



THE UNISON NW
DELEGATION TO
NAW AGM 2023
LEFT TO RIGHT
JENNY WHITTAKER,
TERESA CONNOLLY,
TRACY DELANEY,
RACHEL WRIGHT,
JOANNE MOORCROFT

JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN 50P SUMMER 2023

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NAW agm 2023

DELEGATES from affiliated trade unions and members from around the country came together in Liverpool on 10 June for the annual general meeting of the National Assembly of Women (NAW) to share experiences and plan the work for the coming year. Due to ill health, Rose Keeping, outgoing President, was unable to attend but delegates expressed their thanks to her and wishes for a speedy recovery in a heartfelt round of applause.

The Annual Report, including the Financial Report was unanimously endorsed with a call from the Treasurer, Carolyn Simpson to carry on the good work of getting union branches to affiliate to the NAW. This was followed by a discussion on "Women and Violence" led by speakers Jane Stewart, (Unite Convenor, TUC General Council and Chair of Unite National Women's sector committee) and Vicky Knight (NW Unison Regional Manager).

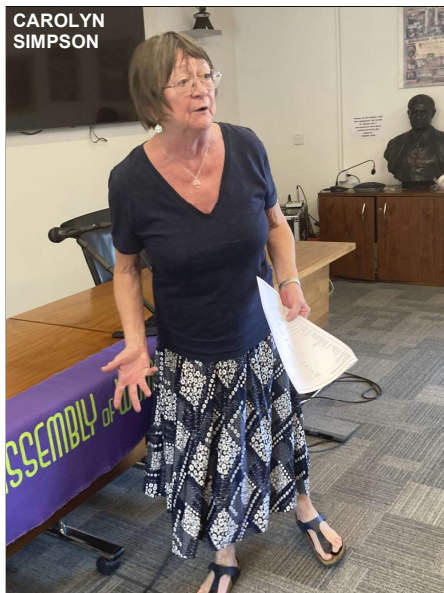
Jane started by saying that women are not only in the front line of current disputes but also face the full intervention of the state, recalling the level of violence that women experienced from the police in the early days of the campaign for abortion rights and how this continues today when women rise up against injustice. She said it's an exciting time to be a trade unionist and that women are showing unprecedented levels of confidence in recent industrial disputes, calling for pay rises and equality. Unite has settled over 600 disputes since 2021, helping to put over £300 million into the pockets of workers. Unite is actively promoting women's equality to help build and strengthen the union, as well as employing more women in the union itself. Jane finished by quoting the poem *Dangerous Coats* (see right on next page).

Vicky Knight started by saying that women collectively are terrifying! But our movement is not devoid of misogyny and the atmosphere can be toxic for women. This is a trade union issue that needs to be challenged, requiring education and organisation. A recent NW Unison survey identified the need to develop robust and useful bargaining tools which led to a Toolkit being produced to help workplace negotiation and address the issue of

SANDRA DURKIN AND LIZ PAYNE



CAROLYN SIMPSON



ness of how widespread sexism and misogyny are in the workplace and in the unions. Despite years of campaigning for proportionality in unions and fighting for equality women still have an uphill battle. Having strong networks and knowing sisters in other unions helps women keep going, The NAW was praised for its strong links with women in the trade unions and for developing the Charter for Women which needs to be promoted throughout the movement. The NAW annual conference was an opportunity for women in the movement to share best practice and having stalls at union conferences with good quality information on topics helps to spread the word.

Two motions were passed unanimously calling on the NAW to raise its profile and strengthen trade union links. Finally, thanks were given to Sharon Hutchinson and Unite for hosting the AGM.

male dominance in branches. The Region has developed workplace champions to develop partners in the community including Thompson Solicitors and even working with the police, who have signed up to the Charter for Women.

A lively discussion followed with delegates giving examples of how on-line workshops, model policies on domestic violence, Unite's Get Me Home Safely campaign, had all helped to raise aware-

elections

Vice Presidents: Dame Vera Baird KC; Gloria Mills CBE; Baroness Rita Donagh; Baroness Helena Kennedy and Sarah Woolley.

