

UNISON Matters

Aberdeenshire

April 2016

EXTRA

FOR MEMBERS IN SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL CARE

Welcome to the first issue of UNISON Matters in Social Work and Social Care. We hope you will find it interesting.

For the past two years the branch has made visits to all the children and families teams across Aberdeenshire. This year, instead of doing that, we have put together this

magazine for all our social work and social care members to bring you up to date with what UNISON is doing locally and at Scottish level to support

social work and social care staff.

Only members will receive this but we would be grateful if you would pass it onto colleagues once you have read it and encourage them to join UNISON. There are details of how to join UNISON on back page. This is very important for their own protection, but also because the more members we have, the more influence we can have in negotiations with the council and our campaigning work.

If you are in a role which is subject to registration with the Scottish Social Service Council (SSSC) it is especially important to be a UNISON member. You can read more on back page about the reasons for this.

We hope you find this magazine helpful. If you would like to know more about the issues highlighted in this magazine or any other social work or social care matters please email Kate Ramsden, Branch Chair on kate.ramsden@aberdeenshire.gov.uk



Family Support Workers

- recognising and valuing their changing role

The branch is supporting our family support worker members in children and families teams to get recognition for the additional responsibilities that many of them have been asked to take on over the past few years. Many family support workers are now required to undertake assessments of various kinds and many also carry caseloads.

Kate Ramsden, Branch Chair said, "Many of our members enjoy their extended role and are happy to undertake these additional responsibilities.

"However UNISON wants to make sure that they are properly supported and trained and that the lines of

accountability are clear. They should also be graded at the right level and paid properly for doing this work.

"We have asked social work management to consider a review of pay and grading for Family Support Workers and to consider establishing two grades of FSW – a main grade and a senior FSW.

"We also want to make sure that there is a clear delineation between what a social worker does and what is expected of a family support worker. We can't have social work on the cheap."





Keeping safe on social media

Did you know that the Social Work service has its own guidance on the use of social media? It sits alongside the Council's Social Media Policy but takes precedence over it. It can be found on Arcadia at: arcadia.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/?p=18517

It is very important that you make yourselves aware of both these policies.

The Social Work guidance covers both texting and social networking. It prohibits staff from communicating with service users through social media and from receiving and imparting information about service users.

This seems very straightforward but it is easy to fall foul of it if you don't have it at the forefront of your mind. After all, when you go on Facebook you are, in effect, going into the public eye and no matter what your privacy settings, your posts can be seen by many more people that you might realise.

The guidance states, *"...even while acting in a personal capacity all social work staff should be aware of the potential of social media to blur the boundary between public and private life. Private communication and information*

posted on line is often open to scrutiny by the public and inappropriate content or language can result in prosecution and/or present risks to their employment."

The branch recommends that you:

- do not identify yourself as a social worker or social care worker on any social media profile.
- think very carefully about what you post to make sure that you are not breaching this guidance.
- should not refer to anything connected with colleagues or clients on your social media posts, even anonymously, because it is possible for people to be identified, particularly if they come from small rural communities.
- are careful what you 'like' or retweet as both these actions can be seen as endorsements or supporting comments made by someone else. Liking or retweeting an inappropriate comment by someone else may be regarded by the Council as being the same as you posting it yourself

Think before you post and keep yourself safe!

Read the full statement at: www.unison-scotland.org/2016/03/15/social-work-in-scotland-2016-on-the-edge/

Bodet and work life balance

Many of our social work members tell us that they are regularly working for free under Bodet as the hours they have worked over their 145 contracted hours are cut back to twenty at the end of each 4 week period.

The Branch has asked Social Work Management to increase the number of flexi days that workers can request in a month from one to two but this has been refused.

We have also asked the service to monitor the number of hours that staff lose – that is, the time worked for free – but they tell us that team managers monitor that on a team by team basis and that there is no overall figure.

UNISON's position is that no one should be losing hours. This is a sign of overwork and it also masks the fact that there are not enough

staff. On a personal level it significantly affects your work life balance and keeping that healthy is extremely important to your physical and mental well-being, especially in the often demanding and stressful environments that social care staff work in.

