

# BRANCH LINES

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## UNISON'S 2020 PAY CLAIM SUBMITTED

We want 10% pay  
rise, more leave and  
shorter working week.

SEE PAGE 2

**WSCC  
OFSTED AND HMI  
REPORTS: OUR  
RESPONSE**

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In this edition we tackle some of the major issues facing members at WSSC and other employers. We share the details of UNISON's NJC pay claim below and

explain the problems we've faced supporting members' local pay awards. There's a summary of our response to the council's poor statutory inspection results in both children's and fire & rescue services, and a report on the council's disciplinary processes and their delays.

We outline our concerns for the new probation policy and share the positive role we've had in supporting job evaluation for further education members. I hope you enjoy this issue.

**Dan Sartin,**  
*Branch Secretary*

# UNISON'S 2020 NJC PAY CLAIM PROPOSAL SUBMITTED

**UNISON NJC (national joint committee) reps met in the summer to consider feedback on its recommendation for the 2020/21 NJC pay claim.**

The committee had consulted members via branches on the following proposal:

- 10% pay rise or £10 per hour minimum hourly rate on all pay points, whichever is greater;
- an extra day's annual leave;
- a two-hour reduction in the standard working week; and
- a comprehensive joint national review of the workplace causes of stress and mental health throughout local authorities.

There was 94% support for the committee's recommendation (81% in West Sussex), so it was taken forward by UNISON.

**Is the claim affordable?**

Councils have suffered cuts of nearly 50% since

2010. Funding for this pay rise must come from central government and it must be new money.

The claim must not be funded through councils further cutting employees' conditions of employment.

The government says there is no magic money tree and yet they have found:

- approximately £4.2bn to spend on no-deal Brexit preparations since 2016 (£1.5bn of it in the 2018-19 tax year alone);
- approximately £1bn of new funding for Northern Ireland because of the government's supply and confidence arrangement with the DUP;
- PM Johnson has already pledged tax cuts for those earning over £80,000 a year plus changes to national insurance and



- stamp duty – costing approximately £23bn;
- he's also pledged to increase spending on education and policing costing over £2bn (though this would only go some way to reversing government cuts made over the last decade).

Clearly there is money available, but it is a political choice made by the government on how and where to spend it.

Thanks go to members in the West Sussex branch who completed our pay consultation survey on the claim. These are early days for the claim, but we'll keep members up to date with progress on negotiations.

# LOCAL PAY UPDATE



**Members on local pay at WSCC (HAY, AfC/public health and SMG4 contracts) will recall the debacle of the 2018-19 pay process and how UNISON played an important role in the eventual offer of a sensible pay award.**

UNISON was on the cusp of running a consultation exercise with all staff, on behalf of the union and the council, to establish consent for UNISON taking on collective bargaining for all staff for pay in future when permission for this was pulled at the eleventh hour by the chief executive. He claimed UNISON was no longer acting in a spirit of “partnership, openness and transparency” following concerns we had raised about the council’s handling of its Ofsted inspection. We have kept members informed throughout via our website.

The offer for 2019-20 from WSCC was therefore not managed through collective bargaining, but was – with the 2018-19 process in mind – a reasonable offer for which UNISON recommended acceptance. 99% of members agreed to accept the offer, and 96% agreed UNISON should push for statutory recognition so that UNISON could use legal routes available to take on the collective bargaining role for future years.

When UNISON raised the prospect of using the statutory recognition process, we were told by the chief executive that doing so could have consequences for UNISON members in other ways, as the

way the union is involved in council bargaining and negotiation could be degraded. UNISON has had to take this threat seriously. The branch is taking advice from our national office.

We are also discussing a new, wider ‘recognition and facility time agreement’ with the council, which could, if agreed, resolve the issue of local pay bargaining positively. However, there are a number of sticking points in negotiations so far, which make it unclear whether agreement can be reached. If it cannot, UNISON will have an important decision to take – with our members – on whether we use the statutory route.

The current situation we can assure members reflects only on the unique circumstances at West Sussex. Other councils do not face these quandaries and obstacles. We are working as hard as we can to overcome them, but the negotiating terrain is uniquely difficult here. We believe however that UNISON has played a key role in securing a 4% pay increase without links to performance over these past two years. We will keep members informed of next steps and seek input to related decision-making.

