

# AGM 2008

## A member's view

Dear Unison,

I have just returned from Unison's A.G.M. held in the Kintore Arms, Inverurie and I feel so angry and let down by the poor attendance that I felt I had to put pen to paper.

Unison Aberdeenshire branch have 2,775 members. Where were you all tonight, 20<sup>th</sup> Feb? Where were all the members Unison are appealing on behalf of against the single status? Where were all the members involved with the agenda motions, like the classroom assistants? Inez is in a working group who are fighting and negotiating tirelessly to bring your status and pay & conditions to a higher level. You are lucky that the members who did turn up thought that it a worthy motion and voted for it to be carried forward, otherwise the fight would have been dropped.

Are you not interested in the New Local Government Pension Scheme? Maybe you feel you will be roped into something you are not prepared to be involved in.....WRONG! I have never been pressurised into something I'm uncomfortable with.

Every year I turn up alone (no, I'm nae a saddo) and every year I am amazed at the amount of work that is going on (often behind the scenes) that we are failing to recognise and support. We're living in a "me" society. What's in it for "me"? I'm not affected so I don't care. I'm glad I was there to support fellow members to carry forward motions that don't directly affect "me". This year I'd an added bonus as I bumped into two people I haven't seen for years.

So, on behalf of myself, I'd like to thank Unison for the clear, no jargon presentation on the new pension scheme. I now know which way I'll be voting when we're balloted in March. Thanks for helping me to be aware of other agency difficulties. Thank you for the beautiful buffet, coffee, free raffle, (nae luck) pen and car ice scraper. Most of all I'd like to thank everyone working at the Aberdeenshire branch for all your hard work negotiating on our behalf for better pay and conditions.

Come on all you fellow members, let's show our appreciation and support the branch by turning up at the A.G.M. They need our support to help us. The guest speaker tonight travelled from Glasgow so distance should not be an issue, after all it's only once a year.

Yours sincerely,  
Moira Deans

P.S. I look forward to meeting lots more members next year.....perhaps I'll meet more that two blasts from the past. Please accept my apologies to any fellow members I've offended, who did have the decency to turn up and support the branch.

**Ed: Thank you for this, Moira. You are reflecting the views of many of us who were really disappointed by the turnout. The AGM is the place for members to come along both to support the stewards and branch officers who have worked on their behalf all through the year, whether giving support to individuals or negotiating terms and conditions like pay, pensions etc., but also to hold us accountable for the work that we do. Please, if you've had a service from UNISON, support us at next year's AGM!**

### Branch AGM Wordteaser

U J W S P S J Q W N T R C R X  
S O W E E R S P T I C O W P A  
C M M M N E H C F W Z T X M G  
H L F O S K I V W Z D C A N S  
I T B H I E F Y D J D E Z I I  
L T V E O E T G Z R C S A M N  
D O E L N S A M Z E M Y P K G  
P L X B S M L N E A I R Y G L  
O L E A Q U L V E H A A N P E  
V A C D C L O M L R L T L F S  
E B V R Q Y W Z H D C N F K T  
R W W O Q S A I I A Y U T B A  
T D N F U A N B Y R A L H U T  
Y A Z F U F C L F A P O V A U  
O R J A P A E C P E L V B H S

AFFORDABLEHOMES  
ASYLUMSEEKERS  
BALLOT  
CHILDPOVERTY  
PAYCLAIM  
PENSIONS  
SHIFTALLOWANCE  
SINGLESTATUS  
VOLUNTARYSECTOR

**So the last competition was too easy, was it? Well, have a go at winning £25 with this Wordsearch, made up of issues from the AGM. Good luck!**

**Send your entries with your name and membership number to UNISON Freepost(AB048) 7 Alford Place, Aberdeen.**

Last issue's competition was won by Mrs C. Hunter, Kemnay. Congratulations! A £25 cheque is on its way.

**Solution:** Rebecca got Shania; Laura got Mozart; Kevin got Madonna; James got Robbie; Joanne got Boyzone and Steve got Steps.

The views expressed in this Newsletter are not necessarily those of the UNISON Aberdeenshire Branch



# Matters

The Newsletter for UNISON Members in Aberdeenshire

Editor: Kate Ramsden - Spring 2008

AGM Special.....AGM Special.....AGM Special.....AGM Special.....AGM Special.....AGM Special.....

# Pension scheme delivers benefits for all

The new Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) will deliver benefits for all its members, and especially for the lower paid, and UNISON called for a YES vote in the ballot which ended on 21st March.

