

# BRANCH LINES

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## CORONAVIRUS

# HOW UNISON CAN HELP YOU

Special feature on Black  
members and Covid-19

SEE PAGES 4, 5 AND 6

WIN £10  
FOR YOURSELF  
AND ANY  
NEW RECRUIT

SEE PAGE 12

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The word 'unprecedented' has become a cliché over the past few months, but the times

we're living through right now clearly justify the description. During the immense upheaval both our personal and professional lives have experienced since March, key worker UNISON members in many

of the services we support have continued to go into work despite considerable risk to themselves. 'Thank you' seems an inadequate response, but on behalf of the branch and the wider union membership, we do thank you and appreciate the selfless effort you have made to help protect vulnerable people and keep services going.

This edition rightly focuses on the impact coronavirus

had had on members and their workplaces, but importantly outlines the support provided by UNISON during the pandemic and how it will continue to do so in the next few months as more people return to their workplace. Make sure you understand your rights as you return, but most of all keep well and keep safe.

**Dan Sartin,**  
*Branch Secretary*

## UNISON GENERAL SECRETARY RESIGNS



**Dave Prentis, UNISON general secretary for 20 years, will retire on 31 December 2020 when his current period of office**

**comes to an end. A timetable to elect his successor has been published, with voting commencing on 28 October.**

The UNISON West Sussex branch committee is fully involved in UNISON's organisation at its national and regional levels, having two of our members elected to the ruling national executive committee of the union. Therefore, we know the candidates to replace Dave Prentis very well. On 23 September the branch committee will decide who it wishes to nominate for general secretary prior to the election. We will then advise members who we have chosen and why we think they are best to lead UNISON.

Meanwhile, the LGSGE has nominated Paul Holmes (see page 12).

## NJC PAY SETTLED AT 2.75%

**UNISON's elected lay member national NJC committee met to consider the results of the consultation of members on the 2020/21 pay offer for local government workers.**

Overall members voted by 2 to 1 to accept the employers' offer. The results of the West Sussex branch consultation were 60% in favour of accepting, and 40% to reject. Consequently, the NJC committee agreed to accept the offer while noting that it fell far short of our claim and did not properly reward a workforce of key workers who have gone above and beyond expectation during the COVID pandemic. The award is with effect from 1 April 2020:

- an increase of 2.75% on all NJC pay points 1 and above;
- an increase of one day to the minimum annual leave entitlement.

At WSCC this will be implemented with backpay to April in October's pay packet. We are working with other employers who implement NJC pay to ensure the same.

Thank you to West Sussex members who took part in the branch ballot.

# LOCAL PAY



**There is a substantial group of around 500 staff at WSCC not covered by national NJC bargaining arrangements.**

These are mostly managers, across HAY, Agenda for Change/Public Health, and SMG4 pay grades. WSCC currently only consults UNISON on the pay award – there is no process of collective bargaining. This lack of rigour led to painful and chaotic pay negotiations in 2018 and 2019. Offers made were completely unacceptable and UNISON, with members, successfully resisted them.

The branch then sought formal recognition on pay, so that we could collectively bargain in future and avoid repeat episodes. UNISON has much better relationships with the new chief executive and director of HR, Becky Shaw and Sue Evans respectively. They could see the sense in our request and recommended it to WSCC

councillors. Unfortunately, WSCC councillors politicised the issue and refused to take the advice of their new chief executive. That episode, in July, did not bode well for councillors' ability to steer WSCC out its current challenges.

UNISON does have access to a statutory process to force recognition for pay bargaining on WSCC. UNISON reluctantly took that route as the only one available to us, after councillors shut the door on a voluntary arrangement, though we did so with the full backing of our members in the pay groups. Completing that process is taking longer than expected however, as the central arbitration committee which oversees these matters ponders how to resolve them.