# CHILDREN'S OFSTED INSPECTION – LATEST

**UNISON is raising issues for members with the acting director of children's services John Readman at our monthly meetings.**

UNISON is monitoring which of these are being addressed and will escalate accordingly:

- UNISON wishes to see a 'wellbeing' strand to the improvement plan, drawing from the council's recent wellbeing survey;
- that there should also be a focus on non-qualified staff and efforts to retain and motivate them;
  - we re-raised the prospect of career pathways for CFWs (child and family workers) from Grade 7, through 8 and 9. UNISON first raised this with Annie MacIver and in response CFWs were promised action on this, but nothing has happened;
  - we raised the issue of family aides and their

moving to CFW roles;

- we raised the prospect of increase apprenticeship and in-house social work training;
- despite improvements in recruitment and retention, not all teams are benefitting equally from this and we have raised this for teams who are struggling with major vacancy gaps;
- IPEH (integrated prevention and early help) is still awaiting firm proposals and the uncertainty is causing stress and anxiety.

## **Retention payments**

UNISON continues to have unaddressed concerns:

- it was wrong to change

- the conditions of the retention payments after most staff had signed up to them, in respect of what is owed and over what period if you voluntarily reduce your hours, and this should be reviewed;
- we requested individual repayment plans to be negotiated, when staff have to leave through unexpected circumstances, rather than staff being placed in a dangerous position of having no wages at all in their last three months of employment;
  - we raised issues of the lack of parking permits for some new staff in Horsham and asked this be resolved;
  - we asked for a review of the suggested position that staff not signing up to retention payments

# UNISON AT FRS SELECT COMMITTEE

**The council's fire & rescue service (FRS) has been rated by her majesty's inspectorate (HMI) as 'requires improvement' in 2 of 3 key areas ('effectiveness' and 'efficiency'), and as 'inadequate' in the third – 'people'.**

It was the only FRS to be judged so poorly in this latter category in the whole country. As HMI said:

"We have concerns about the performance of West Sussex FRS in keeping people safe and secure. It

is inadequate in the way it protects the public through fire regulation and in the way it ensures fairness and promotes diversity."

Branch secretary Dan Sartin spoke to councillors at the FRS select committee

about the poor HMI report and the corporate-wide issues causing problems for all WSCC services, not just FRS.

Dan expanded on the following themes which the HMI inspection had picked up on:

- failure to listen to staff (or trade unions);
- staff disconnect from the council's values

could be stripped of their free parking;

- we asked that staff not signing up for the payments not be quizzed in a personal and intrusive way as to why they were not. We have been unable to secure management's agreement to stop this so if you are affected please get in touch.

### Interest-free loans

UNISON has raised concerns about the creation of a new disciplinary offence of staff missing loan repayments. We have concerns that staff on zero pay (most commonly because they are on maternity leave) could get caught up in this.

### Increments

Members are clear that incremental progression linked to performance in April 2020 would be flawed and should be reviewed:

- surrounding systems are not up to scratch: HR,

IT (lateness of laptops), mileage, excessive time spent resolving support issues;

- WSCC pushing ahead with this will perpetuate a loss of trust between staff and management;
- managers do not wish to be responsible for pay cuts of staff, and are very concerned about the counter-productive impact it will have on relationships within teams. Managers prefer the carrot, not the stick in line with social work values;
- members are considering how a boycott of the part of the appraisal process which links it to incremental progression would work and are seeking UNISON advice and support.

### Leadership and culture

Members want a change of leadership approach and culture; they cite a lack of

direction within the service.

- lifelong services as a project has run out of steam, and is destabilising for no apparent purpose;
- the long-awaited training package for foster carers is delayed;
- members say change is expected at the bottom – but there is little evidence of change at the top or of the top taking their share of responsibility and making the long-term strategic changes that are required;
- the improvement plan is missing the links between the service and wider council which hold it back i.e. wider budget cuts, the corporate culture, support services.

If you have feedback for us, please contact your rep who will feedback to the team who meet with John Readman.

and culture;

- problems with equalities and the employer's approach to this;
- bullying (at an executive level);
- appraisals (and the linking of pay to performance).

