

BRANCH LINES

West Sussex County Branch of UNISON Newsletter

'Pain without purpose'

The TUC condemned the Chancellor George Osborne's Autumn Statement, delivered on 5th December, as lacking any vision of a future economy that could deliver decent jobs and living standards.

"When you are self-harming you should stop, not look for better sticking plasters", said TUC general secretary Brendan Barber. "With the economy still scraping along the bottom, unemployment set to rise and the Chancellor missing his own debt target, we need a fundamental change in direction". The TUC attacked figures published the same day showing that 1,000,000 public sector jobs will be lost by 2018.

Most working age benefits will be uprated by just 1% over the next 3 years, and working families are estimated to lose £3,000 a year from child benefit and tax credit cuts by 2015. Council budgets are due to take another hit as well, with additional cuts layered on top of previous cuts. Overall, the poorest 50% of the country come off far worse than the wealthiest 50%.

UNISON launch phone app

The new UNISON app is already a top-20 hit and is available for iPhone, Android and Blackberry phones. It is easy to use, keeps you in touch with the union, and has useful sections on it such as the one on your rights at work. Download it—free of charge—from unison.org.uk/app



Your pay matters!

The cumulative effect of the last three years' pay freeze in Local Government is that our wages have fallen by 13% in real terms. And private companies delivering outsourced services are often using the pay freeze as an excuse to boost their profits at the expense of their low-paid staff.

Local government workers now have the worst pay and conditions to be found in the public sector. There is an increasing reliance on in-work benefits such as tax credits, and we have seen the rise of the 'Food Bank' phenomenon where workers need charity hand-outs to make ends meet. Meanwhile, the Government is missing its own debt reduction targets as the failed austerity agenda causes continued economic stagnation.

In October, UNISON, GMB and Unite submitted a pay claim to the National Joint Council Employers calling for "a substantial flat rate increase on all scale points as a step towards the longer term objective of restoring pay levels and achieving the living wage as the bottom NJC spinal column point" (see www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/B6085.pdf for details.)

Our branch has been out across the county asking members to support the campaign to back the pay claim. Hundreds have responded, including many new members, who have each completed a postcard which we will send off to the chairman of the Local Government Association.

We have drawn a lucky prize winner from these completed postcards, Marietta Melard who works in Bognor. Marietta takes home a Kindle Fire just in time for Christmas.

The Branch will keep you posted on how the claim progresses.



Worthing High School latest

Sadly, but unsurprisingly perhaps, the Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove approved Worthing High's bid for Academy status at the end of November, despite widespread opposition from parents and mounting evidence of the school management's unsuitability to go it alone as an Academy.

There is some good news however. Headteacher Alison Beer who was largely responsible for forcing through the conversion, and whose resignation due to 'ill health' was followed by a secret WSCC investigation into 'irregularities' in the school, is feeling much better. So well in fact that she has now launched her own consultancy firm!

The parents' action group which led the campaign will be arguing against West Sussex County Council's current policy of unthinking support for Academy conversions when it addresses a Council Select Committee in January. And in a positive move, the group has converted itself from being Worthing-based to have a County-wide remit. It will support other parents and students affected by academies and proposals for academies, and will monitor schools outside of democratic accountability, as well as continuing to lobby MPs and Councillors to maintain support for our local authority schools.

Find the new 'West Sussex Academy Watch' on Facebook or at <http://whaag.blogspot.co.uk>

News in brief

Capita contract

UNISON Reps met with Capita bosses recently to discuss how they would work together on issues relating to the Support Services Outsourcing contract. UNISON Rep Mervyn Sams who works in Office Services said, "We are plugging into UNISON national networks so we can learn from how Capita has approached its other local government contracts in the UK. One thing which has come up locally is confusion from members about whether they can remain in UNISON now they have been outsourced. They certainly can—the benefits of being in the union are exactly the same, we are the recognised union for the contract, and members are just as likely to need our support now as they have ever been."

