

Notes on the Unison strike pertaining to Sandford Station.

- There is very little fact in here and, if I actually do know a fact, I will say so. I have no idea if any of this is of any use to anyone. I hope it will trigger some sense in the entrenched position in which we all seem to find ourselves.
- Fact : The guardians of the residents in Russets / Sherwood have not been consulted in any way by St Monica about the what we think should be done for the carers' terms and conditions. Whether we should have been or not, I don't know. Personally I would have liked to have been asked.
- To me, the carers and other support colleagues are the most important part of St Monica and I am concerned for them and want them to be respected and treated well. After all, it is they who look after Margaret 24 / 7 and, if they are not happy (despite their dedication) she will not be as well looked after and not as happy as she should be. She spends a very large amount of money to live in what I think used to be a Care Home with a deserved reputation for excellence. She and I moved from Cambridgeshire to be here solely for that reason. It seems to be turning into a particularly expensive and mediocre Care Home as one thing after another which made it excellent is nibbled away.
- My perception is that since Margaret & I first looked at Russets in 2015, the relationship between management and colleagues has markedly deteriorated. I heard that people queued to work for St Monica then. Now they are leaving in droves. I have heard that in the last few months that over 30 have left this Care Home.
- There have been a number of notifications sent to the guardians by David Williams (CEO). These seemed to be economical on information so, today (June 29th 2022), I went and talked to the people on the picket line. I am not much wiser. What the colleagues are actually paid is not my concern. How they feel is.
- This is what I have found (in not a logical order!). In the past, St Monica prided itself on paying colleagues fairly, which meant above the general rates in the sector. They were keen to publicise this information in their advertising brochures and it made me proud to support it and be part of it.
 - In March 2022 a new contract was introduced for new colleagues (along with a pay increase of 4%) and existing colleagues were encouraged to sign it. This, it appears, has escalated into them having to sign it or be 'let go'. A particularly extraordinary situation in these times of a huge carer shortage.
 - This followed a dismal and, I believe, an ill thought out and destructive to the management / colleague relationship, pay increase in 2021 of 1% when inflation was around 2%. Fact : Margaret paid an increase in her fees in 2021 of well over 7%.
 - No reason, I have seen, has been officially given for introducing this new contract though I have heard it may be to do with standardising conditions across all sites and reducing costs.
 - If the former is true then that appears to overlook that Sandford Station is not in Bristol with its excellent and frequent transport links running day and night.
 - Existing colleagues who sign the new contract have their pay protected for two years. I read this as saying that, after two years they will be worse off? Is that not creating problems for the future and encouraging disharmony for the next two years?
 - I understand St Monica used to pay particularly well for unsocial hours. Fact : the new contract reduces pay rates for unsocial hours including at Bank Holidays.
 - There appear to be no more payment being made for mandatory breaks and colleagues' hours are being reduced.

- Sick pay is reduced from 6 months to 3 months but maternity leave provisions are improved.
- Unison do not seem to know what they want for the colleagues at St Monica.
- St Monica, apparently, will not speak to Unison.
- The colleagues don't seem to know what they want beyond, for some of them, being able to retain their existing T&Cs for as long as they work here. This was, apparently, promised in writing by David Williams in 2021 but has been reneged.
- So, what do I conclude from this?
 - St Monica have gone about whatever they are trying to achieve in an unfortunate way and have alienated many of their most important colleagues.
 - The communication has been and is dismal.
 - There really doesn't seem to be anything which isn't fundamentally easily solvable with a bit of respect.
 - Carers are not railway workers. They really care about the residents they look after. They have personal relationships and give love and dedication. If they didn't then they would do something else better paid. Many carers believe that to strike in this situation is plain wrong which is why some have signed the new contract and some cross picket lines.
 - David Williams says this strike is 'unwarranted and unnecessary'. I'm not sure about the former but feel the latter is indeed true.
- The **most important things** about this sad situation is something I am not in any way qualified to talk about and, hopefully, somebody who is, will do so. **Those** are the enforced reduction of hours, the reduction of handover times, the increased use of agency staff, the cost of agency staff and the importance of continuity and familiarity of the carers to people with dementia.
- This is the gist of what I feel Margaret would say if she could. To rectify this, surely St Monica should be working hard to return to being a respected, harmonious organisation internally and externally and to provide a sufficiently good package to attract colleagues to join the organisation and then stay as permanent employees? Something special in return for the especially huge amount of money she spends here.