Dan also spoke about:

- u-turns on cuts to prevention services (within FRS and children's services IPEH);
- excessive cuts and undervaluing of admin support.

You can view Dan's evidence to the select committee by visiting the branch website, as there is a link to the video. UNISON and the FBU pulled no punches.

As a result, both unions were invited to meet with the leader of the council, Louise Goldsmith on a regular basis.

The service is now within a period of close scrutiny during which it is expected to improve. Dan and the UNISON FRS rep

(Lyndsay Pink) are on the improvement board. This is welcome, but in itself is inconsistent to the council's wider approach to UNISON which has sought to reduce areas of engagement to legal minimums.

UNISON is working hard to represent members working in the FRS but also in the wider council in the hope that common corporate-wide issues will be picked up and addressed.

# £28MILLION CUTS AT WSCC

**The County Council is reporting a huge budget gap of £75.5m over the next 4 years, with the worst being next year: 2020-21 has a projected shortfall of £28m.**

In our view, this is caused primarily by the government’s austerity policy, but the position has been exacerbated in West Sussex by the costly and ideologically driven council tax freezes of a few years ago, combined with continued high expenditure on consultants, agency workers and executive pay.

### **Executive pay**

In July, the Chichester Observer reported that top salaries were ‘effectively out of control’ at WSCC with:

- the number of officers paid £100,000 or more increased from 16 to 21 in a year;
- redundancies and departures costing taxpayers more than £6m over last two years; and
- six staff members receiving a combined £58,068 in expense allowances in 2018/19.

UNISON regional officer Caroline Fife commented at the time, “Expenses packages for the highest paid have increased by a third since last year. We are upset to see these increases at the top whilst the services our members work in supporting vulnerable people are struggling,

under threat of cuts or being stopped altogether.”

### **Services at risk**

The council produced a list of services they were considering to reduce to meet the shortfall, which went public in July. These will have a direct impact on UNISON members working in those services. Many will impact on them and their families who will see a reduction in the availability of public services or an increase in charges. Here are just five examples:

1. review community hubs library offer (this represents the first significant reduction in a previously relatively-protected service);
2. reduce local assistance network (eye-catching as it represents the total withdrawal of a service);
3. reduce the number of household waste recycling sites;

4. reduce post-16 support service;
5. review in-house residential and day care services.

### **Chief exec’s apology**

Staff were not informed in advance, which caught out a number of managers and upset staff. The chief executive Nathan Elvery apologised to all staff and offered reassurances that no decisions had yet been taken by the council.

UNISON will keep members informed and work with community campaigners to highlight the damage any further cuts will do to the public, service users and our members who deliver the services. For the full list of services at risk please go to the ‘News’ section of the branch website.



# UNISON'S LEGAL SUPPORT



As well as providing legal support with employment tribunals and settlements, UNISON's legal team Thompsons also support members with other types of legal claim.

Our branch often has members receiving our legal support to settle industrial injury claims arising from their work. But not only that, our legal team will support you with claims which arise **outside** the workplace.

One such claim was for a branch member who had a car accident in 2015.

The other side's insurers refused to settle the claim. UNISON supported our member. The claim took a long time to settle, but has been done so now with our member receiving £20,000 in compensation for the injuries sustained in the accident.

## WORKPLACE INJURIES, COMPENSATION AND ALLOWANCES

**If you're unfortunate enough to receive a workplace injury, UNISON can guide you through the various routes to benefits and support that may be available to you.**

If your capacity to work is impaired by injury or you're unable to work at all, there are various channels we can use to negotiate the best support packages for your case.

The industrial injuries allowance (IIA) provides financial assistance depending on the severity of the injury. It can give you an income when you can no longer be gainfully employed, when you're on long-term sick leave or when your sick pay runs out. There are various 'tiers' of IIA, depending on the injury involved and the resulting level of disability. Awards are negotiated with your employer and must be supported by detailed and

relevant medical evidence. A yearly allowance of over £10k until retirement age, with periodic reviews, has recently been awarded to a West Sussex member.

There is also the opportunity to make a personal injury (PI) claim. These are managed by UNISON's solicitors Thompsons. Again, they rely on substantial medical evidence to be successful, but in many cases, this can be provided by qualified medical practitioners.

