

BRANCH LINES

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

NEW FORMAT BRANCH AGM ★ INCLUDES FREE CURRY, QUIZ, RAFFLE AND AWARDS

AGM
Quiz!
& Curry!
2017



SEE PAGE 2 >

SEE INSIDE

Check your pension 3 • Council finances 4 • Facilities management restructure 5 • Major restructure for children's prevention 5 • Social care research findings 11 • Winter fuel grants 15 • School survey deadline 16

INTRODUCTION



A very happy new year! Unfortunately, we think 2017 is going to be even more challenging than 2016. This edition

we focus on major issues affecting members in all services. We examine the unenviable state of the council's finances and the service implications of continued government under-funding. We take another look at the performance in Capita's pension service

and bring you the latest on the children's services' restructure, introduced in our last issue. There's also an update on the restructure in facilities management and reports on both local and national issues impacting on social care staff.
Dan Sartin, Branch Secretary

BRANCH AGMs

Quiz and curry night!

Branch AGMs will take place around the county during the week beginning 27 March 2017.



We're giving you early notice because this year we're trying a different format. We hope it will encourage more members to attend this important annual event. There will be five, short AGM sessions. They will consist of a half hour 'business report' and annual elections to the branch committee,

then time for members to ask questions of the branch secretary, treasurer and other committee members.

They take place from 12:30pm to 1:30pm except the Chichester AGM. Please see the following table.

There are only 80 places for the quiz, so book now via our website below.

Monday 27 March Crawley Library, Crawley RH10 6HG	Friday 31 March Martlets Restaurant County Hall Chichester, PO19 1RQ 4:30pm onwards. The quiz and curry night immediately follows the shortened AGM format event in Chichester, with free dinner for all and free wine for groups of four or more. There will be a raffle and awards. It will finish at approximately 9pm.
Tuesday 28 March Durban House Bognor Regis, PO22 9RE	
Wednesday 29 March Centenary House Worthing, BN13 2QB	
Thursday 30 March County Hall North Horsham, RH12 1XH	

Parking: always a hot issue

The issue of parking at the County Council has apparently not been resolved.

After UNISON input during the last parking review extra places were found in Horsham for staff, at council expense. But the simple fact is, having closed its satellite buildings, there are too many staff coming to single locations like Horsham which do not have off street parking available.

The Chief Executive has set up a 'task & finish' group to look at the vexed issue in 2017. UNISON has a rep on that group: Paul Windsor, a popular and experienced children's social work practice manager.

If you have any views on parking please let Paul or your own workplace rep know, or contact the office at office.unison@westsussex.gov.uk

Check your annual pension statement!



For the second year running West Sussex County Council (WSCC) has failed to meet its statutory obligation to provide local government pension scheme (LGPS) annual benefit statements to LGPS members by 31 August.

WSCC has reported itself to the pensions regulator. We wait to hear their recommendations.

Only a relatively small number of LGPS members do actually log on to the Hartlink portal to check their online statements. A paper version of the statement (as the council used to produce) is available to LGPS members on request. Very few staff seem to know about this option. In itself, this may put the council in breach of the statutory requirement. Again, WSCC is seeking advice.

UNISON believes it is vitally important LGPS members do check their annual statements. The LGPS is a large, union-negotiated benefit of working for the

council. It is your deferred wages, so something to be taken very seriously.

One UNISON member late last year checked her pension statement, and found it was missing two years' worth of pension contributions (which had been deducted from her wages).

Quite rightly worried about losing this substantial sum, she contacted Capita to try to get this error rectified. But due to the difficulties of accessing the helpdesk she failed to get a resolution in three months, despite escalating the issue to the Capita head of service. Not getting any answer, she came to UNISON. We escalated to the right contact

point in the council, but after they had investigated it, they concluded no error had been made! It was glaringly obvious to us, so we asked the council to look at it again. This time they saw the mistake they had made, restored our member's two years' worth of pensionable service, and issued a fulsome apology.

If you're in the LGPS, whatever your employer, the moral of the story is – check your pension statement! Your pension is your money, so look after it. You should not assume your pension will 'look after itself'. Errors can be made, and are made.

Contact the branch if you need support.

Workplace 2020

The Labour Party is starting a national conversation called 'Workplace 2020' to discuss what your workplace should look like in four years' time.

