



BRANCH LINES

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

CORONAVIRUS

UNISON'S COVID-19 SUPPORT FOR YOU

Advice if colleagues test positive
for the virus | SEE PAGES 5, 10 AND 12

**VIRTUAL
BRANCH
AGMS**

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New year greetings have been tinged with an element of sadness and uncertainty

this January as the pandemic continues to spread remorselessly, putting many of us at daily risk during the course of your work.

Our advice for members is constantly updated and we present here the latest available at the time of going to print. Much of this focuses on schools, but all members

need to keep themselves updated in a fast-changing environment. Even though branch officers are working from home, we are still here to support you in any way we can. 2021 will be a very challenging year.

From 2020, there are ongoing disagreements still needing to be resolved such as the thorny issue of exit payments, which we discuss on page 15, and the impact of yet more council cuts on services (see page 4). You can also see branch nominations for this

year's committee, with an expanded membership to include our very welcome three new convenors.

You may also have heard that UNISON has a new general secretary, Christina McAnea. Branch nominee Paul Holmes was placed a hugely creditable second. However, we congratulate Christina and wish her well in her new role. Let's hope 2021 is a better one for everyone. Keep well and stay safe.

Dan Sartin,
Branch Secretary

VIRTUAL BRANCH AGMS

Branch AGMs will take place this year at the end of March using the Zoom app. There will be three, short AGM sessions consisting of half hour business reports and annual elections to the branch committee, then questions to the branch secretary, treasurer and other committee members.

Sadly, due to Covid-19 restrictions we cannot hold our usual quiz and curry night at the end of the

Chichester AGM, but there will be a range of prizes available. AGMs take place at the following times:

- Monday 29 March, 12.30-1.30pm
- Tuesday 30 March, 4.30-5.30pm
- Wednesday 31 March, 6.30-7.30pm

All members from any employer (and retired members) are welcome at any of our AGMs. We'd love you to join us.

We've deliberately organised the AGMs at different times of the day to allow as many members to join us as possible, so that school and shift workers at least have a chance to participate. We will send out links and passwords via email nearer the dates. For those who have never used Zoom, we will also post instructions on how to join a virtual meeting. We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible.





TERM-TIME ONLY PAY — UPDATE

UNISON is continuing to work with WSCC to try to settle the term-time only (TTO) pay issue for members. This mainly affects schools' workers on lower salaries who have not been receiving the statutory minimum 5.6 weeks' annual leave within their pay calculation.

A tribunal which UNISON won (the Brazel judgement) puts WSCC – and potentially any employer – in breach of the law if they did not update their pay calculations to reflect it. Backpay will be owed. Sums are not expected to be huge, but members will quite rightly want to receive their due backpay and have their pay calculated correctly going forwards.

The matter has been delayed by the attention taken up by Covid-19. In addition, the Brazel judgement is now subject to appeal at the Supreme Court. WSCC does not wish to settle its liabilities only to see Brazel overturned by the Supreme Court. UNISON is confident of winning

our case there. But in the meantime, the branch has been working on a different agreement with WSCC, whereby if the Supreme Court appeal is thrown out the council will settle its liabilities at that point.

An agreement will be made in writing now so we know who will be in scope if the Supreme Court finds in UNISON's favour. This will include all members who were on TTO contracts as at 1 April 2020 and those who began or left employment after 1 April 2020 (if you left WSCC employment prior to 1 April 2020 you need to contact the UNISON office).

The agreement will provide for settlement of underpaid statutory holiday

pay going back a period of up to five years and three months from 1 April 2020, and would provide an additional sum, where applicable, to make up for potential loss on pre-2014 LGPS pension.

UNISON is aware that members in schools where WSCC is not the employer will be similarly affected, and we are discussing how this sensible agreement would be promoted to other employers in the school community so they were encouraged to use it.

The Supreme Court appeal is not due to be heard until November 2021, with a judgement expected in Spring 2022. We will keep members updated, and you are likely to hear direct from WSCC in writing about what we have agreed.

Please ask non-members to join us as soon as possible at: join.unison.org.uk



CUTS TO WSCC SERVICES

This government's disgraceful attitude to adequately funding local government services has, according to the County Councils' Network, resulted in 'just one in five councils being 'confident' they can deliver a balanced budget next year without dramatic reductions to services.'

