

BRANCH LINES

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INTRODUCTION



2015 was an incredibly busy year for the branch. Not only have we had to deal with an increasing number of individual cases and collective issues related to restructures, but we've also had to create plans for how we deal with national pressures on unions such as those contained in the Trade Union Bill.

We've had to tackle the political fall-out from the general election and manage our

own elections for UNISON General Secretary. Lately, our Further Education members are holding a pay ballot to decide whether or not they take industrial action.

A highlight of our year has to be the detailed research we completed on the council's Capita contract which evidenced many of the flaws we anecdotally knew were worrying our members. We expect to see actions implemented by the council and Capita in the next few months to address those concerns. We wish you all a very Happy New Year.

Dan Sartin, Branch Secretary



UNISON NJC pay consultation to start

The NJC employers' side has offered a two-year pay deal for two consecutive 1% increases in pay, for 16/17 and 17/18. There are slightly higher amounts for staff on NJC Grades 1 and 2, simply so they can keep up with the government's new National Living Wage.



01

UNISON would recommend to members that they **REJECT** the offer

02

Branches will be responsible for conducting a consultation with members, which will end on 18 February

03

As well as consulting members on the two-year deal, members will be asked whether they would be prepared to take strike action, action short of a strike such as work-to-rule, and selective strike action.

Look out for branch circulars on the pay consultation, including your ballot form. These will be sent by email, so if you have not registered an email address with the branch, do so today by calling 01243 777636. A consultative ballot is not a formal industrial action ballot. One will be triggered

if members **REJECT** the offer in sufficient numbers. It's your pay, and your pay rise which will impact the value of your pension. With falls in take home pay because of NI rises this year (see page 6), 1% is clearly unsatisfactory. Make sure you have your say and use your vote!

✓ VOTE YES

Further Education ballot now open

The Further Education (FE) pay ballot is now open. It closes on 29 January. If you work in FE, let us know if you have not received your ballot paper. We encourage you to vote 'yes' to both questions featured in it. Remember – a high turn-out sends a strong message to FE employers.

Your employers have offered you nothing on pay this year. Some FE members have lost more than £3,000 over the last 5 years as inflation and pay restraint have bitten hard. Your college relies on the hard work you do to keep going. To offer you nothing in return is an insult.

UNISON members overwhelmingly rejected the employers' offer. We wrote to every college asking them to make a better local offer. Only a small number did. We have therefore, taken the tough decision to ballot members for industrial action on pay.

UNISON is working jointly with the University and College Union (UCU) to try to get an improved offer. There is still time for the Association of Colleges to make one.

Ask your local rep how you can get more involved with our pay campaign.

BRANCH AGM DATES

The branch's annual general meetings will take place in main County Council office hubs around the county as shown below. Please make every effort to attend.

All take place from 12:30pm to 2pm. A buffet lunch will be provided. All members are welcome, not just those who work for the council, plus any guest wanting to join the union on the day.

Tuesday 29 March 2016

**Conference Room 4
Centenary House, Worthing.**

Wednesday 30 March 2016

**Main Conference Room, County Hall
North (Parkside), Horsham**

Thursday 31 March 2016

**Committee Room 3, County Hall,
Chichester**

GUEST SPEAKER

Special guest speaker at all three venues this year will be Peter Scott-Presland, author of the three-volume book 'Amiable Warriors': the official history of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality. Volume One, entitled 'A Space to Breathe', was launched at the LGBT History Festival in Manchester in February 2015. Volume Two is planned for release in 2016. Peter is an entertaining speaker. We hope members will be interested to hear about the development of the LGBT rights movement in the UK. If you're coming, please notify our office (phone or email) so we can judge the catering order.



THE TRADE UNION BILL

In November, the government's controversial Trade Union Bill was debated in the House of Commons, before going on to the House of Lords. Our branch lobbied local MPs Tim Loughton and Sir Peter Bottomley. Here, the TUC discusses some of the Bill's key issues.

