

BRANCH LINES

UNISON West Sussex Branch newsletter • www.unisonwestsussex.org.uk

BRANCH RESPONDS TO SCHOOLS' SOS!

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UNISON
SCHOOLS' SURVEY
RESULTS
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INTRODUCTION



This edition features many hard-hitting local issues. We report on the plight of West Sussex schools in our survey results. On this page you can read about an example of the

direct action we've taken to support our schools-based members. The branch also supported our health service colleagues' campaign by taking part in the 'Save our NHS' demonstration in London. We advise members on our approach to new staff consultation channels being introduced by the County Council's

chief executive, review pay changes for children's social workers, look at prospects for the general election and report back on local college mergers. We also pay respects to our much-missed friend, workplace rep and committee member Mervyn Sams who sadly recently passed away.
Dan Sartin, Branch Secretary



Branch responds to schools' SOS

UNISON West Sussex branch members joined more than 300 parents, school staff and children to take part in a march and rally in Worthing supporting the 'Save Our Schools' (SOS) campaign.

Branch secretary Dan Sartin - who was the speaker at the rally after the march - said the union knew of 56 schools in West Sussex planning redundancies for the academic year and described it as a 'scandal'. He said other schools were not replacing staff who had left and were ending fixed-term contracts

for staff. He added: "Our pupils are below the national average for attainment," which he attributed to 'a direct link between resources in schools and educational attainment'.

To join the campaign, search 'save our schools - west sussex' on Facebook.



SAD NEWS

We're deeply saddened to have to report the death of our friend, colleague and comrade Mervyn Sams.

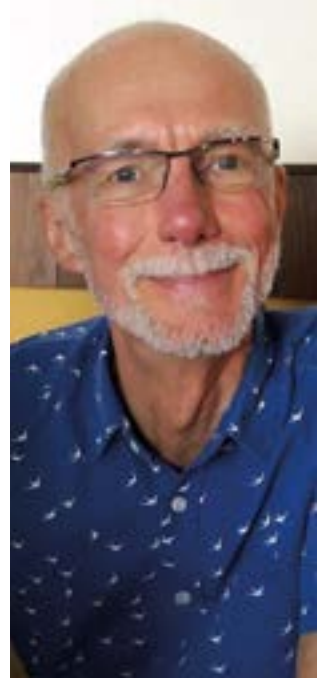
Mervyn was a wonderful man and one of the most active members of the branch committee. He always put others first and was a dedicated union rep, negotiator and caseworker for our Capita members.

Mervyn had dealt with 28 cases since 2009. This is a large number and represents an awful lot of people who benefitted from his kindness, patience, good humour and tirelessness. This is no doubt a considerable under-estimation of the impact Mervyn had, as it excludes

all the individuals Mervyn supported in non-formal settings, the great work he did on collective negotiations and in his education role to make working life better for everyone.

Mervyn was passionate about people and the role the trade union could play in their lives. He really wanted to support his colleagues in his time at WSCC and Capita. We will miss him greatly.

We send our deepest condolences to his wife Dee, his son Matthew and all the Sams family.



GENERAL ELECTION

VOTE FOR PUBLIC SERVICES!

The general election takes place on Thursday 8 June. It's probably never been more important to vote wisely. We urge you to vote for the party you think will value, support and fund public services the best.

A recent survey of councils in England and Wales by the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) found three-quarters had little or no confidence in the sustainability of local government finances.

Councils with responsibility for delivering social care (such as West Sussex County Council) were much more likely to state that the financial squeeze would see a deterioration in the quality of services and cuts would put them in breach of their statutory duties. The impact of local schools' underfunding is described in our feature on pages 6 to 9.

The LGIU found that more than 40% of all councils anticipate making; "cuts in frontline services, which will be evident to the public," rising to 71% among social care authorities. Councils showed little confidence that new measures to alleviate financial pressures would help.

Local government employees have been given a so-called pay rise of 1% at a time when inflation is increasing, food costs more and prices are going up at the petrol pumps. So we strongly urge you to think about voting for public services on 8 June. Those services are your jobs, your families, your future.





Branch helps 'Save our NHS'

On Saturday 4 March a coach of 50 UNISON West Sussex members with their friends and families were a part of an amazing, 250,000-strong demonstration and march through central London.

The march was set up by 'Health Campaigns Together', a group of campaigns which work to keep the NHS fully-funded, prevent its further privatisation and re-nationalise the parts already hived off to privateers.

