

AGM calls for pensions protection and proper resources for social work

Members attending this year's AGM on 18th February heard of another busy year for the branch as members were thanked for their action in support of a decent pay settlement. The meeting pledged to defend public sector pensions and to push for proper resources for social work (see more inside). It also donated £200 to Medical Aid for Palestine's Gaza Appeal.

Support for pay review

The AGM directed the branch committee to engage fully with UNISON Scotland's review of the 2008 pay campaign and the preparation of the 2010 pay claim.

"The action we took in August and September last year was successful in getting an improved offer," said Bob Revie, Branch Secretary who paid tribute to the hard work of branch officers, union officials, activists and members. "However, there are always lessons to be learned. We know that whilst

"The action we took in August and September last year was successful in getting an improved offer,"

a great many of our members took action, others did not and we need to look at how we get more members on board.

"We also need to look at how we worked with the other unions, both our partners in the process, the GMB and Unite, and those we need to support our action like the EIS."

Successful action on pay

Members took two days of action in support of the pay campaign in August and September last year, along with colleagues in the GMB and Unite unions.

These days were co-ordinated across Scotland and our branch was fully involved in the strategy and the key decisions of the campaign. In Aberdeenshire there were pickets at the key workplaces and rallies were organised on both days.



Kate Ramsden, Branch Chair said, "At the rallies we had John Keggie, Scottish Organiser, alongside local activists including

Tell us what you think about the AGM and what would make you more likely to attend: fill in the questionnaire enclosed.

Alison Law, Aberdeenshire Homecarer. We were able to give clear messages to the public and in the media to justify our actions and we were able to get public opinion on our side, which helped us to win our case."

As a result, the employers made an improved pay offer over a 2 year period of 3% 2008/9 and 2.5% for this coming year. Members in UNISON voted in a ballot to accept this and the Council paid the increase and back-monies in the December pay packets.





Branch acts to protect our pensions from new attacks

The AGM rejected Tory and Lib Dem attacks on public sector pensions and called for a continued campaign to combat adverse and misleading press information.

It recognised the real risk to our pensions if a Tory Government gets in at the next election and called for all members to be given information on the position of all the political parties on public sector pensions, to allow them to make an informed choice about who to vote for.

"Since the onset of the financial crisis it has been open season on our pensions. But let's be clear, an average local government pensioner gets just £74 per week," said Ian McDonald, Branch Treasurer, and mover of the motion. He told the AGM that these are deferred wages which members contribute to over all their working lives.

"Because our pensions prevent many of us from being dependent on state pensions, we actually save tax payers money,"



"Nor is this about "special treatment" for public sector workers. Any solution should be about levelling up to ensure that all workers get decent

pensions," he added and called on political parties to urge the private sector to face up to their responsibilities by setting up decent pension schemes.

"We must reject accusations that our pensions are unsustainable and unaffordable," said Ian, urging members to think

carefully about how they cast their vote at the next elections.

This motion will now be submitted by the branch to Annual Delegate Conference.

Call for better resources for social work

The meeting threw its weight behind our social work colleagues as the AGM called for UNISON to campaign for greater investment in front-line services, to make sure that social work and social care staff have the time and the resources to practice safely and effectively to protect children.

Proposing the motion, Kate Ramsden, Branch Chair, condemned the attacks on social work by politicians and the media, which failed to recognise all the children protected by social workers every day.

She commended UNISON's support for its social work members and its efforts to highlight the pressures alongside all the good work which is done through the commitment, skills and expertise of social work and social care staff and called on the meeting not only to pass the motion but also to defend social work whenever they hear it criticised



"These attacks take attention away from the real issues for social work of chronic underfunding, poor staffing levels; too high caseloads and excessive bureaucracy; a culture of over-regulation and management cultures which fail to support front-line staff and acknowledge their crucial task of working with intense and complex situations,"

The motion will now be submitted by the branch to the Annual Delegate Conference and Local Government Conference.

Solution for "relief staff" pensions

Susan Hardcastle, a member who is a relief in a social work establishment, raised concerns about the new pension scheme which denies relief staff the opportunity of membership.

Bob confirmed that this is the case but that this did not form part of the negotiations with the trade unions before it was included in the new regulations. However, a solution may be at hand for those staff who are called "relief" but who, in fact,

work regular hours for the council.

UNISON are aware of this situation and have been in discussion with Aberdeenshire Council. The Council have made it clear that they do not want any employee to be disadvantaged by this change in legislation. We understand that the Council are looking to transfer regular workers to either temporary or permanent contracts which will allow them to remain in the Pension Scheme without any loss.

Single status, reviews & challenges for the voluntary sector

In his Annual Report, Bob Revie, Branch Secretary, updated members on the progress of Single Status Appeals. These are due to be concluded by 31st March, but Bob told the meeting that this seems unlikely. "The big group appeals still need to be heard," he said, adding that branch officers have been kept very busy supporting members who have appealed.

Bob told the meeting that modernisation reviews have continued to take up time and energy for both

activists and members and there have been many criticisms of both the process and the outcomes. "We continue to support members going through this process," Bob said.



Our members in the voluntary sector have continued to face challenges and UNISON has continued to campaign for fair pay and fair funding for the voluntary sector. See back page.

School technical review has left members feeling insecure and unsatisfied



A recent survey by the branch of our school technician members has found that the review has left many feeling insecure and frustrated with increased stress in the workplace. Members do not feel that their views

and concerns were taken into account during the consultation process and feel the outcome has been poorly dealt with.