Dave Watson UNISON's Scottish Organiser and a key negotiator for the Trade Union side in the pension negotiations, told the Branch AGM on 20<sup>th</sup> February that the action taken by UNISON members in 2006, in defence of our pensions, had laid down a clear marker for the employers and the Government.

### Low paid benefit

"Although it was the worst possible time to negotiate on pensions - with attacks on other schemes in the public and private sector, - we have been able to get a scheme where everyone's pension will rise and contributions will be fairer, with 60% of our lower paid staff paying less," he told the meeting. "We have also kept a final salary scheme and we have got a number of other improvements, including increased death in service benefits and extended partners' pensions."

There will also be more choice for those retiring with an option to take up to 25% of your annual pension as a lump sum. Every £1 of your pension that you give up will become £12 as a lump sum. "Thus gives members greater flexibility, but will also mean savings for the pension fund, as experience shows that large numbers of members will opt for a lump sum and a smaller pension," said Dave.

### Tribute

Thanking Dave on behalf of the meeting, Kate Ramsden, Branch Chair paid tribute to the work of UNISON's negotiators in getting a scheme which was fairer but offered benefits and protections for all its members. She called on the meeting to vote YES in the ballot and to encourage colleagues to do the same.

UNISON members conditioned to the LGPS will have been balloted on the scheme between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> March.

### For further information go to

<http://www.aberdeenshireunison.com/pensions/pensionsupdatefeb08.html>



### Inside this AGM Special Issue

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For more information, breaking news and other stories go to the branch website at [www.aberdeenshireunison.com](http://www.aberdeenshireunison.com)

# Policy set at AGM

**In a busy and interesting AGM, held on 20th Feb 2008, members set Branch policy on a range of key issues.**

The meeting considered a record seven motions which looked at members' terms & conditions and the services they provide, as well as wider, citizenship issues such as housing & child poverty.

## AGM challenges shift allowance criteria

Branch negotiators have been sent to negotiate changes to the criteria for shift allowances, implemented following single status.

"The current system is complex, divisive and just doesn't work," Lesley Ogston, Residential Care sector told the AGM. "Relief staff, who make up a large proportion of the workforce in residential services for the elderly, often work full-time, but do not meet the criteria. It's the same with staff who work split shifts, one of the most demanding types of shift work", she added.



LESLEY OGSTON

Bob Revie, Branch Secretary pledged support from the Branch Committee to take these proposals back to the negotiating table.

## Better recognition for school support staff

The AGM supported the work of the Branch and at Scottish level to protect the interests of our members who support the education of our children in schools, and called on UNISON through the STUC, to seek the support of the teaching unions in getting proper recognition, pay and status for the work of these staff.



INEZ TEECE

"These staff are essential to the education of our children, and this has been clearly shown through



research such as 'Valuable Assets', a report by the Equal Opportunities Commission on classroom assistants. Yet they are still seen as second class citizens in schools," said Inez Teece, Assistant Secretary.

She also told the AGM that UNISON has set up an Education Issues Group at Scottish level to take forward the concerns of our members in education

## Like for like funding call

The Branch will call on UNISON Scotland to build on their joint campaign to secure proper funding for the Community & Voluntary Sector.

"For too long our voluntary sector members have been hit by a lack of funding. We are calling for their pay & conditions to be the same as their colleagues in Local Government and for proper funding to ensure high quality services to their users," said Bob Revie.



BOB REVIE

Jean Montgomery, Cornerstone steward told the meeting that their pay award of 1.5% was well below even the paltry Local Government award. "However, even worse than that is that Cornerstone is having to close down services to vulnerable adults because they can't afford to maintain them," she added.

These concerns about service closures were echoed by members from Inspire who also described unacceptable working conditions - 10 hours without a break. They pledged their willingness to work with the UNISON stewards in Inspire to campaign against the erosion of their terms & conditions, and for improved funding for the voluntary sector.

## Call for affordable homes

The Branch is to affiliate to Shelter and support its campaign for 30,000 affordable rented homes to be built.

Steve Gray, Planning & Environmental Services told the AGM that the relationship between house prices and earnings has broken down, as the supply of affordable housing has become limited over the last 20 years, with the number of council homes sold exceeding the number of new affordable homes being built on an annual basis.

In Aberdeenshire at the end of 2007 homeless applications were 1,636, up from 1,467 in 2006. There are about 7,000 people on the Aberdeenshire Council Housing Waiting List.