Officers: President Liz Payne; Secretary Sandra Durkin; Treasurer Carolyn Simpson. **EC:** Mary Davis; Megan Dobney; Siobhan Endean; Bernadette Keaveney; Vicky Knight; Alison Spencer-Scragg and Anita Wright.



a delegate's view



VICKY KNIGHT AND JANE STEWART

MY name is Rachel Wright and I am the Co-Chair of Unison North West Regional Women's Committee. I have been asked to say a few words on my experience attending my first National Assembly of Women meeting.

I was delighted to get the invite to attend this meeting along with my sisters from our union, sisters from Unison North West Regional Women's Committee, our Regional Convenor Joanne Moorcroft, Regional Manager Vicky Knight, our Chair of our International Committee, and other Unison women committee members.

I really did not know what to expect. I knew I would be meeting with lots of women with like-minded views and goals but was unsure how the Assembly worked and how it is structured.

I can honestly speak for all our Unison attendees; we received a huge warm welcome both from established members of the Assembly and Unite representatives. We felt very comfortable and you could clearly see everyone was happy that we were there which was very comforting and we all felt very relaxed in our surroundings.

So, the meeting started, this was the AGM and had a fully structured agenda. The first items of business were completed with not much input from us as this was to agree the elections and minutes of last meeting.

Then we went onto the annual report and brief feedback on accounts. I learned of and could read copies of *Sisters* which there were copies for us to read on the day and also take copies with us. These are fantastic publications, really helpful in fully understanding the kind of work the Assembly works on, the campaigns the Assembly concentrate on delivering and how you organise.

I am blown away on how good these are in particular with the two booklets:

- A history of the first 60 campaigning years of the NAW
- A summary of the NAW campaigning



2012 onwards

To be able to see the historic pictures in the history of the Assembly is so inspiring and the *Sisters* journal front covers are amazing to see.

It is refreshing and inspiring to see NAW history, what this Assembly has achieved since its start in 1952 to focus on all aspects of equality for women all over the world. Fighting for equality, end to racism and sexism, end of world poverty and to be seen and be heard. We are definitely stronger together. Makes me so happy with all trade union women bond together for the same purpose this does make a difference and we do see results of our labour.

We had a great open discussion/panel debate. This was headed by both Unite and Unison leadership, debate included the projects and focus that both unions are delivering on women organising.

Unison's work on tackling domestic abuse was one of the key projects that has been a great success in introducing model policy for all organisations to negotiate with branches and employers plus the domestic abuse champion role that we campaign for all organisations to have to get the best possible support for our members to access. Unite talked about

the schools' programme they deliver and the Get Home Safe campaign they are successfully delivering.

Diversity and succession planning for us all was mentioned. I think we can all agree this is crucial to our women's movement we need more and more women to join together, join the Assembly with particular focus on young women that we can stand with shoulder to shoulder, mentor, work with and build up the confidence and fire inside them to demand what we deserve, women's equality.

Touching on the "Charter for Women" to include visions and goals that include:

Society – end poverty, abortion rights and ideologies that are used to perpetuate women's inequality.

Work – gender pay gap, national minimum wage, affordable child care.

Labour Movement – proportionality, under representation, education.

Women in leadership roles, the Assembly is clearly focused and support women to feel confident and to challenge the trade union structures as to enable us to go further and take on leadership positions within our movement and long may this continue.

Overall, I had a great day at the Assembly, really was empowered to continue to fight for, let's face it, what we all deserve. To be seen and treated no different to men, women's equality all over the world. To build up the confidence of all women to say YES we can do this. When we come together great things can happen. Thank you so much for the invitation to this meeting we all enjoyed the discussion and look forward to seeing you all again.

Solidarity Sisters.

RACHEL WRIGHT IS CO-CHAIR OF UNISON NORTH WEST REGIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

Dangerous Coats

Someone clever once said
 Women were not allowed pockets
 In case they carried leaflets
 To spread sedition
 Which means unrest
 To you & me
 A grandiose word
 For common-sense
 Fairness
 Kindness
 Equality
 So ladies, start sewing
 Dangerous coats
 Made of pockets & sedition.

Sharon Owens

together we rise



UNISON general secretary Christina McAnea gave an impassioned and rallying address to the union's national women's conference in February this year, urging members: "Don't give up in the face of these challenges".