IT concerns

Five UNISON Reps met with Capita managers last month to discuss teething problems with the new IT rollout within WSCC. Issues raised included: inappropriate closure of help calls; calendar conflicts; restricted mailbox sizes; difficulties escalating issues; and opaque complaints procedures.

Branch makes a splash at TUC national demonstration

In the last issue of BranchLines we reported on the national demonstration planned for 20th October. UNISON West Sussex took a coach full of members to London to call for more investment in the economy and public services, and an end to the failed austerity agenda. Some members were taking part in a national demonstration for the first time. One commented that it was "good to see our branch represented and making an impression." Another said it was great to "come together with others who shared a goal – to protect public services."

150,000 people attended the demo which ended in a rally in Hyde Park. UNISON General Secretary, Dave Prentis, who spoke at the



rally, said "This has been a tremendous day... thousands of us spoke with one voice and told this vicious Tory government that we demand a future that works. Today is just the start of our campaign: health workers, council workers, education workers, police staff, workers in the voluntary and community sector and many more – all standing up for public services."

The Shadow Business Secretary, Chuka Umunna (left, middle), supported the event and bumped into the Branch on the day. He wished UNISON West Sussex well in our campaigns and was interested to hear about some of the consequences of the Coalition Government's failed austerity agenda in our own county.

Council Tax 2013/14

Again this year, the Coalition Government is attempting to bribe Councils to freeze their Council Tax with a one-off payment equivalent to a 1% Council tax rise. The impact of accepting though would be to reduce the Council's base revenue for all future years, making a bad situation even worse. UNISON has asked all three parties on the County Council to consider the workload pressure staff are under when making this decision and to reject the Government's 'offer'.

Chichester University

Branch Reps met with the Uni's Deputy Vice-Chancellor in December to discuss the re-tender of its catering contract. In a positive move, the University has agreed to include a requirement that all bids will include costings for paying the Living Wage to catering staff. Chris Anderson, UNISON's senior rep at the University, said "The employer is mindful of the impact poverty pay can have on staff motivation and quality in a service which has previously had a poor track record and reputation with students."

Your contact details

Does the Branch have all your correct contact details? You can now manage the information we hold on you by registering online for *My UNISON* at <https://my.unison.org.uk>

A lot of County Council staff have recently got new phone numbers due to a new IT platform being rolled out. You can use *My UNISON* to update your records with us, or get in touch with the Branch office on 01243 777636 or email us at office.unison@westsussex.gov.uk



Branch organisation—the role of Reps

"The challenges we face as a trade union branch are unprecedented," says UNISON West Sussex Branch Secretary Dan Sartin (pictured right). "Due to the bankers' deficit and the disastrous policy response which has followed, our members are suffering now. But things will get even tougher here on in. The only way we can meet these challenges is to get organised."



"UNISON West Sussex has 5,000 members and 90 workplace representatives, or 'Reps'. But the Branch should have many more. Look around you in your team. Do you have a UNISON Rep? If you don't you need one—and maybe it should be you! The core tasks of a Rep can be grouped under the following headings:

Recruitment

- Talking to new staff who join your workplace (and existing staff not in the union); explaining the benefits of UNISON and signing them up!

Communication

- Talking to members in your team about workplace issues
- Keeping noticeboards up to date and distributing circulars
- 'Taking the temperature' of your colleagues views when asked by Branch on a specific issue e.g. on pay, pensions

Advice and support

- Giving members' low-level advice and support on issues
- If significant or difficult issues, signposting the member to the Branch office for further advice
- If desired, and when trained and confident, representing members in more formal situations (such as grievances, sickness absence review meetings)

Being a spokesperson for your workplace

- Representing members' views to managers when appropriate, or, if more serious or difficult issues, feeding back to the Branch office for further advice
- Supporting Branch Officers when there are consultations and re-organisations in the workplace.

Our UNISON Reps are truly heroes of the modern workplace. They achieve so much for individuals, and all of us collectively, as they are involved in all areas of the Branch's negotiations with employers. The role is an interesting one, and gives you a better insight into how the organisation you work in is run. As a Rep you can also, if you choose to, get involved with the running of your local Branch through its Branch Committee.