Recently, Croydon Council brought in emergency spending restrictions and issued a notice effectively declaring its bankruptcy. More councils are being squeezed to breaking point as Tory spending cuts bite hard with significant lost income from reduced council tax and business rates receipts.

Even though it is a Tory-led administration, West Sussex County Council does not escape the worst impacts of continued central government underfunding. For the next three years it anticipates gaps of £44m, £17m and £5.9m; a total budget gap of £110m over the four-year period before savings considerations. Drastic cuts with a huge impact on our members and

vulnerable members of the public are being discussed such as:

- cutting back children & family centre and Find It Out youth provision from 55 buildings to 11, effectively ending the 'SureStart' model;
- removing a management layer in children's services;
- substantial reductions in overall public health spending by the county;
- closing some residential care homes;
- reducing the use of home care packages for vulnerable and disabled adults;
- closing the staff canteen at County Hall campus; and
- reviewing council-owned estate and buildings.

UNISON head of local government Jon Richards said, "Council workers have been at the forefront of running essential services during the pandemic and shouldn't pay the price by losing their jobs because of government underfunding. A long-term plan is needed for local government, recognising the crucial work it plays in keeping communities going."

UNISON West Sussex branch secretary Dan Sartin said, "We will challenge all local cuts and robustly defend our members jobs and services. With its £multi-billion new spending on defence, and awarding of lucrative Covid-related contracts to its chums without due process, this government has shown it can find funds when it wants to. UNISON membership proves invaluable at times like these and our members will see better outcomes with our support."

UNISON HELP DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN



Deputy branch secretary Karen Daubney updates us on the main issues affecting members during the latest national lockdown.

“Most recently members have come to the branch asking for advice once they know a colleague has tested positive for Covid-19. Many have approached local managers but sometimes their concerns have not been taken seriously, with concerns measures are not maintaining a safe workplace.

“The apparent lack of managerial knowledge of correct procedures in such cases highlighted the need for simple guidelines to be made easily available. We’ve worked on these with the council’s HR service, so there’s clear guidance for managers to know what to do.

“The guidelines are based on information from the government’s website. They outline steps to be taken depending on a variety of workplace situations.

“For example, the definition of someone being ‘in close contact’ with another

who has tested positive for Covid-19 and should self-isolate varies between settings. In an office, if you’ve worked directly with an infected person within two metres for 15 minutes, this is considered close contact



and you must self-isolate straight away. However, the definition of ‘close contact’ changes if you’re a care worker wearing PPE the whole day.

“There are also judgments to be made if a person is for example, diagnosed on a Monday, but has not been in contact with colleagues for over two days. In such cases, the risk of infection will be reduced.

“At time of writing, we know that members who are Clinically Extremely Vulnerable should not be in the workplace. NJC advice is that Clinically Vulnerable staff should not be either.

“We’ve also had concerns raised by social workers being asked to go into face-to-face situations with service users. We raised

these concerns at the children’s services joint consultative committee (JCC). Their advice was that local managers must risk assess each situation and put in place appropriate measures to ensure staff safety.

Your first action is to talk to your manager who should conduct an individual risk assessment. However, if you are not satisfied with their response, please contact the branch office for advice.

We have advised several hundred members on Covid-19 during 2020 and can provide support to ensure you are not put in harm’s way.”

BRANCH OFFICERS FO

The branch committee has nominated the following



Branch Chair
Ian Harvey



Branch Vice-Chair
Sarah Etherington



Branch Secretary
Dan Sartin



Deputy Branch Secretary
Karen Daubney



Equalities Officer (Women)
Carla Hardy



Equalities Officer (BME)
Olu Oyedele



Equalities Officer (Disability)
Sarah Etherington



Equalities Officer (LGBT)
Paul Woodcock



Health & Safety Officer (1)
Karen Daubney



Health & Safety Officer (2)
Carla Hardy



Labour Link Officer
Dan Sartin



International Officer
Chris Hughes



Environmental Officer
Julie Bolton



Young Members' Officer
Kiera Hilder



Education Co-ordinator
Briony Stilliard



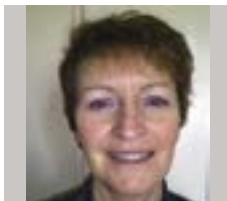
Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator
Briony Stilliard

FOR 2021/22 ELECTIONS

g members to serve as branch officers in 2021/22.