Speakers at the rally included Jeremy Corbyn and PCS union general secretary Mark Serwotka, who is himself recovering from a life-saving heart transplant operation earlier in the year. UNISON rep and intensive care nurse Jacqui Berry, from Medway Health branch in the South East, helped organise the march and also spoke movingly at the rally.

West Sussex member Mike Hobson attended with his family and took the great pictures for the branch you can see here. Mike said, "Well done to all the organisers. A pleasure to meet everyone."



**"BRILLIANT DAY.
THANKS FOR
ORGANISING. MET
SOME FAB PEOPLE
ON THE BUS!"**

Catherine Arnold

**"ANOTHER GREAT
DAY AND A
BRILLIANT CAUSE
TO SUPPORT."**

Tina Green

Children's social workers' pay to increase



WSCC, like many other local authorities, is facing a major crisis of children's social worker recruitment and retention. As well as having concerns about the impact of this crisis on children's welfare and staff's workloads, there is a huge extra cost to the council as they are forced to use locums. Some local councils are paying more for their staff which exacerbates the problem, as our staff move on if they can be paid more elsewhere.

At the end of April, UNISON signed off with the council a market-related supplement for children's social work grades 9, 10 and 11. Also agreed were new career progression pathways for Grade 10 staff to move to 11 and Grade 12 practice managers to move to 'Hay A'. This latter change has effectively introduced for practice managers the chance to be paid at Hay A, as they were prior to the last restructure. There will also be an incentive payment for locums to take up permanent employment with the council.

Framework

UNISON has agreed with WSCC the framework for that career progression scheme. We have also raised with Annie McIver and her team, the need for a wider look at other factors that impact on recruitment and retention. For example, could WSCC do more around: caseloads; working proper hours with lunch breaks; TOIL and overtime; loyalty bonuses; access to paid study; use of paid sabbaticals? UNISON is in regular discussion with WSCC and bringing these ideas to the table.

Ultimately UNISON agrees that WSCC had to act to sort out its recruitment and

retention issues, and still has a lot more to consider. We appreciate though that this gives little comfort to unqualified social work assistants who receive no recognition of their hard work and loyalty through this scheme, Grade 12 advanced practitioners who will not benefit and Grade 12 practice managers who will not receive a pay rise and may not advance to Hay A. Not to mention occupational therapists or adults' social worker colleagues who will feel less valued.

UNISON will take up the issue of non-base pay incentives with adults' services as much more can be done to make WSCC a better place to work for everybody.

2018-19 Pay Claim

UNISON believes the NJC Pay claim for 2018/19 will be key. All staff at WSCC deserve a long overdue pay rise. We cannot afford to wait until our own particular section of staff is in recruitment crisis! All members must support the 2018/19 pay claim (see page 14), with industrial action if necessary, as this is the only effective way to ensure we are all paid what we are worth.

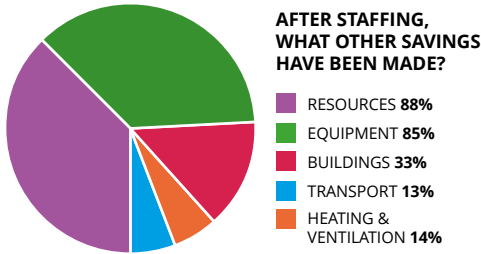
UNISON SCHOOLS' SURVEY

THE WEST SUSSEX FUNDING CRISIS

The funding gap between the national average and the amount given by the government to West Sussex schools is £44m. Ranking 148th out of 151, it is the fourth most poorly funded local authority.

Our 2017 survey aimed to find out the 'grass-roots' impact of the schools funding crisis on our members at the 'coal face'. Here we share our main findings. Though most responses came from UNISON members, almost

40% came from heads, teachers, parents and governors, giving us a more rounded perception of the current state of schools. We asked respondents to tell us the main reasons for their school's restructure. Over 80% said it was financially driven. Not only had this resulted in jobs being lost, but non-staff savings were being introduced as shown left, that inevitably impact on pupil attainment. Perhaps most worrying is the fact that schools are actually cutting spending on things such as heating and ventilation, building maintenance and transport. One of our members told us: "Due to lack of funding there are limited resources and many that are available are very tired and worn."



DIRECT IMPACT

We asked respondents about the direct impact of restructures on them. 78% said they experienced an increased workload, with 65% saying it had lowered morale and 44% telling us it had contributed to stress and health problems. 48% said they had taken on extra responsibilities but mostly without extra pay.

