



# Scotland *in* UNISON

Scottish council activists' bulletin Use these stories in your branch newsletter or circulate the pdf version to members



Communications & Campaigns Committee celebrates Year of LGBT+ worker

## Scotland's communities need investment not abandoned, says UNISON

**UNISON's Scottish Secretary Lilian Macer has called on the Scottish Government to be more determined and make the choices needed to properly fund Scotland's public services. Lilian Macer made these calls on behalf of UNISON following the Scottish Budget.**

UNISON believe that, despite a small increase in the Scottish Government budget, many services face cuts or standstill cash funding – which is a real-terms cut. And in a break with previous practice, no pay policy was announced – this will come after the UK budget.

You can read more of UNISON's position on funding for public services on our website.

UNISON knows this budget follows years of cuts to local government funding and where any increases have been made, they are often ring-fenced policy commitments, so councils have had little room for manoeuvre, and even less with a council tax freeze that is not 'fully funded'.

Speaking to the BBC, UNISON's Scottish Secretary Lilian Macer, said: "The Scottish budget, as it stands, is bad for local services and deals a further financial blow to local councils who are already struggling to balance the books and to deliver the vital services our communities rely on.

"Nearly a quarter of councils are warning they may be unable to fulfil their statutory duties. I agree with other independent commentators who say it is only a matter of time before we see the first council in Scotland declare bankruptcy.

"Our public services are on their knees due to years of underinvestment and the Scottish government's council tax freeze will be a disaster for local services. We need to see investment in public services and a council tax freeze stops investment in public services, in schools and in the NHS.

"The Scottish government had the chance to make big choices to raise more money for Scotland's public services but while the measures on income tax are welcome, much more could and should have been done. We still have a government boasting of low business taxes at the same time that they are delaying urgent improvements to public services.

"The Deputy First Minister spoke of cutting the public service workforce – people need to be aware that job cuts mean service cuts. What communities across Scotland need is investment, not abandonment.

"While we welcome investment in the NHS, the Scottish government failed to say how this would be targeted to tackling the staffing crisis and ensuring proper funding so the safe staffing act can make the improvement the NHS so desperately needs.

"Given the Scottish government's commitment to become a fair work nation by 2025, it's concerning that there was no mention of fair work anywhere in the budget statement, particularly in social care, a sector in crisis."

# Celebrating Year of LGBT+ workers

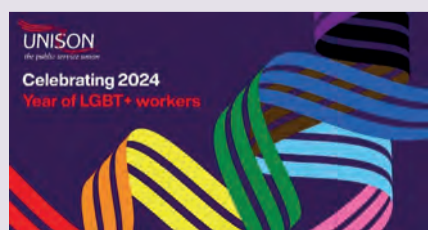
**During 2024, UNISON will celebrate the year of LGBT+ workers.**

This is an opportunity to not only showcase the amazing work the LGBT+ SOG has done over our history, but it will also be a chance to highlight continued discrimination faced by LGBT+ members, what they can do to make their workplaces and communities more inclusive and how non-LGBT+ people can be allies.

At the 2023 National Delegate Conference, the national LGBT+ committee motion to make 2024 the year of LGBT+ workers passed unanimously. This has been after a year for young workers in 2021, disabled in 2022 workers and Black workers in 2023. Also, at the 2023 STUC Congress the STUC LGBT+ Workers Committee passed a motion to make the 2024 the year of LGBT+ workers in Scotland.

Our Union from its inception has had a strong history in LGBT+ activism, 2024 will mark 50 years since the establishment of NALGAY, the first gay and lesbian group in the UK trade union movement within one of our union's predecessors.

**At the 2023 National Delegate Conference, the national LGBT+ committee motion to make 2024 the year of LGBT+ workers passed unanimously.**



Scottish LGBT+ Committee want to make sure that all Scottish, branches and committees are fully involved in making 2024 a year to remember.

Branches can work with the Scottish LGBT+ Committee to ensure that we have a visible presence at all Scottish Pride Events in 2024 and advocate and campaign for a revision of employers' equality policies to ensure they follow our model guidance for LGBT+ workers.

