

BRANCH LINES

West Sussex County Branch of UNISON Newsletter

Your Branch Needs You!

Election Special

See page 4 of this edition for details of how to get involved in YOUR Branch in 2013.

Negotiated outcome for AMHPs

AMHPs (Accredited Mental Health Professionals) are employed by WSCC but seconded to Sussex Partnership Trust. They perform a vital and statutory duty for WSCC, as part of the process by which mentally ill people are sectioned and supported to return to normal living. Morale is extremely low in the service and has been the subject of much discussion between UNISON and management at its regular negotiating meetings. In 2012, management tabled proposals to extend shifts later into the evening and to change how AMHPs were paid for fulfilling their duties. UNISON's judgement was that the proposals were likely to cause extreme upset in the service, to such an extent that the reaction would likely have endangered service provision. Working groups were set up to look at the issues and these were then resolved through a set of proposals which were put to consultation and which proved acceptable to staff. UNISON Rep Mary Davies said "UNISON was able to work closely with managers to get a better outcome for both staff and the service. There are still a lot of problems but at least these issues have been sorted."

UNISON support

If you have a workplace issue or problem, always talk to your UNISON Rep or the Branch office first, before you take any action which could make a bad situation worse. We're here to help, and to do that it is vital that we advise members as early as possible.

Your branch's facility time under threat

A decision has been taken by the political leadership of West Sussex County Council (WSCC) to cut UNISON's facility time.

Facility time is time off from an individual's job, granted by the employer, to enable an elected rep to carry out their trade union role. The basis for these arrangements are set out in law, and in some cases facility time can mean that the rep is seconded from their regular job, enabling them to concentrate fully on trade union-related tasks. In West Sussex, WSCC secondments to work on UNISON-related work equate to 2.13 Full Time Equivalent roles (or 79 hours).

UNISON West Sussex has one of the lowest amounts of such facility time in the region, and when the large size of our branch is taken into account, we are seen to have quite modest arrangements. These do however contribute an enormous amount to the smooth-running of the Council, saving it money from unnecessary Employment Tribunals and providing an additional source of support to employees. In addition, the Council is entering a period of further significant cuts and re-organisation, and must negotiate with UNISON, the recognised trade union, throughout.

The Cabinet decision was communicated to the Branch at short notice just before Christmas, and will, if implemented, be for a cut from April of 30 per cent. This reduces Branch Officer hours enabled by WSCC facility time from 2.13FTE to 1.5FTE.

One of the more worrying aspects for UNISON members of such a cut would be the politicised nature of the decision, which would not take into account the evidence of what works well in the County. That evidence is available locally in abundance. The Branch works constructively with its major employer to resolve potential disputes by negotiation, and has prevented costly Employment Tribunals for the Council by being there to support individual members.

/continued on page 2



Your branch's Facility time under attack —continued from page 1

The evidence is available nationally too that facility time works. A central Government study in 2007 found that public sector union facility time returned benefits to employers worth between £2 and £5 for every £1 spent. Instead, what appears to have held the day with the WSCC Cabinet is the constant bombardment of negative messages about unions found in the media, a lot of it propagated by an unaccountable right-wing pressure group, *The Taxpayers' Alliance*.

Pressure to re-consider

At its regular *Staff Joint Committee* meeting with Councillors on January 17th, Branch Reps put the case for facility time to the Cabinet member for Finance and Resources, Michael Brown. Pleasingly, other Councillors present listened to the case made and supported UNISON's request that the Cabinet re-consider its decision. Michael Brown has therefore agreed to go back to his Cabinet colleagues, and this second discussion will take place on 12th February.

Evidence before ideology

If the Cabinet does decide to ignore the evidence of what works in West Sussex, and put ideology first, this will be a big source of concern for all staff in WSCC. The Council is now entering a phase it is calling *Future Council*, whereby it is positioning itself as a 'commissioning authority'. Over time, all County Council staff will find their employment status determined after a process of looking at all 'sourcing options'. Privatisation and mutualisation will be some of those options, along with retaining public services in-house. WSCC staff will want assurances that the processes used to determine what happens to their services, their careers and their livelihoods is determined by evidence, and not by ideological decision-making of a kind that West Sussex has not historically experienced in its local government. Whether or not the Cabinet pushes ahead with an unjustified political attack on its recognised trade union will be a major signal to staff of how the next few years are going to pan out.