FIVE SURPRISING THINGS

1 Conservative opposition. It's an important Bill for the government, who want to bash unions. But it goes too far for some of their own MPs. Speaking against proposals to change union funding rules, Conservative MP Jeremy Lefroy said: "As a Conservative I am not in favour of prohibition of many things and certainly not of this."

2 Conservatives trying to amend their own government's Bill. They didn't just speak against it, some of them tried to change it too. Jeremy Lefroy put forward an amendment on union funding. David Davis MP and others tabled amendments to protect union members' civil liberties. This shows how deep the unease at this Bill runs in all parties. It's not easy to go against your party, but they stood up for what they think is right.

3 It's only supported by Conservatives and UKIP. Labour, the SNP, the Lib Dems, Plaid Cymru, the DUP, the UUP, the SDLP, and the Greens have all spoken out against the Bill. And even then, some Conservative MPs didn't vote for it.

4 So what's the problem with electronic balloting? The government keeps saying it wants to see higher turnout in votes for strikes. Unions agree, and have asked for legal permission to run votes online. The government's response is always the same: "Online voting is not secure." Yet every time they say that, someone points out that the Conservative Party uses online voting themselves to choose candidates. If online voting is good enough for them, it should be good enough for the trade unions too.

5 The great government back track. The government is trying to make the Bill a little more palatable. They have announced that one of the provisions – a change in how union members pay their membership fees – will only be introduced in a year. However, we are hopeful, after intense lobbying, that a clause to preserve paying membership subs through the payroll will be inserted at the House of Lords stage and unopposed by the government. Tim Loughton MP has confirmed this to the branch.

THREE UNSURPRISING THINGS

1 The government still isn't listening. The TUC and the unions recently brought thousands of ordinary people to Parliament to discuss their concerns with the Trade Union Bill. MPs listened, discussed, and took note. The government, however, hasn't listened. Even when the government had to u-turn on their barmy idea that people on strike would have to tell police what they

were writing on Facebook weeks in advance, they never admitted they got it wrong.

2 Unions aren't the only ones against the Bill. The government's Bill is opposed by every single union. But that's not all. Other groups have come out too. Environmental groups like Friends of the Earth, Civil liberties groups like Liberty, Amnesty, and the British Institute for Human

Rights. And even the professional body for human resources, the CIPD, has come out against. Even the Institute of Directors have said they support electronic voting.

3 “Unions play a valuable and important role in our society”

At some point in the debate, practically every Conservative MP mentioned how ‘valuable’ and ‘important’ unions are in Britain. We agree. But if the MPs are such fans of trade unions, why are they voting to restrict them?

What does all this tell us?

The government has won a vote, but lost the argument. Clear points against the Bill were made by MPs of all parties – and we fully expect more chunks of it to be knocked off in the House of Lords, which is where it is headed next. The pressure’s building. If you want to take a stand against the Trade Union Bill, you can sign up here: www.protecttherighttostrike.org.uk

UNISON General Secretary results

Dave Prentis has been re-elected as General Secretary of UNISON.

Voting in the ballot was as follows:

- **Roger Bannister** 16,853 (12.6%)
- **John Burgess** 15,573 (11.6%)
- **Dave Prentis** 66,155 (49.4%)
- **Heather Wakefield** 35,433 (26.4%)

However, there has been a challenge to the results from John Burgess who suspects the union’s own election rules were flouted during the course of the campaign. This issue has been referred to the Electoral Reform Society by a number of branches, including West Sussex. The outcome will be announced in mid-January. John has also referred the matter to the government’s Trade Union Certification Officer. The allegations centre around the misuse of significant union resources to promote the Dave Prentis campaign. The story has made The Guardian and Private Eye. Watch this space!

Cornwall County Council wins case against outsourcer BT

In the last edition of Branch Lines, we reported on Cornwall County Council’s (CCC) battle with BT over alleged failures by BT to fulfil elements of its outsourced contract.