The NJC pay award has now been settled (see page 2), and so rather than delay implementation of a pay rise for members in local pay groups, UNISON has worked with the council and encouraged it to make a sensible offer that matches the NJC settlement of 2.75%. That is therefore the proposal of the council, and this is currently out for consultation using the existing process for settling pay. UNISON is consulting with its affected members at time of going to press on this pay offer.

We will keep you updated on progress with the statutory request for recognition. UNISON does want as many members as possible in this group of workers to strengthen our hand. Now is a good time to recruit your colleagues (see offer on page 12) and doing so will help existing members ensure they get decent pay offers and are not left behind NJC workers or subject to performance strings.



## A STRONG AND GROWING UNION

The West Sussex branch is enjoying its highest membership total ever with over 6,500 members. Thank you to all new members!

# CORONAVIRUS

## UNISON SUPPORT FOR YOU

**“Working with your manager, make sure you have an individual risk assessment done before you return to your usual workplace,” says deputy branch secretary Karen Daubney.**

“It’s the single most important thing you must do to protect yourself, especially if you’ve been shielding or are vulnerable in any way. Black members need to be particularly vigilant. It’s also vitally important you know the range of measures put in place to protect you at your workplace (see page 5). Each building should have been risk-assessed

too. These assessments should minimise your virus exposure.”

UNISON produced a wide range of advisory articles, often before national and local government.

“Unions have been leading the way when councils had to rely on central government advice based on Public Health England and World Health

Organisation guidelines, which were sometimes delayed and lacked clarity.

“In WSCC, the new chief executive and director of HR are more open to working with us, so we feel more confident that the needs of our members will be taken much more seriously and that the council will do what it can to keep us safe,” continued Karen.

To find the latest UNISON guidance go to the union’s national website [unison.org.uk](http://unison.org.uk) and search ‘coronavirus’. You can also check the ‘News’ section of the branch website for regular updates.

## BRANCH SUPPORT DURING LOCKDOWN

**UNISON West Sussex has kept the branch office fully functional, dealing with a very large number of member queries. For example, in one week in April, we took 10% of our annual member requests for advice in just 5 days.**

The pandemic has resulted in a surge in union membership. We now have 6,576 members – our highest ever. All members contacting us were called back the same day wherever possible. We’ve negotiated with all employers where we have an existing relationship.

For WSCC, there are twice weekly meetings with the HR director, monthly meetings with the chief

executive and each service directorate with senior managers. For schools, we had a weekly meeting with the director of education and skills. Negotiations with academies are maintained by a combination of regional, national and branch UNISON officers.

The inquest into this crisis will examine the national government response

and the effects of years of austerity. It will be a major task for UNISON to ensure public service funding cuts are reversed in the aftermath of this epidemic.

If any member requires advice, please access us in the normal ways: first through a workplace rep if you have one, and if not, through the branch office.

Members can rest assured the branch is working hard and is as active as ever in supporting members in these challenging times.

# RE-OPENING COUNCIL BUILDINGS

**“Every building must be risk-assessed. Those findings and any measures put in place to prevent infection must be made available to you if you’re asked to return to your normal workplace,” said Karen.**

“There is no one solution that can be applied to all buildings but, for example, in offices these will include:

1. one-way systems;
2. gender neutral toilets to allow appropriate social distancing;
3. lower occupancy of buildings;
4. allocated desk policies rather than hot-desking;
5. improved ventilation;
6. strict social distancing measures enforced;
7. clear desk policies and no equipment sharing; and
8. daily thorough cleaning of desks and frequently-touched surfaces.



“Risks are higher in social care settings. So, the level of assessment and recommendations should be appropriate

“UNISON will not allow members to return to unsafe workplaces. If you’re not convinced measures have been thorough enough, UNISON has produced a template letter you can fill-in to give to your manager explaining why you will not return to your workplace. It’s designed by our solicitors to protect your job and pay if not attending work because of unacceptable risk. Members must seek advice from the branch office before using it so we can discuss your individual situation.”