With the union's members involved in a string of pay disputes, across sectors, Ms McAnea noted: "Women are at the heart of the action we're taking now. I've met many of you on the picket lines."

"The right-wing media – and Tory politicians – still like to use the language of the '70s when attacking trade unions. They talk disparagingly about 'trade union barons holding the country to ransom'. Yet again, they're showing just how out of touch they are, as it's women who are fronting so many of our disputes and negotiations. And I don't just mean me. Our lead negotiators across most sectors are women.

"I meet amazing women every day in this job," she added. "Women whose lives have been changed for the better by our union, who then go on to change other people's lives for the better." She said that too often women's achievements and struggles are overlooked.

Ms McAnea reminded delegates of the nursery nurses' strike in Scotland in 2003, which was the biggest strike in Scotland since the miners' strike and was led and planned by the women involved. Their slogan was *We don't just change nappies – we change lives!*

"At the end of it, every single nursery nurse was getting higher pay. One of the leaders was our own Carol Ball – who I met through the strike. She inspired me and many other women to get involved and be active in our union.

"I'm sure many of you in this hall will

have your own story to tell – and will know someone who is just like Carol. And that's what a union ought to do: give everyone the opportunity to learn, to grow, and to lead – if that's what they want to do. That's why it's so important that we support each other and don't give up in the face of these challenges."

In relation to the multiple crises gripping the UK, she said: "For years we've warned successive governments of the urgent need for more investment, planning and change in public services. But they ignored our warnings. And now we find ourselves struggling to make headway in the midst of a perfect storm.

"Across all our public services, the cost-of-living crisis is forcing people to leave jobs they love, because they can get more money working in a supermarket or an Amazon warehouse.

"But conference, this government reckoned without our members. Hasn't it been fantastic on strike days to see a sea of green and purple on our TVs?... Despite the upheaval and the impact on our public services, polls show we still have huge public support for the action we're taking. People aren't taken in by Tory propaganda. They understand our actions are to secure a safer and better future for everyone. And in our critical sectors, our members are still keeping people safe."

Finally, Ms McAnea asked delegates to think about what they wanted the world to look like, 20 or 30 years from now.

"I know what I want to see – a world where the very idea of your being different because you're a woman, or a Black person, or disabled seems strange. I want a world where LGBT+ and trans people can be exactly who they want to

be, without fear of assault and persecution. Where being Black doesn't mean you're more likely to be passed over for promotion or be disciplined at work. And where having a disability isn't a barrier, but a fact of life. Where it's not disabled people who have to adapt, but society and work that have to change.

"I want a union where women leaders become the norm – not the exception. So I'm determined to build on the work we've already started, developing and supporting women leaders – and Black leaders – in our union.

"I want to make sure that women's voices are heard at every level. And we can all play our part in making it happen. There will be no turning back from this. We need to be focused, we need to be bold, we need to be loud, and we will make change happen."

**FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT
WWW.UNISON.ORG.UK**

THE EARLY YEARS STRIKE WHICH LASTED OVER A YEAR FEATURES IN A BBC SCOTLAND DOCUMENTARY WOMEN WHO CHANGED MODERN SCOTLAND AND CAN BE VIEWED ON IPLAYER

unison nw meets the fmc

THE Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) was set up in 1960 after the revolution by the late Vilma Espin, one of the leaders of the Cuban Revolution. The aim of the FMC was to provide equal opportunities in the workplace and education for women, to place women's equality and rights at the centre of the revolution, and to monitor their progress in order to inform future government policy.

I am currently reading a book called – Women in Cuba – 'The making of a Revolution within the Revolution' – which describes the active role that women played in the revolutionary war – including weapons being given to some women rather than men. When a man challenged Fidel why, he replied "they have a better shot than you."

In spring 2023 I took part in a Unison North West delegation to Cuba and was impressed by the number of women in positions of leadership in organisations we met with including trade unions. Following the March 2023 elections, Cuba now has the second highest percentage of women MPs in the world at 55% (the UK has 35%). The majority of doctors, lawyers and judges in Cuba are women, women make up over 50% of health workers on international medical brigades, and women scientists were the majority of those working on Cuba's successful Covid-19 vaccines.