We also hope that branches attend our meetings, webinars and events throughout the year and take actions to encourage and develop activism amongst our LGBT+ members to build a stronger movement.

UNISON Scotland Communications & Campaigns Committee are seen here at their policy forum displaying the new logos after hearing from UNISON Scotland LGBT+ Convenor Watty Gaffney about the plans for the year ahead.

# Radical social work webinars still going strong

**UNISON Scotland's Social Work Issues Group (SWIG) has continued to host our very successful online webinars promoting radical social work.**

Set up during the Covid lockdown, the lunchtime webinars have been so popular that they continue to this day. They have looked at a wide range of topics relevant to our social work workforce, keeping them up to date with national developments like The Promise, the National Care Service Bill, trauma informed practice, co-design and the proposed National Social Work agency, and critiquing these developments from a radical social work perspective.

Our next webinar focusses on stress and wellbeing in the workplace – looking at how social work staff can look after themselves in a demanding and stressful environment.

The events are organised by a small working group from SWIG but we would pay particular tribute to Irena Gill and to retired member, Colin Turbett, both of whom have been key to their success.



Webinars have covered all aspects of the social work profession, including criminal justice, children and families, care management, drugs and alcohol services, mental health and the role of paraprofessionals. They have all been well received and at some, the numbers of participants have topped 200.

In 2022, the radical social work webinars won SWIG the UNISON Scotland Communications and Campaigns Chris Bartter award for creativity in communications.

Receiving the award on behalf of SWIG, Stephen Smellie said: "We are delighted to have won this award. Not only have the webinars recruited more members and social work activists, but they have also enabled us to engage more effectively with social work leaders, Ministers and COSLA on common challenges facing social work across Scotland."

Last year, the Year of Black Workers, we hosted a webinar on racism in social work, which heard of the experiences of Black social work practitioners, and from the working group set up to tackle this issue. Participants heard about discrimination against Black workers and Black service users, both unconscious and overt, and about the need to record and quantify this in order to address it.

Further webinars are planned throughout 2024.

# Call to recognise long Covid as industrial disease

**UNISON Scotland has taken a key role in a steering group on long Covid as part of the Scottish Employment Injury Advisory Council (SEIAC).**

Roz Ronan, Chair of the UNISON Scotland Welfare Committee is our representative - a role that has taken her to the heart of the Scottish Government.

In November, Roz was part of a delegation to the Scottish Parliament, calling on the Scottish Government to recognise long Covid as an industrial disease and backing Mark Griffin, MSP's call for a new advisory body on industrial injuries.

She made a powerful speech, describing how many sufferers caught Covid at their work, and she shone a light on the plight of care workers with long Covid, describing how previously fit and healthy people have been completely debilitated it.

Roz told of a particular care worker, who contracted long Covid, describing her as a

shadow of her former self. "She has been told she will never fully recover. The physical damage and related mental health issues can be overwhelming on a daily basis, affecting her wellbeing, self-confidence and self-worth," adding that "there was no guidance out there, you just had to get on with it, the best you can."



"It's extremely heart-breaking when workers find they can no longer do the job they love and have done expertly for so long. We can't put a bandage on this and hope it goes away. We have

to recognise this is an often-invisible condition, yet it's changing people's lives leaving many facing a really challenging future."

Roz highlighted the importance of Mark Griffin's Bill, a bill that the Social Justice and Social Security Committee has since declined to back. The Scottish Government has promised a new industrial injuries benefit which could financially benefit long Covid sufferers but has dragged its feet over implementing it.

Roz said: "Long Covid simply has to be recognised as a debilitating condition which in most cases was contracted through a work place environment."

She pledges that SEIAC will continue to meet to find ways to get justice for long Covid sufferers and called on the government to put Scotland on the map and demonstrate the way forward – "to show that we can show empathy and give hope to our workers who have experienced life changing disability."



By Stephen Low

UNISON Scotland Policy Officer

**This April will see a chance for UNISON to drive a change for the better for staff across the NHS.**

It comes with the introduction of the Health and Social Care Staffing (Scotland) Act – better known as the Safe Staffing Act.