We’re pleased to report that in December, the High Court found in favour of the council. In his blog, CCC independent councillor Andrew Wallis reports: “It confirms our argument that BT had been in material breach of the contract due to its failure to carry out services to required standards. Therefore, the

council was justified in reaching the decision to terminate the contract.”

The council will be seeking payment of its legal costs from BT and intends to hold discussions to agree the level of damages it will receive, which could run into £millions. “I would also like to say well done to the council’s legal team who took on the

might of an international corporation – and won. The principle of outsourcing great swathes of the public sector to commercial companies who have little, if any, understanding of the public sector is flawed. They are quick to promise to solve their funding problems. Truth be told, local government is better at knowing how to save money without thinking how it will affect profit margins.”



PENSIONS SPECIAL

Don't be fooled – new state pension arrangements

From 6 April 2016 the state pension age will change to become a single amount for those of you who have not reached state pension age by that date.

You may be under the impression that your state pension will be £150 a week, as this is what the new state pension amount will be. Sadly, you may be in for a shock! Changes to the state pension are supposed to be cost-neutral, so there are likely to be many overall losers.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has admitted that fewer than half of those retiring between 2016 and 2020 will get the full amount of state pension and that 'contracted out' workers (public-sector workers who pay into an occupational

pension scheme such as the LGPS) will receive no more than approx. £133 a week.

The current state pension system is split into two: the basic state pension and the state second pension. Public service workers currently only earn entitlement to the basic pension, currently £115.95 per week (for someone with full 30-year National Insurance contributions).

If you're a member of a public service pension scheme (such as the Local Government Pension Scheme: LGPS), you are currently contracted-out of the state second pension.

You do not get a second state pension, but do pay less National Insurance (NI), as does your employer. From 6 April this will stop. You will no longer be contracted out and will pay a higher rate of NI, expected to be 1.4% more. This will impact your take-home pay and put any 2016-17 pay offer into perspective.

If you are close to retirement you may well not get what you're expecting. However, younger workers will accrue a bigger state pension than they would have done before, although they will pay larger NI contributions

CHECK YOUR PENSION STATEMENT

A very significant benefit of working for many public service employers in West Sussex is entitlement to membership of the West Sussex Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

Annual benefit statements for members of the LGPS are available through the 'Hartlink' online portal. Have you checked yours yet?

UNISON has been made aware of some technical difficulties accessing the statements, as well as some irregularities with the figures presented, which we are taking up for members. Please check your statement, which is in any case a healthy part of your own financial planning. Let the UNISON branch office know if you have any concerns or difficulties.

Capita was referred to the pensions regulator last year for not getting pensions statements out on time. Recognising the difficulties of access to the pensions portal, and after significant pressure from UNISON, the council has asked Capita to develop a new website to replace Hartlink. This should make pension statements more accessible. It should be available from summer 2016.

and have to wait longer to draw their pension.

How can you find out what state pension you will get?

If you will reach state pension age between April 2016 and August 2021 you can get a personalised estimate of your pension entitlement, together with information on how you might enhance this. Go to www.gov.uk/state-pension-statement for further info. This service will

eventually be extended to all working-age people.

Checking your state pension age

This depends on your date of birth. State pension age is currently 65 for men and approx. 62.5 for women. This will equalise in November 2018. From then, the state pension age will increase to 66 by October 2020 and 68 by 2046. You can check your own state pension age at www.gov.uk/calculate-state-pension.

HOW THE PENSIONS ADVISORY BOARD HELPS YOU

UNISON (retired) and Pensions Advisory Board (PAB) member Chris Scanes explains the role of the board and how it helps pension scheme members.

"The PAB helps WSCC (the pension fund scheme manager) ensure the scheme complies with legislation and the Pensions Regulator. It makes sure correct decision-making processes are followed by the Pensions Panel (PP). This is the council committee responsible for dealing with:

- its specialist investment advisers on pensions;
- the council's investment policy; and
- pension fund investments.

