

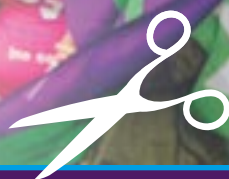
BRANCH LINES

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



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Campaigning against the cuts



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Combing through the Capita Contract

The branch has recently sought and secured resources from the regional funding pool to conduct an independent review of the outsourced Support Services contract currently operated by Capita plc.

This includes services such as pensions, payroll, IT and health and safety across a number of public sector organisations such as WSCC, the University of Chichester, schools and academies. The review will:

- analyse whether the contract is meeting its stated performance objectives;
- assess the impact on pay and conditions of staff affected; and
- consider the 'social value' of the contract to local residents and businesses from this method of public service delivery.

Due to report in spring 2015, part of the study involves asking you, our members, to fill in one of two short, online questionnaires about your experiences. These are:

- one targeted at service users (such as council staff); and
- one targeted at Capita staff who deliver the service.

Watch this space for further information and links to the surveys.

WELCOME

Welcome to the first special edition of Branch Lines aimed at our members in outsourced services.



Our branch now represents many private and voluntary sector employees, now working for organisations that provide services on behalf of the public sector. We support members who have transferred over through 'TUPE' arrangements from the public sector, or have been directly employed by those organisations.

We hope you will find the information in this newsletter interesting. Please feel free to pass it on to colleagues who are not UNISON members: we are always happy to welcome new recruits. If you have any story items for future editions, please let us know. And of course, feedback is always welcome.

Dan Sartin, Branch Secretary



Sick pay during holidays



Recent changes to legislation state that if an employer falls ill while on holiday they are allowed to take the leave again at a predetermined date.

UNISON West Sussex Capita reps have been working hard for over a year to get Capita to change their staff handbook to reflect this. We're pleased to report this has now been done.

This was quite a coup for UNISON West Sussex. The issue worked its way up through various layers of senior Capita management to their Head of HR, who recognised that their Staff Handbook was wrong on this point. They have now changed their guidance for their 64,000 employees.

Capita service level challenged by schools

Several WSCC schools have raised serious and frustrating complaints about the poor quality and timeliness of service provided by Capita Employment Support.

One of the most pressing concerns was the impact of 23 redundancies made by Capita in payroll services, without appropriate supporting technology being installed. The council's own report acknowledged that the cuts to staffing levels 'were a serious error of judgment'. It became so bad that some schools said they were considering sourcing services from other providers.

A council report to the Schools' Forum recommends a series of actions be taken to address these concerns, including working initially with a group of bursars, business managers, headteachers and governors to review employment services.

The group aims to put in place a new model of support by July 2015 by:

- exploring different ways the service could be provided;
- exploring how the services could be best specified and costed;
- deciding how best to assure quality;
- agreeing the information that would need to be given to WSCC; and
- agreeing the monitoring mechanisms that would need to be put into place.

UNISON West Sussex will be closely monitoring developments.

Outsourcing failures criticism

The government's ability to negotiate and manage outsourcing contracts has been strongly criticised by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

PAC chairwoman Margaret Hodge, MP, criticised the lack of openness around such arrangements. She is calling for three basic measures to promote transparency:



- 1** extension of Freedom of Information requests to contracts with private providers;
- 2** access rights for the National Audit Office;
- 3** a requirement for contractors to open their books to officials.

G4S, Atos, Serco and Capita were prepared to accept the measures, said Ms Hodge.

“It appears that the main barriers to greater transparency lie within government itself”

Margaret Hodge, MP

“I have always found your staff helpful both on the telephone and via email, and have had replies promptly which was great as I have felt anxious at times and needed reassurance and advice”

(UNISON West Sussex member)

Grace Eyre Foundation

For over a hundred years the Grace Eyre Foundation (GEF) charity has supported people with learning disabilities and mental health needs across Sussex. In 2012 WSCC, contracted GEF to run some of its supported living services. At that time some existing UNISON West Sussex members were transferred to them.

Since then, UNISON has provided support and advice to our members individually, and negotiated collectively through the Joint Consultative Committee when GEF consulted on changes to contracts and working practices.