The Act will give any NHS staff member the right to raise concerns about short staffing or inadequate staffing. Health Boards need to put in place procedures that allow staffing level issue to be raised with an individual who has lead professional responsibility.

By Matt McLaughlin

UNISON Scotland Head of Health

**UNISON Health activists met recently to discuss how the Scottish Governments commitment to implement the Safe Staffing legislation on 1 April 2024 will affect NHS branches and members.**

The Act was first agreed in 2019 and applies to a number of prescribed workers across the NHS in Scotland as well as some areas within social care, but with no real direct sanction for failure to achieve safe staffing, it is hard to

# Safe Staffing Act – our chance to change things

The Board needs to keep those making the complaint informed as to what is done about it. If those making the complaint aren't happy with the response, they can take it higher – all the way up to the board if necessary.

The Act covers a whole range of staff groups, not just medics and nursing staff (see the Briefing on the UNISON Scotland website for details!). The Act means Health Boards a duty to identify and address those risks which are considered to be either severe or liable to materialise frequently. The Board is then under a duty to take whatever steps it can to mitigate the risk and prevent its recurrence. Boards will also have to compile real time

information about staffing levels.

Branches can and should use the legislation to help drive improvements. One of the common complaints about the current system is that complaints are ignored. Under this system they can't be – and if nothing changes, we can just keep raising the issue at higher and higher levels until something is done.

This isn't a silver bullet, but it's a step forward if we are prepared to take it. If we are informing staff of their rights and getting them to act – ideally in groups (imagine if everyone on a ward put in the same complaint!) we can make a difference.

see how the Act will actually improve staffing levels or have a positive impact on care – at least in the short term.

The Act does give NHS workers more powers raise concerns over staffing and standards of care and UNISON sees this added power as a key tool in the organising approach we need to develop.

The unions Head of Health, Scotland, Matt McLaughlin said, "This particular government has a bit of a record on setting targets and failing to deliver on them, you just need to look at AE waiting times, or their commitment to reduce delayed discharge, so there was certainly some scepticism amongst our NHS activists who met to

discuss how UNISON should support members around Safe Staffing."

Wilma Brown, Chair of the Scottish Health Committee said, "Our health branches were crystal clear, whilst UNISON welcomes the legislation, we see that as the beginning of the journey, not the end. UNISON Scotland will ensure that our members who are affected by this legislation have a voice, use that voice and critically that their voice is heard!"

The first stage of the emerging campaign will see thousands of UNISON members in the NHS surveyed to determine just how aware they are of the new Act and what power it gives them.

# School support staff continue to experience most abuse from pupils

**UNISON's education issues group says school support staff continue to be at the forefront of verbal and physical abuse from pupils, despite receiving the lowest pay and the least training and support.**

These views are echoed in a new Scottish government report that shows more than 8 in ten (86%) support staff encounter low-level disruptive behaviour every day, with almost two thirds (66%) experiencing verbal abuse and more than half (59%) experiencing physical aggression on a regular basis.

The government report is based on surveys and interviews with head teachers, teachers and focus groups with classroom-based support staff. The report confirms that the incidence of serious disruptive behaviours has increased since the last report in 2016. There has also been a notable increase in primary school support

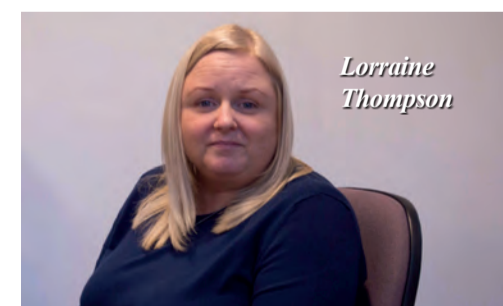
staff saying they are negatively impacted by verbal abuse, physical aggression and violence towards themselves and other staff.

UNISON Scotland chair of the education issues group, Lorraine Thompson said: "No-one should have to face violence and abusive behaviour at their work and if they do they need to be properly supported to deal with it."

"Yet in our schools in Scotland, it is the lowest paid mostly women support staff who deal with challenging and disruptive behaviour every day."

"The money announced by the Scottish government is wholly inadequate for the challenges their own research outlines. We need substantial investment not only in our schools but also the wider support teams that children and young people need."