Next steps

UNISON will keep you up-to-date through *Branch Lines* so you know how the WSCC Cabinet responds and how your Branch will adapt to the new environment if 'politics' holds the day.

Any member who wishes to see the Branch report to Staff Joint Committee can contact the office for a copy. You can also help to strengthen the Branch in 2013 by becoming a Workplace Rep. See the back page for more details on how to do this.

News in brief

West Sussex Music Service

The WSCC Music Service provides music tuition for children and adults across the County and has done so successfully for over 50 years. Late in 2012 a Select Committee of Councillors came together to scrutinise proposals for turning the service into an independent company. Dan Sartin, UNISON West Sussex Branch Secretary and Dave Thomas, Branch Secretary of West Sussex NUT spoke together at the meeting on the risks associated with this move, the lack of staff engagement and the lack of detail being given to Councillors to inform their decisions. The striking think about the two hour debate was that for most of it, until the unions made their contribution towards the end, not a single Councillor asked for any evidence that the new model would be the best thing for the service, students or staff. Sadly, and despite belatedly acknowledging the lack of detail in front of them, and asking Council Officers to rectify this in future, Councillors still felt informed enough to pass a motion supporting the move.

Adults' Services Transformation

UNISON Reps and Officers Dan Sartin, Di Knight, Wendy Wilson and Karen Daubney met with Director of Adults' Services Amanda Rogers just before Christmas to comment on proposals and to highlight concerns. These ranged from the proposed new ways of working in the Contact Centre to the need to maintain qualified/unqualified staff ratios at acceptable levels. For more information, please contact the Branch office.

Worried about fuel bills?

With rising fuel costs and another cold winter many members are worried about how they're going to pay this year's winter fuel bills. 'There for you' (formerly known as UNISON Welfare) has set up a limited fund to help UNISON members on low incomes by way of a one-off payment of up to £40. To apply and to find out more about the other range of services 'There for you' offer, such as financial assistance, debt advice and wellbeing breaks, visit their website at www.unison.org.uk/thereforyou or contact the branch office.

UNISON WEST SUSSEX — RECRUIT A NEW MEMBER

When you recruit a new member, you are entitled to receive a £10 Store voucher. Just make sure your name is included on the 'recruited by' section of the form, and we will send a voucher to you as soon as we receive the completed form.

Please could you send an Application Pack to:

Name: (Capitals) _____

Home Address: _____

Their workplace: _____

Introduced By: _____ Your Workplace: _____

Please return to: UNISON West Sussex, County Hall, CHICHESTER PO19 1RQ (Please **photocopy**—if required)

Change to Branch office hours

Due to changes implemented to the Branch administration team, the Branch office is able, from January, to slightly extend its opening hours. Core office hours are now:

Monday to Friday, 9am to 4.30pm.

Schools' policy change

Work supporting members in schools by UNISON has uncovered the incorrect application of two-year written-warnings as sanctions. The disciplinary policy has been updated by WSCC to reflect that written warnings should only be kept open for a maximum of one year.

Young members required

UNISON's Young Members' Officer Josh Bennett is leaving the Branch as he has found a new job and is moving onto pastures new. This has created a vacancy for the Young Members' Officer post. If you are under 27 years old and would like to find out more about the role please call Dan Sartin on 01243 777636. The Branch would also like to hear from any young members who are interested in attending the unions' National Delegate Conference in Liverpool in June. All expenses are paid and it is a great opportunity to find out more about our union.

Capita meeting due

UNISON is awaiting confirmation from Capita on dates for a delayed meeting, to be held in February, of what will be a new negotiating forum to discuss staff matters. If you are a Capita member and have issues you want raised there, please contact UNISON Rep Mervyn Sams.



Branch AGMs—make it a date!

UNISON West Sussex is holding its Annual General Meeting across three venues this year to give members every opportunity to attend. The dates and locations are:

Monday 11th March
County Hall North, Horsham, RH12 1XH

Tuesday 12th March
County Hall, Chichester, PO19 1RQ

Wednesday 13th March
Centenary House, Worthing, BN13 2QB

All three meetings are held over the lunch period from 12.30pm until 2.00pm, and are open to any member of UNISON West Sussex branch.