One member received a workplace injury resulting in not being able to work. Thompsons took on the case and successfully negotiated an award over £30k. This doesn't make up

for the extent of injuries, but it makes life that bit easier to manage. It's likely this would not have been awarded without UNISON intervention.

Ill-health retirement (IHR) is often a keenly disputed area, but if any member feels they should have been awarded this and were not, there is the opportunity to lodge an appeal, should further medical evidence become available.

Being injured at work is not something most of us would consider, but if you are injured, it's good to know the union will be by your side to champion your case.

For more information contact the branch office or go to the UNISON Direct helpline 0800 0 857 857.

# EXECUTIVE TURNOVER

**UNISON is increasingly worried about high executive turnover rates at WSCC and the impact this is having on staff and service delivery. Despite excellent rates of pay and relocation packages, the council does not seem to be able to hold onto its executive leaders.**

UNISON has gone public with our concerns, raising them with councillors at the fire service select committee (see page 4). Branch secretary Dan Sartin outlined the five grievances about bullying the branch has supported at a senior level, which is a number unheard of. This has led to a meeting with the leader of the council, Louise Goldsmith.

It is clear that the much heralded 'culture' of the council leaves a lot to be desired for some staff. UNISON is continuing to raise our concerns and to support individuals working at this level who experience bullying.

If you experience bullying and harassment in the workplace, please contact the branch office for advice.



## “ THANK YOU ”

**“Thank you for all your help and support over the restructuring and academisation, which as you know is now not going ahead. It seems to me we had a very narrow escape there!”**

**“Just a quick email to say we think you and x did a fantastic job with your speeches at select committee yesterday. You both complemented each other brilliantly. Let’s hope they actually listen to what’s been said now! Thanks so much for giving us a voice.”**

**“This is the best result for me all round, to say I’m ecstatic is an understatement. I want to thank you for all your support and help with everything.”**

**“I’m satisfied – and thrilled – that it’s now resolved! Thank you so much for all your help and perseverance with this.”**





## PROBATION CHANGES AT WSCC

**The County Council has changed its approach to probation for new employees, and UNISON does not agree to the changes or believe that they will help staff.**

WSCC has always had a probation period, though it is not called that. In the first 12 months of employment, all new staff were monitored for performance and could be performance-managed through the existing capability processes, exactly like other staff. More so, in that new staff could enter capability at a higher second-stage if necessary.

Despite this option being available, performance management is not used as much as you would think. And UNISON has a long-record of supporting members through such processes successfully. When staff have less than two-years' employment history, they are vulnerable as they have no recourse to tribunal unless they are discriminated against. UNISON is therefore concerned that introducing a standard six-months' probation period could lead to a situation where staff are 'let go' much more easily by WSCC. WSCC HR has also said that the process will be more streamlined for terminating employment.

With more speed comes greater risk of unfairness and discrimination. However, an equality impact assessment was not undertaken by WSCC for these changes. This is of concern to UNISON and likely the staff groups, given this is an issue of primary importance to

staff with protected characteristics (i.e. disability, race and so on).

There is no reference to performance expectations being relative to the length of time new staff have been within the role; nor of the reality that new staff often do not have all the resources (e.g. IT systems) they need to be successful at the start of their employment. How will these realities sit alongside performance expectations?

The removal of staff's right to access the staff appeals panel is a retrograde step and creates a two-tier system at the council, undervaluing new starters and exposing them to even greater risk of unfair or discriminatory dismissal. This appears at odds to the 'one team' approach.

UNISON believes the new probation policy reflects changes to the 'culture' of the organisation where performance is increasingly seen as a problem of individual staff rather than connected to resource and governance issues, which are the responsibility of the council's executive and political leaders.

**It is incredibly important that new starters at the council join UNISON immediately they arrive. Please help us spread the word.**

# 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](http://www.unison.org.uk/changes)

This information is standard direct debit mandate information

Please go to [unison.org.uk/privacy-policy](http://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](http://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	Office use only
Service user no.	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
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Banks and building societies may not accept Direct Debit instructions for some types of account

# DISCIPLINARY ACTION AND THE IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

**As reported in our last issue, WSCC is consulting UNISON on merging three of its most important policies (sickness, disciplinary and capability) into one single policy.**

UNISON is very concerned about this as we believe there will be considerable scope for staff to understand less well the processes they are being subject to. We also said in the last issue that we had concerns about the way the disciplinary policy was being used by the council in practice. This included concerns about delays resolving cases and the impact this has on staff after several worrying reports from members who had been suspended for a very long time without progression in their cases.