Branch Treasurer
Jennie Barrett



Pensions Officer
Judith Taylor



Retired Members' Secretaries
Jennie Gudgeon/Margaret Guest



Children's Services Convenor
Sarah Etherington



WSCC Adults' Services Convenor
Gerard Robson



WSCC Schools Convenor
Keith Manville



WSCC Other departments
Convenor **Vacant**



Welfare Officer
Stuart Gibbons



Communications Officer
Vacant



Membership Officer
Vacant

The branch committee has nominated the above members to serve as branch officers in 2021/22.

As part of the union's democratic process, nomination forms for any of the positions are available from the branch office.

The annual election process for workplace representatives has also started. The nomination period for all positions ends on Wednesday 10 February.

If you are interested in taking on any role, please contact the branch secretary to find out more or request a nomination form. Branch committee meets six times per year (in 'non-pandemic' times, usually split between Chichester and Worthing, though there are now options to meet virtually by Zoom). If you would like to get more involved with the branch, as a committee member or workplace rep, now is the time. Please get in touch!

IT SERVICES TO BE INSOURCED FROM CAPITA

The County Council is looking to bring its IT services provision back in-house, releasing it from the Capita contract early. It's the latest example in a long line of services previously outsourced to Capita now brought back under council control.

By doing this, the council is estimated to save £500k per year, forming a major element of its savings plan over the next few years.

The current contract concludes at the end of September 2022 but research shows there is greater benefit to the council by moving to a new model earlier. It intends to insource the service by summer 2021. We estimate that of the 20 services included in the Capita contract at various times, at the most only six will remain so by the summer. If the council can save £500k each year by doing this, it begs the question how much money it has wasted since 2012 on the failed contract.

Branch secretary Dan Sartin said, "We always knew that

outsourcing services to companies such as Capita was going to prove inefficient and costly for the council in the long-term. Incredibly given its experience, the council may still look to keep some elements of IT in the private sector so UNISON will be looking for assurance and involvement at each stage so we know that in-house solutions are not being unfairly side-lined."

Capita UNISON rep Ian Harvey said, "UNISON members affected by this change can rest assured we will be present throughout the TUPE process and will always seek to achieve the best outcome possible for you."



NEC NOMINATIONS

UNISON's national executive council (NEC) is its highest governance body. It is made up of 68 representatives to cover UNISON's diverse and huge 1.3million membership.

NEC members are elected to represent the 12 regions, 7 service groups (for example, local government being one) and 3 national groups (black members, disabled members and young members). The election this year will take place from 4 to 27 May.



The West Sussex branch currently has two members successfully elected to the NEC to represent the South East region, Dan Sartin – our branch secretary – and Abi Holdsworth – a workplace rep who works for Capita in Bognor. Both have decided to stand again in 2021.

Dan Sartin said, "Abi and myself will be standing with other like-minded candidates on a platform of radical change for UNISON. The NEC runs UNISON and determines the union it will be, so it is essential that members take part in these important elections."

UNDER DISCIPLINARY INVESTIGATION?

A UNISON West Sussex social work member describes their recent experience: “I have decided to share my own experiences hoping it will highlight flaws in the current systems and make WSCC think about the need for reform.

“I never expected to have my social work practice investigated under a disciplinary process. It started unexpectedly. I had not been pre-warned of any problems, yet I was summoned into a room with my managers and told I was suspended pending a disciplinary investigation. I sat crying and confused in a conference room.



I was told I was not allowed to share this information with colleagues and they would be told my role was changing due to other reasons.

“After that, obstacles were continuously put in my way. One of the biggest things I noted was the lack of communication.

“My mental health quickly declined and I had to seek professional help. I ended up on anti-depressants for the first time ever and lost a substantial amount of weight.

“This once again knocked my mental health. I raised this with HR and my managers. They told me to access the employee support service. I gave it a go. However, I was disappointed by what they had to offer.

“After six months of my professional life being inspected the disciplinary investigation concluded there was ‘no case to answer’. Six months of my career I will never get back.

Further investigation

“As time dragged on, I decided to use the opportunity of being a more restricted office-based worker to show my capabilities, and put all I could into supporting my service. I got to the point where I thought I would get through it and be OK. Then, out of the blue I was told WSCC had decided to investigate another area of my practice that had never been previously raised as a concern.

Help and support

“On reflection, the reason I made it through without more serious mental health issues was due to the support I had from UNISON. I am fearful for any peers who may have to go through this process in the future without their support.