WHAT IMPACT HAS THE RESTRUCTURE HAD?



“Many colleagues openly discuss alternative employment and express dissatisfaction regarding pay and conditions.” (Support staff)

Workloads often increase as a result of vacancies not being filled, resulting in higher stress levels. We do not expect our members to be taking on the work of 2 people to compensate for job losses where that work should have ceased or diminished, as defined in redundancy law.

73% told us their school does not have enough staff to do the work since its restructure (see pie chart opposite)

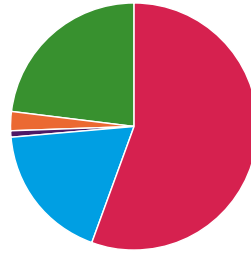
UNISON is extremely concerned about the sudden loss of school support staff, especially as they provide much needed support to the most vulnerable children.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The impact of cuts on educational attainment cannot be underestimated. Almost half (47%) of respondents told us educational outcomes in their school had got worse as a result of its restructure. UNISON has repeatedly made the point over many years of the direct link between cutting jobs, overworking staff and dwindling resources on children's educational outcomes.

“If support staff are used instead of a permanent teacher giving a stable environment for learning, then safeguarding issues can be overlooked.” (Teaching assistant)

In September 2016, only 44% of West Sussex Key Stage 2 youngsters made the grade when it came to reading, writing and maths compared to the national average of 53%. The attainment in writing (60%) fell particularly short of the national average of 74%. Sadly, members also believe children's safeguarding can no longer be guaranteed,



HAS THE NUMBER OF STAFF NEEDED TO DO THE WORK BEEN IMPACTED?

- WORSE 55.75%
- MUCH WORSE 17.7%
- MUCH BETTER 0.88%
- BETTER 2.65%
- NEITHER BETTER OR WORSE 23%

“Everyone is stretched to the limits. In a school of social deprivation we are unable to offer the support to children and their families of previous years.” (West Sussex headteacher)

despite the best efforts of schools. Fewer staff on the ground means greater risk for children in schools. 31% of respondents told us there was an increased risk to safeguarding as a result of restructures.

The impact on children who have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is alarming. 65% of respondents told us SEND provision had got worse since their restructure.

It's a shocking statistic, showing that the most vulnerable are most likely to suffer as a result of funding cuts. Teaching assistants (TAs) are at the forefront of SEND provision. When schools face difficult funding decisions, it's often TAs who are targeted. The long-term social impact of inadequate SEND support should not be underestimated.

“There are now fewer staff to support children with additional needs. This has an impact on all the children we work with, not just those with additional needs.” (Teacher)

UNISON SCHOOLS' SURVEY CONTINUED

HEALTH AND SAFETY

We asked respondents to tell us about the perceived risk to the health and safety of children and staff resulting from a restructure. Over half (51%) told us there was now a greater risk. Combining this feedback with the results of our question on non-staff cuts (see

“There are always going to be increased health and safety risks for everyone involved when class sizes are forced to increase.” (West Sussex parent)

page 6), UNISON West Sussex will be pressing schools for more robust risk assessments of the impact of funding cuts.

RESTRUCTURE MANAGEMENT

**THREE BRIDGES
PRIMARY SCHOOL
CRAWLEY**
is losing
9
FTE support staff

**DURRINGTON
INFANTS AND
JUNIOR SCHOOLS
WORTHING**
are losing
3
FTE teachers and
11.75
FTE support staff.

**WOODLANDS
MEED SPECIAL
SCHOOL
BURGESS HILL**
is losing
8.3
FTE higher level
teaching assistants

UNISON is also concerned about how well restructure processes are managed. There is a perceived worsening of support from the council's central services. There should be good support from management, proper consultation and transparent selection for any alternative roles being offered. However, over a quarter of respondents (27%) told us their restructure was not managed well, with a further 36% telling us it was just 'ok'. Here are three examples of the level of funding cuts being imposed on West Sussex schools. They illustrate the types of staffing cuts being made across the county during the period March to May 2017.

FTE (full-time equivalent) masks the actual number of staff affected, as many roles are part-time.

In total, in West Sussex schools, we know there are at least 15.5 FTE teaching and 81.65 FTE teaching assistant/support staff jobs being lost. UNISON has been supporting members during these restructures. Fifty-six West Sussex schools are taking advice on processes that could result in redundancies now or in the next few months: a shocking figure. This will have a massive impact on both our members and the education our children receive.