Our advice to members is that if your hours in credit on Bodet mean that you are likely to lose hours, you should speak to your line manager and ask them to help you to prioritise your work and tell you what not to do or what can wait. Alternatively they may agree to you claiming

TOIL for these additional hours. It is important to get this in writing, however and to make sure you take it. Otherwise it just adds to your pressure.

If this is happening regularly and you are not getting the support of your line manager to deal with it you should come to UNISON and ask for support. It is important to keep a paper trail so we recommend that you set down your concerns and your line manager's response in an email.

The branch continues to raise this matter in meetings with senior management but as members you also need to act to protect yourselves from overwork and seek UNISON's support where necessary.



Supporting homecare members to care for our vulnerable citizens

Our homecare members do a really important job to support our elderly and disabled citizens within their own homes. They are very committed to providing the best possible service to meet their service users' needs. The branch has supported members to raise a number of issues with their management over the past year.

For example, there have been many concerns raised about the "Buddies" which are the phones that all homecarers must use to log their visits to their service users. It has now been agreed that these are not fit for purpose and new phones will be issued to all carers in due course.

In the meantime systems have been put in place to make sure that homecarers are being properly paid for the hours they work. If any members are still having problems, please get in touch.

The council has ended the practice of

banked hours and staff are now being paid for their contracted hours, though a shift system has not yet been implemented. It is early days for this and whilst it has been welcomed by members there are still teething problems.

Again we are urging our homecare members to encourage your colleagues to join UNISON. Homecarers are a group that will have to register with the SSSC by 2017, so having the backing of your trade union will be very important should you be investigated by the SSSC.

Social Work Issues Group – Standing up for social work and social care



UNISON Scotland's Social Work Issues Group (SWIG) meets four times a year and is made up of activists who are also front line social work and social care staff from across Scotland. Kate Ramsden is the branch representative on SWIG.

UNISON is by far the largest union representing most Social Work and Social Care staff in Scotland. We represent Social Workers in all specialisms, residential workers, social care workers, OTs, home care staff and professional, admin and clerical support staff.

UNISON Scotland campaigns actively on a range of issues relevant to our social work members. We have produced a Manifesto for Social Work, and we have taken the lead on issues such as direct payments. We have also issued a Workload Management and Supervision Resource and have recently completed a Guide for Social Work Practitioners, Keeping Safe in the Workplace. You can see these publications and more at www.unison-scotland.org/social-work/

UNISON Scotland responds to consultations on social work matters, and we meet regularly with Scottish Government Ministers and with key civil servants. We have a seat at the Scottish Government's Social Work Forum and have been part of working groups including the Strategic Review Group reviewing the SSSC Codes of Practice.

UNISON Scotland also promotes the important role of our members in social work in the media and we challenge negative press and media reporting. We believe that we have had some success in improving the profile of social work in the media and in promoting a better understanding of the work done by social work members and the pressures faced.

SSSC and importance of being a UNISON member



Over the years UNISON has supported many members who have been investigated by the SSSC. Members think that it can't happen to them, but any one of us could find ourselves subject of investigation by the SSSC.

codes of practice, you will get the support of a Thompson's solicitor at this hearing. It can and has made the difference between continuing in your job and dismissal.

The branch passed a motion at the AGM calling on our members to make their colleagues registered with the SSSC, aware of the importance of being a UNISON member for support and protection and to encourage them to join. We hope that you will do so.

If you are investigated under the disciplinary procedure you must let the SSSC know. If you are charged with even a minor offence, you must let the SSSC know. If a member of the public makes a complaint to the SSSC then they will investigate.

It is very important that you come to UNISON as soon as you are contacted by the SSSC and before you make any response. We have stewards trained to support you and we will also refer you very quickly to our full time officers who are experienced in these matters. We have a Professional Services Unit at national level who will provide advice as necessary.

If you have to attend a conduct hearing, provided you were a member for four weeks at the time of the alleged infringement of your



For more information and assistance contact your local UNISON steward or the branch office on: 01224 620 624 email: aberdeenshire@unison.co.uk