During the delegation we met with Dania Rodriguez, an international officer at the Federation of Cuban Women. Dania told us about Article 44 of the Cuban Constitution which says that the state guarantees women the same opportunities and possibilities as men in order to achieve women's full participation in the development of the country

Dania also told us about the updating of the Family Code. In 1975 the Code was designed to allow Cuban women to share the household duties fairly with their spouses. The Family Code covers marriage, divorce, marital property relationships, recognition of children, obligations for children care, education and adoption.

In September 2022, following public consultation, a new updated Code was passed by referendum to bring the 1975 Family Code into the 21st Century. It places sexual and gender politics, at the centre of the social and political fabric. It covers reproductive rights, domestic violence, children rights, maternity and paternity, and new protections and rights for old age and people with disabilities just to name a few. Same sex marriage and adoption were also legalised.

The Federation of Cuban Women organise and mobilise always looking at ways to improve. Like all organisations that we visited in Cuba, they told us that the biggest challenge they faced was the US blockade which made their work harder and the material conditions for



women in Cuba harder too. It was a privilege to hear and share with them.

During our visit Dania also said she would love to work with the North West Regional Women's Committee to produce a statement of intent and work in partnership with each other and invited us to attend the 4th Summit of the National Conference of Women.

On 2 May, we attended an International Solidarity Conference and I chose to take part in the Women's forum during the event. It was inspirational with women from all over the world speaking, even the USA, it 'put the fire in your belly'.

The woman chair of the forum concluded the meeting saying "we are a nation of carers... we have one single voice... we are united not divided."

It ended with them saying "Viva Cuba (long live Cuba), End the US blockade!"

Then the music started, and we were doing Salsa... it was an amazing experience

If you are reading this article I would encourage you to affiliate to the Cuba Solidarity Campaign and to encourage others to do so too. My work has already started within the North West. It is so important to raise awareness of the great work they do campaigning to end the US blockade. Read more about Women in Cuba at <https://bit.ly/WomenCuba>

And visit www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk to find out more about the blockade and delegations to Cuba.

**BY TERESA CONNALLY
NORTH WEST UNISON**



in conversation with aslihan



LIZ PAYNE IN CONVERSATION WITH ASLIHAN CAKALOGLU OF THE TURKISH WOMEN'S SOLIDARITY COMMITTEES

JUST after the election results came through in Turkey, I caught up with Aslihan Cakaloglu, the International Relations Representative of the Women's Solidarity Committees (WSC), the country's affiliate to the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) and sister organisation of the NAW. It was a great opportunity to ask about the situation of women in Turkey and their relentless struggle for equality and freedom, as well as the significance of the recent vote.

First of all, I asked Aslihan about the experience of women in Turkey during the two decades in which the AKP, Recep Tayyip Erdogan's party, had been in power. This had been, she told me, an era characterised in general by reactionary policies and privatisation of the economy. There had been an attack on the hard-won achievements of women since the republic was established in 1923 and secularism was being eradicated from social and public life.

The most prominent themes of the struggle of women during this period had been against violence and femicide, which had increased with the theocratisation of the state. Other campaigns had included fighting for higher wages for working women to end female poverty and for the right to organise, as well as for measures to prevent girls from prematurely dropping out of school.

The WSC had focussed on the fight for secularism and against the most reactionary conservatism, for nationalisation and against privatisation, connecting these intrinsically with the struggle against violence, exploitation, and inequality in all areas of life.

We moved on to talk about the most

pressing issues for the working-class women of Turkey at the present time. She said that, a century on from the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the intention is to impose a life exclusively made up of home and family on women by 'blessing' family and motherhood. Women's rate of participation in the labour force in Turkey is still very low, with only 26.3% in work. Aslihan noted that if more women were able to work, then precarious and unregulated working conditions would become a major issue, as would wage exploitation, 'donkey-work', and poor physical conditions for women in the workplace.

I then asked whether the outcome of the presidential election would change anything for women (for better or worse). She reminded me that together with the presidential election, parliamentary elections were also held in Turkey. The new parliament is, she said "the most right-wing parliament in the history of our republic". Some members are against the Istanbul Convention and other laws against violence to women; they want to see women only at home as mothers and wives but excluded completely from social life. Some Islamists even see women as objects that should be owned. Aslihan concluded bleakly: "We think that in the process of drafting the new constitution, which has been on the agenda of the government for a while, civil law will be targeted along with secularism, and with its right-wing composition, the new parliament will readily approve the new misogynistic policies".

