

BRANCH LINES

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



UNISON JOINS HOUSING CUTS PROTEST AT COUNTY HALL

Charities supporting homeless at risk • SEE PAGE 15

PRP AND INCREMENTS LATEST

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A very happy new year to all our members. It's branch committee elections and AGMs in the next

few weeks: always a busy time for the branch. Please

do your best to attend one of our AGMs – they are an important part of our democratic process. You can see committee nominations for branch officer posts on pages 4 and 5. We also highlight the difficult changes being proposed on pay: council management

of NJC year 2 payments; the latest on performance related pay (PRP) and increments; and retention payments. Changes as fundamental to staff as these show it's never been a better time to join the union.

Dan Sartin,
Branch Secretary



Branch AGMs will take place around the county at the end of March. There will be three, short AGM sessions consisting of half hour business reports and annual elections to the branch committee, then questions to the branch secretary, treasurer and other committee members

Two take place from 1 to 2pm as follows:

- **Wednesday 27 March**
Conference Room 4,
Centenary House,
Durrington Lane,
Worthing, BN13 2QB
- **Thursday 28 March**
Cowdray Room, County
Hall North/Parkside,
Park Street, Horsham,
RH12 1XH

Followed by:

- **Friday 29 March**
Martlets Restaurant,
County Hall,
Chichester, PO19 1RQ:
5.00pm-9.00pm.

The quiz and curry night immediately follows the shortened AGM in Chichester, with free dinner and wine for all members. There will also be a free raffle with some great prizes.

All members from any employer (and retired members) are welcome at any of our AGMs. We'd love to see you there. There are only 80 places available at the quiz and curry night in Chichester, so you must book your place or quiz team's places via www.unisonwestsussex.org.uk as soon as possible.

ARE YOUR CONTACT DETAILS CORRECT?

Is the information we hold about you up to date and correct?

Please tell us about any change in the personal information we hold about you such as your email and postal addresses, workplace and salary level.

It is particularly important that the branch has an up-to-date email address for you, and that we have your permission to use it!

If in doubt, or to tell us if there are any changes to your personal details, call the branch office on 01243 777636 or email office@unisonwestsussex.gov.uk

PAY AND INCREMENTS AT WSCC

UNISON members will recall WSCC's Chief Executive (CEX) wrote to all staff in March 2018 to say that from April 2019 incremental progression would be dependent on performance-assessment. In August 2018 consultation on a local pay offer for HAY/SMG4/AfC managers was launched which would link pay rises and increments to performance.

UNISON advised members in the local pay group to reject the proposals.

Members followed this advice because a **majority of staff rejected** the CEX's pay offer. We only know this because the CEX has told managers in a letter: there has been no transparency of how staff voted. Nor has UNISON – or individual staff – received a response to the detailed points they raised in the consultation. This includes there being no response on 2 key matters:

1. **Evidence:** not a scrap of evidence has been provided to explain how linking cost of living pay awards and increments to appraisals will improve motivation or morale. This is probably because such evidence does not exist, and the changes are predicated on the 'gut instinct' of one or two individuals.
2. **Equalities:** there has been no Equality Impact Assessment carried out, to check the proposals would not lead to or worsen discrimination at the council. This is despite

the focus the CEX has put on the equalities Staff Groups over the past two years.

When responding to the consultation, the CEX confirmed the pay award for the local group would be 2% after all for 2018-19 (which had been agreed with UNISON in May), and not the 1% offered in August.

The CEX admitted in his letter to staff that there was clear opposition to linking pay and increments to appraisals. But then the same letter states that having listened to staff, the council still intends to implement a system of performance-related pay at the council!

Many members have told us this confirmed their feelings that the council is good at saying it is listening, but is actually fast-losing the ability to listen to staff and act upon their concerns.

UNISON has seen a **huge growth in membership** within the managers' group. We have used this membership growth to lodge a request for **voluntary recognition** of UNISON for

these managers' pay awards and related-matters, to clear up any confusion on our status.

What next?

There is a clear intention to implement a pay system whereby pay and increments are linked to appraisal outcomes. This is the case for HAY/SMG4/AfC staff and there are likely to be similar ambitions for NJC staff. The CEX referred without detail to pockets of performance challenges at the council, which he presumably believes can be dealt with by withholding pay.