As Aberdeenshire Council begins to implement the review of school technical services the branch is looking at ways to best support our members affected by the review and to encourage more of you to become active in the branch. Tricia Morrison, steward and Health and Safety Officer, and herself a school technician, is taking the lead in this.

Tricia said, "The branch wrote out to all members with a short questionnaire and has now collated the responses. 52% of those surveyed returned the postal questionnaire. Most were able to attend the local meetings.

"However, many were disappointed in the facilitators' level of knowledge of the review process and felt that they were ill-informed and did not give straight answers. Often they did not seem to have the understanding to answer questions adequately which was very frustrating. Members did not feel that they sufficiently understood the jobs that they do and did not care about the impact of the review on staff.

"A number of our members were left feeling very unsatisfied and worried and more than two thirds felt more insecure about their job following the meetings. The comments showed that many did not feel that the views of technical staff and teachers

given as part of the consultation, were taken into account and that the serious concerns raised made no difference to the outcome of the review.

Tricia added, "Members did not feel that their expertise and skills have been recognised and there is a clear sense that many of them feel degraded and devalued by the review process and the outcome. They describe anxiety and stress within the workplace as a result.

"Those on temporary contracts feel especially vulnerable and the way supervisory technicians were dealt with came in for particular criticism. Members were also concerned at the short time-scale for appeals.

"Some were unhappy with the support from UNISON throughout this process and would have welcomed a UNISON presence at each of the meetings.

"That is why we need more of you to become stewards or even contacts. We will provide you with training, support and information to support your colleagues throughout the challenging time ahead. You are the people who know your job best and who are best paced to do this," said Tricia.



The branch will now be taking your comments and feeding them back to management. We will also be using the comments made to help us to give our technician members the best possible support at this difficult time.

If you have queries or comments please contact Tricia Morrison on 01224 620624.

Parliament lobby for community & voluntary sector

A Parliamentary Petition launched by UNISON, UNITE, the STUC, Community Care Providers Scotland and Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations was heard on 17 March. As part of the joint "Fair Funding for the Voluntary Sector" pact, UNISON organised a lobby and other events that day.

Jim Murphy of Inspire said, "During a recession the demand for the services that we provide increases dramatically.

"Cuts in public funding just mean that the Community and Voluntary Sector suffer knock-on cuts to jobs, conditions and services."

Simon Macfarlane, UNISON Regional Organiser,

said, "The Scottish Government's concordat with Cosla has already led to many, many cuts over the last year to projects provided by the community and voluntary sector.

"Redundancies are now occurring on almost a weekly basis and it is typically the lowest paid providing services to the most vulnerable who are affected.

"The continuation of the Council tax freeze will only accelerate this process." "We need to get the message over that our CVS members can no longer be expected to subsidise the provision of public services through poverty wages and inferior conditions."

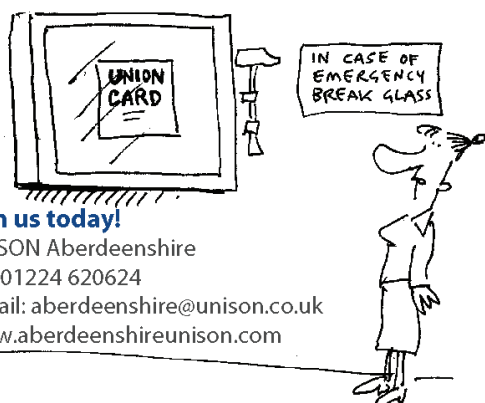
Getting involved in your union

Aberdeenshire Branch of UNISON is growing – we now have almost 3000 members and the vast majority of our members are women. There is always a need for more activists to support the branch and at the moment women are under-represented in our branch team.

Have you every thought about becoming more active in UNISON but don't know much about it? Maybe you don't think you have the skills or are not sure what is involved.

To give our members the opportunity to find out more, the branch has arranged a Pathways into UNISON Course in June this year. The course is aimed at women who want to find out how the union works and explore the many different ways to get involved. Those attending will be entitled to paid time off from their workplace and all expenses will be covered by UNISON.

If you would like more information or are interested in attending please contact Tricia Morrison, Branch Development Officer on 01224 620624 or Lynne Duncan, Organising Assistant on 01224 629995.



Join us today!

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Your chance to win £25

If one girl can eat 100 chocolates in half a minute, and another can eat half as many in twice the length of time. How many chocolates can both girls eat in 15 seconds?

Send your entries with your name and membership number to Unison freepost (AB048)

Congratulations Janet Marchant of Inch you were last times winner and a cheque for £25 is on it's way.

Les says thanks

Our Welfare Officer, Les Chalmers, took seriously unwell with a heart attack at a Welfare Seminar in Bristol two years ago. He was admitted to Bristol Hospital where he remained for over a week.

We are very pleased to report that he made a good recovery, mainly because one of the delegates was a paramedic, David Page, who recognised Les's symptoms right away and took all the right action.

At the Welfare Seminar last year, Les presented David with a trophy as a token of his thanks. "Without David's quick action I probably would not be here today," Les told delegates.

Les also thanked Welfare HQ, especially Janice, Sue Nash from Bristol Health Branch, all the Scottish Regional Delegates, especially Eleanor Haggett, Andy Douglas and Lila Sneddon, Aberdeenshire Branch and everyone else who sent Les their good wishes.