“It’s time WSCC reviewed its processes to ensure support is there for employees in vulnerable positions. Investigations drag on for such long periods and with poor communication.”

UNISON is involved in ongoing and detailed discussions with HR at senior levels to review and make its performance and disciplinary processes more efficient. This work started positively in 2020 and will continue into 2021. As described above, all public service workers can benefit from UNISON membership and are encouraged to join us.

UPDATE

COVID MEASURES IN SCHOOLS



Branch schools' convener Keith Manville shares the responses to concerns posed on behalf of our schools' members at the recent WSCC schools' joint consultative committee (JCC).

1. Face Coverings

In West Sussex schools it has been agreed that staff who wish to wear face coverings may do so. It is not however, acceptable for employers to allow vulnerable staff to wear PPE but then ignore other issues such as crossing bubbles, ignoring social distancing guidelines and disregarding the risk of underlying health conditions.

2. Deployment of school support staff

The branch knows some school support staff have been instructed to carry out tasks outside their job description, such as cleaning toilet areas. This is not appropriate. We have been working closely with WSCC HR to resolve such member concerns within schools.

3. DfE – mass lateral flow testing for schools

After a recent meeting I attended with UNISON national colleagues and the department for education (DfE) discussing the roll-out of mass testing in schools, I have an additional concern regarding workplace



safety, given the potential false reassurance these tests provide. They should not be used instead of self-isolation for close contacts of individuals testing positive for Covid 19, but in addition.

The test is only suited to identifying some asymptomatic individuals. It suffers from low sensitivity when administered by volunteers or self-trained staff. Studies show it only detects 48.89% of positive infections compared to lab-based PCR tests. This explains why two tests are recommended taken three days apart.

I presented this criticism to the DfE. They couldn't provide answers. We want to engage with mass testing in schools but only alongside existing measures. It can't replace the need for these measures or be used instead of them. For a more complete evaluation of UNISON concerns on the national schools' sector statement on this subject, check out the branch website.

4. Risk assessments

Schools should be publishing their risk assessment on websites or making them available to staff on an intranet.

If you have concerns on any of the above matters, please contact me through the branch office. UNISON is providing support to hundreds of school support staff through the Covid pandemic. If you are uncomfortable at what you are being asked to do, or believe your health is being put at risk, get in touch.

SCHOOL RESTRUCTURES

In addition to the many council services being restructured where UNISON is actively supporting our members, the branch is also involved in several schools-based restructures.

Members' support is led by branch negotiations officer Zoe Walker and branch schools' convenor Keith Manville. Here are some of the school restructures,

negotiations on terms and conditions and TUPE transfers we've recently supported:

- North Chapel Primary School, Petworth

- Steyning Grammar School
- Our Lady of Sion School, Worthing
- Manor Field Primary School, Burgess Hill
- Oriel High School, Crawley
- Bohunt School, Worthing
- Stepping Stones Nursery School, Bognor Regis
- The Education Centre, Haywards Heath

If any UNISON member at any of these schools would like further information or support, please contact the branch on **01243 777636** or **office.unison@westsussex.gov.uk**

VIRTUAL ADVICE

In an attempt to turn a negative into a positive for schools-based members, branch negotiations officer Zoe Walker wants to make the most of the opportunity the 'virtual office' model has provided due to the coronavirus pandemic.



"Though I miss many of the benefits of working together in an office, there is an up-side to homeworking," said Zoe. "Technology has arguably allowed better use of time. Using video-call software such as Zoom has allowed me to virtually 'meet' more members to provide support and also meet groups of schools-based reps. This would be difficult in normal

circumstances, not least due to travel and transport problems.

"Many of the issues I hear from different schools are often similar, so I'd like to make the following offer. "If any UNISON rep or group of members from a particular school would like support or advice on a specific issue that can be delivered virtually, then I'm happy to help if I can. Please let me know if there is

anything causing you and your colleagues concern. "Also, we need more school reps. I can help train up new reps via video technology and support new reps through their first few months in the role. Please get in touch with me if this is something you would consider."

Contact Zoe on: zoe@unisonwestsussex.org.uk

C-19 IN SCHOOLS: NEW YEAR, NEW LOCKDOWN



The situation in schools has been fast moving. One moment the PM was stating his opinion, “schools were safe to be open” and yet within 24 hours he had closed most settings to all but keyworker children and the most vulnerable students, following pressure from education unions and SAGE advice.