The council is now embarking on a plan to improve its appraisal process as this must be made fit for purpose. Senior managers have been engaged on this, and there is an intention to roll out discussions on appraisals to team meetings.

But the detailed proposals of what will happen are not yet clear. Only the principles for pay and reward for the local pay managers' group have been confirmed, though this has been done without listening to them. Despite the communication to all staff in March 2018, it does not appear that incremental progression can be linked to appraisal for NJC members in time for April 2019.

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Recognition

After our request, the CEX wants to check that staff in the local pay groups want to be represented by UNISON on pay matters. This means that soon in 2019 there will be a communication to HAY/SMG4/AfC staff. We need UNISON members and staff in the local pay group to **confirm they do want the council to recognise UNISON**. Please watch out for this in the new year.

UNISON wants to take this opportunity to reassure **ALL** members that these damaging proposals are our top priority for 2019. When they are firmed up, we will return to our members for a clear steer from you.

THANK YOU

“Thank you so much for your valuable time yesterday and for the advice you were able to give. Thank you also for your good wishes. It is people like you it has been a pleasure to work with within the organisation over the years.”

Branch Officers

The branch committee has nominated:



Branch Chair
Ian Harvey



Branch Vice-Chair
Sarah Cawston



Equalities Officer (Women)
Vacant



Equalities Officer (BME)
Anusree Biswas-Sasidharan



Health & Safety Officer (1)
Karen Daubney



Health & Safety Officer (2)
Carla Hardy



Environmental Officer
Julie Bolton



Young Members' Officer
Chloe Pascovitch

Officers for 2019/20 elections

Presented the following members to serve as branch officers in 2019/20.



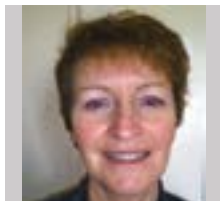
Branch Secretary
Dan Sartin



Deputy Branch Secretary
Karen Daubney



Branch Treasurer
Jennie Barrett



Pensions Officer
Judith Taylor



Equalities Officer (Disability)
Heather Andersson



Equalities Officer (LGBT)
Paul Woodcock



Welfare Officer
Stuart Gibbons



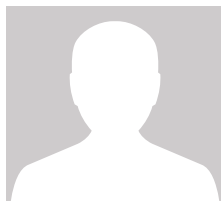
Retired Members
Secretary
**Jennifer Gudgeon
/ Margaret Guest**



Labour Link Officer
Samuel Theodoridi



International Officer
Vacant



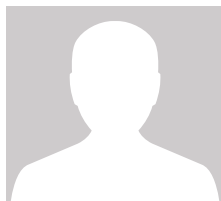
Communications Officer
Vacant



Education Co-ordinator
Briony Stilliard



Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator
Briony Stilliard



Membership Officer
Vacant

As part of the union's democratic process, nomination forms for any of these positions are available from the branch office. The annual election process for workplace representatives has also started. The nomination period for all positions ends at 12 noon on Friday 25 January.

If you are interested in taking on any role, please contact the branch secretary to find out more or request a nomination form.

If you would like to get more involved with the branch, as a committee member or workplace rep, now is the time!

RETENTION PAYMENTS

WSSC has been trying for some time to address a recruitment and retention crisis in some of its children's social work teams. This led in 2017 to the introduction of a market-related supplement to lift up children's social worker pay. There have also been other initiatives discussed to try to give greater stability to the workforce. UNISON's children's social care reps contributed a list of 38 different ideas to management in July 2018.

5 separate 'retention payments'

In November, WSSC considered its recruitment and retention crisis had got so severe it introduced a scheme to pay 5 separate 'retention payments' of £3,000 to social workers in certain children's teams. UNISON was greatly concerned about the way this was communicated.

We raised 27 different points with management at our November meeting with them. For example:

- The email did not explain the rationale and evidence for the payments leading to greater staff upset;
- The conditions for receiving the £3K were not set out. These are extensive, but it looked like the cash was 'without strings';
- The email did not mention that non-eligible staff could move teams in order to receive a payment;
- The email did not mention there will be an annual review of teams eligible, and of making the payments overall.