## CLAIMING EXPENSES FOR WORKING AT HOME

**As many of you have had to work at home since the lockdown, (you’re advised to continue this until workplaces are safe), we’ve received more enquiries about claiming expenses related to working at home.**

This may become more relevant from autumn, but would include claims for additional domestic costs relating to heating and lighting homes during working hours when traditionally, family members would be based in their usual workplace.

The County Council has provided a link to the HMRC website to claim tax relief on such costs. However, this may not be as beneficial

as being paid an allowance and carries the risk of over-claiming. UNISON is seeking clarification from WSCC HR on this and will share any findings with members when available.

The council’s ‘new ways of working’ (NWW) group is using the experience of working at home during the pandemic to inform their research on how council staff might work differently in the future. They’ve been looking

at the use of office space and the sort of work that:

1. can be done remotely;
2. is business critical;
3. what space that critical work would require; and
4. could a new, permanent model of working emerge to replace what we have?

UNISON will be monitoring the progress of this research as it develops and are members of the NWW group by invitation of the council.

## CORONAVIRUS

# COVID-19 AND BLACK MEMBERS

**Black members should know about the recent guidance leaflet on Covid-19 in relation to black staff issued nationally by UNISON (see News section, branch website).**

UNISON has been working to put black members' interests at the heart of the council's Covid-19 strategy since day one. It was UNISON that asked the council to ensure the needs of black staff were flagged up early in its risk assessment template, in line with emerging TUC advice. At that stage we were turned down, because Public Health England had not caught up with union advice. We went back to the council during discussions on its updated risk assessment template. This time, we are pleased to report, the needs of black staff were included.

UNISON has concerns about the council's approach to equalities due to the practice we have seen and experienced over the last few years. Much needs to change, and this should be a priority area. UNISON does not believe WSCC is making sufficiently quick progress regarding equalities and needs a major overhaul of its:

- staff groups;
- collection and evaluation of equalities data;
- equality impact assessments;
- recruitment, retention, promotion, acting up, disciplinary, and internal redeployment processes.

The branch has equality officers for black, LGBT+ and women members, with a vacancy for a disabled member's officer. If you would like to support the branch in its equalities work, please get in touch.



## MEET BLACK MEMBERS' OFFICER OLU OYEDELE

**Children's social worker Olu was recently elected as branch black members' officer. She's part of the children's disability team in Horsham and has worked at the council for over 12 years.**

"I want to be the voice of black members and make a difference to working lives. I want to be someone who can positively challenge the male, white-dominated and bureaucratic culture of the council to make sure black members' views are heard.

"Whilst I've seen some positive changes since I started working with the council (e.g. more BAME staff), some of these are still quite tokenistic, so more changes are necessary.

"I'd urge all black members to read the UNISON advice. Experience tells me not all managers have had sufficient training or support to implement necessary measures for at-risk members, so it's up to us to make sure the right steps are taken.

"If you are a black member and want Covid-related support with your return to the workplace, please get in touch with me, your workplace rep or the branch office."

'CARE AFTER COVID'

# TIME FOR A NATIONAL CARE SERVICE

**Throughout the pandemic, UNISON prioritised the safety and wellbeing of social care members. We know the problems in social care go deeper than just the last few months.**

A national care service is the only way to prevent another care sector tragedy. We need a resilient care system, like the NHS. Care workers should get a real living wage and a standard employment contract. And the system can't survive without resources. It needs significant, emergency government funding.

The UK's response to the coronavirus left vulnerable people and carers unprotected. Never again. We have 5 demands we want the government to immediately guarantee:

1. A real living wage for all care workers.
2. A standard employment contract for care work – including sick pay, contracted hours and pay for all hours on duty, including 'sleep ins' and travel time.
3. Significant, emergency government funding.
4. Professional standards – the care certificate should be upgraded and expanded and professional registration should be standardised throughout the UK.
5. A partnership working group of commissioners, providers, governments and trade unions must be established to action solutions.