At time of writing, UNISON remains concerned about the position given by the DfE in special school settings, given the wider definition of vulnerable to include all pupils with an EHC Plan. However, it is our understanding the director for education in West Sussex has taken a pragmatic approach in his advice to heads in SEN settings.

Early years

The DfE position on early years settings is also a concern for our members. UNISON has been requesting

the SAGE data on this and does not believe this is right. It is astonishing PM Johnson could decide early years settings are safe to remain open, while saying schools must close on safety grounds.

The new national lockdown means our members will now face new challenges in supporting reduced numbers of pupils in schools, whilst some members remain at potential risk in their workplaces.

Risk assessments

Risk assessments should be updated whenever there

is a significant change to circumstances and that would include a new national lockdown. Please check your school risk assessment and individual risk assessment has been updated and your school is following the latest advice on protecting clinically and clinically extremely vulnerable individuals in allowing those indicated by guidance or risk assessment to work from home or undertake other duties. It is also important that all previous C-19 H&S guidelines are being followed to keep those that remain in our schools as safe as possible.

Testing times

Mass testing in schools was rolled out but the issues were overshadowed by events during early January. Engagement with testing is voluntary and no one can be forced to undertake or carry out testing. UNISON further advises that testing of close contacts should not replace self-isolation protocols. Testing should be in addition to, not instead of, existing H&S protocols.

We continue to fight to keep members safe and issue new guidance to our members through emails and the branch website. Any member of schools' support staff with concerns about their place of work, risk assessments or the duties they are asked to undertake should get in touch.

MEET SARAH, BRANCH CONVENOR FOR CYPL

Former WSCC senior careers adviser, new branch convenor and UNISON West Sussex rep and vice-chair Sarah Etherington, talks us through some of the significant issues facing our members in the children's, young people and learning directorate (CYPL) over the next year.

"I've been seconded to the branch from January. This is timely as I will be able to support members in CYPL through whatever changes there may be to the directorate resulting from the inadequate judgement by Ofsted of children's services in May 2019 and the recommendation in December 2019 that control of these services be transferred to an operationally independent children's trust to improve services for children, young people and families.

However, in December the department for education announced that, "The council should retain control of its children's services for a period of twelve months pending a review of improvement progress."

Sarah said, "We hope that during this pause the council is able to make sufficient progress to prevent the service being run by a trust."

"My role is to support our members through any changes ensuring their interests are fully considered.

This is likely to be significant work and I will be working closely with Dan Sartin (branch secretary), Karen Daubney (deputy branch secretary), Paula Knott (UNISON rep early help) and Debbie Lawes (UNISON rep children's services) as we make up the team that meets monthly with senior CYPL management.

"I'll be consulting with members throughout the 12-month pause so please share your concerns with me so I can make sure your views form part of the discussions and negotiations.

"We anticipate a major restructure to start in 2021. Members should also be aware that UNISON is negotiating a new scheme for children's social workers' pay."

Sarah can be contacted through the branch office.



HE PAY CONSULTATION UPDATE

In early December, UNISON's higher education (HE) service group executive (SGE) met to consider the results of the pay consultation that closed on 30 November.

The consultation asked UNISON members whether they wished to accept or reject the pay freeze that has been imposed on HE staff.

The SGE noted that members voted strongly to reject the pay freeze and

decided that, on the basis of this result, a dispute will be lodged with the employers. The SGE also decided the campaign should be escalated, including planning for industrial action.

UNISON senior national

officer Ruth Levin said: "Higher education staff have worked harder than ever before under such difficult circumstances to keep universities running and to support students. We are urging the higher education employers to reconsider their position and get back around the table and make a meaningful offer."

RESTRUCTURE OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

One of several restructures the branch is involved in is that of the council's adults' mental health services. Branch negotiations officer Laurence Crossan has been leading UNISON's input.

"Management had made UNISON aware of issues with the existing service and we understood the reasons for the proposed structure changes," said Laurence.

"If it had not, there was a risk the service could not have met its statutory requirements because the delivery model was failing.

"The proposals included bringing some outsourced services back in-house, such as those provided by the Sussex Health Partnership Foundation via a Section 75 agreement. Though the council funded those posts, it had no direct

management responsibility.

