

Time to get equal

Inez Teece, Assistant Secretary

UNISON believes there are employees of Aberdeenshire Council that may be entitled to compensation in respect of equal pay.

During 2006 Aberdeenshire Council made compensation offers to many mainly low paid female employees. This was because it was believed they had not been paid equally to male workers in the Council who did jobs of equal value. Many people who received the compensation then signed for the money and at the same time, signed away their rights to make any further equal pay claim up to 31 December 2006.

UNISON believes there could be other groups of workers in many other jobs that could claim compensation in respect of equal pay.

These claims would be based on the new grades given to their job as a result of single status. Many people have found their jobs have been upgraded as a result of the single status process which may give an indication that in the past their job was undervalued.

UNISON does not have the information to identify each and every potential claim. However, each employee will be entitled to request information from the Council about their job – this information could help you decide if you have an equal pay claim.

What is equal pay?

Equal pay is an issue when groups of male workers and groups of female workers may do different jobs but those jobs have been evaluated the same – but the male and female workers have been paid differently.

Here's an example (a bit ridiculous but it will give you an idea)

Bobby McDonald's Circus employs 10 strongmen and 12 bearded ladies – both acts are big hits with the audience. The strongmen were paid £20,000 a year and the bearded ladies were paid £15,000 a year. The Circus has just done a job evaluation exercise on all the acts and in the evaluation the strongmen's jobs scored 300 points and the bearded ladies' jobs scored 302 points.



What does this mean? It means that in the new pay system their jobs are valued the same and the strongmen and bearded ladies should be paid the same. The Circus has decided that the strongmen will stay on £20,000 and the bearded ladies will also now be paid £20,000.



The law says if you can show unequal pay between groups of male and female employees doing work of equal value then there is an equal pay claim and the difference in pay over the previous 5 years can be claimed.

So – the bearded ladies can claim £5,000 for each year before the new evaluation for up to 5 years which would give them a potential pay out of £25,000!

Now, we know there's no strongmen or bearded ladies working for Aberdeenshire (at least we don't think so) – and this is a very simple example. In reality equal pay is a complex issue and if you wish to find out more or think you may have a claim then get in touch with the branch.

Remember, not all claims will be successful but UNISON will guide you through the process and give you advice on your particular situation.

It's back! Win £25 in the UNISON Matter's brain teaser.

Bobby's Goldfish



Bobby's fish is 30 inches long. Its head is as long as its tail. If the head were twice as long as it really is, the head and tail would together be as long as what's in between.

How long is each part of the fish?

Entries on a postcard with your name and membership number to:

**UNISON Freepost (AB048)
7 Alford Place,
Aberdeen
AB10 1ZQ**

by Friday 25th May 2007



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Matters

The Newsletter for UNISON Members in Aberdeenshire

Editor: Kate Ramsden - Spring 2007

Green light on Single Status

UNISON along with the other trade unions have now agreed Aberdeenshire Council's Single Status proposals . This means that changes to the contracts of all council employees have been agreed under a collective agreement with the unions. These changes will come into force from 1st June 2007.

"This does not mean that all the issues around the proposals have been resolved," said Inez Teece, Assistant Secretary. "Many of you still have questions around your grade, your terms and conditions, the appeals process and the modernisation reviews."

So what will it mean for members?

New terms and conditions

You will all have seen the package of terms and conditions laid out in the council's booklet, "Single Status and You." These have been changed slightly as a result of further talks with the unions but are now fixed. You will get a full, updated version of your terms and conditions with your new contract.

"These will be the same for all employees. The old differences between "manual" and "white collar" staff have been done away with to ensure equality," said Bob Revie, Branch Secretary, adding that future changes will only be made as a result of collective bargaining with the unions.

New contracts

During May and June your new contract will be sent out. The unions are still in talks with the council about whether you will need to sign and return this. "Contracts have been varied by collective agreement, so it is not clear why employees would need to sign individually," said Bob. "However, we will be making sure that even if members are asked to sign a new contract that this does not affect their right of appeal," he promised. UNISON will send out further advice on this later.