"So, what will be the most urgent tasks for your organisation in the post-election period?" I asked. The women who do not fit into the AKP's Turkey will have a lot of tasks in the coming period, she said. It seems that the issues of Law No. 6284,

WOMEN GONG TO VOTE IN THE TURKISH ELECTIONS

which is on violence against women, the right to take alimony, forced child marriage, and even the right to coeducation will be on the agenda in the next few months. "We will certainly continue to raise our voices against all anti-secular and reactionary political agendas and discourses, whether they are directly misogynistic or not. It is our most important duty to defend secularism, to defend our achievements, and to move them forward."

I asked about any practical ways in which women in Britain, and the NAW in particular, might support the struggle? Aslihan had no hesitation in responding that "the best way to be a voice for our voice" will be to raise the women's equality struggle in Britain. She stressed that we should listen primarily to the WSC, the organisation of thousands of working women, to find out what is happening in Turkey and warned that we should not be deceived in any way by reactionary legislation masquerading as 'democratic'.

In conclusion Aslihan stressed that women in Turkey have to fight for equality and freedom, and even must defend the very right to live. The capitalist class has already done its best to obscure the meaning of freedom. She concluded by saying: "I think the struggle for equality is very prominent for us today. Remember that there is no freedom without equality!"

sudan – democracy threatened

NAW PRESIDENT LIZ PAYNE EXPLAINS HOW THE CIVIL WAR THREATENS DEMOCRACY IN SUDAN

FOR the people of Sudan, the war that broke out on 15 April between two factions of the military, the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), is a disaster and a tragedy, especially following their great victory in late 2019. At that time, the people poured onto the streets demanding an immediate end to the 30-year dictatorship of Omar Al-Bashir, and a move to civilian rule. Thousands upon thousands turned out, again and again, in the face of the most brutal of crackdowns. Women were at the forefront of those revolutionary forces and their contribution to demonstrations, including under live fire, was legendary, their hopes high for greater equality and justice in a democratic Sudan. After three months, in a ploy by the military to halt the revolution, the dictator was ousted in an army coup, arrested, and incarcerated.

In the immediate aftermath, a transitional power-sharing arrangement between the military and civilians was put in place with the pledge that first the military would be the 'senior partner' and then the civilians. When the time came, however, the army was, as many had foreseen, absolutely unwilling to concede power to a civilian-led government and snatched full control in a coup in October 2021.

Eighteen months down the line, earlier this year, a new agreement for the army to share power with civilians was due to take effect on 11 April. The military again reneged. By then huge divisions had opened up in ruling circles about who would gain the upper hand in government, reflecting the differing interests of the army factions' rich and powerful backers. Within days war had broken out.

The heavy fighting that began in the capital, Khartoum, in mid-April spread rapidly to Darfur in the west of the country, itself the scene of brutal conflict, massacres and other war crimes between 2003 and 2020. Now full-blown civil war threatens to engulf the whole country and spread beyond its borders.

The latest ceasefire, instigated by the US and Saudi Arabia with vested interest only in keeping a government sympathetic to their designs in place, broke down some days ago. Fierce bombardment resumed. Gunmen rule the streets, and the majority of the population are living through a nightmare. Public infrastructure and services have broken down, food is scarce, and many are left without access to medicines and any form of healthcare. More than a million have fled their homes and are internally displaced and hundreds of thousands have left as refugees. As with all wars, events have disproportionately affected women, who are unable to access the very basic necessities for

themselves and their families. They are secure neither at home nor in their neighbourhoods and are at risk of violence whether they stay put or flee.

For the instigators of the war, and their



backers inside and outside Sudan, the stakes are very high. Sudan is of huge geostrategic importance as the third largest country in Africa bordering six neighbouring states, astride the Nile and with a coast on the Red Sea, one of the top five shipping routes in the world. It has wealth of gold and other minerals and huge potential for agricultural and livestock exports. The US, Britain (the former colonial power), and other Western states, not only want to protect their interest in Sudan, which they view as ripe for plunder, but to curtail the foothold of others including China, a huge investor and trading partner. It can be no accident that of the arms Britain sold to Sudan in the decade from 2012 to 2022, 78% were sold in 2022 alone. Westminster then cries crocodile tears for the civilian rule that never happened.