"Though there were no redundancies or job losses, some staff expressed concerns about having to learn to use council rather than health management systems. However, training, buddying and lots of whole-group meetings, group and individual consultations and HR meetings have been held to ensure the new structure was fit for purpose. It goes live from January 2021.

"But it hasn't all been plain sailing. There have been several queries over job roles and location changes, the future

Laurence Crossan



relationship with health and allowance payments, but we have negotiated arrangements where no one will be worse off. The introduction of new rotas has also caused concerns regarding work/life balance for a number of individuals. These are currently under discussion and review.

"It's taken almost two years to get to this point and with nearly all staff affected being UNISON members, I believe we have achieved a positive outcome for many of our members."

NJC PAY CLAIM

The 2021-22 NJC pay claim will be as important for ever in helping members keep their heads above water after years of poor and below-inflation pay increases.

Members deserve a big rise after all their efforts during the pandemic. Instead, the government has cynically chosen to tell public service workers outside of the NHS that their pay will be frozen. The only problem they will have with local government

and schools' workers on NJC pay is that the government is not our employer! Our local councils are.

So the 2021-22 pay claim will proceed as normal with our employers. The West Sussex branch's member consultation on what level



the claim should be for resulted in a clear majority of members wanting a 10% claim. Watch this space. We may need to fight hard for the pay we deserve in 2021. If the Covid-19 experience tells us anything, it is that we are well capable of rising to any challenge.

UNISON SEEKS JUDICIAL REVIEW ON EXIT PAYMENTS

Recently, UNISON held discussions about the possibility of formally challenging the government's public sector exit payment cap regulations. This has resulted in UNISON sending a 'pre-action' letter to the government informing them of our intention to take out a judicial review. The legislation came into force on 4 November 2020, limiting exit payments to a total of £95k.

This means the combined value of; your statutory redundancy pay, enhanced redundancy pay and the cost to your employer of your 'pension strain' (making up your LGPS so that if made redundant after the age of 55 you can take your accrued pension benefits early and unreduced, in line with LGPS scheme provisions), must not exceed 95k. It won't just affect higher paid senior managers: it could also have a real impact on many members on moderate salaries but with long service (e.g. £30k per year with 20 years' service).

As yet, neither the guidance nor directions to accompany the regulations have been published. This means it's not clear to employers how they are supposed to put the 95k cap into force. The government has left the matter unresolved.

UNISON understands the cap will apply to all employment exits on or after 4 November 2020. Therefore, any member made redundant after age 55 from an English council, school or academy with unreduced LGPS benefits may not receive part or all of their redundancy and severance payments. They will have to pay



their pension fund a sum equal to the strain costs to allow them to retire early with no reduction in pension. Therefore, they could lose some or all of their redundancy pay.

In addition, in early September, the ministry for housing, communities and local government (MHCLG) launched their consultation on implementing exit payments for local government and the local government pension scheme (LGPS). This included further **disastrous** proposals. Potentially, these make the situation even worse as they seek to ensure **anyone** over 55 (regardless of salary or length of service) must choose between taking an unreduced pension or redundancy pay, even where their combined entitlements would **not** have taken them over the £95,000 threshold. **Everyone over 55 would be hit, even the lowest paid.**

This is an unjustified and unfair attack on public sector workers, and local government in particular. We will keep you informed on the progress of our judicial review request.

If you're in the LGPS and at risk of redundancy, keep in close touch with UNISON so we can advise you accordingly.

“ THANK YOU ”

“I would like to thank you for all the help and care you gave me. This period has opened my eye to how important UNISON is when needing guidance and help.”

“I would like to thank you for your very helpful and kind advice and support, especially in the telephone meeting and emails to HR. I would not have got to this place without you, they would have sacked me by now. I am not easily bullied but at times it felt that way, as when you are in a vulnerable state, off sick, it is easy to succumb.”

“Having just finished the phone call with X, and having achieved such a positive outcome, I wanted to thank you so much for your help and support with my grievance. I know that it has been a real slog, and hard work, but you have been so understanding – this has made such a difference to me personally, and the organisation. I really could not have done this without you – thank you.”

ADULTS’ PROVIDER SERVICES UPDATE

Though the review of the service’s western area was almost complete, the second phase of the general restructure was paused during the first lockdown.

Day centres closed, with only ‘critical hubs’ open for those with acute needs. Since lockdown was relaxed, the restructure has relaunched with staff having to apply for promotions or risk being downgraded. All must state their workplace location preference.