An undertaking was given to send out a further



communication to staff, which happened.

Serious concerns

UNISON retains serious concerns though about the payments and how they have been rolled out.

- Staff not receiving the payment feel that they are not valued;
- There are likely to be unintended consequences in worsening retention rates in non-prioritised teams;
- Staff being managed through a **formal process** (e.g. sickness) will have their payment withheld. This could be unfair if the sickness is related to disability or stress caused by work;
- Eligibility for the payment will be **subject to performance** being at

an 'appropriate' level as determined via appraisal and supervision. This is highly subjective, and introduces a form of arbitrary, performance-related pay.

We are advising members eligible who are denied a payment to get in touch with the branch office for advice and support. We will monitor the impact of the retention payments on other teams, and are taking up direct concerns for particular teams.

We are also asking the council to prioritise work on other forms of retention initiatives (e.g. career breaks, paid sabbaticals, flexible working) to improve the experience at work for all children's services staff.

NJC PAY YEAR 2 UPDATE

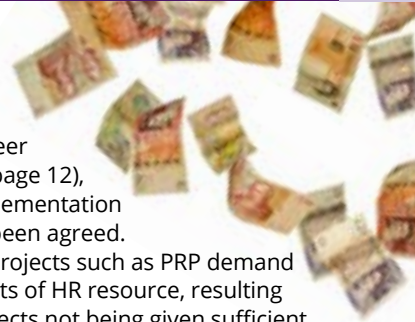
Following our report in the last edition of Branch Lines, we can confirm that talks between WSCC HR and UNISON West Sussex concerning the year 2 (2019-20) payment of the NJC pay settlement took place during December.

At time of going to press, no agreements have been reached concerning the implementation of the complex year 2 pay awards. We believe it is symptomatic of the wider problem of 'initiative overload' across the council, as was identified by the LGA in

the recent peer review (see page 12), that the implementation has not yet been agreed.

Massive projects such as PRP demand huge amounts of HR resource, resulting in other projects not being given sufficient attention. The council really must prioritise its initiatives to make sure that those impacting on large numbers of staff (such as NJC pay) are not marginalised.

UNISON will ensure the NJC year 2 implementation is tested for 'equal pay' issues.



PENSION ADMIN SERVICE UPDATE

WSCC's LGPS pension admin service will transfer from Capita to Hampshire County Council on 4 March 2019, with TUPE transfers for staff expected on that date.

We expect some redundancies (but can't yet confirm) as the service is transferring to Winchester from Chichester. UNISON will be fully supporting members to get the best outcome and making sure redundancy payments are made where applicable.

Members directly impacted by the TUPE should first approach the designated UNISON workplace reps for the service: Ian Harvey and/ or Sandra Armstrong.

Capita has asked its employees (including UNISON members) to also elect a 'staff rep'. This is not in the UNISON/Capita

recognition agreement and is poor HR practice in a number of respects. UNISON is the only recognised trade union for Capita staff. UNISON reps are fully trained and experienced in collective negotiations – randomly appointed 'staff reps' are not. This could have negative implications for staff during negotiations. The branch is taking advice on the matter from its national secretary for private companies.

For LGPS pension members there should be no change in admin provision during the transfer phase,

with improvements expected from March.

However, pensions admin staff will be under more pressure until then as many are leaving largely because working from Winchester is simply not an option. This puts more pressure on those who remain as Capita is then forced to hire more agency staff to address the deficit.

Should members needing LGPS admin support experience any problems, please use the escalation route UNISON put in place with Capita, directly linked from our website home page.



Membership Form

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

We use this address to send you information core to your membership such as your membership pack, UNISON election information and any information relating to ballots if relevant

We use this to contact you about trade union activities and services

This information helps us find the best UNISON branch to support and represent your needs

This information helps your employer and us confirm your identity

Your subscription rate is determined by how much you earn

1 Tell us about you

Title	First name	
Last name		
Home address		
		Postcode
Email		
Phone		Date of birth

2 Tell us about your job

Employer's name	
Your job title or occupation	
Workplace name and address	
	Postcode
Payroll number	NI number

