

BRANCH LINES

Equalities
edition

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

Staff Groups or 'SOGs'?

**UNISON's unique arrangement
with one of our key employers...**



UNISON was at the forefront of establishing West Sussex County Council's staff groups back in 2005. The union funded the first few events that encouraged staff to join those groups if they identified themselves against one of the 'protected characteristics' being championed at that time.

West Sussex is – we think – unique in having an arrangement where its staff groups meet the aspirations of the union's 'self-organised groups' (SOGs).

The first group to be established was the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender group (LGBT), originally known as 'GLO-West'.

It was quickly followed by the Disabilities Staff Group (DSG) and the Black & Minority Ethnic Staff Group (BME). All three have continued to meet regularly throughout the year since they were established.

In the past, staff groups have convened their own conferences and seminars inviting high profile speakers and senior members of the council such as WSCC Leader Louise Goldsmith and former Chief Executive Kieran Stigant.

Staff who work for Capita or other contractors are also welcome to join the staff groups.

You'll find contact details in this newsletter.

Black Members Conference 2015: Report

The UNISON Black members' Conference took place in early February. Here's a summary report from our Equalities Officer (BME), Jules Wilson:

"The first motion to be carried was 'Defining Black'. This tried to tackle the issue of the widespread use of 'Minority Ethnic' in workplaces, and the fact that it has the disadvantage of being viewed as more marginal and less important than 'Black'. As far as UNISON is concerned, 'Black' is used in its broad political and inclusive sense to describe people in Britain who have suffered colonialism and enslavement in the past and continue to experience racism and diminished opportunities today."



Jules Wilson: UNISON
Equalities Officer (BME)

jules.wilson@westsussex.gov.uk

"There were debates about the importance of the Black vote at the general election. Seema Malhotra MP argued that Black people were disengaged from politics because parliament neither looked nor sounded representative. Indeed, out of 650 MPs, only 27 were Black. To be fully representative, this figure should be closer to 84.

"The Black vote could decide over 160 seats, so it's essential to mobilise the vote to fight against the coalition's cuts and austerity measures. With the growing popularity of UKIP and far right groups, it's also important for Black voters to challenge the politics of hate that seek to divide our communities."

As Margret Greer, Chair of the National Black Members' Committee said: **"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."**

"I hope to attend next year's conference," continued Jules, "and would like to extend that invitation to other Black UNISON West Sussex members. Please contact me if you are interested."

UNISON's Black Members' Group

UNISON is committed to increasing its representation and participation of Black people within the union. National UNISON's Black members' group campaigns for equality in the workplace and the wider community. Challenging racism in the workplace is crucial to UNISON's work because no workplace where racism is allowed to flourish can ever be effectively organised. For more information contact [Jules Wilson](#), our BME Equalities Officer.

WSCC Staff Group contact:

Eleanor Hope: Chair, WSCC BME Staff Group
eleanor.hope@westsussex.gov.uk

Disabled Members

UNISON is committed to achieving equality for all by fighting disability discrimination and campaigning to remove barriers to employment in the workplace.

Through self-organisation, disabled members help the union to identify and challenge discrimination. This helps build equality throughout the work of the union. It can also be a valuable way for members to get involved in the union, develop skills, expertise and confidence.

The South East disabled members' committee meets four times a year including the annual general meeting, where disabled members' representatives are elected on to the committee. This includes our own UNISON West Sussex Equalities Officer (Disability), Robert Hayes (pictured below):



Representatives are also elected to attend UNISON's National Disabled Members Conference on behalf of the Region.

A training weekend is held each year to provide representatives with the skills to promote issues relating to disability within their branch, as well as identifying barriers that may prevent disabled members from participating fully both at work and within the union's own structures.

Any member who defines him or herself as disabled, can be elected on to the Committee or attend training.

Disability Staff Group

WSCC has its own staff group for people with disabilities. The Disability Staff Group (DSG) is fully supported by UNISON. Its purpose is to support anyone in the council who has a disability. It also offers a valuable professional resource to WSCC for example, to help with web site testing and give advice on accessibility.



Mark Hannigan, DSG Chair (pictured) said, "The group meets three times a year in a different location

to give our members the chance to attend a meeting close to their workplace. Agenda items can be tabled by any group member. We encourage external speakers to brief us on key issues and ask for their support on DSG matters."

The next meetings are:

9:30-12, Weds 29 April, Conference Room 1, Centenary House, Durrington

9:30-12, Weds 19 August, Parham Room, County Hall North, Horsham

"In the longer term, the three WSCC staff groups making up its 'Diversity Forum' will link action plans and ask senior managers for their support. To help this, each group has a corporate sponsor acting as link to the council's senior management. For DSG we are grateful to have the support and guidance provided by Alan Jones, Head of Resilience and Emergencies.