HOPE FOR CHANGE?

It's clear from respondents that their main concern is for the children they support. Many school support staff could earn higher salaries in less stressful jobs elsewhere, but they work in schools because they care. Specialist TAs enable disadvantaged children from poorer backgrounds or those with SEND to access education.

It's clear the whole school suffers from cutbacks, not just the most vulnerable children. But there is hope for change. UNISON, complementing the work of campaigns such as 'Worth Less?' and 'Save Our Schools' is fighting for a better local deal for our schools.

SURVEY RESULTS ON THE BBC



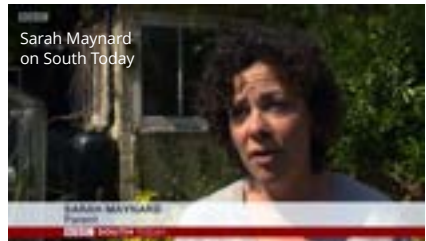
James Ingham (BBC Reporter) on South Today

We received excellent recent media coverage, including an appearance on BBC TV South Today on the evening news bulletins of Thursday 20 April. It's the fourth time the branch has appeared on South Today in less than 2 years. Our work appeared on BBC Radio Sussex and the BBC website. The branch also received extensive coverage in local newspapers across the county.

It is vital that the imminent general election is not limited to discussions about Brexit. Our cherished public services are at breaking point, including most contentiously in schools and the NHS. The branch is doing what it can to ensure ordinary people are

aware of the crisis in schools so they do not vote without that knowledge. It is frightening to think where our key public services will be in another 5 years' time.

One of our UNISON members at risk of redundancy spoke anonymously but movingly about the difference her role makes to vulnerable pupils. Parent Sarah Maynard



Sarah Maynard on South Today

expressed her concerns about how 7FTE support staff redundancies will impact on educational outcomes at her child's school.

The government has just approved 7 new unnecessary free schools in West Sussex and set millions aside for grammar schools; part of the government's ideological approach to education. All at a time when mainstream comprehensive primary and secondary schools are being decimated.



Dan Sartin on South Today

FULL SURVEY RESULTS ARE AVAILABLE ON OUR WEBSITE.

Join UNISON – Membership Form

Please fill in the form and send to UNISON West Sussex,
Central Attic, County Hall, Chichester, PO19 1RQ

1 Tell us about you

Title	First name											
Surname/family name		Date of birth / /										
Home address												
Postcode												
email												
Phone number (please indicate if home, work or mobile)	National insurance number (from your payslip)											
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Please give your ethnic origin: <i>(tick one box)</i>												
<input type="checkbox"/> Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/> Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/> Black African										
<input type="checkbox"/> Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian UK	<input type="checkbox"/> Black UK										
<input type="checkbox"/> Indian	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian other	<input type="checkbox"/> Black other										
	<input type="checkbox"/> Black Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/> White UK										
		<input type="checkbox"/> Irish										
		<input type="checkbox"/> White other										

2 Tell us about your job

Employer's name
Your job title/occupation
Workplace name and address
Postcode
Payroll number (from your payslip)

3 What you will pay each month

Please tick the appropriate box for your earnings before deductions.

Annual pay	▼	Your subscription
Up to £2,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£1.30
£2,001–£5,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£3.50
£5,001–£8,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£5.30
£8,001–£11,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£6.60
£11,001–£14,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£7.85
£14,001–£17,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£9.70
£17,001–£20,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£11.50
£20,001–£25,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£14.00
£25,001–£30,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£17.25
£30,001–£35,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20.30
over £35,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£22.50

4 Choose your political fund

One of the ways UNISON works on your behalf is through political campaigning. Your subscription includes a political fund payment so you won't pay any extra, but in UNISON you choose how you want that money to be used.

Please tick one box only.

- Our Affiliated Political Fund takes UNISON members' views directly into the Labour Party, working to promote UNISON policies.
- The General Political Fund is used to pay for branch, regional and national campaigns but is independent of any political party.

5 Choose how you wish to pay *Please tick ONE box only*

EITHER deduct from salary:

I wish to join UNISON and authorise deduction of subscriptions from my pay by my employer.