3 What you will pay each month

Please tick the appropriate box for your earnings before deductions

Annual pay	Core subscription	£14,001 – £17,000	£9.70	<input type="checkbox"/>
£0,000 – £2,000	£1.30	£17,001 – £20,000	£11.50	<input type="checkbox"/>
£2,001 – £5,000	£3.50	£20,001 – £25,000	£14.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
£5,001 – £8,000	£5.30	£25,001 – £30,000	£17.25	<input type="checkbox"/>
£8,001 – £11,000	£6.60	£30,001 – £35,000	£20.30	<input type="checkbox"/>
£11,001 – £14,000	£7.85	£35,001 – and over	£22.50	<input type="checkbox"/>

Instruction to deduct the subscription from my salary

By signing the below I wish to join UNISON and authorise deduction of subscriptions from my pay by my employer

Signature	Date
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This information tells us whether you wish to contribute an additional 5% toward UNISON's campaign fund. This voluntary contribution will be taken annually in October as a single deduction by Direct Debit. Further information is available at www.unison.org.uk/changes

This information is standard direct debit mandate information

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

We are legally required to keep your information up to date. You can amend your details via My UNISON at www.unison.org.uk/my-unison

Email Text Phone

By ticking these boxes, you are giving your consent for UNISON to contact you by these means about how we campaign on your behalf.

4 Campaign fund contribution

UNISON stands up for its members and speaks out publicly on the issues that affect them. To continue this work we ask for a voluntary 5% campaign contribution by Direct Debit when you join. Please tick your preference below:

Campaign Fund

The campaign fund promotes better public services, enables the union to talk with politicians of any party about the work our members do and supports the union's equalities work.

UNISON Labour Link

Labour Link campaigns for UNISON policy on the NHS, your employment rights and for quality public services within the Labour Party locally and in Parliament.

No thank you

I do not wish to contribute to campaigning at the moment. Those who choose not to opt in will not be disadvantaged in any way as compared with members who do opt in.

If you selected 'No thank you' – by ticking this box you are giving consent for UNISON to contact you in future about our campaign funds. We will do this using the contact details you provided on this form.

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



To the manager bank / building society

Address

Postcode

Name(s) of account holder(s)

Account number

Branch sort code

Office use only

Service user no.

Office use only

Membership number

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

Date

LABOUR LINK

LABOUR'S PLANS TO TRANSFORM WORKERS' RIGHTS



The Labour party is planning the biggest extension of individual and collective rights the country has ever seen, based on trade union principles. It would include policies addressing the gig economy, restoring trade union rights, equality, industrial democracy, developing government's role in the labour market and to deal with skills and investment.

Shadow chancellor John McDonnell said, "We want to transform the working world so that everyone, regardless of their background, has the right to a healthy work-life balance, family time and personal development."

Labour would 'properly resource' HMRC, the government department responsible for enforcing statutory rights like the minimum wage. Employers who break the rules would be fined. HMRC would work alongside the TUC to close legal loopholes.

Zero-hours contracts would be banned, guaranteeing all workers a number of hours work per week and a clamp down on bogus self-employment. All workers would receive full rights such as sick pay, maternity rights and rights against unfair dismissal from day one of employment. A real living wage of £10 an hour would be introduced.

Labour would repeal the 2016 Trade Union Act, guaranteeing unions the right to access workplaces, requiring companies securing public contracts to recognise a union representing their workers and promoting collective bargaining. It would also introduce secure online workplace balloting for industrial action votes.

PfIs would be brought back into public ownership, with workforce representatives forming part of the future management structure.

The Labour Party's plans to transform workers' rights represent the best chance in a generation to restore a fair balance between working people and their bosses.

TOWARDS A 4-DAY WEEK

John McDonnell, the Labour shadow chancellor, is in discussions with economist Lord Skidelsky about an independent inquiry into cutting the working week, possibly from the traditional five days to four.

McDonnell has suggested the party could include a pledge to reduce the traditional working week by a day in its manifesto for the next election.

The idea was floated during the Labour conference in September.

Labour insiders say that people work too many long hours while workers in France and Germany produce more than their British counterparts, despite working shorter weeks. In fact France recently made it illegal to expect workers to answer emails out of hours.

The EU working time directive sets a limit of 48 working hours a week. Britain is the only EU member that allows workers to opt out of this and work longer hours, a practice that trade unions have argued has been subject to "widespread abuse".