"The lack of affordable housing is going to impact more upon UNISON members as some members struggle to find a home of their own and others face requests to help to fund their children's first home by remortgaging their own home," said Steve.

"Shelter Scotland has campaigned to raise awareness of the developing crisis in affordable housing and to look for solutions to it," Steve added calling on the AGM to support the motion.

## Branch action leads to significant improvements for asylum seeker children

The AGM pledged its continuing support to the campaign which started in 2006 to challenge the inhumane treatment of asylum seeker children and to support UNISON members who work with these children to practice ethically and put their interests first.

Kate Ramsden, Branch Chair, spoke of the significant achievements since the Branch first raised its concerns.

"UNISON has influenced a huge change in the political culture in Scotland and many more protections have now been put in place for these children. UNISON members in Scotland have welcomed the guide we issued and guidance is now being produced for members across the U.K.



KATE RAMSDEN

"The campaigning work has brought great credit on the Branch and the union in Scotland," she said.

## Call to End Child Poverty

The Branch will urge UNISON Scotland to join with the campaign to end child poverty in Scotland to press for a clear strategy to improve educational outcomes for children living in poverty and to support our members to advocate for improved services for these children.

"Our members in community learning, education and social work are key to supporting these children to achieve their potential, but they are an easy target for cuts. If the Government is serious about reducing child poverty, this needs to change," said Kate Ramsden, Housing & Social Work, calling for proper investment in these services.

Supporting the motion, Gordon Thomson, Planning & Environmental Services told the AGM that 30 years ago before the Thatcher Government only one in ten children lived in poverty. "At its worst it was one in three children, but one in four is still a national disgrace and action is needed to address the inequalities which lead to this."

## More stewards please!

Once again there were no elections for officers' or stewards' posts. 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.

Ian McDonald, Branch Treasurer reported that once again, branch finances are healthy and the AGM approved the accounts and the honoraria paid to key branch officers for their services to the branch.



IAN McDONALD

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

## Sharing services won't deliver savings

By Chris Bartter, Scottish Communications Officer

UNISON's Scottish Secretary, Matt Smith, has visited the Scottish Parliament to tell MSPs that relying on sharing services to save money in the public sector will not work.

At a meeting in the Parliament organised as part of the STUC TU week, he told MSPs of huge budget overruns in much vaunted schemes abroad and criticised authorities for uncritical acceptance of savings claims from private consultants.

"While UNISON is a key supporter of public authorities working in partnership to deliver better and more cost-effective services, Shared Services does not deliver the major savings in the short term that some consultants and government departments try to sell us," he said.

"Our own National Audit Office indicates that shared service projects in the UK have so far taken five years to break even, and that major investment is needed in the short term to deliver longer term savings.

"If you add in other costs - like increased VAT costs - it is clear that, even if there are longer term saving potentials, shared services will not deliver the Government's desired 2% savings in the short term."

A briefing with the material, that was circulated to MSPs is available on the UNISON Scotland website at [www.unison-scotland.org.uk/revitalise](http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/revitalise)

## Scotland's local government unions reject three-year pay offer

UNISON has rejected a three-year pay offer from CoSLA, the Local Government employers, and negotiations continue to press for an acceptable settlement.

The claim has also been rejected by the other two local government trade unions. The unions had submitted a pay claim looking for a rise of £1,000 or 5% in 2008 last November.

CoSLA responded last week with an offer spanning three years, proposing rises of 2.2% in 2008, 2.3% in 2009 and a further 2.2% in 2010. The meeting didn't agree any improvements to the offer, despite its rejection by the unions.

Dougie Black, UNISON Regional Officer and secretary to the trade union negotiators said:

"This level of offer is unacceptable to local government staff. It doesn't approach the current rate of inflation, let alone begin to catch up the loss staff have suffered over recent years and it skews the pay scales, increasing the gap between higher and lower paid - for our lowest paid workers the increase after 3 years would be 42p! This is already a pay cut, and it doesn't even have a reopener clause, should inflation increase over the three years."

## Jean wins the prize

In a new initiative to encourage members along to the Branch AGM, a prize draw was held on the night. Jean Montgomery, a Cornerstone steward won the star prize of a meal for two, including wine, at the Redgarth, Oldmeldrum.

Jean is pictured here receiving her prize from Kate Ramsden, Branch Chair.

"I am delighted to have won and my husband and I will look forward to a really good night out," said Jean.