Signature

OR pay by direct debit:

please complete the direct debit form below

I wish to join UNISON and authorise deduction of subscriptions by direct debit

Date

Please go to unison.org.uk/privacy-policy to see how we will protect and use your personal information

Instruction to your bank or building society to pay by Direct Debit

Please fill in the form and send to UNISON West Sussex



Name and full postal address of your bank or building society

To: The Manager	Bank/building society
Address	
Postcode	

Name(s) of Account holder(s)

Bank/building society account number

Branch sort code

Service User Number

Reference number (for office use only do not complete)

Please pay UNISON Direct Debits from the account detailed in this Instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this Instruction may remain with UNISON and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my bank/building society.

Signature(s)

Date

Banks and building societies may not accept Direct Debit instructions for some types of account

WSSC Culture Board: why is UNISON not involved?

Last summer a new chief executive arrived at WSSC, Nathan Elvery. This change at the top has provided challenges to UNISON, not least as a new way of looking at the world and trade unions has come to West Sussex.



UNISON has long had a productive, partnership relationship with WSSC. The tone of this relationship is changing. UNISON is no longer viewed as a partner in the way it has been.

'The Big Conversation' intranet forum is being used as a direct line of communication between the senior leadership team and staff. UNISON of course welcomes a close dialogue between a leadership team and its staff. UNISON welcomes the involvement of staff in the development of ideas, to make our teams run more efficiently or to make WSSC a better place to work.

Where we have concerns is when new forums – like the online forum and the Culture Board – become utilised to discuss changes to **terms and conditions**.

UNISON is 'recognised' by WSSC for the purpose of collective bargaining and negotiation on behalf of WSSC staff. If alternative forums are started to initiate that dialogue and negotiation on terms and conditions, UNISON has concerns that the interests of staff may not always be protected as best they might be.

The new Culture Board's membership is handpicked by senior management from

staff who volunteer. UNISON has not been invited and will not be. Yet many staff have not even heard of the Culture Board or 'The Big Conversation', and some simply do not have time to engage in them due to pressure of workloads. So they cannot be representative of staff. The people who attend them will no doubt do their best, but they do not have the training or back-up from a large organisation like UNISON to ensure the best outcomes for all staff are achieved. This would not be a problem, except that the Culture Board is designed to be a sounding board on changes to terms and conditions and the HR policy framework you work within. On top of this, the chief executive plans a review of the ways UNISON is engaged in negotiations, with particular scrutiny of our informal involvement before proposals are firmed up.

UNISON thinks all staff should be wary of these developments. No doubt the next few years will be tough ones: perhaps tougher than ever before. But this does not mean the role of the trade union should be diluted in any way, and nor should your terms and conditions be used to fund the budget shortfall. We will keep you informed as matters develop.

PARKING AND STAFF TRAVEL

Parking has become a thorny issue at WSCC and for good reason. When WSCC closed satellite buildings to place staff in large hubs, it was obvious there would be problems where there is limited parking supply.

There has been a patchwork of solutions to this problem, but broadly these have worked: except in Horsham where there are particular difficulties due to lack of supply. UNISON negotiated a £60,000 investment in Piries Place spaces and a points system for County Hall North. This compared better to the lot of workers from Horsham District Council who were charged by their employer for parking in the same building.

WSCC's new chief executive has responded to the problem by establishing a 'Parking Forum' which



included volunteers who had expressed an interest on 'The Big Conversation' forum. UNISON was to be excluded but we argued strongly for a place on the forum, which was agreed. The remit of this Parking Forum expanded to include staff travel in its entirety. These are your **terms and conditions:** what you are paid and how you are paid for travelling on behalf of WSCC.

UNISON has concerns about this way of developing policy. We await to see firm proposals from WSCC. But UNISON will seek to defend your interests and we have principles we wish to defend – **with your support:**

- No reduction in mileage rates;
- No charging for parking;
- No punitive impact on low-paid staff.



Workplace rep Jo Cooke (pictured here with Dan) won the star raffle prize of a tablet PC.

SUCCESSFUL BRANCH AGM

“It was the most successful AGM for a number of years,” said branch secretary Dan Sartin. “This year we tried a different format with a social event at the end of the final AGM in Chichester. Over 80 people came along.”

Among many compliments received, UNISON members Jackie Hoare, Peter Cooke and Simon Napper said, “Dan and team: thank you for the curry and quiz night. A great event!”

The ‘Rep of the Year’ awards went to Karen Polie, Ian Harvey and Mervyn Sams (see page 3). Nominating Karen, one colleague said, “Karen always responds quickly and offers fantastic support and guidance.”

lan’s colleague said: “lan

has given good advice, helpful feedback and a balanced view.”