CHANGE OF WORKPLACE DRESS CODE POLICY?

We recently supported one of our members in a school through a dispute where the employer changed its dress code policy which could have compromised our member's ability to work due to their hair colour and tattoos.

To help other members facing a similar situation, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) has updated its dress code guidelines. This follows a nationally publicised case involving women being asked to wear stiletto heels in the workplace.

Any dress code should be non-discriminatory and should equally apply to both men and women. Any dress code should not be stricter, or lead to a detriment, for one gender over the other.

Often an employer will introduce a dress code for health and safety reasons,

for example health care workers may not be allowed to wear jewellery when around patients for safety reasons.

Regarding religious dress within policies: employers should tread cautiously in this area as they should allow groups or individual employees to wear articles of clothing etc that manifest their religious faith. Employers will need to justify the reasons for banning such items. Any restriction should be connected to a real business or safety requirement and be non-discriminatory.

For more information contact the branch.

100-DAY PLAN – WHAT'S NEXT?

In the last edition of Branch Lines we reported on the 100-day plan for Adults' Services, following the County Council's peer review. That plan was to last from July to October 2018. Has it been successful? What happens now?

According to a paper recently presented to the council's health and social care select committee, significant progress has been made on a number of issues, but there is a need for some work to continue beyond the timescale of the 100-day plan.

Supporting the peer review findings, the service believes it needs a long-term structured programme of improvement,

underpinned by a vision and strategy. A framework for this, together with a proposed three-year improvement programme went out to public consultation, with responses required by mid-December. The programme had to take into account other council change projects, to make sure they were aligned. It consisted of four cross-cutting sub-programmes, all requiring intensive analysis.



There is also a requirement to work more closely with health services: the County Council has not moved as quickly on this as other local authorities.

Once the consultation feedback has been analysed and reported back to committee, we will share the main findings and service implications with our members.



WINTER FUEL GRANTS 2018-19

UNISON's grants of up to £60 per household are available to help members in low-income households.

To be eligible you must:

- have paid 4 weeks' union subscriptions before 3 December 2018;
- have a total net annual household income of £18,000 or less;
- not have more than £800 in savings (including your partner and rolling bank balance);
- not have received financial assistance from UNISON 'There for You' during the previous six months (excluding School Uniform Grant).

To apply:

- Print out, complete and post the application form from our website home page; or
- Contact UNISON Direct on 0800 0857 857 for a postal form

Please send all requested paperwork with the form or the application cannot be accepted. Applications must be received by 15 February 2019. We would encourage all eligible members to take part.

Please see the branch website for more information.

PEER REVIEW HIGHLIGHTS TRADE UNION RELATIONSHIPS

The recent County Council peer review, conducted by members of the Local Government Association (LGA), has highlighted many areas of concern. It also reinforced many of the issues the branch has been campaigning on for many months, often against substantial resistance.

One of the LGA's key findings stated: 'Ensure emerging People Strategy is fit for purpose – take trade unions and staff with you.'

We believe the unions clearly have not been 'taken with' the council for the past few years. Many of the previous formal channels we enjoyed where views could be exchanged fairly and frankly have been removed, such as the staff joint committee. Others supportive of staff – like the staff appeals panel – are no longer available. Overall, we believe our access to councillors and senior staff is not as open as it has been in the past, even though new communication mechanisms have been introduced.

A sad reflection though it is, we're pleased the LGA recognised that 'staff morale is low' as this confirms our own concerns. They recommended 'engaging and empowering staff – invest and trust them rather than using external advisers', which again supports one of the main issues we have been campaigning on for years: use of consultants.

The LGA reported: 'be clear on what matters most and focus on that – avoid initiative overload.' Their point was further reinforced when they stated there is 'priority overload – everything is a 'work in progress'.'

UNISON agrees – too much is being taken on, often without evidence, meaning that a lot of things are done badly or not completed, rather than a few done well.