Now UNISON West Sussex and GEF have extended the existing union recognition agreement to cover all GEF staff working in East and West Sussex and Brighton and Hove. This will provide a single point of contact for GEF for discussions, consultations and negotiations. It will be particularly important in 2015 when GEF bids to continue its existing contracts and seeks new opportunities, particularly in supported living services.

In November 2014, branch and regional UNISON members staffed a recruitment stand at the annual GEF staff conference, celebrating the organisation's successes and developments. If you want to join UNISON, complete the form on the back page.

Essex Cares consultation



The contract for 'reablement' services (ie those services helping to rehabilitate vulnerable people in their own home after hospitalisation) is due to be re-let.

The local authority 'spin-out' organisation Essex Cares is currently contracted to provide these services. There are likely to be significant changes to the current contract that will impact on the service provided and the roles and responsibilities of UNISON members working for Essex Cares. UNISON is fully involved in the negotiations and will support our members through whatever scenarios arise. Currently Essex Cares is consulting on cutting its management layer down from two to one. When the contract began, four council managers transferred to Essex Cares. UNISON has serious concerns about the proposed level of management, and is supporting our members affected. For more information contact Brian Walter (Negotiations Officer) in the UNISON office.

ASPIRE Signs of improvement

Aspire Sussex Ltd, formerly WSCC's Adult and Community Learning Service, was the first major service to be 'spun off' from the council as a 'social enterprise'.

As reported in the last edition of Branch Lines, not everything went well in the early stages of this transfer. UNISON members identified many areas of concern.

Vital lessons needed to be learned and it seems that changes introduced in the past few months are tackling some of the problems previously identified. If organisations choose to 'spin out' their services, we have always advocated that careful preparation and planning is essential.

Since the early hiccups, and with arrival of the new Chief Executive Robyn Kohler, things appear to be turning round. Our members have seen improved working conditions and have helped successfully negotiate a 1.1% pay award. Aspire staff were also granted an additional three days' annual leave over the Christmas period.

We have two UNISON reps in the service: Linda Wilson and Karen Polie. They continue to meet with Aspire management on a regular basis to negotiate the best deal for members.

Contact Centre staff payrise agreed

Following intense negotiations with our Branch officers, 88% of Contact Centre staff (on a 78% turn-out) voted to accept Capita's pay offer for at least a 2% pay increase from June 2014.

TUPE transferred WSCC Contact Centre employees whose full time equivalent (fte) annual earnings are less than £30,000 were awarded an increase of 2.5%. Staff earning between £60,000 and £30,000 received an increase of 2% from 01 June 2014.



"I am glad UNISON and Capita were able to reach an agreement members were prepared to accept. We hope future offers will go some way to helping our low paid members catch up"

Ian Harvey (pictured)
Branch Chair and
Contact Centre Rep.



Any member of staff in an outsourced service can join the union: you don't have to have been transferred over from WSCC.

Capita Workplace Rep Mervyn Sams, pictured above), explains: "It's important I represent staff transferred from WSCC, but also those who have joined Capita directly, following the transfer. I think some people are not aware that – because Capita have both national and local recognition agreements with UNISON – anyone can become a member of our union. It's

JOINING THE UNION

What can your rep do for you?

important members use UNISON reps to report issues of concern, rather than 'staff groups', which have a different purpose."

Our Workplace Reps can be called on to mentor new members, guiding them through the first few weeks of their new job, making sure they are well aware of their workplace rights. Reps have successfully negotiated an agreed consultation process with Capita, allowing all staff to contribute and be represented meaningfully when changes are proposed.

All our reps are 'ERA'

(Employment Rights Act) accredited, meaning they have received training in employment law. They regularly update this training to keep abreast of legal changes. They can informally advise you if you're not happy with something in the workplace, and if necessary, arrange for further support or advice from union caseworkers and solicitors.

You can read a profile of Mervyn in the Winter edition of Branch Lines.

To join UNISON, complete the form on page 8 or join online.



Birmingham's Capita call centre brought back into council control

The Birmingham City Council call centre, with 380 staff, is being transferred back under council control from 1 November in a bid to save £20 million over seven years.

A survey of people using the call centre, operated by Capita Service Birmingham, has found woeful levels of customer satisfaction.

- Only 49% were happy with their experience
- 41% found staff unwilling to help
- Only 43% were happy with the resulting service.

“Our in-house call centre will now be managed around quality rather than call volume or handling times.”

