

The case for defending your pension



UNISON has balloted 90,000 Scottish Local Government workers on strike action opposing changes to their pension scheme. Proposals to increase the retirement age in the local government pension scheme in England and Wales are being rushed through parliament for April 2005. If the government succeeds in this, these changes will be implemented in Scotland a year later.

Mike Kirby, UNISON's Scottish Convenor, said "The average pension for a local government worker is already too low at £3,800 a year. Many of our members have difficult and stressful jobs. Working longer could force them into an early grave." He added that the government has refused to discuss the changes. "The only way to demonstrate the anger and concern that members have is to give UNISON a clear mandate for strike action."

So what are the proposed changes? There are 2 major changes proposed from April 2006 (or 2005 in England and Wales.) If these go through....

It will be financially impossible for most people to retire before they are 65. Although this is normal retirement age in the LGPS, under the "rule of 85" members of the scheme who are between 60 and 65 can choose to retire early on an unreduced pension if the sum of their age and the number of years they have been in the scheme is at least 85. It is estimated that at least half of LGPS members are able to retire early under this rule.

The minimum age for retirement for reasons other than ill-health will be raised from 50 to 55. This means that workers between 50 and 55 who are made redundant will no longer be entitled to an immediate pension.

UNISON is calling on the government to suspend the planned changes and to enter into real dialogue with the trade unions. "We are not against the modernisation of the public sector pension schemes," said Dave Prentis, General Secretary. "However, these proposed changes are a cut to our members' terms and conditions and are being imposed without any consultation." He added that this is only the beginning. A consultation paper on further reforms to the LGPS proposes further sweeping changes, with significant implications for members, and he called on members to support UNISON's campaign.

Join us today!
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The views expressed in this Newsletter are not necessarily those of the UNISON Aberdeenshire Branch

Political Fund Ballot

Members of UNISON have voted overwhelmingly to retain the union's political fund. 85% of those who voted said YES to the fund which will allow UNISON to continue campaigning in the political arena. General Secretary Dave Prentis said "This result is a clear indication that our members want their union to speak up for them in the political arena as well as in the workplace. They understand that increasingly we need to make the case to politicians as well as employers."

General Secretary Election

Dave Prentis has been re-elected as General Secretary of the UK's biggest union, receiving 75.6% of the vote.

Dave said "This is a vote of confidence in me and all those who work together to unite the union around a mainstream common agenda. We will continue our campaigns to defend our members' interest and to speak up for public service workers and for the services they provide."



COMPETITION

The last edition of the newsletter gave you a chance to win a DVD simply by recruiting someone to UNISON. We had a good response to this – it just goes to show how many people have never joined UNISON simply because they had never been asked!. Hugh Gordon who works at Banff Swimming Pool recruited Karen Smith and Hugh now wins a DVD player – congratulations Hugh – this was the form that was pulled from the hat.

Here's a question for you -

The three medals in a race went to Australia, Britain and Canada. One newspaper reported that Britain won Gold and Australia won Silver. A rival paper reported that Canada won Gold and Britain won Silver. Each paper's report got one medal right and one wrong. What was the actual result?

To win £25 simply send your answer on a postcard along with your name, address and membership number to UNISON FREEPOST (AB048), 7 ALFORD PLACE, ABERDEEN, AB10 1ZQ by 30 May 2005



Matters

The Newsletter for UNISON Members in Aberdeenshire

Editor: Kate Ramsden, - Spring 2005

A.G.M. Special ...

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Anger at pensions threat

UNISON members who attended the Branch AGM on Wednesday 16 February expressed overwhelmingly opposition to the proposed changes to their Local Government Pension Scheme and pledged support for the UNISON campaign. At the well attended and vocal AGM, members expressed anger and concern at the attack on their pensions and vowed to fight this threat.

Guest speaker, Stephanie Herd, Chair of UNISON's Scottish Local Government Committee, gave warning of the attack on pensions which are due to be implemented south of the border in April this year.

"Make no mistake," she told the AGM, "if these changes are implemented in England and Wales, they will be implemented in Scotland in April 2006. The Scottish Public Pensions Agency has made that very clear."

She called on members to act now to bring the government to the negotiation table and to stop them bulldozing through changes which will result in a much poorer retirement for many of us.

"I'm sure we were all outraged when Robert Maxwell plundered his employees' pension scheme," she added, "Well that's what the government is doing to us, and we should be just as outraged!"