It is still the case that discussions are taking place with UNISON on disciplinary practice and the single formal action policy, after a hiatus of some months.

Meanwhile, a freedom of information request to the council to find out how efficiently its disciplinary processes worked during 2018-19 revealed some worrying trends.

1. There were 58 disciplinary cases in total but only 7 (12%) were resolved within 28 days;

2. Of 51 disciplinary cases not completed within 28 days, the average length of the process was 5 months.

For those staff waiting 5 months or more for their case to be concluded, it begs the question: how many of them were suspended on full pay from the public purse because the council was unable to expedite their cases? Not only is taxpayers' money being used in this way, but the impact on staff mental health is often totally unacceptable.

## MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT

One such case involved a UNISON member who went through the disciplinary, grievance and capability processes. They were also on long-term sickness absence due to the stress primarily caused by the council's poor handling of these procedures.

Our member had been suspended for a whole year. There was no proper welfare contact from the council. Our member could not return to work after the verdict because they had

been made mentally unwell by the experience. This was reinforced by doctor's notes to the council explaining the impact of the seemingly endless suspension on our member's mental health, but to no avail.

The council had insufficient capacity to conduct the investigation. In addition, data breaches were made as our member was sent letters from the council intended for other staff about their disciplinary meetings.

HCPC (the Health and Care Professionals Council) completed their investigation after the disciplinary process, which they were obliged to do. HCPC found no evidence of wrongdoing. The process had taken two and a half years from start to finish but the case was thrown out immediately by HCPC.

## MY MESSAGE

Our member said: "If I had one message to the council it would be that they must do more to be both consistent and fair. They should respect staff more than they do and recognise the difficult jobs we do. It felt to me like they were grasping at ways to incriminate and blame staff, rather than seeing the bigger picture."



"I am now off medication. I didn't have a full appreciation before of just how difficult mental illness can be and the challenges it brings. I had no history of mental health problems at all up to this point in my life. What this experience has done is make me permanently worried that I could have a relapse back to my depression, now I have experienced it. I'll have to live with this worry for the rest of my life."

"What I can say is that

UNISON was brilliant. I can't fault my rep whatsoever and without them I am sure I would have been sacked. UNISON supported me when I wasn't mentally strong enough to understand what was going on within the process."

#### **UNISON'S RECOMMENDATIONS**

UNISON has provided a range of suggestions to the employer to improve their disciplinary process. However, at the time of going to press, it would

appear that some of our main recommendations have been rejected by the council. They have proposed their own changes which we feel would be detrimental to staff. UNISON continues to work hard to try to bring improvement to the processes, and we will report the outcomes when reached.

**Membership of UNISON is vital to protect you (and your professional status if applicable) at work. Join at [unisonwestsussex.org.uk/join](http://unisonwestsussex.org.uk/join)**

## REGRADE SUCCESS AT RICHARD COLLYER

**In July, two UNISON members working in one of the support services at The College of Richard Collyer, Horsham, fought successfully to have their jobs regraded to the same level as other colleagues doing exactly the same job. Neither had realised they'd been placed at a lower grade when they first started their new roles.**

The college's UNISON rep Jane Crowley supported our members at meetings with senior school management, arguing that pay should be backdated to the start of the contracts, with further compensation to reflect loss of pay rises and pension contributions.

She said, "I was very pleased to be able to help two colleagues to be placed on a fair pay grade in accordance with their job roles, with the support of West Sussex UNISON branch."

Both Jane and branch officer Zoe Walker supported our members at the appeal. Governors then asked the school principal

to reconsider. We're delighted to report that both members have now been offered full back pay and financial remuneration to the beginning of their employment.



## SCHOOLS' FORUM UPDATE

**UNISON's rep on the forum, Keith Manville (pictured), updates us on the latest concerns.**

"There are considerable challenges ahead. Despite the fact we are all fed up hearing about 'Brexit', it does play a part, because government departments and any spending reviews are distracted or delayed by it.