The party wants to hear about your experiences at work and gather your ideas about creating workplaces fit for the future.

What would you like to see change?
Can you make ends meet with the

pay you receive? Is health and safety taken seriously? Do you feel like you've got a good work-life balance?

UNISON West Sussex encourages you to take part in this consultation. It's important trade unions continue to influence Labour Party policy. The party wants to go beyond its current commitments, but from an informed perspective from its own and trade union members.

www.workplace2020.org.uk/get-involved

UPDATE

Council finances

The council's £39million 2017/18 funding gap has closed to some extent. This is good news for members and recipients of council services.



However, this does not mean savings do not need to be made. Rather, there has been a process of 'smoothing out' the savings over a longer period, so they are not mostly required next year.

This has been achieved through two measures. Using reserves of £16million is one. Some reserves, like the 'budget management reserve' are explicitly designed for this purpose. But make no mistake: this is quite a revolution for West Sussex County Council (WSCC) which, since 2010 had steadfastly refused to use reserves to reduce the pain of cuts. UNISON has consistently argued that reserves should be used, so we are pleased with these developments and believe our influence is having some effect.

Loan repayments

Secondly, a change to 'MRP' (the rate at which the council has to repay its loans) has found a further £8million. This is essentially an accounting exercise. It was unnecessary to put quite so much money aside for loan repayments. This could be

better diverted to support front line services. The debt hasn't gone away but how the council repays it can be more sensibly addressed.

This reduces the gap to £16million, even if the council's reorganisations in 2016/17 don't all deliver the savings once anticipated of them.

Council tax increase

It does mean council tax must go up (3.95%, including a proposed 2% precept for adult social care). Due to the ever-deepening social care crisis, the council will also have to decide if it wants to 'frontload' some of that precept in the next two years. It could mean that council tax is recommended to increase by 4.95%, though the council is still crunching the numbers due to the late announcement by central government that this would be possible.

While no-one wants to pay more tax, the sad fact is that if we do not, the most vulnerable adults in the county will be harmed. Central government is only offering a sticking plaster, rather than a long-term

solution, but we believe the council should take it and we will support them for doing so.

Council tax is regressive; but the real problem is that we have a central government which is choosing to push through another cut to corporation tax at the same time it is forcing councils into a 'Catch 22' on council tax. We hope WSCC will join UNISON in 2017 in campaigning for a radical re-think of government priorities.

Next steps

There are major cost pressures in adults' and children's services due to demographic changes (more very elderly people) and other factors, such as the unaddressed housing crisis which impacts on so many families. 2017/18 will no doubt be a challenging year with £16million cuts still to be faced. UNISON is working through the budget and trying to understand how these may impact our members. We have a meeting scheduled with the cabinet member for finance in February.

Facilities management restructure

The facilities management (maintenance of all council buildings including some schools) and catering service restructure has been on hold since 2014 after two reviews proved it couldn't be outsourced effectively.

UNISON says the service must now remain in house. The second review suggested the service be outsourced. This was rejected by the council's cabinet member.

The current third review brings in external consultants at cost to the council because there is now no capacity in the service with the appropriate skill-set to conduct it satisfactorily. UNISON reps opposed this course of action but the service continued.

Our members' issues on a wide variety of matters have been channelled effectively by workplace rep Carla Hardy through the residents' services joint consultative committee (JCC).

Your input helps strengthen our case. Send your thoughts to Carla: carla.hardy@westsussex.gov.uk

UNISON will be working hard to ensure an acceptable long-term solution is found this time so staff can continue to do their important jobs for the County Council.

Major restructure for Children's prevention

At time of writing the council is finalising a major restructure exercise.

It will affect over 500 staff providing support to vulnerable children and families, including those working in children and family centres, youth services, 'Think Family' teams, and so on.

The council aims to save £6million while maintaining outputs through a more integrated system.

£2.75million is to come from cuts to the 'Healthy Child Programme' contract currently delivered by the NHS (school nurses and health visitors). £3.2million must still be found from council services by 2020, including £1.8million next year.

The branch lobbied councillors on potential outsourcing at the September select committee. In December, Branch Secretary Dan Sartin returned to the committee to present staff concerns about the impending restructure. You can watch Dan's comments and responses to councillors' questions online: goo.gl/sLRofO

At the select committee

managers committed to making changes largely without redundancies. UNISON welcomes this, but it does not mean staff should be forced to take unsuitable alternative roles they do not want.