Chris Gibbs, Birmingham Council assistant director

According to a report to councillors, the damning results have been blamed on ‘a profit driven call centre rewarded on increasing call volume’.

Interesting that WSSC managers visited Service Birmingham prior to its contract award with Capita to get a sense of how things were working in practice, to understand some of the challenges experienced so that they could learn from it.

Swindon Capita services on their way back to council control

To try to meet its savings targets, Swindon Council is bringing back more services and up to 200 staff back into direct council control.

This will save it £2m. The original contract with Capita, worth more than £240 million, was signed in 2007 and was set to last for 15 years. The council has become less reliant on Capita for some of its services.

Since signing the deal with them seven years ago, many council services can now be provided in-house. Therefore, many of the services provided by Capita are now duplicated. They provide customer services,

finance administration and business support.

The council wants to take these services back. Though 200 staff may move back to the council, there are 256 people employed by Capita. It's not yet known if there will be any job losses.

RETURNING TO WORK

A disabled Capita member's experience

One of our members tried to negotiate a phased return to work with Capita after a long and severe illness left them permanently classified as disabled.

However, not all was at it seemed. Believing that Capita would be subject to the same policy for people with disabilities as WSCC, this person expected to return to the same job, with appropriate 'reasonable adjustments' in place to help them cope during the first few difficult weeks. Unfortunately, this was not the case.

One of those reasonable adjustments was to reduce hours to part-time, with the remaining hours covered by a job-share arrangement. This was to help our member cope better with ongoing

lapses of concentration (due to treatment) and sustained periods of fatigue: residual effects of the illness.

This was not permitted. The reason given? It increased headcount.

Indeed, not only was there no offer of a reduction in hours, but a complete change in the type of work being given to our member. This new work would normally done by staff operating five grades lower, and not a good use of our member's skills, knowledge and ability. New tasks did not consider our member's specific needs and issues,



resulting in increased stress levels.

It was only after 14 anxious months - when the union was formally approached - that any serious attempt to provide reasonable adjustments was introduced. Largely through the union's intervention, improvements have been made.

Anyone can become disabled at any time. Equalities legislation is in place to protect workers from discrimination. Contact us if you need advice.

NOMINATION FORM to become a UNISON Workplace* Representative

Complete and send to: UNISON West Sussex, County Hall, West Street, Chichester, PO19 1RQ.

I would like to become the Workplace* Representative for *(name your team, location, directorate or employer):*

Full name (PLEASE PRINT)	Signature	Date
Proposed by (PLEASE PRINT)	Signature	Date
Seconded by (PLEASE PRINT)	Signature	Date

Please note: proposers and seconders should be UNISON members from the same workplace.
 *A workplace may be a large team, a location (a day centre for example), a section within a directorate, or an employer.

Capita and ACAS compliance

UNISON supported a disabled member through a performance improvement process with their employer, Capita. With 'reasonable adjustments' they came through with flying colours.

Two weeks later our member contacted us to say they had been called to a management meeting, told not to tell us, and offered £3,000 to sign a voluntary redundancy 'settlement agreement'. If they didn't accept, they would be downgraded. We took it up with senior Capita management.

Capita correctly pointed out that it's not a legal requirement to allow union representation in initial 'without prejudice' discussions on settlement agreements. We stated that it is ACAS recommended good practice and would they not want to reflect

this? Capita asserted they do not follow ACAS in this regard, but would try to make a local agreement with the Branch. We now have a verbal agreement to ensure all employees can be accompanied by their trade union rep to such meetings, though we could not get written confirmation. But we did manage to satisfactorily resolve the situation for our member.

So if you are ever invited to a 'without prejudice' meeting, or to discuss a 'settlement agreement' – don't go alone. Phone UNISON, your friend at work, and we will help.

“I just wanted to thank you both for helping me in getting this horrible situation resolved as best we could.”

(UNISON West Sussex member)

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Join UNISON! MEMBERSHIP FORM REQUEST

Complete and send to: UNISON West Sussex, County Hall, West Street, Chichester, PO19 1RQ.
You can also join online at: www.unisonwestsussex.org.uk/join

Name (PLEASE PRINT)	Email address
Workplace address	Home address

I would like more information on (please tick all that are relevant):

Joining the union

Becoming a rep