For DSG email: disability@westsussex.gov.uk
UNISON members can email Robert Hayes: robert.hayes@westsussex.gov.uk



Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans (LGBT) Members



West Sussex LGBT Staff Group

WSCC offers all its staff, and those working with our contractors, the opportunity to participate in a lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) Staff Group.

Group Chair, Robert Rhodes-Kubiak said, "The group's main aim is to offer LGBT staff a safe, comfortable and supportive place to meet, discuss issues, share stories and raise concerns.

However, we also act as a critical friend to WSCC, striving to make the council a better place to work for its LGBT staff, their colleagues, friends, families, and communities."

With an action plan and a budget for activities, regular meetings, and a range of activities and opportunities to make a difference throughout the year, coupled with a growing external reputation and outreach work, everyone is encouraged to get involved and support the group. This is especially if you are interested in, or affected by, the issues that affect LGBT individuals, staff and communities.

You can contact the group by emailing WSCCLGBTStaffNetwork@westsussex.gov.uk

South East Regional LGBT group

UNISON South East LGBT group fights discrimination and prejudice in the workplace on behalf of its lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members. We organise through an elected regional committee who meet three times a year to plan our campaigns. We are very high profile at many Pride events in the South East talking our messages of equality and standing up for public services to the wider LGBT community.

Members can join our confidential e-network to receive the latest news, events and campaigns, simply [email us](#) with your name and membership number. Our Regional LGBT Convenor is Andy Stenning (pictured below).



Cuts and LGBT jobs and services

The 2010 Equality Act requires public bodies to take active steps to promote equality for LGBT people. Many LGBT people choose to work delivering public services, so public sector cuts affect us as workers and as service users.

UNISON believes the cuts are bad for the economy, bad for equality and bad for LGBT people. We call for a different future: we are fighting the cuts and defending public services. Where mainstream services meet everyone's needs or there are good services targeted at LGBT people, it changes lives. In some cases, it saves lives.

Like all vulnerable groups, when times get hard LGBT people need public services even more.

But services for LGBT people are among the first to go when budgets are cut. They are a lifeline for those who use them, but they don't win popularity contests.

In the workplace, bullying often increases in the face of reorganisation and redundancies. LGBT workers fear to complain when their jobs are at risk.

LGBT equality at work



Prejudice and discrimination mean many LGBT people keep their sexual orientation or gender history private. Some employers and public service providers think they have no LGBT staff or clients. They are wrong: LGBT people are everywhere. UNISON has been working for decades to make LGBT rights visible.

Employers and service providers must recognise that LGBT people are in all workforces and communities. It's no excuse to say they don't know what people need - they have a duty to find out.

The fact that LGBT people would not even consider certain jobs for fear of other people's reaction is a worrying sign that prejudice and discrimination still limit people's choices and chances in life.

UNISON works to make sure the voices of LGBT members are heard, in the good times and the bad. We defend public services and promote equality.

Training for branch LGBT officers



Are you a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender member who wants to get more active in your UNISON branch? The union is holding a one-day national training course in Birmingham on 6 March, which will look at:

- what's involved in becoming an LGBT activist;
- where to get the resources and support you need;
- how to develop strategies to support LGBT members in your branch; and
- how to campaign and get LGBT equality on the bargaining agenda.

If you are interested in applying please contact the branch office:

office.unison@westsussex.gov.uk

Tel: 01243 777636

New guidance on supporting transgender employees

New county council guidance supporting transgender colleagues in the workplace has been launched. It was developed and approved by a transgender UNISON member and Branch Secretary Dan Sartin, working with WSCC HR colleagues. The guidance clarifies issues on all forms of 'gender dysphoria' and gender reassignment. It helps both managers and transgender staff to successfully manage through - what can be - an uncomfortable

and emotionally challenging time.

People who have gender dysphoria feel their assigned gender at birth and their gender identity do not match. It can place a great strain on the individual and the decision to undergo gender reassignment is a difficult one. It is not uncommon for the individual to feel that they must leave the job they are doing in the old identity and to seek new employment in the new identity. Both UNISON and West Sussex County Council (WSCC) are committed to supporting individuals at work so that their valuable skills and expertise can be retained.

As the guidance is also relevant to schools, you can find the guidance on both WSCC's intranet and the Grid for Learning.

UNISON: Equalities resources

There is a wealth of resources available on UNISON's regional and national websites to support employees who identify themselves as BME, Disabled or LGBT. Here are a few useful links:

BME:

[UNISON South East regional website](#) providing details of Black Members' groups and issues.

LGBT:

[UNISON South East regional website](#) providing details of LGBT members' groups and issues.

Disabilities:

[UNISON guide to making sickness absence policies work better for us](#)
[UNISON guide to time off for medical appointments and health screening](#)
[UNISON disability leave factsheet](#)
[Raising awareness of disability - self disclosure](#)
[TUC Equality Audit 2014](#)