Join the campaign for a national care service: [unison.org.uk/our-campaigns/unisons-5-demands-national-care-service](https://unison.org.uk/our-campaigns/unisons-5-demands-national-care-service)

## VOLUNTARY RECOGNITION FOR ABBOTSWOOD

**At the time of going to press, UNISON West Sussex is hoping to finalise a new voluntary recognition agreement with London Care plc, the operators of Abbotswood care home, Rustington.**

Abbotswood came to our attention when members there first raised concerns over employment contracts. Branch negotiations officer Brian Walter met with them before lockdown, resulting in an agreement emerging between the union and the employer.

London Care plc also run Highdown Court care home in Worthing, with some staff working in both centres. UNISON is therefore, also hoping to include recognition for Highdown in its discussions.

Brian said, "The agreement is based on a robust previous model created between the branch and the Grace Eyre Foundation. It involves setting up structures such as the election of local union reps and establishing a joint consultative committee (JCC) for negotiations.

"We believe this is a sound model to support our members and in difficult times, care workers are increasingly turning to UNISON for support."

If you work in residential or home care and UNISON is not recognised by your employer, it is possible to change that and then improve your terms and conditions. The law provides for both voluntary and compulsory recognition of trade unions by employers. 'Bargaining units' can be single or multiple workplaces, and don't have to cover the whole employer. If you would like to see UNISON recognition in your workplace, contact the branch.

# WORKING TOGETHER ON REDEPLOYMENT

**A recent case involving one of our library service members shows how much more effective it can be when UNISON and the council's HR service work together.**

Our member Dave King was made redundant when his job as driver for the mobile library was no longer required as the service was withdrawn to help meet service cuts targets.

In September last year whilst decisions were being made, Dave was temporarily moved to Horsham where he worked as a full-time library assistant. Whilst he was able to perform most of the role, he required further training to enable him to meet all its demands.

However, he was never offered the opportunity to learn these skills and was made redundant due to the library service not offering him a permanent library assistant post. An appeal to the staff appeals panel was



then lodged. In developing Dave's case for the appeal, UNISON caseworker Amanda Godfrey worked with him to find out if there were any specific issues preventing the library service from finding him suitable redeployment.

Researching through recruitment statistics, Amanda discovered a significant unconscious bias in the library service against the employment of men,

especially those who were over 50 years old.

However, working effectively together with WSCC's HR service, the council was able to reinstate Dave to the council. In effect, this cancelled his redundancy. He was reinstated as a full-time relief driver in the highways service Broadbridge Heath depot after successfully completing a trial period.

Though there remain equalities issues within the library service that must be addressed, this example proves that when there is good partnership working between UNISON and the council's HR service, there are mutual benefits.

Dave would like to thank rep Tim Stanton and the branch for their support during the redundancy process.

## DELIGHT OVER SETTLEMENT PACKAGE

**We're delighted to report that our solicitors Thompson's recently negotiated a settlement package for one of our members after they sustained a serious injury at work.**

The award amounted to £65,000 to compensate for loss of earnings and care costs. Our member

was delighted with the settlement. Injuries can happen to anyone at any time. It's worth being part of

Britain's biggest trade union to take advantage of the excellent legal support we offer should you be involved in an accident.

JOIN US AT  
[join.unison.org.uk](http://join.unison.org.uk)



# BACK THE #10BILLIONBAILOUT FOR LOCAL SERVICES



**Our communities face a £10 billion shortfall in funding for local services.**

Refuse collection, children's services and adult social care are just a few of the vital services that could be slashed if the government doesn't find significant, emergency funding for councils. The government must fund local councils properly to keep communities safe and rebuild the country after Covid-19.

Due to the pandemic, West Sussex County Council has been forced to overspend its budget by £50m. It desperately needs part of a larger government bailout being advocated by UNISON. And it's not alone.

Sign the petition to tell the government you back the #10BillionBailout.

