



A very lucky man!

Our own Branch welfare officer, Les Chalmers, had cause to be very grateful to his welfare colleagues when he took a bad turn at UNISON's National Welfare Conference held in Bristol in May.



At one of the first training workshops, Les took ill with a suspected heart attack. Fortunately for Les and all the delegates attending this workshop, a paramedic from West Midlands, **Dave Knowles** was also there. Dave very quickly assessed the situation (accurately) and insisted that Les remain still whilst an ambulance was called. The ambulance arrived and Dave reported his findings to the crew. These were quickly relayed to the waiting **Emergency Team at Bristol Royal Infirmary**. Within seconds Les was taken straight to the hospital emergency area. On examination Les was informed that he had a blood clot and if Dave had not insisted that Les not move, the clot would have moved and could have been fatal.

Some days later Les underwent surgery to inflate a valve in his heart. Whilst he was in hospital he was visited regularly by other welfare officers, initially from the Scottish delegation and then, when they had to leave, by Sue Nash, the welfare officer from the local area.

"I am very lucky to be here," said Les of his experience. "I can't thank enough all those who helped me out and gave me support, especially Dave, who really saved my life, and Sue who visited me all the time I was in hospital." Les also paid tribute to his Scottish colleagues, especially Eleanor Haggart and Andy Douglas, and to the Branch, who offered him any support necessary and sent him and his family all our good wishes.

Les returned home just a week after his attack and needless to say, was back in harness within a few short weeks. He is all set to go off to the retired Members Conference in October and we wish him well!

Consultation starts on 2008 pay claim

UNISON Scotland's Local Government Committee has now issued timescales for their Pay Consultation talks for the creation of a pay claim linked to 1 April 2008.

As the results of local consultation have to be back in HQ by the start of August we will not be able to embark on and complete as wide a consultation on these options as we would like.

The consultation document along with some background papers have been passed to stewards who can be contacted for information.

If you do not have access to a steward, copies of the materials can be obtained from the Branch Resource Centre, or you can email your views to aberdeenshire@unison.co.uk

The consultation focuses on specific issues such as...

- Should we be seeking a one year deal or spread it over several years as has been the norm in the recent past?
- Should it be flat-rate? If so, what figure should be applied?
- Should it be percentage-based? If so, what figure should be applied?
- Should there be elements of flat-rate and percentage? If so, what figures should be applied?

The last time the branch consulted, the clear consensus was for a 3 year pay claim with an element of both a flat rate and a percentage, to ensure a fair deal for our low paid members, at the same time ensuring that middle earners did not lose out. Unless we receive a great many views which disagree with this it is likely that we will keep this position.

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

Single status appeals likely

As new contracts are issued to council employees and single status comes into force in Aberdeenshire, the Branch is bracing itself for a high number of appeals by members.

"Many staff are unhappy with their mapping and are likely to register appeals," said Inez Teece, Assistant Secretary. She reminded members to copy their appeal registrations to the Branch as soon as they submit them.

"It is also important that members contact us if they think they may have a claim for equal pay, as outlined in the Spring newsletter."

This is likely to be a busy time for the branch and we are keen to find members willing to act as stewards and workplace contacts.

"We will make sure that training and support are provided along with time off for union duties," said Bob Revie.

Competition Corner

Brainteaser—win £25

A woman has 100 coins in the following denominations: pennies, pound coins, ten pence pieces and 50 pence pieces, that add up to £5.00. What TWO combinations of denominations of coins could she have?

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

UNISON Freepost (AB048)
7 Alford Place,
Aberdeen

Answer to last issues Brainteaser

Bobby's head and tail 6 inches; body 18 inches. The winner was **Margaret Hutcheon of Inverurie**. Congratulations!

Join us today!

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Matters

The Newsletter for UNISON Members in Aberdeenshire

Editor: Kate Ramsden - Summer 2007



Ballot on pensions before christmas

Pension talks are still going on but it is hoped to move to a ballot later in the year.

There is broad agreement that the future Local Government scheme should be a final salary one with an accrual rate of 1/60th, although this will depend on final costing.

There is also agreement on improved death in service provisions and partner pensions.

There are three main areas that require more work.

Cost Sharing and Governance: COSLA wants a 2:1 contribution rate. UNISON is trying to get full member representation on each fund.