The restructure is a result of a decision to close a number of day-care centres, relocating services to those still open. Some centres needed huge levels of investment and others were suffering from low attendance due to the council introducing more restrictive needs criteria. This meant fewer people were eligible for the service, with only those people having complex needs able to attend.

The new service structure will combine both learning disabilities and specialist day services. A building refurbishment programme has started, with some members temporarily relocated to other centres. In Worthing, The Pines centre will close with services relocated to The Rowans after refurbishment, with similar work being done to Glebelands (Shoreham) and The Laurels (Rustington).

Some members will be faced with extra travel time and costs, but the service has committed to work with individuals to resolve any issues. UNISON will support members faced with temporary or permanent relocation including those at risk of being downgraded.

CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL SERVICES RESTRUCTURE

Following Ofsted's recommendation to close one WSCC children's home, the council reviewed others and decided to close a further two, with staff being reassigned roles. There has been formal consultation on final proposals for the new service. These include reopening Seaside (Shoreham), Mayhouse and Cissbury (both Worthing).



Deleting management layers

Ofsted believed there were too many management layers throughout children's services. However, instead of deleting posts at a senior level (where our members believe Ofsted had meant), the service decided to strip out more junior layers. The new structure means the grade 8 principal child care worker and grade 7 senior child care worker roles are deleted, with new team leader posts created at grade 9, while retaining the grade 6 childcare worker role.

Our members are not happy with this outcome. It means those currently on the grade 7 and 8 roles must decide whether to apply for the (fewer) grade 9 posts or be downgraded to grade 6. Many members have been in their roles years and feel they have given everything, especially during the pandemic, only to be targeted for what they view as an unfair and skewed restructure. Lower paid staff appear to have been targeted, while higher grade managers are merely slotted in. UNISON made

representations but these were largely disregarded.

Redeployment and redundancy

If members do not want the extra responsibility of a grade 9 role nor downgrading to grade 6, there is the option to choose redeployment via the internal placement service to suitable roles in other services (should they exist). The latter is only available for 13 weeks. After that there is a real risk of redundancy.

Future promotion?

Embedded into the new structure is the latent problem of future promotion opportunities: moving from a grade 6 to grade 9 role is a big jump in responsibilities. How is a grade 6 to incrementally acquire the skills for a grade 9 unless they take on duties above and beyond their grade for no extra pay? An additional role was added after UNISON representations, but there are far too few of these. Yet again the council is building in career progression problems for the future.

UNISON has fully supported our members through the process but it has been a frustrating and stressful experience for many staff. It will be interesting to find out Ofsted's views once this restructure has completed.

GBMET UPDATE

POSSIBLE CLOSURES, ALLEGED POLICY BREACHES AND PAY CLAIM



Former Northbrook
College, Broadwater,
now GBMet

Karen Fisher, branch workplace rep at the college's Broadwater campus, reports on the latest alarming developments in local further education (FE).

Closure of Worthing campuses?

"The further education commissioner (FEC) reported in August that the college: 'is facing several serious and deep-seated challenges, relating to both financial and quality issues. The college has been in difficulty for several years, with a deteriorating position following the 2017 merger.'

"Ever since the merger with Brighton City College, the fortunes of the former Northbrook College have deteriorated, in terms of both quality of teaching and finance. Ofsted says we now 'require improvement' and the FE Commissioner has put us under formal intervention.

"Our acting chief executive Andy Green (Chichester College) along with a re-vamped board of governors are working hard under difficult circumstances to turn things around. This would be difficult enough under normal circumstances, but factor in losses and expenses from Covid

and with no additional government funding, you can see an almost impossible task without radical change.

"One of the FEC's recommendations is to create a new 'estates strategy', stating the college is 'not sustainable on five campuses.'

"We know this could mean the closure of one or both Worthing campuses: a massive blow to everyone in the college and local community. With millions of pounds sunk into the central Brighton site it's as if Northbrook has been penalised for the failings of its enforced merged management.

Alleged policy breaches

"We're also concerned the college is in danger of breaching its own policies, especially in the area of pay protection. The explanations for these policy breaches do not ease our concerns. Although the first phase of restructure affects only upper management, the subsequent phases

concern us most. Previously, there would have been no question that pay protection applies. In all the restructures we've endured I've never known the college to break policy. We are exploring possible responses. To quote our chair of governors; 'nothing is off the table'.