"Pensions are a huge personal investment so it's important schemes are managed properly. The union should be involved in decisions affecting scheme members as we can for example, scrutinise the advice and challenge any lack of openness of investment firms. I've had UNISON training and I am the only PAB member who has actually worked for WSCC, so have a unique insight."

Buying extra pension

If you reach state pension age before 6 April 2016, you will be offered the opportunity to boost your state pension by up to £25 a week. This will be done by paying Class 3A voluntary NI contributions up to £25 a week. The window for this top-up scheme closes on 5 April 2017. How much you pay depends on your age and how much extra pension you want to purchase. Find out more at www.gov.uk/state-pension-topup.

Join UNISON – Membership Form

Please fill in the form and send to UNISON West Sussex,
Central Attic, County Hall, Chichester, PO19 1RQ

1 Tell us about you

Title	First name											
Surname/family name		Date of birth / /										
Home address												
Postcode												
email												
Phone number (please indicate if home, work or mobile)	National insurance number (from your payslip)											
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Please give your ethnic origin: <i>(tick one box)</i>												
<input type="checkbox"/> Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/> Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/> Black African										
<input type="checkbox"/> Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian UK	<input type="checkbox"/> Black UK										
<input type="checkbox"/> Indian	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian other	<input type="checkbox"/> Black Caribbean										
		<input type="checkbox"/> Black other										
		<input type="checkbox"/> White UK										
		<input type="checkbox"/> Irish										
		<input type="checkbox"/> White other										

2 Tell us about your job

Employer's name
Your job title/occupation
Workplace name and address
Postcode
Payroll number (from your payslip)

3 What you will pay each month

Please tick the appropriate box for your earnings before deductions.

Annual pay	▼	Your subscription
Up to £2,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£1.30
£2,001–£5,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£3.50
£5,001–£8,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£5.30
£8,001–£11,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£6.60
£11,001–£14,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£7.85
£14,001–£17,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£9.70
£17,001–£20,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£11.50
£20,001–£25,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£14.00
£25,001–£30,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£17.25
£30,001–£35,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20.30
over £35,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£22.50

4 Choose your political fund

One of the ways UNISON works on your behalf is through political campaigning. Your subscription includes a political fund payment so you won't pay any extra, but in UNISON you choose how you want that money to be used.

Please tick one box only.

- Our Affiliated Political Fund takes UNISON members' views directly into the Labour Party, working to promote UNISON policies.
- The General Political Fund is used to pay for branch, regional and national campaigns but is independent of any political party.

5 Choose how you wish to pay *Please tick ONE box only*

EITHER deduct from salary:

I wish to join UNISON and authorise deduction of subscriptions from my pay by my employer.

Signature

OR pay by direct debit:

please complete the direct debit form below

I wish to join UNISON and authorise deduction of subscriptions by direct debit

Date

Please go to unison.org.uk/privacy-policy to see how we will protect and use your personal information

Instruction to your bank or building society to pay by Direct Debit

Please fill in the form and send to UNISON West Sussex



Name and full postal address of your bank or building society

To: The Manager	Bank/building society
Address	
Postcode	

Name(s) of Account holder(s)

Bank/building society account number

Branch sort code

Service User Number

Reference number (for office use only do not complete)

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(s)

Date

Banks and building societies may not accept Direct Debit instructions for some types of account

Branch Officers—2016/17 Elections

The Branch Committee has nominated the following members to serve as Branch Officers for the following year. 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 has also started. The nomination period for all positions ends at



Branch Chair
Ian Harvey



Branch Vice-Chair
Sarah Cawston



Branch Secretary
Dan Sartin



Deputy Branch Secretary
Karen Daubney



Equalities Officer
(Disabled)
Robert Hayes



Equalities Officer (LGBT)
Paul Windsor



Equalities Officer
(Women)
Vacant



Communications Officer
Vacant



International Officer
David Hammond



Education Coordinator
Mervyn Sams



Membership Officer
Vacant



Young Members' Officer
Laura Child

12 noon on 29 January. Currently, there are four vacancies. We're particularly keen to fill the post of Pensions Champion, especially as major changes to the state pension (see page 6-7) start in April and Capita's 'Hartlink' replacement is scheduled for the summer (see page 7). This role is open to any member, in-work or retired, with any employer. If you are interested in taking it on, please contact the Branch Secretary to find out more.