Contribution Rates: There is general agreement on a banding system but more work needs done.

Ill health: "There has also been positive movement in providing ill-health retiral for those who may not be permanently incapacitated but who are unlikely to work gainfully for several years," said Ian McDonald, branch treasurer, who attended a recent update on the talks.

"But there is still work to be done here to avoid dismissals on the grounds of capability".



Delegates in debate

Branch delegates were in action at UNISON national Delegate and Local Government Conferences this year, as Scotland played a key role in debates..

See inside for a fuller report on both Conferences and a Scottish perspective.

Fair pay for teaching support staff

The branch has invited teaching support staff members to come along to one of two meetings to hear from Laura Hutchison of the Equal Opportunities Commission, who carried out the formal investigation into the role and status of classroom assistants in Scottish schools. This found that classroom assistants and SFL auxiliaries across Scotland are underpaid and undervalued for the work they do and UNISON is calling for Local Authorities to remedy this situation.

The meetings will be held in Inverurie and Fraserburgh on 29th and 30th August from 6pm until 8pm.

Betty Lyon, branch development officer said, "We'll also be giving an update on Equal Pay and Pathways. This meeting will provide members with very important information and I would urge you to attend. If you would like further information please contact me at the Resource Centre." Find out more at www.eoc.org.uk/valuableassets

For more information, breaking news and other stories go to the branch website at aberdeenshireunison.com

Conference makes landmark decisions on pay and privatisation as Scotland plays key role in debates

UNISON's National Delegate Conference made fundamental decisions about a co-ordinated fight for pay south of the border - across health and local government - and a trade union wide fight against privatisation, with national and regional demonstrations. It also decided key policies on pensions.

Bob Revie, Branch Secretary, was active at the podium once again this year, as Scotland played a huge part at conference, in much greater proportion than our numbers.

UNISON pledged to step up its 'Positively Public' campaign for public services and against privatisation and back this up with a national demonstration. Scotland had a key role in the debate with an amendment warning of the 'creeping privatisation' of shared services and PFI.

Speaking in support of the amendment, Bob told conference of the unique public services model in Scotland which centres on collaboration and co-ordination, not competition. "But Scotland also faces many challenges similar to England," Bob warned, emphasising that the union must continue to influence the public policy debate.

"We must let politicians know they cannot reform public services without taking account of the views of users and staff"

Bob was only one of a wide range of Scottish speakers.

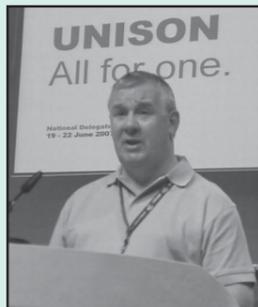


Delegates listen intently

Jane Carolan, Scottish NEC member, played a key role speaking for the National Executive on all of the major issues of the week. She proposed the emergency motion on pay, and warned against the EU services directive, as well as having a voice in the debates on privatisation and Trident.

Mike Kirby, Scottish Convener also spoke on many key issues and was joined by a host of other Scotland speakers from branches large and small and across a range of services. All in the tradition of putting the arguments, trying for the hearts and minds - being critical when needed - but largely avoiding destructive and cheap platform bashing.

The speakers had something different to say each time. They addressed the motions and the points of debate. That



"take account of the views of users and staff"

is refreshing in a Conference where some took pleasure in getting up time after time to flog the same dead horse.

The plethora of Scotland speakers did expose one issue we need to address for the future. It is not just in Service Groups that the devolution agenda is becoming obvious, it is national Conference too. Issues like housing, schools, and many health and local democracy issues are specific to Scotland. We need therefore to develop discussion in the union about how we can all fully involve ourselves under UNISON's national policy agenda.

The answer may well lie in developing joint seminars with the NEC Policy structures on various topics to ensure devolution issues are addressed while maintaining solidarity and a broad policy and campaigning consistency across our union.

Your branch delegation this year was: Bob Revie, Branch Secretary, Patricia Morrison, Health and Safety, Kate Ramsden, Branch Chair and Inez Teece, Assistant Secretary (sharers) and Ian McDonald, Treasurer (observer).