Meanwhile, the warring army factions, true to the colours of dictator Bashir's military enforcers from which both sprang, remain united by one thing. They are absolutely determined that there will be no free and fair elections, no space for democracy and progress, and no possibility for voices calling for justice and equality to be heard. It was in this context that the RSF recently ransacked the Khartoum offices of one of the leading left parties in Sudan, looted its archives and turned the building into a war office. No one who openly speaks out for peace is safe and those who bravely continue the struggle have been forced 'underground'.

In this now very dangerous situation, with the potential of contagion leading to regional conflagration, it is crucial that we demand of our government that they cease to intervene directly or indirectly in Sudan. They must not engage in diplomatic work with any 'side' that seeks continued involvement of the military in the government, neither must they provide them with funds, weapons, or training on any pretext. Westminster must also under no circumstance seek to replace the army with a civilian government of the rich and powerful to do its bidding and that of the US, EU, and other Western allies.

The only acceptable way forward for the women and all the peace-loving people of Sudan who fought so courageously to bring down the dictatorship in 2019 and achieve civilian rule is an immediate cessation of hostilities, the return of all military forces to their barracks and the establishment of a democratically elected government through a free and fair election. This too must not be imposed through any foreign intervention. The process must be entirely in the hands of the democratic forces of Sudan which now, in the most difficult of circumstances, continue to voice their demands, making clear that it is the people of Sudan and they alone who must determine their future. Justice and equality can only come this way.



Saturday 5 August 2023 @ 7pm
 Worley Hall - Wortley,
 South Yorkshire,
 Sheffield S35 7DB

Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Lecture 2023

This year there will be two contributors who will look at the historical and contemporary legacy of Sylvia Pankhurst. Both talks will be illustrated.

Lynda Walker: None so fit to break the chains as those who wear them
 This presentation will explore Sylvia Pankhurst's links with like-minded people, such as James Connolly and others in Ireland.



Wortley Hall accommodation bookings for the night
 ☎ 01142 882 100 or ✉ info@wortleyhall.org.uk

Helen Crickard: Building the Links

To mark the tenth anniversary of the attendance of the delegation from Ireland to the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Lecture, Helen Crickard will talk about the bonds that have been made with Reclaim the Agenda in Belfast and "friends" of Sylvia.

Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee queries
 ☎ 07932 87 38 38 or ✉ megan@gn.apc.org

Sponsors



sylvia pankhurst memorial lecture 2023

To be given by Lynda Walker and Helen Crickard at Wortley Hall on Saturday 5 August at 7pm

<https://sylviapankhurst.gn.apc.org/>

what's on...

NAW Executive Committee meetings are open to all members.

For more information about meetings please contact the Secretary, Sandra Durkin, on naw@sisters.org.uk or at NAW, 72 Beaconsfield Road Coventry CV2 4AR

south yorkshire festival

wortley hall, wortley village S35 7DB
 sunday 6 August 2023 from 11am

The NAW will have our stall as usual at this year's festival at Wortley Hall, the Workers' Stately Home. We are known across the county for our wonderful bargains and socialist banter.

Join us on the day (but don't forget to bring armfuls of good things for us to sell) and then buy them back at renowned value prices!

More info should come up here in due course:
<https://wortleyhall.org.uk/events/south-yorkshire-festival-4/>

diary date: note it now!
 the NAW's annual seminar will be Saturday-Sunday 27-28 January 2024 at the NASUWT's education centre near Birmingham

watch the website for further information
www.sisters.org.uk

join the NAW now!

*I would like to join the NAW. Here is £20 for the annual subscription (£10 unwaged) which includes my subscription to **sisters**, the journal of the NAW.*

Our organisation would like to affiliate to the NAW. Enclosed is: £20 (local organisation/NAW branch), £45 (regional organisation), £60 (national)

Name _____

Address _____

postcode _____

Organisation _____

phone _____

email _____

Send to: Carolyn Simpson, 13 Wren Gardens, Hornchurch RM12 4DT