We are also concerned about increased workload passing to staff if the new

structure does not deliver expected efficiencies.

Therefore, UNISON has secured commitments that the current staff experience (how you are coping) will be baselined

in March then monitored.

We also secured a commitment from the select committee that it would review the new structure's progress after six months and one year in.

The branch expects some proposals will be deeply unpopular with some staff groups. The consultation goes live on 11 January. We will be in touch with members affected then. We urge UNISON members to give their feedback to the branch office rather than directly to management as non-members have to do.



Branch Officers for 2017/18

The Branch Committee has nominated the following members to serve as Branch Officers for



Branch Chair
Ian Harvey



Branch Vice-Chair
Sarah Cawston



Branch Secretary
Dan Sartin



Deputy Branch Secretary
Karen Daubney



Welfare Officer
Vacant



Equalities Officer: BME
Jules Wilson



Equalities Officer (Disability)
Robert Hayes



Equalities Officer (LGBT)
Paul Windsor



Health & Safety Officer (1)
Karen Daubney



Health & Safety Officer (2)
Clive Coleman



Labour Link Officer
Sarah Cawston



International Officer
David Hammond



Retired Members' Secretaries
**Jennie Gudgeon/
Margaret Guest**



Pensions Officer
Judith Taylor



Communications Officer
Vacant



Membership Officer
Vacant

Elections

the following year.



Branch Treasurer
Jennie Barrett



Environmental Officer
Julie Bolton



Lifelong Learning Coordinator
Mervyn Sams



Young Members' Officer
Vacant



Education Coordinator
Mervyn Sams



Equalities Officer (Women)
Vacant

As part of the union's democratic process, nomination forms for any of the above positions are available from the Branch Office. We are keen to fill the Women's, Welfare and Young Members' Officer positions.

If you are interested in taking on any of these roles, please contact the branch office: 01243 777636 or email: office.unison@westsussex.gov.uk

Keep your contact details up-to-date!

It's really important for you to tell us about any changes to your personal and workplace contact details so we're able to easily get in touch with you.

This is especially so for email addresses. Some members prefer not to use their work email for union communications, but people often change their personal email account and forget to tell us.

It's vital we have up to date records, so please take a few seconds to inform us if you've changed your contact details recently. You can:

- go to our website page: unisonwestsussex.org.uk/contact-us/unison/
- call the main office on 01243 777636 or
- email office.unison@westsussex.gov.uk

You'll need to make sure your employer also knows your work contact details (though not personal email addresses), especially for information accessible on their intranets. UNISON branch officers and workplace reps often use the council's intranet contact information so it helps if this is as up-to-date as well. Thank you.

“Just wanted to thank you for your support and advice last week. I would not have been able to do this without your support, I really appreciate it.”

UNISON member to Deputy Branch Secretary.

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)											
	<table border="1"> <tr> <td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td> </tr> </table>											
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

2012
2013
2015
2016

192,000

83,000

Employment tribunals drop

TUC analysis of government figures concludes the number of people challenging discrimination or unfair treatment at work has fallen by 9,000 a month since the introduction of tribunal fees.

In 2012/13 (the year before fee introduction) almost 192,000 people brought tribunal claims. By 2015/2016, that dropped to just over 83,000. There was a drop of 73% for unfair dismissal claims, along with sharp falls in sex discrimination (71%), race discrimination (58%) and disability discrimination claims (54%). The TUC is calling for fees to be abolished.

Currently, workers have to pay up to £1,200 to bring a claim to tribunal. However, UNISON members have these fees covered by the union. Neil Todd, (UNISON's solicitors Thompsons), said; "Fees have deterred many from bringing claims where they have been unfairly dismissed, discriminated against or not paid what they are legally entitled to."

LATC threatens staff pay cuts

The local authority trading company (LATC) Tricuro, set up by Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole councils to provide care for elderly and disabled people, is sacking and re-engaging 350 staff on poorer terms and conditions.

They could each lose up to £2,600 per year, despite promises from Tricuro when the LATC was formed that there would be no pay cuts.

Tricuro wants staff to work bank holidays and weekends for no extra money. Its financial shortfall of £1.3m was caused by poor council planning which omitted important cost pressures such as future pay rises and increases in employers' national insurance contributions.