UNISON Scotland regional manager, Kay Sillars said: "UNISON has consistently raised



violence and abuse of school support staff with employers and government. Most support staff experience difficult behaviour every day and it is not acceptable. Now that we have the evidence to back up what we know is a growing problem we need to see government funding and action to help schools deal with it."

You can read the full report, Behaviour in Scottish schools: research report 2023, online [horturl.at/ioyzo](https://horturl.at/ioyzo)

# Sam Macartney Award presented to Stephen Smellie

By Fiona Montgomery

Information Development Officer

**Deputy Convener Stephen Smellie was presented with the 2023 Sam Macartney Award at Scottish Council in December.**

Stephen was honoured for his outstanding international solidarity work over many years, but particularly for his focus on Turkey and Kurdistan.

Tony Caleary, Co-Convener of the International Committee, presented Stephen with the Award, quoting from the nomination letter submitted by South Lanarkshire UNISON, where Stephen is branch secretary.

Tony also said that the Sam Macartney Commemoration Lecture will be held at Glasgow City UNISON branch on Friday 23 February, with a speaker on Palestine solidarity (a cause close to Sam's heart), and a speaker on an issue chosen by Stephen. (details below)

Delegates also stood for a photo holding Ceasefire Now/End the Occupation posters. See UNISON website for statements calling for a ceasefire in Israel and Gaza.

South Lanarkshire branch was delighted when Stephen's name was announced and said the award was very well deserved.

Chair Margaret Gallacher and Assistant Branch Secretary Dougie Marshall said in nominating Stephen, it was "for his work and campaigning to build solidarity with progressive trade unions in Turkey.

"Stephen has promoted this work in every post he has held in UNISON over many years, educating members in our branch, across UNISON and in the wider trade union movement about the continuing attack on democracy and human rights in Turkey and the persecution that democratic trade unions suffer under President Erdogan's regime.



"Stephen has highlighted the repression, including arrest and imprisonment, of many public sector workers, women, trade union activists, Kurdish people and journalists. He has helped to raise awareness of the violence against women perpetrated by the Turkish state

and the threat and punishments suffered by trade union activists who are trying to carry out what we would all know as normal trade union duties, under harsh conditions.

"Stephen has visited Turkey to offer solidarity in person to the Turkish trade union confederations KESK and DISK, writing articles, posting on social media and making speeches on his return that highlighted the attacks on confederation members' trade union offices and intimidation of their officers and members.

"He has also written motions, including the motion that was successful in being heard and carried at NDC in 2018 regarding worker's rights in Turkey.

"He has met some of those personally who are now imprisoned and has helped to organise solidarity actions.

"This sustained UNISON campaigning has added to the international attention that has no doubt pressured Turkey to release of some of those prisoners."

Branches are invited to hear a speaker on solidarity with Kurdistan at the Sam Macartney Award event on the evening of Friday 23 February. And Mohammed Alazraq, from the Lajee Centre Project, in Aida Refugee Camp, in the West Bank, will speak about the work there supported by UNISON in Northern Ireland, as well as discussing the horrific situation for Palestinians under Israeli bombardment.

A video of Tony's short presentation speech is on the International Committee Facebook page.

# Solidarity with Northern Ireland walk out

By Greig Kelbie

Regional Organiser

**UNISON Scotland's secretary Lilian Macer sent a message of solidarity to colleagues in UNISON Northern Ireland who in January embarked the biggest walk out in the region for years.**

UNISON members joined thousands of workers from 16 unions as part of the mass walk-out.

Lilian said: "It is disheartening to hear that public services workers across Northern Ireland had to take to the picket lines to demand decent public services and adequate



pay. But their decision to stand together in the face of ongoing challenges shows the strength of being in UNISON.

The fact that public service workers have had a decade of pay cuts and live with the impact of rising inflation means we all must demand fair recognition for the vital contributions of public service workers to broader society.

The commitment of UNISON members in Northern Ireland serves as an inspiration. We know they have extra political problems.

That's why I wanted our colleagues in Northern Ireland to know that UNISON Scotland stands firmly with them in their

quest for improved public services, fair wages, and improved working conditions.