The AGM went on to give its unanimous support to a motion which calls on all UNISON members to give their fullest support to any action called for by UNISON in the campaign to oppose these changes, and to return a Yes vote in the ballot for industrial action to oppose the attack on our pensions. Several members put themselves forward to serve on an Action Committee to co-ordinate the campaign locally.



Stephanie Herd

CAMPAIGN GETS NEW LIFE...

Whilst the blood was up, the AGM also raised the issue of car allowances. A claim for uprating made by the branch failed to secure an increase in the allowances, despite the clear increase in costs. The AGM instructed the branch committee to resurrect the campaign and to write out to all car users to ascertain the support for this. More on the attack on our pensions inside. Also, a fuller report of the AGM, the campaign for uprated car allowances and much more.....

STRIKE OFF AS GOVERNMENT PROMISES TALKS

UNISON called off planned strike action by 90,000 members of the Local Government Pension Scheme due to go ahead on Wednesday (23 March), after John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister, agreed to withdraw regulations to change the pensions scheme. Lengthy negotiations led by UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis, led to a written statement by Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott, confirming the withdrawal of the Amendment Regulations, which would have raised pension and retirement ages in Local Government in England and Wales from 2005 and threatened to do the same in Scotland from 2006. He also agreed to the setting up of a negotiating forum on the Local Government Pension Scheme with "nothing ruled in or out". In Scotland, Joe Di Paola, UNISON's Scottish Organiser for Local Government said: "We are pleased that these discussions will allow us to ensure the views of local government workers can be made without the immediate threat to the pension ages of colleagues in England and Wales, and the knock-on threat to Scottish Local Government workers. "We look forward to these discussions as they affect Scottish Local Government pensions."

Dave Prentis General Secretary of UNISON said: "The strike is off but I have no doubt that had it gone ahead on Wednesday we would have seen a massive show of strength and solidarity across public services." There was a 77% vote in favour of action in the UNISON ballot in Scotland. "However, I am pleased that the government has listened," he added. "Our aim throughout talks with the Deputy Prime Minister has been to have these regulations revoked and to have real negotiations on how we can have a viable, sustainable pension scheme that will benefit all. We have achieved both these objectives and we now look forward to meaningful talks on the future of our members' pension schemes."

AGM – demands action!

The 2005 Branch AGM was a lively affair, as members gathered to hear about and discuss a range of issues including the threat to our pensions; single status; efficient government and car allowances.

It was chaired for the first time by Kate Ramsden, who was duly elected branch chairperson during the course of the meeting. In her opening remarks, Kate paid tribute to Naomi Mandel, the outgoing chairperson, who has held the post for the past 5 years and whose association with UNISON goes back many more. Thanks and best wishes were sent to Naomi from the meeting.

Groundhog Day?

Stephanie Herd, Chair of the Scottish Local Government Committee spoke to the meeting about the issues which UNISON is dealing with nationally. As well as the pensions threat, (see front page) Stephanie updated us on the progress (or lack of it) in relation to single status and job evaluation. She referred to the statement in our 2004 AGM Minutes which says that single status "has been imminently about to happen for years." "That just about says it all," she said, adding that it has also been referred to as "Groundhog Day!" However, UNISON has now made it clear to employers that single status must be implemented, if councils are not to leave themselves open to legal challenge on equal pay claims from UNISON members.

Stephanie went on to outline UNISON's concerns about the Scottish Government's drive toward efficiency within local government and her fears that this just means cuts. "They are talking about a root and branch review of local authority funding, and have said they are even prepared to consider boundary changes. But where is the analysis and evidence that this is needed?" she asked, adding that the Scottish Executive should be heralding all the good work done in Local Government, and building on success. "UNISON will continue to press for meaningful dialogue with the Scottish Executive about this issue," she pledged.

Tribute

In his branch secretary's report, Bob Revie paid tribute to Doug Thorne, one of our long standing members and a branch auditor, who died towards the end of last year following a long illness. "Doug was a well liked and well respected member of our branch," Bob told the meeting. "He will be sadly missed, and our thoughts are with his family."

Bob's report detailed the business of the branch over the past year. There was considerable discussion about car allowances and the meeting expressed a great deal of anger that no progress has been made in the branch's claim for an uprate. Members made the point that without

car users the Council could not function properly. They feel that they are being taken a loan of, and that enough is enough. The meeting instructed the branch committee to reinstate the campaign for an increase in car allowances and demanded that letters be sent out to all car users to determine their willingness to take action in support of this.

Accounts

The AGM approved the branch accounts and agreed the payment of honoraria to the relevant branch officers.