Branch Treasurer
Jennie Barrett



Environmental
Officer
Julie Bolton



Welfare Officer
David O'Connor



Equalities
Officer: BME
Jules Wilson



Health & Safety
Officer (1)
Karen Daubney



Health & Safety
Officer (2)
Clive Coleman



Health & Safety
Officer (3)
Chris Barrett



Labour Link Officer
Sarah Cawston



Lifelong Learning
Coordinator
Mervyn Sams



Retired Members'
Secretary
Ruby Cox



Pensions Champion
Vacant

Branch Committee meets six times per year. All UNISON West Sussex members are welcome to observe meetings. See our website 'Events' page (look under 'Get Involved') for more information.



Campaign for a Public Service Users Bill

Local libraries, schools, day care centres and fire stations are all public services. But all can be privatised or outsourced: run by companies that don't have to tell you anything. Campaign group 'We Own It' is lobbying for a 'Public Service Users Bill' to give you a say. It is supported by 102 MPs. Here are six reasons to support their campaign.

1 Consultation: you would be consulted before any public service is privatised or outsourced (79% public support) and about the services you receive through public service contracts.

2 In-house bids: when services are tendered, there would always be a realistic in-house public sector bid (80% public support).

3 Needs not profit: organisations (such as public sector,

cooperatives, genuine mutuals, charities, social enterprises) focused on meeting your needs rather than making a profit would be more likely to win contracts (57% public support).

4 Data: you would be able to see performance and financial data from private companies running your public services. They would be as transparent

as the public sector (88% public support).

5 Fol: You would be able to make Freedom of Information requests to private companies running public services (48% of the public mistakenly believe this is already the case).

6 Right to recall: you would have the 'right to recall' private companies doing a bad job (88% public support).

Go to <http://weownit.org.uk> to join the campaign

THE ENTERPRISE BILL – restriction

The government wants to change public sector exit payments. The impact of their proposals, currently out for consultation, could have a major impact on many staff, and not just the very highest earners.

The Government is looking to limit the total value of exit payments to £95,000. This would be a cap on redundancy payments and employer-funded contributions to enable unreduced access to your pension in the event of redundancy.

Dan Sartin, Branch Secretary said, "A £95,000 cap is actually not a lot if you are over 55, have long service and a median salary, and are made redundant. Such reductions would be made for life – meaning that workers forced out of employment through no

fault of their own would not simply suffer the immediate consequences of their redundancy but would be impoverished for the remainder of their life. Once again the government is targeting public sector workers."

The government has released additional, last-minute proposals just before Christmas and is asking for responses by 25th January, a short time frame to consider

Young Workers' Festival success

Young workers from around the County Council attended the first joint UNISON/WSCC Young Workers' Festival at County Hall North, Horsham in November.

Several stalls promoting union and council initiatives were visited by attendees, providing information on issues such as the staff volunteering scheme, environmental approaches and the range of union benefits. Informal feedback told us they felt it was a great way to network and make contact with people from other services they would not normally meet.

Event raffle winner Joe Gardner said: "The event was a great way to discover all the opportunities and support available to young workers at West Sussex. Winning the tablet was a real surprise!"

Building on this success, UNISON and WSCC are hoping to repeat the event to help young workers get together more often.



CUTS 2016/17

The West Sussex County Council (WSCC) budget will be bad news for staff and residents from April.