The social event followed the main AGM business, giving members an overview of achievements and challenges faced during the past year, together with a summary of future issues the branch is likely to face. One encouraging piece of news is the increase in branch membership (see page 19), testimony to all the hard work put in by branch reps.

NJC Pay Claim 2018/19

The UNISON NJC (National Joint Council) Committee, made up of elected UNISON representatives, recently discussed the draft 2018/19 pay claim.

It is recommending a 5% increase on all NJC pay points and deletion of NJC pay points 6-9. The NJC Committee is formally consulting with branches on the claim. In considering this, the committee took into account the following factors:

- The aspiration of UNISON to achieve the Foundation Living Wage at the lowest pay point;
- The ongoing decline in our members' pay: worse than for any other workforce in the public sector. Pay is lower compared to other public sector groups throughout the NJC pay spine;
- Unprecedented cuts in local government funding and increased pressure on schools;
- The immense pressure our members are under with ever increasing workloads, deteriorating terms and conditions and persistent job insecurity;
- The compression at the lower end of the NJC pay spine, which is over-riding job evaluated differentials and the need to maintain the differentials which might emerge from the pay spine review; and
- The need for a simple claim which is easy for members to understand. It should be seen as realistic and have credibility with members.

UNISON West Sussex Branch Committee discussed the claim and responded to the national UNISON consultation deadline of 26 May, using member feedback.



SCHOOL UNIFORM GRANTS: APPLY NOW!

UNISON's 2017 school uniform grants programme is now available.

Families on low incomes can struggle to make ends meet, especially just before the start of the new school year in September. UNISON's scheme helps members on low incomes deal with the cost of school uniforms.

One-off grants are available to low-paid UNISON members of £40 per child up to a maximum of £120.

You will be eligible if you are either on housing benefit or have a total net household income of £18,000 or less.

On our website page you will find an application form and a question and answer sheet with more details about who is eligible for the grants, the value of each grant and other important information.

Please read the Q&A sheet before you download, print-off and complete the application form. Make sure UNISON receives your application by 21 July 2017.

Go to the following web page for more information: unisonwestsussex.org.uk/news/school-uniform-grants-2017

IPEH changes: UNISON supports members



Over 500 staff working in prevention and early help (IPEH) services for children and families were re-organised by WSCC for April.

Although redundancies were not sought (because vacancies had been frozen for months prior to the changes), this was still a major restructure exercise because many staff were asked to take on new roles, sometimes at different rates of pay and in different locations.

When such restructures happen it can feel a bit like a massive jigsaw has been thrown up in the air. When it falls back down it is not always the case that all the pieces can be made to fit back together, even if redundancies are not planned. Staff have rights in these situations, and UNISON provided some intensive and timely

“I am pleased to say that my hub base has been changed to X which I am really relieved about. Thank you so much for your help.”

Member affected by IPEH

support to its members at the ‘business end’ of the consultation.

Some members did not feel the roles they had been offered were ‘reasonable alternatives’ and actually preferred to take a redundancy package. Other members had the same issues about roles and agreed to undertake

trial periods. Some other members had particular child care needs which could not be made to fit around new working patterns or locations. UNISON reps were on hand to ensure that, with the right advice and support, alternative offers were put on the table by WSCC.

There is no doubt this support avoided a number of redundancies or claims for unfair dismissal. Members who love their jobs and rely on them for their family’s income were able to continue to work for WSCC when the situation had appeared impossible to resolve at the outset. This shows the value of UNISON membership at critical times at work.



REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS REVIEW

UNISON has been raising concerns about reasonable adjustments (measures employers must put in place to permit staff with disabilities to work effectively) processes for some time, as have council managers.

This has led to a substantial piece of work by HR to review the process to improve it for which we congratulate the council’s HR staff. The review has not yet been implemented but we’re hopeful this will go a long way to supporting disabled staff more effectively. More details next time.

Maternity changes

The branch has helped the council change its approach to redundancy policy for those on maternity leave.

Prior to this, if managers decided to restructure their service, resulting in redundancies, any woman taking maternity leave at that time would be subject to the same selection process as any other member of staff. They would



be competing for suitable new roles – where available – in the new structure.

One of our members approached us asking for advice, as she had previously been subjected to such a process in her previous service. She was now facing a repeat of this when pregnant with her second child and was stressed by the thought of having to go through this again.