Members at the AGM

Officers and stewards

Once again, no elections were required for branch officer or steward positions and those nominated for these posts were duly elected. If anyone out there is interested in any of the vacant positions, please get in touch with the branch office. We'd be delighted to hear from you.

Motions

Three motions were put to the AGM. The first, entitled "Attack on Pensions" received overwhelming support. A motion on the political fund ballot called for all members to vote yes in the ballot.

"This does not commit you to paying into either fund," explained Bob Revie, proposing the motion. "It only makes sure that all members have the choice to pay into either or both of UNISON's campaigning funds, and allows UNISON to continue its campaigning activity." This motion too was clearly carried.

The final motion, on single status implementation, recognised the importance of getting the scheme in place to ensure equality of employment conditions for Local Government staff. It called for proper resources to support branches in the local negotiations, and called on the Scottish Executive to provide additional funding.

"Other public sector pay models like McCrone and Agenda for Change have been fully funded by the Scottish Exec," said Bill Edwards, who put the motion, "However, Local Government has received no additional funding to implement single status."

The AGM passed this motion with a large majority.



Sheltered Housing Wardens – Aberdeenshire Council

A number of Aberdeenshire Sheltered Housing Wardens have taken Employment Tribunals as they do not believe they have been paid the National Minimum Wage and they believe that the Working Time Directive has been breached. UNISON is supporting them in their claim. Aberdeenshire Sheltered Housing Wardens have been expected to be on-call and available for ridiculously long hours. We believe that this time they have been on-call is working time and the wardens should have been paid properly for it. The on-call system has had a major impact on their lives.

There have been lengthy discussions to try and resolve this matter for a number of years. However, the Wardens decided enough was enough and lodged claims at the

Employment Tribunal in September 2004. There was a Case Management Hearing in the Tribunal in January 2005 and it is likely there may be future Case Management Hearings before the full case is heard at Tribunal.

In the meantime, we are gathering information on everyone's contracts and working time. We are also gathering information on the working practices for the Sheltered Housing Wardens throughout the years as there were a number of different practices over time and in different geographical areas of the Council. If you have any information that you think may be of use, please send it to UNISON at the Grampian Resource Centre.

Successful Regrading Conference 2005 Appeal

At the Appeals Committee on 4 March a further group of staff were successful in winning their regrading claim with backdating.

Members involved wrote a letter of thanks to branch secretary, Bob Revie in appreciation of the way their case was handled and presented before the Committee. Bob said "it is nice to get acknowledgement of our efforts for members, but much nicer when we win".

Conference 2005

For the first time in UNISON's history, the Annual Delegate Conference will be held in Scotland, at the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre in Glasgow in June this year.

Your Branch delegation to the Conference is Bob Revie, Inez Teece and Kate Ramsden (sharers), and Ian McDonald and Bill Edwards (observers).

The Branch still to fill a place. However, Branch rules say that this place must be filled by a female member earning less than £6.55/hour. If you meet this criteria and would like to represent your branch, please get in touch.

Branch goes live!

www.aberdeenshireunison.com

It's up and running! After much planning and preparation, Aberdeenshire UNISON has officially launched its branch website. "The site still needs some tweaking," said Bill Edwards, Assistant Secretary who is behind the launch. "However, at least it is now live." He thanked Gillian Dick, who was responsible for planning and setting up the website, but who never got to see it live before she left the Branch. "I think she'll be quite pleased with it," he added. Members are urged to have a look at the site and let us know what you think!

DETRIMENT

There are still a number of Employment Tribunal cases outstanding for those who suffered a detriment in 1996 Local Government Reorganisation. Much of this delay was caused by events in the Employment Tribunal, but UNISON is trying to get things moving again. We should have a date for a Case Management meeting at the Employment Tribunal soon. This will help to speed up the process.

We have asked Aberdeenshire Council to settle the case and pay up the amount we believe that they still owe staff. We would like to resolve this matter without having a court case. Aberdeenshire Council to date has refused to settle.

Your branch officers 2005

- Branch Chair and Publications Editor – Kate Ramsden
- Vice Chair – Naida Sneddon
- Branch Secretary – Bob Revie
- Assistant Secretary – Bill Edwards
- Assistant Secretary and Branch Development Co-ordinator – Inez Teece
- Treasurer – Ian McDonald
- Health and Safety Officer – Adam Keith
- Communications Officer – Jim Murphy
- International Officer – John Mair
- Retired Members and Welfare Officer – Les Chalmers

Situations Vacant :- contact us if you think you can help

Equalities Officer, Health and Safety Officer (Job Share)
Young Members' Officer, Education Officer.