginning 9<sup>th</sup> September. One of the biggest questions on their agenda will be the issue of climate change. Surrey County UNISON calls on all union reps attending that event to support calls to back the school students strike on 20<sup>th</sup> September'

ENDS

#### **Notes:**

UNISON is the largest trade union in the UK (1.4 million members) and represents workers in councils, hospitals, schools, charities and the private sector – anyone who provides public services.

Surrey County UNISON represents members working for Surrey County Council, support staff in Schools, Colleges and Universities, workers in charities and the private sector who work in public services. We have over 5,000 members in Surrey. We have a facebook event for the rally on 20<sup>th</sup> which can be found here: <https://www.facebook.com/events/487675435379396/>.

Strike4ClimateGuildford is a network of school students, part of the national and international school strike movement and is totally independent of UNISON. They can be contacted via their facebook page here: <https://www.facebook.com/Strike4ClimateGuildford/> or by email on: [youthstrike4climateguildford@gmail.com](mailto:youthstrike4climateguildford@gmail.com).

#### **Surrey County Council staff memo:**

*As an organisation, SCC has confirmed its commitment to tackling climate change publicly through our Council meeting in July, when Members declared a 'Climate Emergency' and committed to work with partners to develop a strategy for the county becoming carbon neutral as early as possible.*

*If you would like to know more about what we're doing to tackle climate change within Surrey, including our exciting challenge open to local residents, communities and businesses, you can find out more here: <https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/people-and-community/climate-change/what-are-we-doing>*

*We're therefore fully supportive of work underway regionally, nationally and internationally to draw attention to the detrimental effects of climate change. This extends to the upcoming Day of Action on 20 September, which is planned to allow people to demonstrate their support for this.*

*Whilst the council is completely supportive of the need to tackle this global emergency, we have to be mindful that as a public sector organisation our priority on a day to day basis has to be the residents of Surrey and therefore we need to ensure that we can continue to run vital services. To help us do this, staff who wish to take part in the Day of Action should discuss this in advance with their manager and book leave for the time off in the normal way.*

Photos supplied. Credit: Youth Strike 4 Climate Guildford. Photos show school students preparing for the 20<sup>th</sup>, making their banner. Paul Couchman from UNISON is pictured in the centre of one of the photos.