Appeals

If you don't think you have been mapped properly then the most important issue for you will be the appeals process and the modernisation reviews.

The council will send you an appeals form at the same time as you get your contract. If you think your job has been wrongly

"mapped" and want to appeal you should fill this in and send it back to the council.

BUT if you would like UNISON to support you with your appeal you MUST also send a copy of the form to us at the same time. Failure to do this might mean we cannot support you.

"We think there may be a great many appeals," said Inez, "and we need as much time as possible to look at members concerns and to plan appeals. The branch will send out further advice on appeals in due course."

Modernisation reviews

The council is to carry out modernisation reviews in every service over the next 18 months. "We think that the council will put appeals on hold until these reviews are completed as they anticipate that they will resolve some of the appeals," advised Inez, adding that there will be full consultation throughout and UNISON will keep you informed through the process as to how it will affect you and your service.



UNISON Aberdeenshire Branch is proud to sponsor a

Ceiliùh

In aid of Dignity. Period!

Saturday 5 May 2007

8 till midnight, Inverurie Town Hall

with

Ceilidh Mor



Tickets £10 waged, £5 unwaged. BYOB

Tickets on sale from 1 April from

Morgan's Music, Inverurie



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Busy year for branch as progress made

Members attending the branch AGM were the first to hear, hot off the press, that all three trade unions have now accepted the council's single status proposals.

This was the major issue at an AGM on 21st February that reflected the hugely busy year for branch officers and activists with complex negotiations and campaigning on single status, equal pay and pensions.



"It has been a long process and the negotiations have been fraught at times, as UNISON has fought to get the best possible deal for our members," Bob Revie, Branch Secretary told the AGM. "We know that not

everyone is happy with the outcome and we will continue to support and advise members who wish to appeal their mappings. However, we believe the scheme is fit for purpose in terms of pay equality and the best we could achieve through negotiation."

Few losers

The AGM heard from Emma Philips, Regional Organiser, that the branch has achieved a scheme which has relatively few losers. "This compares favourably with other schemes such as the Shetland scheme where around 50% of the workforce face a cut in wages," she added.



A lively question and answer session followed as members checked out how the appeals process will work and the support they can expect from the union. "We are hoping that many more of our members will come forward as stewards and workplace contacts and will do the training on appeals, so that they can support their colleagues," said Emma. She added that this need not be a lot of work and that time to do this work will be arranged.

The motion on single status calling on the Branch Committee to keep up the good work, to keep members informed and to encourage member involvement was carried overwhelmingly.

For regular updates on single status go to: www.aberdeenshireunison.com/singlestatus/index.html

Branch wins equal pay claims



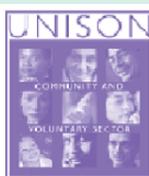
Almost half the equal pay grievances lodged by the branch have been resolved to the satisfaction of the members, Inez Teece, Assistant Secretary told the AGM.

"Many of our members accepted the compensation offers made by the council back in May last year, but the branch has supported many members to take grievances against the council," she said. "Others, including the equal pay claim by classroom assistants, have been lodged at Employment Tribunal."



See page 4 for more information about equal pay.

Support pledged for voluntary sector



The plight of the voluntary sector was highlighted by members attending the AGM who were employed by voluntary organisations. They spoke of the problems caused by the funding squeeze both for staff and for the service users.

"Because of these cuts, our service users no longer get the quality of service they used to. We feel this is discriminatory," said one member.

Bob pledged UNISON's support at both local and national level, to campaign for improved pay and conditions. He acknowledged that the squeeze is a result of the voluntary sector being at the end of the funding chain. "It is all to do with local authority funding," he said, "and we will continue to raise the funding issues and the wider practice issues both locally and nationally."