2012 has been a tough year, with the main challenges being pay, pensions, redundancies, privatisation and the increasingly difficult environment we all have to work in. UNISON did however support its members in ever-larger numbers, and has been campaigning to protect public services throughout. Recruitment is on the up, with the Branch now having 5,100 members. The AGM will provide reports back from Branch officers on the year behind us, and allow us an opportunity to look towards our priorities for 2013.

Refreshments and a sandwich buffet will be available. To attend, please register with the Branch office so we can cater according to numbers. Email office.unison@westsussex.gov.uk or call 01243 777636 indicating which venue you will attend.

Chichester College

Chichester College has campuses in Chichester city and at Brinsbury. It has a progressive position on pay rates for its low paid staff, offering a minimum pay rate of £7.36 per hour. This is well above the National Minimum Wage, and only 9 pence below the recently uprated Living Wage of £7.45, so UNISON Rep David Hammond has requested that his employer take the extra step and commits to become a Living Wage employer. David said "I think the employer will give this serious consideration as it sends a powerful signal to staff about how they are valued. Chichester College is also currently formalising its Facility Agreement with UNISON which secures me a set number of hours a week to support members."

Change in Learning Disability day centres

In late 2012, consultation commenced on remodelling Council day centres for people with learning disabilities. The organisational change required a complex set of redeployments of staff, sometimes to lower-graded new roles, and in different locations. There were several examples where UNISON has been able to intervene on behalf of members who were proposed to be redeployed to locations which would not have proved possible for the staff member to work in. In UNISON's view the moves could in some cases have led to costly employment tribunal claims for constructive dismissal (which in itself is mostly a difficult thing to prove at tribunal). UNISON was able to intervene and ensure that appropriate offers were made. An anonymous member said "I am so grateful for your support. Without the union's help I would not have known what to do. I am very pleased with the outcome."

Branch Officers—2013 Elections

Following its January meeting, the Branch Committee have nominated the following members to serve as Branch Officers for the following year.

Chair	Graham Anderson
Vice-Chair	Sarah Burnett
Branch Secretary	Dan Sartin
Deputy Branch Secretary	Simon Holder
Treasurer	Jennie Barrett
Equalities Officer, BME	Jules Wilson
Equalities Officer LGBT	Simon Holder
Equalities Officer, Women	Karen Fisher
Equalities Officer, Disabled	No nomination
Health and Safety Officer (1)	Karen Daubney
Health and Safety Officer (2)	Clive Coleman
Health and Safety Officer (3)	Chris Barrett
Welfare Officer	David O'Connor
Education Coordinator	Georgina Hodgson
Environmental Officer	Julie Bolton
Communications Officer	Mervyn Sams
Labour Link Officer	Sarah Cawston
Membership Officer	No nomination
Young Members' Officer	No nomination
Lifelong Learning Coordinator	No nomination
International Officer	David Hammond

As part of the union's democratic process, nomination forms for any of the above positions are available from the Branch Office. The annual election process for Workplace Representatives is also underway. The nomination period for all positions ends at 12noon on 31st January 2013. A nomination form for Workplace Representatives can be found below. If you would like more information about what is entailed please contact the UNISON Office on 01243 777636 or via email at office.unison@westsussex.gov.uk.

Nomination Form - Workplace Representatives

Workplace Representatives play a vital role in the Branch. They invite new colleagues to join, represent members' views, distribute information about UNISON and get involved in local issues and negotiations. A workplace may be a large team, a location (a day centre for example), a section within a directorate, or an employer. Full training is provided and Reps receive paid time off to undertake the role. Can you help? If you are interested please complete the form below (which can be photocopied) and return it to:

UNISON West Sussex, County Hall, West Street, Chichester PO19 1RQ by 12noon on 31st January 2013.

Please note that current Workplace Reps need to be re-nominated in order to continue in the role.



I would like to become/continue (delete as appropriate) as the Workplace Representative for:

_____ (team/location/directorate/employer)

Full Name: (please print) **Signature:** **Date:**

Proposed by: (please print) **Signature:** **Date:**

Seconded by: (please print) **Signature:** **Date:**

NB - Proposers and Seconders should be members working in the same workplace.