"This isn't helped by promises of money that might only be an enticement to vote in a snap election but don't materialise following a 'no deal' Brexit.

"This year fewer schools are in deficit compared to the same time last year.



However, the combined deficit has increased to £1.765m. The total number of schools in deficit is steady but the size of deficits is growing year on year.

"Uncertainty for many school staff, resource shortages, restructuring, the

impact on workloads and curriculum opportunities for young people will be impacted for a longer period than originally planned.

"The recent County Council school funding survey showed that one of the measures taken by schools to manage budgets and reduce costs was making significant cuts to the number of non-teaching staff. In some cases, this has resulted in a reduced capacity to support pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Schools were also considering or continuing to reduce administrative support staff in order to make cost savings."



## MPS CALL FOR MULTI-BILLION POUNDS EDUCATION CASH BOOST

### **UNISON has welcomed MPs' call for a 'multi billion pounds cash injection' into education.**

The call for the investment, together with a proper, long-term funding strategy, comes in a House of Commons education select committee report on education funding in England. The committee found that schools and colleges 'desperately need' more money.

UNISON national secretary Jon Richards said its report, "backs up what UNISON and others have been saying about the funding crisis caused by this government's real-term cuts."

The union points out that support staff in schools and colleges have borne the brunt of these cuts. Teaching assistants in secondary schools have been cut by 12%, and technicians across schools by 14%. Teaching assistants in primary schools are being made redundant despite higher pupil numbers, including more children with special educational needs.

Support staff are often trusted adults and confided in by pupils about a huge range of welfare issues, regardless of whether this is expected of them in a formal capacity. But a third of staff in a recent UNISON survey reported that schools had cut the number of staff providing this support in the past year.

Mr Richards called on the government to, "put an end to this national scandal and commit to a long-term plan to end all funding cuts and to fully fund schools and colleges."

## ACCESSING HEALTH ASSURED SERVICES

**The WSCC HR service recently clarified an important issue regarding staff accessing the council's employee assistance programme (EAP) provided by 'Health Assured'.**

Employees who leave WSCC are allowed to make use of the EAP service for up to three months after they have left: access is not withdrawn immediately someone leaves, as one of our members was led to believe by local management.

The EAP is a telephone counselling service set up by the council and can help provide support for a variety of issues such as family problems, work, addictions, debt, domestic abuse and a range of other issues.

Please note that UNISON members also have access to the union's wide variety of support services to help with these and other matters. You can access these by going to the branch website home page and selecting 'get help'. From the drop-down menu you'll then be able to choose from the wide range of services we offer.



## BRANCH SPEAKS OUT AT NATIONAL CONFERENCE

**West Sussex branch chair, Ian Harvey spoke on behalf of our branch at this year's UNISON national delegate conference (NDC) in Liverpool.**

The branch jointly submitted motion 126 to UNISON's NDC. This was important because it ensured the union had to deliver the funding increase for branches we have been demanding for years, as well as a 'root and branch' review of UNISON.

"I was quite nervous," said Ian, "not so much about the size of the audience, but

because it was so important to our branch to get this motion passed. "This review is crucial as branches like ours need more funding to cope with the pressures caused by austerity.

"When UNISON was created 26 years ago, branches had more facility time for their officers and often only had one

or two employers to work with. Now our branch represents members within many employers, like Capita, who deliver local government services in West Sussex and provide no consolidated facility time."

It was great news for our branch when the motion was passed. It will have an immediate positive funding impact on every branch in the country.

## NEC ELECTION RESULTS

**Huge thanks go to all West Sussex branch members who took part in the national executive committee (NEC) elections for the 2019-21 period.**

This is the most important UNISON committee, as it is the union's main decision-making body and so influences the national tone and direction of our organisation.

The branch is delighted to report that two of its members, Dan Sartin (branch secretary) and Abi Holdsworth (workplace rep at the Capita contact centre),

have been elected to the NEC. Abi said, "I'm looking forward to representing low paid workers in the SE region. That's what our union is all about."