FE pay claim

"This year's FE pay claim is for salaries to be brought into line with what they would have been had pay rises been awarded in-line with inflation. We'd like the college to be accredited to the Living Wage Foundation and for all contracted-out services to be brought back in-house. We await the recommendations from the Association of Colleges (AoC)*.

With more colleges than ever experiencing financial difficulties due to this government's lack of investment in FE over the past decade, it is hard to see how we'll be able to rise to the skills shortage this country is currently experiencing."

*see page 19

FE UNIONS OUTRAGED AT PAY OFFER

Trade unions representing staff in English further education (FE) colleges have slammed the decision by the Association of Colleges (AoC) to only offer a 1% pay increase to staff.

In a joint pay claim submitted in October, the unions (UNISON, UCU, NEU, Unite and GMB) made clear that college staff had suffered a real-terms pay cut of 30% since 2009 with over 24,000 teaching staff leaving the sector.

This year colleges saw a significant £224m increase in funding, yet it is unclear

what employers spent this on instead of investing in staff. The unions believe that only full transparency into where the money was spent will give staff the answers they need. Unions also called on employers to publicly commit to working towards closing the £7000 pay gap between school and college

teaching staff and introduce the foundation living wage.

UNISON head of education Jon Richards said: “College leaders had made clear promises that staff would get a substantial pay rise this year. But they’ve simply ripped these up and raided the wage pot to foot the bill for the pandemic.

“Pay in the FE sector is simply too low and this offer yet again ignores the value of college staff.”

WIGAN & LEIGH REHAB WORKERS WIN STRIKE

Drug and alcohol support workers employed by ‘We Are With You’ (WAWY) – formerly Addaction – in Wigan and Leigh have announced the end of a long-running trade dispute with their employer.

WAWY had promised pay would keep pace with NHS ‘agenda for change’ pay rates, but the charity failed to keep its promise once NHS staff received a pay rise in 2018. The victory comes more than 15 months after the first strike, involving 30 rehab workers (many of them UNISON members) who had been transferred from the NHS to WAWY. In December, they formally ended their dispute after agreeing a new settlement. The campaign included 26 strike days.

UNISON North West regional organiser Paddy Cleary said: “This dispute is a fantastic example of what can be achieved when workers stand up together. The legacy of this struggle is that this group of workers have found their voice and now have the right to negotiate collectively with their employer.

In a further boost, the central arbitration committee recently declared UNISON to be the recognised union for the workers. This decision means that from now on WAWY will be forced to negotiate collectively with the support workers through UNISON. The West Sussex branch committee agreed a donation of £500 to the WAWY strike fund to support their important dispute.



UNISON COVID-19 RESPONSE FUND

UNISON members have been among those facing the daily battle with the pandemic – not just in their work keeping our vital services going, but also on a personal and domestic front.

UNISON's 'There for You' unique welfare charity has opened a Covid-19 response fund to help members who are struggling as a direct result of coronavirus.

The fund's first round ran from May to July and distributed over £250,000 in grants to individual members, including many in West Sussex.

Grants of up to £500 will be made available to help members struggling financially as a result of coronavirus.

These can support with day-to-day living costs: for example, if you or your partner are furloughed or shielding and relying on statutory sick pay.

They can help you through loss of working hours, or towards housing costs like rent, mortgage or council tax arrears that have accrued since March.

For more information or to apply, go to unison.org.uk and search 'Covid 19 response fund'.



JOIN US!

If you're reading this newsletter and are not a member of UNISON West Sussex, please think about joining us!

We're a very active and busy branch, working hard to support our members individually when times get tough and collectively when there are negotiations needed to get the best deal for members.

You'll be joining 6,000 other local members benefiting from our support. Membership is not expensive and is adjusted to reflect your income level. There are also many other benefits available. To find out more, simply go to join.unison.org.uk

“Thank you so much for the Zoom meeting, I found it very useful! Good to know there is plenty of help if we need it. UNISON was brilliant when I needed help before. Fingers crossed the next few weeks go smoothly!”

THANK YOU

“A big thank you and X for the meeting. You have given me some useful pointers to raise with my employers.”

“I was successful in being awarded the grant from UNISON towards my university studies of £500. I can now purchase a much-needed laptop and a comfy office chair. Thank you.”