Central government has hit the council with an unexpected £31.7m cut. This was announced late in Parliament on the 17 December, giving little time to prepare plans. Taking into account funding pressures in social care and the cost of implementing the Tories' National Living Wage, WSCC estimate the funding gap to be a whopping £44.5million.

West Sussex has a worse settlement this year because of its relative affluence compared to the rest of the UK. Years of lobbying by West Sussex Tories to Tory ministers has had little effect. More than this, central government has changed tack on council tax. After years of encouraging freezes, the government now want WSCC to increase it to help plug the gaps it has created. West Sussex Tories mistakenly took the freeze bait for five years, and are millions short every year as a result. Your UNISON reps argued tax freezing was folly. Now WSCC agree with us and are finally planning a tax rise of 3.95% to protect essential services.

By raising tax and using reserves, WSCC estimate they can close the gap to £18.7million. This will be found through a variety of means, but undoubtedly some will be cuts to services and involve staff redundancies. It is too early to say what precise cuts will be made but we will protect your interests and keep you informed.

as on exit payments

a complex set of proposals. These extra regulations would come into play from April 2016 and hit higher earners with salaries over £80,000. Any redundancy package they received (again, including payments to ensure unreduced pension if over 55) would be repayable on a sliding scale if they got a new job anywhere in the public sector within 12 months. It would become a legal duty on staff

to notify their old and new employers that they had to make the repayment.

"This is a nasty set of proposals, singling out the public sector. The 95K cap will hit staff on ordinary, median salaries and members need to be aware of what this government is pushing through," Dan continued.

JOINING UNISON

What's in it for social workers?

When talking to employees at union recruitment events, we're sometimes asked by social care staff about the advantages of joining a trade union.

To answer this, we describe circumstances below that could happen to anyone. It shows the benefits of union support during a particularly stressful workplace situation.

A WSCC social care worker with over 30 years' blemish-free service admitted to making a genuine mistake which led to disciplinary procedures. Though our member was traumatised by the error, the situation was compounded by the way they

were treated by senior managers, including a catalogue of fundamental procedural management errors. Incredibly, this included changing accusations part way through a disciplinary hearing due to challenging questions from the UNISON caseworker.

Our member was forced to take a long period of sickness absence due to stress-related illnesses linked to the way they were treated in the workplace. However, due to their tenacity and total compliance with our caseworker's advice, they were able to negotiate a much fairer outcome and seek successful redeployment. Our member is now in a new social care role.

Social care staff can be exposed to unforeseen circumstances where expert support and legal advice could be needed to get a fair result.

Aspire's damning Ofsted result

The council's former Adult and Community Learning Service, now outsourced to social enterprise 'Aspire Sussex' has been rated as 'inadequate' just three years after it was rated as 'good', when under council control.

It's yet more evidence of outsourcing failure. Not only does this reflect poorly on previous Aspire management, but also on the quality of the council's contract management, brought in for particular criticism by Ofsted.

In their report, Ofsted remarked: "West Sussex County Council (WSCC) managers do not adequately manage and monitor the provision. The contract management team sets Aspire very ambitious targets, yet when these are not achieved managers do not interrogate the

underlying reasons sufficiently, agree alternative actions or revise the target." Members will recall that the council's audit function could only give a 'limited assurance' rating to the council's commissioning function in 2015. This judgement reinforces that view.

During the three years since it was outsourced, the service almost went bankrupt. Staff unanimously passed a vote of no confidence in the previous Chief Exec, who has now left.

This result is in no way a reflection of the

hard work of our Aspire members but it does reflect the poor way they have been previously treated.

UNISON believes the new Chief Exec will make improvements to the service, but it beggars belief that a 'good' service can be turned to 'inadequate' so quickly after outsourcing.

The UNISON branch will be raising this experience further to underline to councillors the damage that outsourcing can do to great public services.