Ian McDonald enjoys the debate

Kate joins newsheet team

Kate Ramsden, Branch Chair joined the Scottish Newsheet Team for the first time and was kept very busy as the team produced a record 10 Scottish briefings.

This year there were also two briefings which reported on debates with Scottish input. **These reports can now be found at www.unison-scotland.org.uk/conf2007/index.html**

Emma takes up new role

Emma Phillips, the Branch's regional organiser, is leaving temporarily to take up a new role as a mum! Emma's baby is due in September but she began her maternity leave in July.

"I am really looking forward to a new challenge," said Emma, who will be back in post next year. Meantime her job has been advertised and will hopefully be filled soon.



Asylum guidance for social work staff across UK

Branch members were in action at the Local Government Conference as delegates backed Scotland's call for guidance for UNISON members who work with asylum seekers, based on the guide, "child's welfare paramount?" This was produced by UNISON Scotland and the British Association of Social Workers after this branch raised the issue at UNISON's Scottish Council.

Kate Ramsden, Branch Chair, told conference how UNISON Scotland had come to produce the guide. She slammed the appalling practices of the immigration services and the inhumane way they treat asylum seeker families and their children.



"members need and deserve guidance"

"We have been very clear that our members should not collude with such practices," she said. "However, we believe that our members should provide a service to these vulnerable families as they would to any other."

She went on, "We believe that the worst aspects of immigration and asylum law can and should be challenged by social work laws. However asylum and immigration is a reserved matter. Most asylum seekers live in England and it is our social work members there who, every day, are having to deal with

these issues and provide support to vulnerable asylum seekers. These members need and deserve guidance and support from their trade union."

Bob Revie, Branch Secretary, speaking in his role as a member of the Service Group Executive, the ruling body of UNISON's Local Government Service Group, welcomed the proposal and commended UNISON Scotland for its excellent work on this issue.

"We agree completely that our members must work within social work law and professional codes of practice when providing services to asylum seeker children and vulnerable adults, and we accept fully that we must provide support and guidance for our members working in this difficult area," he said.

Equalities

Conference also set policy on a number of key issues which had UK relevance. The equalities agenda had a high profile, and conference pledged to ensure that all aspects of the equality duties laid down by government are implemented by Local Authorities and other employers to the benefit of our members, as employees and service users. Duties in respect of gender; disability; race and sexual orientation are all now in place and UNISON will have a key role to

make sure that they address discrimination in the workplace and more widely.

It urged branches to ensure that all workplaces have in place policies to address the widespread but still often hidden problem of domestic abuse and called for support systems for the victims of domestic violence.

And it called for greater investment in the social care sector and proper and adequate funding for the community and voluntary sector, both to improve the working conditions of our members and to ensure quality services to those who need them.

The conference also heard about UNISON Scotland's work on Direct Payments. Spearheaded by the Social Work Issues Group, a joint statement has been agreed between the union and key Scottish disabled peoples' organisations, with an aim to empower disabled people to live independent lives, and to provide good conditions of employment to those providing the services, including the right to join a trade union.

Relevance?

Despite the devolution agenda, however, much of the business continued to have greatest relevance for our colleagues in England. Conference set key policies on pay, pensions and education, but these were focussed on the situation in England and Wales. Scotland has its own bargaining machinery (and indeed its own parliament) and negotiates pay and pensions separately.

Your branch delegation believes that this conference has an important role to play in developing UK wide policies on a range of matters, but should be divided so that one day is devoted to business with a UK relevance whilst the other focuses on the issues relevant to England and Wales.

Fringe meeting on social work issues

Kate was also one of the speakers as around 80 delegates from across the UK packed into the Scottish Fringe meeting on the Sunday evening to hear about the work of Scotland's Social Work Issues Group (SWIG).

Colleagues from England and Wales heard how the Social Work Issues Group had been set up in response to the crisis in social work some 5 years ago, when there were major staff shortages and staff morale was very low. Since then SWIG has taken part in the 21st Century Review of Social Work to make sure our members interests were taken into account.

They heard about SWIG's achievements over the years, including the work which has been done on Direct Payments, along with disabled people's organisations; and the campaigning for the rights of asylum seeker families including the guide for members, "child's welfare paramount?"

For a full report go to www.unison-scotland.org.uk/conf2007/story6.htm