Northern Ireland's cause is our cause, and their mass walk out will not only resonate in Northern Ireland but across our trade union.

United we can strive towards a better future where the contributions of public sector workers are valued and properly rewarded.

Hard working public services workers in Northern Ireland who are taking action today have UNISON Scotland's complete support."



# Industrial action 'inevitable' after college staff renew strike mandate

**Members in Scotland's colleges have voted overwhelmingly (81%) for further industrial action.**

The vote was after national strikes in autumn last year and staff experienced another winter without a pay rise.

Employers made an improved offer of £5k over three years, but this came with a threat of compulsory redundancies. After months of delay the employers say they will meet negotiators. Negotiators will also meet the government minister in February. UNISON further education branch secretary Chris



Greenshields said, "We are urging employers to get money into staff pockets now to alleviate further hardship and start talks on avoiding redundancies. Unless college

employers get serious about pay negotiations and job security industrial action appears inevitable. College staff are clearly up for the fight against college bosses who they think, despite being paid big bucks, have let the sector down.

There has been industrial action in the sector for eighth out of the last nine years and more colleges are, reportedly, in financial difficulty. Moray College and Shetland College are the latest to announce threats of compulsory redundancies. We must get Scottish government around the table to discuss how they support Scotland's colleges properly."

# A fond farewell to Jane – we'll miss you

**The Communications and Campaigns Committee has bid farewell to yet another stalwart as Jane Aitchison hangs up her boots. Jane retired from South Lanarkshire Council and her UNISON roles at the end of last year.**

Jane takes with her many years of communications and campaigns knowledge and expertise. Up until 2022 she was vice-chair of the Comms and Campaigns Committee, initially to the late John Stevenson, then to Kate Ramsden, who herself retired last year.



Over many years, Jane has led on the Communications and Campaigns awards, which recognised and rewarded excellence in campaigning across Scotland's branches and self-organisation.

She was also a regular tutor on UNISON Scotland communications and campaigns courses and supported the production of Scotland in UNISON, with both her keen editing abilities (expertly reducing articles, however lengthy, to 350 words) and her eagle-eyed proofing skills. If Jane didn't spot a typo, it wasn't there!

However, Jane was not only active on the committee, she was also a key member, for many years of the National Delegate Conference Scottish briefing team, initially teaming up with John and Kate (John's handmaidens as they laughingly (and satirically) called themselves.)

For the past two conferences, Jane has taken the lead role at NDC, continuing Scotland's tradition of producing a daily newssheet that "briefed" on the Scotland position on motions and rules and reported on Scotland's delegates' input in conference debates, with room still for some funnies – even when, last year, it went completely digital.

Both Jane and Kate were fortunate to have worked alongside the late, great team of John Stevenson and Chris Bartter, from whom they learned a great deal about communications and campaigning, with a great many laughs along the way. Jane is the last of that era to go and will be solely missed by all on the Comms and Campaigns Committee

Jane, we send you our very best wishes on your retirement.



# Happy New Year to all our members

By Tom Cairney

Ayrshire and Arran Health Branch

**We are now a few weeks into 2024. As we do every year during the festive period, stewards within Ayrshire and Arran Health Branch were out and about spreading the word of UNISON, and our very own Tom Cairney from the branch was helping out by donning the big red suit to deliver goodies to the children's ward's and chatting to the patients and staff within Ayrshire.**



As well as this, the branch donated £3000 worth of toys to the children of Ayrshire who may have woken up on Christmas morning without, and also cash donations to the 3 food banks in the area. Thank you to all the members of the branch, as without your continued membership this would not be possible. This in itself was a huge undertaking, and the Branches very own administrator Pat Gorman, in her own time, went round the toy stores and purchased them as well as the hamper items on behalf of the branch. The branch also held prize draws of their membership where members had the chance to win incredible Christmas Hampers.

So, on behalf of the branch and its members, we offer a special thanks to Pat for all she does to make these things happen. Also, after 30 years she is retiring from the branch in April. Pat was the branch secretary before working full time as the Administrative Assistant/Guru and fountain of knowledge. This will be a huge loss to the branch, but she will only be a call away.