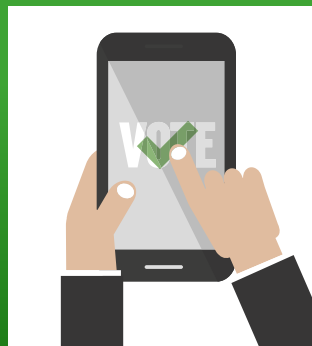
CONSULTATIVE BALLOT OF SCHOOLS' MEMBERS

A national consultative e-ballot of UNISON schools' members (similar to those being run by the NEU, ASCL and NAHT) will take place from 22 January 2019.

It will ask members about job losses, increased workload and rising stress for staff resulting from government underfunding, and will include a question on whether members are prepared to take strike action.

This could lead to a formal industrial action ballot, depending on the result and turnout. It's important UNISON gets as high a turnout as possible.

The employment issues members face are linked to cuts in funding, which is why we are conducting this ballot. We have email addresses for the majority of school support staff members, but we are missing some. The national union will ensure there are mechanisms in place so all appropriate members can vote. However, you will find it much easier to vote if we have your email address as we will be



able to send you a direct link to the ballot questions. You should add your email address to your membership record before the ballot opens. Please do this at 'MyUNISON' via our website or contact the branch direct. We have posted information on the branch Facebook page. Please 'like' us to receive the latest updates.

SCHOOLS' FORUM BLOCKS COUNCIL'S FUNDING PROPOSALS

UNISON rep and schools' forum (SF) member Keith Manville reports on the serious state of schools' funding, especially in the high needs block.

"In December, SF voted against the council's proposal to transfer £2.3m from the schools' block funding to the high needs block as well as denying the request to transfer £0.4m from early years funding, supporting an earlier request from headteachers.

"It's just 'robbing Peter to pay Paul': councillors want to use direct support grant (DSG) reserves to prop up high needs funding with no credible long-term solution.

"It's disappointing to be in the same position as last year, but we will be in danger of an even worse

situation next year, with no further progress made and no reserves to rely on.

"An increasing number of schools will have deficit budgets, with some forced to consider closing or reducing provision."

Both UNISON and SF teaching reps clearly made the point to Richard Burrett (WSCC cabinet member for education) that this was not a viable strategy to address funding issues. These are a result of a political decisions about services and cuts: the lack of funding is the inevitable outcome. We will meet again in January to discuss the council's response and proposals.

A NEW ATTITUDE TO VIOLENCE AT WORK

Tim Halpin, UNISON steward at the Grace Eyre Foundation (GEF: supporting adults with learning difficulties) supported a member through the grievance process which resulted in more rigorous use of existing procedures so observations from staff have more influence.

Staff complaints about pushing and shoving by service users with complex needs are easily dismissed as part of the job, but that ignores the message from the service user as well as the impact on staff.

Tim said: "Sarah was being grabbed and hit while driving the minibus. After reporting it without a satisfactory



Tim Halpin

response, Sarah asked for support and was advised to speak to managers again, making them aware UNISON was involved. This resulted in an agreement to have

experienced escort staff on the bus. When this was not implemented, we initiated the grievance process. A senior manager listened as Sarah explained how GEF's policies were not followed and how risk assessments were inadequate without staff input.

"The resulting eleven-point action plan included retraining for managers and agreement that staff can call a meeting with relevant people to deal with areas of concern. Management thanked Sarah for the positive impact she made."

GDPR: WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) raised many issues across our employers, but especially in West Sussex maintained schools. Branch negotiations officer Brian Walter takes up the story.



Brian Walter

"Prior to GDPR, county schools had a nominated person responsible for data management in their school. This would usually be the bursar or business manager. However, with GDPR being both a collective and individual responsibility, the scope of data management widened considerably.

"Several members contacted us to clarify where they now stood because they felt existing grades did not accurately reflect the increased responsibility.

"A couple of members helped gather the evidence we needed to support our case, allowing us to present robust evidence to WSCC HR so the extra responsibility of 'GDPR manager' could be correctly evaluated.

"Our reps and the branch office worked successfully together with the council's HR service to produce a fully evaluated role description. This was sent out to members who had contacted us for their approval.

"I'm pleased to say the job evaluation process produced a fair assessment of the extra responsibilities involved. Our work now is to make sure all those members affected by this are told about the re-evaluation and take steps to get their role profiles changed accordingly.