Local UNISON officer Peter Challis said, "Managers told staff if they didn't agree to cuts in their pay and conditions they would be sacked. It is trying to take £600,000 out of the pockets of its lowest paid workers." Tricuro handed back £345,000 to council shareholders last year.

The three councils declined to comment on the plans and said the day-to-day management of the company, including staff terms and conditions, was "a matter for Tricuro's management."

It's a salutary lesson to council care staff here in West Sussex: LATCs are simply not the answer to address resource shortages in adults' social care.

Adults' Services: latest news

Following our detailed report on innovation sites in the last edition of Branch Lines, deputy branch secretary Karen Daubney briefly brings us up to date.

"The new operating model focuses on community-based social care from 'innovation sites'. The council has been busy asking staff to volunteer to move to these sites.

"The first of these is at Lancing/Sompting, due to go live on 16 January. Then SW Crawley on 6 February, Rural Northern Chichester on 27 February and East Grinstead on 13 March."



Falling standards of privatised social care

According to the non-party think-tank Centre for Health and the Public Interest (CHPI), increased privatisation has caused the service quality and staff terms and conditions in adult social care to decline significantly over the last twenty years.

It found that private social care staff receive a 'considerably lower' rate of pay compared to the public sector, resulting in higher staff turnover.

Since 2014, 41% of community-based and residential social care services were found to be

inadequate or requiring improvement by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

The report said: "While recognising the difficulties involved in replacing private by state provision, it would be possible to introduce a 'preferred provider' policy. Local authorities would give

preference to their own provision, voluntary sector or user-led organisations.

"Local authorities could require the return on capital achieved by private providers to be capped to a maximum of 5%. This would help re-balance the market."

The new measures recommended by the CHPI include a transparency test, where contractual arrangements with a provider are fully open, and allowing the local electorate to demand that a contract be terminated if there are concerns about performance. The CHPI also proposed forcing private providers to guarantee terms and conditions and workforce bargaining rights, and a requirement for companies to prove that they are subject to UK tax.

Grace Eyre Foundation

At a recent joint consultative committee (JCC) meeting between UNISON West Sussex and the employer, the Grace Eyre Foundation (GEF) renewed its commitment to become a real living wage* employer from January 2017.

GEF had previously been a real living wage employer, but because of funding pressures, it had to step back from this commitment.

UNISON recently lodged an annual pay claim with GEF, so we are delighted they are now able to offer this commitment again. The pay claim will be discussed at the GEF board in February. UNISON branch officer Brian Walter spoke at the GEF staff conference and signed up several new members as well as a new workplace rep, Tim Halpin. He joins existing rep Catherine Goldsmith.

*Using the Living Wage Foundation's higher benchmark, not the government's appropriated version.

**LIVING
WAGE**

Is the fire service in need of rescue?

A recent national BBC investigation found fire service response times have increased because of government cuts.

The West Sussex fire and rescue service (FRS) is no exception. However, the County Council is heavily engaged in trying to persuade residents of the benefits of retaining the FRS under its control, as opposed to transferring it to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC).

Campaigners are saying that performance under the council's stewardship has deteriorated in the past few years (see opposite). The recent major fire at Selsey Academy was an example where the service failed to meet its response time. Had Selsey Fire Station been properly crewed, the first fire engine could have been at the school within 6 minutes. Yet it took 18 minutes for the first to arrive.

The council claims the service is better in its hands than the PCC. It ought to be, but their record is far from impressive. Would the PCC have delivered cuts to the FRS in any better way? Probably not. But all residents and workers in West Sussex should be concerned about the impact central government cuts are having on such a vital, life-saving public service.



1 Average fire deaths increased from 2.6 to 5.2 per year between 2005/6 and 2014/15.

2 The council used to have 46 fire engines: now there are just 35.

3 Cuts to firefighter numbers mean the council often fails to crew all 35 fire engines.

4 Response reliabilities have worsened. For example, at Steyning it's down from 95% availability to 59% and in Petworth from 98% to 72%.

5 Overall, response times are the worst they've ever been: 20% of calls to critical fires fail to meet their response time target.

LEVEL 2 MEETINGS

Make sure HR is present!

UNISON has received worrying reports from its reps at the County Council about our members attending Level 2 sickness absence review meetings with no HR officer present.

On one of these occasions the UNISON rep rightly refused to hold the meeting without HR being there, so the meeting was rescheduled.