A large number of the branch's preferred candidates were also elected, including:

- all 4 local government representatives (Jane Doolan, Andrea Egan,

Diana Leach and Paul Holmes); 2 higher education reps (Sandy Nicholl and Keith Owen); 2 black members (April Ashley and Hugo Pierre); 1 health rep (Claire Dixon); 1 disabled member (Paula Carlisle); and 1 water, environment and transport rep (John Jones).

Candidates took office at the close of national delegate conference (NDC) in May 2019 and will be in office until the end of the NDC in 2021.



## TIME TO STAND UP FOR A BETTER HE DEAL

**UNISON is running a national ballot of our higher education (HE) members asking them to vote 'yes' for strike action to demand an improved pay offer after universities offered a pay increase of just 1.8% – well below inflation. Over two thirds of members who voted in our recent consultation rejected it.**



Ballot papers started arriving at home addresses from 9 September. If you haven't received one yet, please call the ballot helpline on 0800 0 857857.

Along with the other unions, our pay claim was for:

- a rise of RPI plus 3%, or a minimum increase of £3,349;
- £10 per hour minimum rate of pay;
- all universities to become accredited by the Living Wage Foundation;
- a 35-hour working week;
- action to close the gender and ethnicity pay gaps;
- action to reduce excessive workloads and combat stress.

It's important to have a high turnout for the ballot to show employers the strength of feeling against their unacceptable offer. Please make sure you send in your vote as soon as possible. If you know of any non-UNISON colleagues who would like to vote, they can join us before 22 October to receive a ballot paper.

## SUCCESSFUL JE APPEALS AT GBMET

Some years ago, the branch agreed a joint process for job evaluation (JE) appeals with Northbrook College which continued following its merger with Brighton City College to become Greater Brighton Metropolitan College (GBMet).

This year the branch supplied expert support to the appeals panel from one of our branch officers. As a result, there have been a number of successful appeals, increasing grades in some cases and restoring people to their original grade following a downgrade in others.

This helped the college to better understand its structures and will hopefully stand them in good stead in the future.

Local UNISON rep Karen Fisher said: "JE is tricky: it's completely impersonal and based purely on the requirement of the post. It's very hard for any member negatively affected to not take it personally if their post is downgraded. Who wouldn't?"

"This is why it's invaluable for members to get UNISON advice if they feel the evaluation outcome is not correct. It's vital to understand the process when putting together a successful appeal.

"Having an experienced branch officer on the GBMet appeals panel ensured a fair and balanced assessment and helped senior college panel members gain much needed insight."

This demonstrates why UNISON is the trade union for college support staff and worth joining.



# OVERPAYMENTS

**Longer-standing members will recall a spate of overpayments being made to staff at WSCC – and particularly in schools – a few years ago which were then reclaimed from pay without notice, putting members into great hardship. UNISON fought long and hard for members so-affected, and often with success. On one occasion we even led the BBC TV local news broadcast highlighting an overpayment that had caused much suffering.**

Things have quietened down on that front, but at the end of last year we had two cases come into the office of adult services' social workers who had been overpaid by the council to a great extent. One of these was an overpayment made over many years of £17,000. Our member bore absolutely no blame for this overpayment and nor could they have been expected to know about it.

UNISON has been supporting our members since, and neither case is



yet resolved, for different reasons. The council has expected our members to pay back the sums

overpaid in full, knowing this would effectively give one member a 28-year debt repayment plan!

This would not be reasonable behaviour of any employer, let alone a county council that has aspirations to be an employer of choice. UNISON is aware that other employers would be much more flexible, and it is flexibility and reasonableness which has been missing from the WSCC approach so far. Our member is pursuing a grievance with UNISON support in order for common sense to prevail and for WSCC to learn from other employers how it might approach such situations.

You can imagine the upset and stress this situation has caused our members, with neither situation yet resolved after nine months. We will keep you updated.

## “ THANK YOU ”

**“I would like to say a massive thank you to you for helping and supporting me through the very difficult dismissal process that I have just been through. You made it much more tolerable and were always full of sound advice. Another massive thank you for referring me to see the financial adviser at Centenary House last week, where the news from him about my pension was almost life changing. Thank you once again for all your support.”**

## MEET PAUL WOODCOCK: BRANCH LGBT+ OFFICER

**“Be proud of who you are and be reassured there are people in UNISON to support you and make it safe to be who you are in your workplace,” says Paul Woodcock, branch lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) officer.**

“I’ve only been in this role since November last year, but we were pleased to represent UNISON in the march at Worthing Pride in the summer.