Reps are entitled by law to paid release time so they can carry out their duties and also access free UNISON training during work hours. Training takes place mostly in the UNISON Regional office in Brighton and you can choose from a wide range of courses, from Employment Law to Negotiation Skills.

Interested? I hope you are. The workplace is vitally important to our lives and those of our families in every respect. How we experience it in the next few years will to a very large extent be determined by how UNISON members like you respond to appeals like this to get involved. To find out more, please call me at the Branch on 01243 777636."

UNISON and Britannia Over 50 years working in partnership



Take the mortgage challenge...

UNISON and the Britannia building society are celebrating 50 years in partnership by offering UNISON members £150 cashback if they are first-time buyers, moving homes, or re-mortgaging from another lender. They are inviting UNISON members to 'take the mortgage challenge' to let their advisers check if they can save you money on your current mortgage deal. Visit a branch or www.britannia.co.uk/unison

Stress Risk Assessments

Day centre worker and UNISON Rep Karen Daubney writes: "As a Branch Health & Safety Officer, I helped UNISON negotiate at the Health & Safety Steering Group so that Team Managers would undertake Stress Risk Assessments for their teams in Adults' and Children's services. These formal Risk Assessments gave an opportunity for staff to record the pressures they experience in the workplace and for actions to be put in place to reduce the stress members were under. Staff experiences are still being analysed, but already in response to the high levels of stress four additional posts are to be recruited to in CTPLDs. This is a great result and shows the benefit of UNISON highlighting issues and negotiating on members' behalf."

Newly qualified social workers

Social worker and UNISON Rep Jeremy Webster is meeting with newly qualified children's social workers to find out about how they experience their first year working for WSCC. He is feeding back his findings to the service Director, Stuart Gallimore.

Health & Safety success

Parking Contracts Manager and UNISON Rep Chris Barrett has negotiated successfully to resolve seemingly intractable health and safety problems within the Council's Northleigh building in Chichester. Much to the relief of members a number of faults with the office's heating and lighting are now being fixed. "After UNISON training I understand the law and the employer's responsibilities so I was able to get this result," Chris said.

Are you an LGBT UNISON member?

All UNISON Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender members in the South East are invited to the group's AGM in London on Saturday 12th January. You don't have to be out to attend and the union will pay travel expenses. To reserve a place, call the Branch's LGBT Equality Officer Simon Holder on 01243 777636.

More news in brief

Dates for your diary

The Branch's 2013 AGM has been set to take place over three dates and sites next year. Please put a date in your diary now to avoid disappointment! March 11th (Horsham), March 12th (Chichester), March 13th (Worthing). We'll issue more details nearer the time.

Contact Centre

UNISON has lodged a pay claim with Serco Listening for 5%. Hard-working members, some earning as little as £14K a year, met with their Branch representatives at the end of November to discuss and agree tactics going forward. We are awaiting the employer's response which is due before Christmas.

Essex Cares bombshell

In our last edition we reported on the hourly rate Essex Cares Ltd pay to new starters on its West Sussex Reablement contract—a sub-Living Wage £6.83. Since then, the company has announced that half of its four-strong management team are to be made redundant. Both these bombshells are flatly at odds with the nature and tone of the reassurances given to staff during the outsourcing process. UNISON is supporting its members throughout the process.

ALPHABET POOL

The Alphabet Pool is our local lottery. As a member of UNISON West Sussex you are entitled to join the Alphabet Pool. One unit costs £1 per month. Payment can be made direct from your salary or by standing order.

Recent winners include:

£200	AG Knapton
£100	CP Ansell
£ 50	Chris Earwaker
£ 50	KJ Faith
£ 25	Karen Russell
£ 25	Graham Anderson

From the staff and Branch Officers in the UNISON team, we wish all our members a very happy and peaceful Christmas.

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)

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