Level 2 sickness meetings are serious. Not only do members need union representation they deserve – as do all staff – to have an experienced HR officer present to advise the manager. Indeed, the council's own policy requires an HR adviser to be present.

We believe the pressure on the council's HR service, contracted through Capita, sometimes means that shortcuts are being taken – even though this contradicts the council's own policy. Also, sometimes managers are not requesting HR support. If you find yourself in a Level 2 sickness absence meeting and your manager has no-one from HR on hand to advise them, our advice is to call off the meeting, and insist it is rescheduled and run in accordance with the council's policy.

Northbrook merger

All indications are that Northbrook College (in Worthing and Shoreham) and Brighton City College will merge on schedule in April 2017, adopting the title Greater Brighton Metropolitan College.

Brighton's Nick Jubba has been appointed chief executive designate.

Each college has very different operating systems in place that need harmonising, not least on pay. Inevitable anomalies must be addressed. Pressure from UNISON West Sussex at Northbrook has resulted in the college becoming a living wage employer (using the Living Wage Foundation's benchmark, not the government's appropriated and lower version).

Northbrook UNISON workplace rep Karen Fisher talks us through some of the issues she will be leading on before merger.



Northbrook College, Worthing

HR policies

"We're starting to look at the HR policies in both colleges, which includes work to

ensure there is an effective change management policy to support staff," said Karen.

"I'm hoping we can harmonise as many as possible before the merger so the new college will have a solid HR policy foundation for all staff. City College staff are being TUPEd over to the new organisation, though this does not impact Northbrook because our college isn't being dissolved.

New structures

"New structures will start to be put in place once Greater Brighton Metropolitan College is formed on 1 April. UNISON will ensure fair processes are in place to manage these changes. This will include ensuring any new jobs are evaluated.

"The colleges have not revealed any savings figure. We know our back-office services will not be outsourced, but there are likely to be issues because both colleges use similar systems. There's also a potential problem of future student and staff travel if courses are to be offered at just one campus.

Workshops

"However, I will work as hard as possible to support our Northbrook members through the merger. We've already held workshops at the college conference day in December and hope to repeat similar events in the future."

Another possible college merger?

Following the further education West Sussex area review, discussions have started on a possible merger of Chichester and Central Sussex Colleges (CSC).

CSC, based in Crawley, Horsham and Haywards Heath, has been going through a period of belt-tightening following serious financial difficulties. This led to many redundancies and the closure in summer 2017 of the sixth form college in Haywards Heath.

UNISON will be involved in discussions to support members at both colleges throughout the difficult period ahead.

Social workers oppose government reforms

A UNISON survey of social workers shows they reject many of the government's proposals to reform the sector in the Children and Social Work Bill.

The government has already indicated it will no longer require social workers to be directly regulated by them, but it is still pressing ahead with the other controversial aspects of the Bill. Please contact your local MP and ask them to speak out about the dangerous aspects of the government's Children and Social Work Bill. Ask them to call on the government to:

- Abandon the Bill's dangerous and controversial elements allowing local authorities (LAs) to exempt themselves from important statutory duties towards children.
- Agree to meet with a range of frontline social workers and their representatives to properly discuss how the challenges facing social work can be overcome.
- Listen to the views of looked-after children, their families and supporters to learn about their experience of social services and related support.
- Invest more resources into supporting social work across England.
- Ensure social workers continue to be regulated independently.

Only 1% believe proposals will address their main concerns.

69% believe that allowing local authorities (LAs) to exempt themselves from children's social care legislation will lead to more children being placed at risk.

Only 8% believe it won't lead to more children being placed at risk.

90% believe social workers should be regulated independently rather than by the government.

96% believe private companies should not be allowed to take over social work functions from LAs.

Only 1% said they trust LAs not to privatise social work services.

Full report at: unisonwestsussex.org.uk/news/social-workers-oppose-governments-plans/

“AVA places on record the valuable support our staff received from West Sussex UNISON over the year of this annual report. This made a huge difference to the stressful and uncertain situation faced by all AVA’s paid staff. AVA recommends that all local charities employing staff encourage trade union membership, and draw up workplace agreements. This is not a paid advertisement. It is simply the voice of AVA’s direct experience.”