We discovered case law relating to similar circumstances, resulting in a change to employment law. It stated that if a service decides to restructure when a member of staff is on maternity leave, then that woman should automatically be given a suitable post without having to go through a selection process.

A woman on maternity leave can only be made redundant from a restructure when no suitable posts are available. The change in law is to protect women at a vulnerable and stressful time of life.

After being challenged by the branch on this point, the council realised an error had been made and changed its approach. Our member was hugely relieved at the positive impact this had on her.

GRANT SUCCESSSES FOR LOCAL MEMBERS

UNISON West Sussex members have successfully bid for a range of grants either to help reach learning targets, achieve Open University qualifications or support them when times are tough.

Two teaching assistants were awarded £200 and £100 to help pay for courses on primary practice and becoming a higher-level teaching assistant. One of our members based in learning was also awarded £100 to help towards payment for a course

focusing on issues around bereaved children.

Another member was awarded over £400 from the union's welfare service 'There for You' to help with mortgage payments.

These grants – and others – are available to any UNISON member, subject to meeting

relevant criteria. If you're looking for contributions towards learning courses, find out if the union can contribute to your fees. Go to our website and search 'learning grants.'

If you're struggling to make ends meet, UNISON can help with one-off welfare grants through its 'There for You' service. Go to our website and go to 'Get Help' then 'At Home' and 'There for You'.



TRADE DISPUTE

FIELD PLACE INFANTS SCHOOL

At time of going to press the branch has lodged a formal trade dispute with Field Place Infants School in Worthing.

UNISON understands very well the nature of the funding crisis facing our schools but we cannot accept, and crucially nor do our members, restructures which are unfair at heart and disadvantage part-time workers.

Many of our learning support assistant members are being told to spread their part-time hours over five working days, regardless of the impact on their other work and caring commitments or their health or personal disability. At the same time, the school is removing 6 full time equivalent learning support roles, which leads also to concerns about workloads.

The branch will work hard to get a resolution with the school but will run a consultative ballot of our members for industrial action if required. UNISON has a great rep at Field Place and a high membership 'density'.

MEMBERSHIP FEES DURING MATERNITY LEAVE

If you choose to take the full 12-month maternity leave allowance, you may well have several weeks towards the end of this period where you receive neither statutory nor occupational maternity leave payments.

For the period of unpaid maternity leave, you do not have to pay any UNISON membership fees. However, you must tell us in advance of any periods where you will be unpaid and your return-to-work date so your fees can be reinstated. It's important you do this so your membership doesn't lapse. Please don't assume information is sent directly to us from payroll services as it's not part of their duties.

If you've chosen to pay us by direct debit, tell us when your unpaid leave starts so we can suspend the debit for you. In some cases we may have to ask you to complete a new mandate on your return.

Sometimes women returning to work opt to work permanently fewer hours. Your membership fees must be lowered to reflect your new rate of pay. Please tell us when you change your working hours and your new gross annual salary as this won't happen automatically.

If your pay reduced when you were on maternity leave and you wish to apply for any fee overpayment refund, you'll need to provide us with copies of payslips for your whole maternity leave period.

If in doubt, please contact the UNISON office for advice: 01243 777636 or office. unison@westsussex.gov.uk

Local FE college mergers update

Our rep Karen Fisher reports of an ‘inauspicious beginning’ at Northbrook College, Worthing.

“The Greater Brighton Metropolitan College (‘The Met’ - formerly Northbrook and Brighton City Colleges) was launched on 31 March, with seemingly all focus on Brighton. To be fair, it’s early days. However, one of the first things senior managers did was to award themselves a pay increase of between 1.7% and 14%. When asked about a pay-rise for the rest of the staff we were told ‘hopefully by 2020 if financially viable!’

“I raised the issue at our regular joint consultative committee (JCC) and successfully answered queries from the finance director regarding pay figures we had provided. With members of the college union UCU, I’m now meeting with the chief executive to put our case forward. We want to see the pay-rise plan for everyone else.

“I’ve also leafleted most Northbrook staff which has successfully helped recruit several new members. I’ve never known such a positive response from the local workforce, but all indications are for difficult times ahead.”



Northbrook isn’t the only local college where major change is taking place. The merger of Chichester and Central Sussex Colleges will go ahead for the new academic year. The principal designate is agreed to be Shelagh Legrave from Chichester College (CC). The branch will be pleased to work with Shelagh as the relationship with CC has always been very good. UNISON will work to support members and defend your interests. Recruitment events are planned to boost UNISON’s membership, so please look out for those.