# Free tickets for UNISON Inverclyde members

By Dougie Maclean

UNISON Inverclyde Comms Officer

**UNISON Inverclyde was delighted to see so many of our members again taking advantage of the offer of free tickets for the Christmas Cinema treat at the Waterfront cinema for the Annual event which is now in its ninth year.**

The event was a great success, and all the showings were packed despite the awful

weather with the variety of movies on offer with 'Wish' proving to be a massive hit with the kids.

Huge thanks go to Veronica Rasmussen of the Branch (pictured centre) who helped organise the event and worked very closely with the Waterfront Cinema to make sure that the whole weekend went without a hitch.

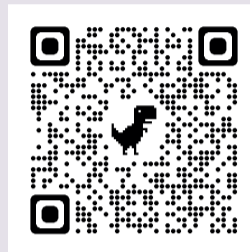
The Branch is looking forward to welcoming our members again in December for what will be the tenth anniversary event.



# Activist training for 2024 is launched

**The activist training programme, recently launched, is designed to give activists the skills they need to confidently carry out their roles. Courses are free for you to attend, although there may be a charge to your branch.**

The learning and organising committee say that the programme aims to develop knowledge and skills so that new activists can become pro-active but also to re-energising existing activists.



Learning and organising training officer Willie Docherty said: "Training is vital to help improve workers' rights and to deliver UNISON campaigns to improve

pay and conditions, make workplaces safer and promoting equalities. This year there is a mix of in-person and online events, along with a variety

of options for participating in organising stewards and health and safety courses.

UNISON courses are friendly and informal, and designed on the principle that everybody has equal rights to participate in, benefit from, and contribute to them. Participants will often work together in small groups.

There are no tests or exams, and learners will not be lectured to or suddenly called on to give answers. Have a look through and join up if you can. It would be great to see as many of you as possible".

# Fife Health Branch Donation to The Cottage Family Centre

**Year after year UNISON Fife Health Branch get behind The Cottage Family Centre in Kirkcaldy to ensure they can provide the most vulnerable families with food in their bellies and heat in their homes and this year they needed our help more than ever before.**

It is without a doubt the most challenging year they have ever experienced in the Christmas appeal history and there is no way they would be able to make a difference to lives without community support. We were delighted to make a donation to them of £10,000. Our Branch Treasurer Wilma Brown

spent Friday 22nd December playing a small part in the delivery day. Well over 1800 children in 1750 families, across Kirkcaldy and surrounding areas, were gifted food for a number of days, cleaning products, toiletries, treats, gifts, toys and payments for utility bills.

All of this to ensure families are warm, well fed, and visited by Santa. Having done this for over 10 years, she is still humbled by the amount of people who donate and get involved in this appeal. We shouldn't have to do this, but The Cottage Family Centre will never give up ensuring Christmas is for every child.



# More Black members register with UNISON

**The Black members committee in Scotland report a 32% increase in registered black members and say they have seen over a 100% increase in activists after a successful Year of Black Workers 2023.**

Committee chair Raza Sadiq reported the success at Scottish Council in December. He also said that Black networks are being established in many more branches across Scotland.

Black workers committee member Zia Hussain said: "Scottish black members worked hard to make last year's Year of the Black worker a success. And we are delighted that our November 2023 black members AGM had the record number of registered delegates.

We ran over 30 Year of the Black worker sessions with Scottish branches and groups. The result is we now have 4216 registered Black



members that's a big increase from 3178 last March. We also now have up to 80 Black activists, at the beginning of our campaign we had 32.

This is a fantastic achievement and testament to everyone who put in so much work over this last year. Thank you to everyone who helped, we now intend to build on this success.

The Black workers committee have also released a short video about the legacy of

the YOBW2023 which can be viewed on UNISON Scotland website and includes members talking about their experience of being black public services workers in Scotland.

The committee say that any branches that have not yet engaged with the committee can contact Zia.Hussain@sepa.org.uk.

The committee now pass the baton on to Year of LGBT+ workers 2024.

## We want to hear your news

SiU is your paper, we want to hear your stories

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