Getting 'quizzical'

The branch's first Christmas Quiz held in early December proved to be a very enjoyable and entertaining evening, stretching the brain-power of the teams to the limit with questions such as: "What are the five top cheese-producing countries of the world?"

Our valiant team of retired members, 'Antediluvians' (led by Ruby Cox) proved to be ultimate winners even though a tie-break failed to separate them from the 'Tolpuddle Farters'. The team of Occupational Therapists (OTs) were awarded best team name with 'TOTs' (tired OTs).

The event raised £328 for cancer research charity 'Lofty's Legacy'. UNISON member Rhona Mitchell (Lofty's wife) told us he died of a very rare tumour called malignant thymoma. It's hoped that by raising funds for rarer cancers it may in the future lead to earlier diagnoses and a less final outcome for anyone with them.



Legal advice wins £27k payout!

One of our West Sussex teaching assistant members was awarded a £27,000 payout after intervention by UNISON's solicitors Thompson's.

This followed an injury on the way to work. She was knocked-off her bicycle, hitting her head on the car's bonnet. She broke her wrist but also suffered from 'post-concussion syndrome', causing her to feel exhausted and unable to concentrate. She couldn't read or use computers and took several months to recover.

She had already taken independent legal advice (they would have taken 30% of any award), but was told about UNISON's free legal support through Thompson's. They doggedly pursued her claim, including tackling bureaucratic obstacles largely due to questionable service from Capita. Capita were responsible for administering sick pay insurance readjustments from the £30,000 award back to the council, totalling £3,000. They were poor at responding to the

solicitor's enquiries, unnecessarily slowing down the case. It took an intervention from the council's Legal Services to get any sense. Fortunately, following advice from Occupational Health and Thompson's, our member phased her return to work four months later and is now working full-time.

It shows one of the benefits of UNISON membership. Our legal team at Thompson's do not operate like 'no win no fee' solicitors, and will offer sound legal advice to our members free-of-charge on both work and non-work related matters.

Accidents can happen to anyone any time. UNISON membership can help alleviate stress in difficult situations. Effective legal support is just one way our members benefit. Please do all you can to encourage others to join.

JOB VACANCY

Do you want to work for us?

We have a fantastic job opportunity in our branch for a Casework Coordinator.

It's a vital role supporting our 6,000 members. You'll advise and represent individual UNISON members through formal and informal employment procedures where they have problems at work, such as grievance, disciplinary, capability, sickness and issues related to terms and conditions of employment.

You'll work closely with the branch's workplace reps to mentor and guide them as they support individual cases. You'll be part of a busy, supportive and effective branch team. You'll be mostly based in Chichester, but may occasionally have to travel around West Sussex.

Hours are negotiable, but are available from a minimum of 24 per week, up to a maximum of 37 per week for the right candidate.

FURTHER DETAILS

- NJC Grade 9: £27,123 (pro-rata).
- Attractive annual leave and final salary pension.
- Closing date for applications: Monday 1 February, 12pm.
- Interview date: Tuesday 9 February.
- Shortlisted candidates will be notified by 5pm, Wednesday 3 February.

For more details, please visit www.unisonwestsussex.org.uk

Come and join us! Work for a branch of UNISON: Britain's largest public service trade union.



Winter Fuel Grants

Low-paid members can apply for a one-off winter fuel grant of £40 per household from the union.

To be eligible:

- You must be a member who has paid 4 weeks' subscriptions before 15 December 2015;
- Your total net annual household income must be £18,000 or less (full details described in the form);
- You are responsible for meeting the household fuel bills and are struggling to pay them.

Members and their partners must not have combined savings or rolling bank balance, of more than £1,000. Savings of any other adults in the household do not apply. Applications are limited to one per household and priority is given to those who have not previously applied.

Download the form from our website www.unisonwestsussex.org.uk or contact UNISON Direct on 0800 0857 857 for a form to be posted to you. You'll need to provide us with supporting paperwork, outlined in the form. Submit the form along with the completed short survey by 23 February 2016.