"But this was a good outcome reflecting effective partnership working between the union and the council."

COUNCIL CUTTING SUPPORT FOR THE HOMELESS



UNISON West Sussex took part in recent protests at County Hall against 100% funding cuts being proposed by the County Council to housing-related support services.

Southdown, the not-for-profit organisation delivering the council's homelessness prevention partnership service, is strongly opposed to these cuts. It claims thousands of vulnerable people will be left at risk of homelessness if they go ahead.

Michael Jones, Labour county councillor for Southgate & Gossops Green (Crawley) said: "While the Tory leadership has been ruthlessly cutting back frontline services, at the same time they have been lavishly

spending millions of pounds of taxpayers' money on consultants, including £4.6 million on PriceWaterhouseCoopers conducting a 'transformation of services' review for the Chief Executive.

"It makes me furious that in a week where they refused to guarantee the funding that will protect people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, there is still room to pay for things like this."

The council is also planning to hit another vulnerable group of people with their proposal to charge an additional £5.28 per week to working age people who receive social care support. The Aldingbourne Trust charity said: "This is in effect an increased care tax on people who need social care."

CHRISTMAS LEAVE SUCCESS

UNISON welcomed WSCC's granting of Monday 24 December as an extra day's leave as staff more than deserved an extra day's rest.

This was a sensible and pragmatic decision by the Chief Executive given the state of staff morale.

But it was UNISON West Sussex that first made the request, which wasn't made clear in the council's communication to staff. This is a shame as the council should be prouder of its partnership working with its main trade union.

Branch rep Gerard Robson, (Worthing

community adult social work team), raised the issue with the branch secretary who took the request to the Chief Executive.

The decision was confirmed in November. It shows how our branch works, and what we can achieve for members. If you've an idea to improve work at WSCC, why not become a rep yourself, and use our established mechanisms to further it? Many thanks go to Gerard!

UNISON reps also persuaded Capita to follow suit. Capita initially intended to only allow staff scheduled to work on Christmas Eve to have an extra day off, not everyone. Therefore, part-time staff not due to work on Monday would not benefit. Capita rep Ian Harvey spoke to Capita. They quickly agreed to change their position so all staff could enjoy the same time off as WSCC.

BRANCH WELFARE OFFICER

Health and social care commissioning manager Stuart Gibbons has been branch welfare officer for a couple of years.



Stuart Gibbons

"Prior to my current job I'd always worked with front-line housing and homelessness services, involving direct contact with vulnerable people in very difficult circumstances.

"My welfare officer role allows me to draw on that experience, using my knowledge and expertise to help members who are struggling.

"A recent complex local case involved me helping someone with unsuitable social housing, workplace disability needs not being met (partly causing long-term sickness absence), financial difficulties and relationship problems: the perfect storm!

Using UNISON's wide range of 'There for You' welfare services, I was able to draw-on several sources of support to help our member turn their life around such as:

- Rescheduling debts and payments using the National Debtline Service, supported by UNISON;
- Arranging a UNISON winter fuel payment;
- Providing access to the union's 'Turn To Us' website which details any benefits available, taking into account your circumstances;
- Introducing reasonable workplace adjustments for regular hospital appointments;

- Obtaining additional priority for more suitable social housing through the local authority;
- A UNISON grant for removal expenses (the union's 'gold star' service actually made the move);
- Arranged a local assistance grant from WSCC to help buy furniture and white goods.

"This is an exceptional case, but it really does illustrate the support the union can provide when times get tough."

For more information look under 'Get Help' on the branch website.

BRANCH MEMBERSHIP AT HIGHEST EVER!

UNISON West Sussex is celebrating a significant milestone: branch membership is at its highest ever! This is against a challenging background where staffing numbers have markedly decreased across its countywide public sector employers.

At the end of December, branch membership totalled 6,091 including 14 unemployed members and 632 retired members.

"This is a remarkable achievement," said branch secretary Dan Sartin. "I believe it's a result of tireless campaigning by

the branch and reps, a reaction to poor management decisions across local employers and a growing recognition of the hard work union officers and reps do to support colleagues during tough times."

The branch's success is also mirrored nationally, where UNISON has just become Britain's biggest trade union (recently overtaking Unite) with over 1.3m members.