Adur Voluntary Action (AVA), published in their November annual report 2015-16

WORKPLACE REP PROFILE

Sara Pink



UNISON workplace rep Sara Pink is a council-employed family support and family outreach worker working for two council-commissioned children and family centres: Boundstone Nursery and Lancing.

She's been a UNISON member since she joined the council 4 years ago and a workplace rep for the last 2 years. She represents nursery school support staff and day care staff in both centres.

"Most of my support for local members involves making sure both council and school HR policies are as aligned as possible," said Sara.

"There are some historical anomalies on issues such as sickness absence and holiday pay. I'm working hard with our senior leadership team to make sure everyone is treated fairly.

"Our sickness absence policy records the number of sickness 'incidents'. It's now based on the council's policy, but with local amendments to reflect our service.

"I joined the union when I first started work involving visiting people's houses. Being a lone-worker, I felt quite vulnerable. I wanted the protection of the union in case anything unforeseen happened that compromised my safety and security.

"At the time we had no workplace rep to support us, so I put myself forward. My colleagues enthusiastically supported me. There's a good working relationship here between the union and managers.

"Our members are very concerned about the impact of the children's services restructure. We don't know how it will affect us yet.

"Whatever happens, I'll be there to support our members."

Winter Fuel Grants

We're launching our 2017 winter fuel grant programme to help our to help our lowest-paid members.

They are one-off grants of up to £50.00 per household. To be eligible you must:

- have paid 4 weeks' union subscriptions before 1 December 2016;
- have a total net annual household income of £18,000 or less;
- not have more than £800 in savings (including your partner and rolling bank balance); and
- not have received financial assistance from UNISON 'There for You' during the previous six months.



Applications are limited to one per household. This includes members on housing benefit. Priority is given to those who have not previously applied. Send all requested paperwork with the form or the application cannot be accepted. To apply:

- print out and complete the short 2-page application form and survey linked from our website: unisonwestsussex.org.uk/news/winter-fuel-grants-2017, or
- contact Unison Direct on **0800 0857 857** for a postal form.

Send in by 17 February 2017 to
There for You (WFG), UNISON Centre,
130 Euston Road, London NW1 2AY.

Schools' funding crisis: a worsening picture

The West Sussex schools' funding crisis reported on in the last edition of Branch Lines continues to worsen.

The government failed to increase funding in the chancellor's autumn statement, with no change to the funding formula until 2018. However, it could find £200m to support the expansion of grammar schools.

West Sussex schools are close to breaking point. In a recent letter to the press, 'Worth Less?' campaign headteachers said:

"Our first inclination is to work alongside political leaders to secure additional funding by January 2017.

If we are not successful we will consult our stakeholders to find the best way forward.

"There should be no doubt in anyone's minds that our financial situation is very bad indeed and without immediate help the provision for pupils in all of our school settings will be severely and detrimentally affected."

To find out how your children's school will be impacted, the NUT has launched a new website: www.schoolcuts.org.uk

Enter your postcode to see the percentage

funding cut being applied to your local schools. You can also directly email your local MP from the site and sign a petition.

UNISON West Sussex is still gathering information in its own schools survey. The survey closes on 20 January. We will then analyse the information and report findings in a future edition of Schools' Branch Lines. If you've not taken part, please do so now. Go to unisonwestsussex.org.uk/news/schools-survey

UNISON's national office has also featured the plight of our local schools on its website in an excerpt from general secretary Dave Prentis' blog.

Rota changes

Our reps in Cissbury Lodge in Worthing (a centre for disabled children) got in touch with our office in December to advise us that a major but rushed change to rotas was taking place.

If your manager wants to change your shifts to any significant extent they need to consult with you. The branch made these representations to council HR managers and a consultation was organised.

As the consultation concludes, it appears that the rotas favour full-time staff. Some part-time staff are set to lose out as the rotas make unreasonable demands of them. Part-time workers have workplace rights. The branch is getting legal advice for its impacted members.

Payroll issues

The branch office continues to receive contacts from members who have had incorrect overpayments added to their salaries, only to see them deducted from their following salary without any warning or negotiation.

This risks putting staff into severe hardship. It's contrary to council policy and practice so shouldn't be happening. Nor should the salary miscalculations happen in the first place.

We're supporting members to make sure errors are corrected, apologies given and repayment plans negotiated to take account of the stress caused to staff. If this happens to you, call us on 01243 777636.

For lower-level problems and issues with payroll, see the information on our website homepage.