Unless ministers fix the council funding shortfall of

£10bn, there could be tens of thousands of job losses and catastrophic cuts to local services in England. But in July's economic statement, the chancellor failed to offer any support.

**Join UNISON's urgent call for a £10 billion bailout by signing the petition via this link: [action.unison.org.uk/page/65995/action/1](https://action.unison.org.uk/page/65995/action/1)**

## BIG ISSUES LOOM FOR GBMET

**Following the enforced merger of the former Northbrook College with City College Brighton, branch members' greatest fears have been realised. Last year the college was found 'requiring improvement' by OFSTED and placed into informal intervention by the further education commissioner due to poor financial health.**

Following lockdown, the college was not secure enough to ride out the financial losses and has had to be bailed out by the education & skills funding agency to the tune of £5.7m. Following this, the college has been placed into formal intervention and seen the rapid departure of its chief executive, Nick Juba.

In a staff webinar chair of governors Sue Berelowitz said financial issues predated



the lockdown and that, "Nothing is off the table," concerning ways to address the deficit. So, there is an obvious risk to jobs. A rescue plan has to be agreed by October.

UNISON workplace rep Karen Fisher said, "Next academic year will be

brutal in many different ways. Not only do we have the uncertainty about personal safety, but also the executioner's hatchet hanging over us. It's more important than ever to belong to a union."

The government has told all colleges to fully open in September. Karen continued, "GBMet has tried to ensure the workplace is as safe as possible, working with unions to try and allay fears. However, with no additional government funding and very inadequate guidance, there's no guarantee the workplace is Covid-safe. There remain real concerns, especially for those staff classified as vulnerable or shielding who must now return to the workplace."



## SOCIAL WORKERS: IMPORTANT NOTE

**Social workers should note that if you are subject to a 'fitness to practice' investigation, you must legally respond to the regulator Social Work England (SWE) within seven calendar days of being notified by SWE. This updated advice was recently issued by UNISON's Professional Services Unit (PSU).**

Experience tells us that the 7-day limit is very time-constraining and stressful for anyone involved. We know that, in practice and for various reasons, sometimes members don't tell us about the formal notification within this time frame, even though they may be already subject to a related internal investigation.

Please don't assume that if you are a UNISON member, we will automatically be informed of any notice issued to you, whether or not you have self-referred or have been referred to SWE by your employer. Should you receive such a notice from SWE, you must immediately inform the branch office so that legal representation can be arranged quickly with our regional office and/or PSU.

The risk of losing social work registration is very serious and potentially career-threatening. It's vitally important we know immediately if you are formally notified of investigation by SWE.

## CAPITA FINANCE TEAM COMES BACK TO WSCC

**The service finance team dealing with financial transactions mostly related to adults' and children's services was transferred over to Capita during WSCC's outsourcing programme, but is now returning. It's the latest example of a service being taken back into council control after the pensions admin service, 'MASH' children's safeguarding and several HR services were 'insourced' in the past couple of years.**

Branch rep for Capita Ian Harvey said. "The council argues it can manage this service better if they have full control over it," said Ian. "We have no problem with that and will be pleased to see many of our members returning to work for the council. However, there are issues, for example, over the council inheriting a two-tier workforce from Capita, where staff previously employed by the council and transferred ('TUPEd') over to Capita are on better terms and conditions than those recruited directly by Capita.

"We've been successful in securing an agreement for all staff to go over on current salaries but roles would be re-evaluated in any new structure or voluntary opportunities provided to assimilate to WSCC terms if a restructure is not required. We've also secured better redundancy terms though we do not anticipate they will be needed. The insourcing took place smoothly in August, with members happy to become part of the council's workforce again."

**STOP PRESS!** Capita health & safety team is also due to insource back to WSCC. Negotiations are currently underway.

# RECORDING VIOLENT INCIDENTS AT WORK

**An example pre-lockdown in the library service illustrated just how important it is for members to promptly and correctly report incidents of violence at work.**

## Threatening behaviour

One of our library staff members had to deal with a very unpleasant incident during an evening shift in a reference library. A library customer was asked by our member to put his mobile phone on silent after talking loudly in conversation within hearing of other library users. Initially he complied, but then complained about the quality of the WiFi signal.