HIGHER EDUCATION PAY OFFER

Higher education employers have made a ‘full and final’ offer on pay for academic year 2017-18 (starting September 2017), following the conclusion of pay negotiations.

The pay offer gives extra increases to the lower paid, between 1.7% and 2.4% up to pay point 16.

All staff above point 16 will receive 1.7%. The lowest pay point (spinal column point 2) will receive the highest increase, which will equate to the living wage rate of £8.45 an hour for those working a 35-hour week.

Joint work between the employers and the trade unions on the gender pay gap and zero-hour contracts will continue.

The employer’s offer will be discussed at the next meeting of the higher education service group executive. We will report back via our website.

Overpayments

The branch has continued to support members who have been overpaid because of administrative or other errors in calculating their pay.



This can happen in any employer, but there is no doubt that Capita's management of WSCC's payroll has required improvement for some time. UNISON has had to get involved in a great many overpayment situations.

In some of these, where an error can be shown to be Capita's fault, and

there is hardship likely to result to our members, UNISON can seek to have the overpayment waived. This has happened on two recent occasions for UNISON members. Others cases are in the pipeline.

The branch has also supported a member with a grievance. She was a social worker who was told she

had been overpaid. A sum was immediately reclaimed from her wages without negotiation, with more to follow. There should always be negotiation with you prior to an overpayment being reclaimed as to simply take the money back can put you into unnecessary financial difficulty. UNISON got involved to support the member's grievance. This was investigated and it turned out that WSCC owed the member money – not the other way around! The grievance was upheld and the member received a full apology and was paid back what she was owed.

It is always worth talking to your UNISON rep if you are told you have been overpaid. UNISON membership can save you hundreds or even thousands of pounds at times like these.

MEMBERSHIP IS ON THE UP!

We're delighted to report that membership of UNISON West Sussex is at its highest level ever, with a total number of 5,375 full members plus 608 retired members.

It's a full-member increase of 3.95% on our 2012 membership numbers, with significant numbers recently joining from schools. This is in spite of fewer employees now working at the council and other employers.

Branch secretary Dan Sartin said: "This tells us



our branch is doing relatively well, but we are not resting on our laurels. We think our membership is stable because we are a good, well-organised branch which works hard to defend our members and their interests at work. The more members we have, the more we can achieve for you."



CAPITA CONTRACT

Which way forward?

There is no doubt that when WSCC outsourced 600 staff in 2012 to Capita, things could not be said to have gone to plan.

In 2015 the branch commissioned external research into the Capita contract about service quality and the treatment of staff and this put evidence on the table. This in part led to a 'contract reset' process. This took a lot of time and effort and was due to commence from April 2016. But with the arrival of a new chief executive at WSCC in the summer of 2016, this was put on hold to allow both parties more time for consideration.

The contract reset was suspended, in favour of an 'action plan'. This action plan is due to take effect soon.

UNISON is determined to ensure that Capita's West Sussex staff are placed at the heart of any solutions to be found in the action plan. If they are looked after, and given the right support framework and tools to work with, services will prosper.

UNISON believes it is only right to look at insourcing individual services back to WSCC, and this should happen if it is the best thing for the service and staff. Insourcing should be looked at as a credible option all the time and for all services.

The branch will be in touch with Capita members again this summer. We want your views on how UNISON can best protect your interests at work as we enter the latest phase of the contract's 10-year life.

COME AND MEET US!

Branch officers will be holding a series of drop-in events around County Council offices in early June.

If you're an existing member, please come and chat to us about current workplace issues. Encourage your colleagues to come and join us! We look forward to seeing you from 10am to 3pm at:

Chichester Monday 5 June
The Martlets, County Hall.

Horsham Tuesday 6 June
canteen, County Hall North.

Worthing Wednesday 7 June
canteen, Centenary House.

Bognor Regis Friday 9 June
canteen, Durban House.

Crawley Monday 12 June
Crawley Library, meeting room 2.

WORK IN EIE? UNISON NEEDS YOU!

UNISON currently has vacancies for reps working in highways and waste on our Joint Consultative Committee in Economy, Infrastructure and Environment (WSCC).

Established in August 2016, this forum has proved to be a very useful space for UNISON reps and service managers to discuss organisational change and other arising matters. The directorate is in transition, with structural change likely across most services, so now is a good time to get involved.

If you work in highways or waste and would like to be a UNISON rep on the committee then please contact us at office.unison@westsussex.gov.uk