“Research tells me there is a significant proportion of LGBT+ workers who remain uncomfortable about ‘being out’ at work.

“Working life for LGBT+ people has improved immensely in the past 10 years, but there are many who still don’t feel the benefits. Therefore, UNISON has an important support role, to help create an inclusive and safe workplace.

Paul’s day-job is the council’s commissioner for sexual health: experience he is able to draw-on to help in his UNISON officer role.

“Thankfully, I’ve not come across any shocking examples of homophobia at WSCC, but it’s often the incidental, daily drip-feed of discrimination we must challenge: it’s not OK to make jokes or insults about someone’s sexuality, no matter how intentioned the remark may be.

“Sexual orientation does not impact on anyone’s ability to do a job. As Stonewall once famously said: “Some people are gay. Get over it.”

If there is anyone out there needing support on LGBT+ issues, just get in touch with me via the branch office.”



## BRUSH UP YOUR NUMERACY SKILLS WITH UNISON

**This summer, UNISON is working with National Numeracy, an independent charity, to give all our members working in schools and education the chance to brush up their number skills.**

By using the charity’s National Numeracy Challenge – a free online learning tool – you’ll be able to work towards the essentials of numeracy: the maths skills you actually need in work and everyday life.

It allows you to find out your level and points you towards resources personalised to you to help you improve.

You can get started on the challenge using the link below to find out your current numeracy level and how to improve it, based on your strengths and weaknesses. Being better with numbers isn’t a special talent, it’s something we can all learn.

### **Think you’re not a numbers person?**

Many of us say we’re not – but numbers play a big part in all our lives. Understanding how they work can have a hugely positive impact.

Whether finding a new job or getting a promotion, managing debt or getting a better handle on family finances, everyone can benefit by finding a way to make numbers work for them.

Go to [www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk) and search ‘numbers’. Follow the first link.

## THE AWFUL MURDER OF BELINDA ROSE

**Wendy Wilson, social worker and UNISON West Sussex branch committee member, writes:**

“Andrew Harper, a police officer killed while working, quite rightly received tributes on the front pages of many papers and all across the media.

“What I find incredible is that just two days later a social worker, Belinda Rose, was murdered while working, but there was no such outcry. Did Andrew’s life have more value? Social workers are so frequently vilified and blamed: it’s never the fault of central

government for cutting funding, increasing work, reducing numbers.

“I believe we need to toughen our attitudes towards the general abuse of social workers. It’s time for our safety and wellbeing to be prioritised. It is not ok to be rude to social workers just because we do not wear a uniform. We need the right to work without being frightened of being attacked, verbally or physically. Zero tolerance is just the starting place.

“We need to have good publicity as well as the bad. We get more things right than we do wrong. It would help if the council published some of the incredible work that we do.”

The branch is raising these matters with the council to ensure sufficient focus remains on staff safety at WSCC.

## COULD YOU BE OUR NEXT YOUNG MEMBERS’ OFFICER?

**We talk to our current young members’ officer Chloe Pascovitch as she steps down soon from the post, sadly having reached the ‘not young enough anymore’ threshold the role demands!**

“I have been the branch’s young member’s officer for the past two years and a UNISON member since leaving university and starting full time employment in 2014. It wasn’t until I moved to WSCC and faced the issue of Horsham parking that I became a workplace rep.

“Then the branch discovered I was under 27 years old and encouraged me to become the young member’s officer!

“I recently supported a colleague through a flexible retirement case. It was challenging as time frames were not always met and our first request was initially declined. We appealed the decision and put together a letter to fight the case and after months of meetings with the member we finally got the green light.”

We asked Chloe for any top tips she could pass on to her successor.

“Join UNISON! They are

there for you if ever you have any problems with your job including pay, sickness and even parking.

“You can be as involved as you want and your time allows.”

If any UNISON member below the age of 27 is interested in taking over from Chloe, please call the branch office 01243 777636 or email office.unison@westsussex.gov.uk