Our member suggested he try the system again in a few minutes as no-one else was having problems and no obvious fault could be seen. At this point the customer became very aggressive and was shouting loudly. He was asked to leave the library but refused; so, our member had no choice but to immediately call the police using 999. The customer snatched the phone out of our member's hand, threatening to 'tear up the library'.

Fortunately, there was no physical assault before the police arrived to deal with the situation. The police charged the customer with public order offences. The UNISON member



involved decided to pursue this through a library management route, to be discussed with local senior managers aiming to ban the customer from the library.

## Management response

Sadly, in our view the management response to this incident has been inadequate, despite UNISON raising its concerns. There was an initial staff debrief, but nothing else happened until the library staff member raised the general issue of the withdrawal of library security staff by email to all

library managers and senior support staff.

Managers then arranged a meeting of community groups to talk about what might be done in the future to prevent similar incidents. They would not though reinstate evening security staff in the library as they did not consider the incident to be serious. They also offered to send key staff on 'de-escalation training'.

As a result of this response, sadly another library assistant involved in the incident resigned. However, this was not the first resignation from a member of libraries staff because of violent incidents at work. It had happened previously in 2017.

## Record incidents fully and accurately

It is completely unacceptable for any member of staff to be threatened, intimidated or assaulted. Managers must introduce appropriate measures quickly to prevent a repeat of such situations. Make sure you and your manager record incidents at work promptly, accurately and comprehensively. Inform UNISON as soon as you can. We can offer full legal support if the situation demands.

UNISON will continue to raise our concerns as part of the discussions on re-opening Covid-secure libraries.

## WIN £10 FOR YOURSELF AND ANY NEW RECRUIT!

To take up this offer, existing members simply need to recruit a friend to the UNISON West Sussex branch. In return the existing member and the new member will both receive a £10 shopping voucher. Existing members can recruit as many members as they like to receive more vouchers.

The new member must join within 2 weeks of the date the branch receives the nomination slip. This offer cannot

be used after 31 October 2020 and is only applicable to new members who are eligible for the UNISON West Sussex branch (our sister branches are not participants in this scheme). Vouchers may take up to 8 weeks to arrive after new membership is verified.

Scan and email this slip to [office.unison@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:office.unison@westsussex.gov.uk) or photocopy and post it to 10:10 offer, UNISON, County Hall, Chichester, PO19 1RQ.

Existing member's name:

Existing member's email:

I nominate [insert name]:

to join UNISON West Sussex.

## LG SGE NOMINATES PAUL HOLMES

UNISON's local government service group executive (SGE) has nominated Paul Holmes for general secretary.



- Paul has been a UNISON branch secretary for over 30 years and an NEC member for 13 years.
- He knows the union needs radical change and strong leadership.
- He will make sure UNISON is at the forefront of all current battles.
- He has a clear agenda for local government members, on pay, jobs and green issues.
- He is a lay member and would only take a worker's wage.
- The local government SGE believes Paul is the credible change our union needs.

## CALL FOR LGBT+ ALLIES

UNISON has issued new guidance for those who want to act as 'allies' to LGBT+ people.

The UK's specialist LGBT+ anti-violence charity, Galop, has issued a sobering report which found that one in five people described being LGBT+ as 'immoral or against their beliefs'. Disturbingly, this rose to one in four among 18-24-year olds – higher than in other age groups. One in 10 people said that LGBT+ people were 'dangerous' to others; one in 10 people said that being LGBT+ could be 'cured'.

UNISON is working on training to encourage people to be allies – supportive friends – for their LGBT+ colleagues. Discover more – and access many more resources – at [www.unison.org.uk/out](http://www.unison.org.uk/out) and [www.galop.org.uk](http://www.galop.org.uk)