See: www.aberdeenshireunison.com/voluntarysector/index.htm

"Cautious optimism" for new pensions scheme

There was some good news for members on the pensions front, and the AGM heard about the talks underway to design a new look pension scheme which will be distinctively Scottish.

"We were very disappointed that the magnificent day of action last March did not save the Rule of 85," said Kate Ramsden, Branch Chair. "However there are some grounds for "cautious optimism" that the new scheme will give improved benefits for members, many of whom are relatively low paid," she added, citing the average wage of pension scheme members as £16,000.

Ian McDonald, Branch Treasurer added that the scheme is likely to remain a final salary scheme and looks set to include improved partner benefits and death benefits and a better basis for ill-health retiral as well as a flexible retirement scheme. "Once the scheme is finalised there will be a full consultation and a ballot of all members," he told the meeting.

For more information go to: www.aberdeenshireunison.com/pensions/index.html

More stewards please!

Once again there were no elections for officers' or stewards' posts and the business of the branch was quickly dealt with. There was the annual plea for more stewards and workplace contacts to come forward. The branch is busy but members can take on as much or as little as they feel they can manage in these posts and there will be lots of support and training available to those interested.



Branch finances are healthy thanks to our long serving treasurer Ian McDonald, and the AGM approved the accounts and the honoraria paid to key branch officers for their services to the branch.

The AGM recorded a vote of thanks once again to all the branch activists, branch officers and full-time staff who have worked so hard over the past year.



No strike ballot on pensions

English and Welsh delegates to a special Local Government Conference in London on 6th March, voted by a majority to continue negotiations on the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) south of the border and ruled out a strike ballot at this stage.

Your branch delegates to the conference were Ian McDonald and Kate Ramsden. They heard that the negotiations so far have resulted in many improvements on the original proposals from the employers and the scheme as it stands has many benefits for lower paid workers, who form a majority of the scheme members. Talks are continuing to press for further improvements.

Those calling for a strike ballot argued that members who turned out in March to oppose the loss of the Rule of 85 feel let down by the new scheme and would be prepared to vote for another round of strike action to give backbone to the negotiations.

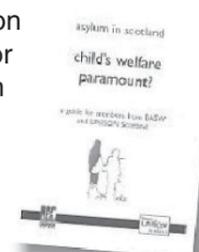
Delegates arguing against a ballot at this stage pointed out that, as in Scotland, there will be a full consultation of members through ballot on whether or not to accept the finalised scheme.

Branch calls for action on asylum families



The branch is to keep up the pressure for the humane treatment of asylum seeker families and their children.

The branch voted overwhelmingly to submit another motion to UNISON's Annual Delegate Conference, calling on the union to campaign at a UK level for an end to dawn raids and the detention of children, and an amnesty for asylum families who have lived in the country for more than a year.



Proposing the motion, Kate Ramsden, Branch Chair, outlined the progress already made in Scotland since the branch put a motion to UNISON's Scottish Council last year. She pointed to the guide for members working with asylum seeker children; the talks with the Scottish Executive about their proposed protocol to ensure the needs of these children are assessed; and the links built with other like minded organisations. However, she warned there is no room for complacency.

"Dawn raids and locking up children are still happening," she told the meeting. "We need to get this issue onto the national stage and get UNISON nationally to join forces with others to put pressure on the Westminster government to end these appalling practices."

For more info go to: www.aberdeenshireunison.com/news/asylumguide.htm

If members are not happy with the proposals a strike ballot will be held then.

Scottish and Irish delegates were not allowed to vote as the conference focussed exclusively on the LGPS in England and Wales. However, much of the debate was relevant to the Scottish position where we may be faced with similar decisions once the proposals for the "new look" scheme in Scotland are finalised.

The conference also highlighted the need for all the schemes to be "equality proof" in relation to gender, race and disability, and spelled out some of the challenges for our Scottish negotiators.

For further info go to www.aberdeenshireunison.com/pensions/pensionsconfmarch07.html