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Scotland in UNISON

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

# Crisis: UNISON speaking up for workers on the front line

By Kate Ramsden
*SiU Editor*

**As the country gears up to face the challenge presented by the Coronavirus, described by most as "an unprecedented crisis" two things have become very clear.**

The first is that writ large in this crisis is the critical importance of public services and public service workers - our members who are on the front-line of dealing with the virus and providing services to our most vulnerable citizens.

**Scotland convener, Lilian Macer and secretary Mike Kirby, on behalf of us all in UNISON Scotland, would like to say a big thankyou to all those members on the front-line.**

Lilian said, "We are so grateful to our NHS and emergency services staff working directly with patients; to our cleaners, caterers and carers who keep our hospitals and care homes going, and to our council staff providing vital support to our communities in this crisis – we thank you all."

> **'Writ large in this crisis is the critical importance of public services and public service workers.'**

The second is the absolute importance of being in a union. In a fast moving crisis, the advice is changing by the day but regular updates can be found on the UNISON Scotland website at https://unison-scotland.org/

As we prepare to deal with the many people who will become critically ill with Covid-19, it is becoming clear that the impact of cuts to our NHS and councils over the past 10 years has markedly undermined their ability to cope with this crisis.

Aberdeenshire UNISON Home Care members Lorraine Reid, Helen Florence and Shona Craig stay cheerful as they provide a service to vulnerable service users in difficult times.

At last the government and communities are waking up to the impact that 10 years of austerity has had on our public services.

Hospitals without enough intensive care beds, ventilators, protective clothing and staff. 17,000 UK beds lost to the NHS over the last 10 years and the fewest ICU beds per 1,000 population in all the G20 countries.

Our social care sector hit by privatisation and austerity with cuts to jobs, pay, training, and support for carers providing care to our most vulnerable citizens.

Yet it is our members on the front-line in our NHS and in our councils and community and voluntary sector who this country will rely on in the coming weeks and months.

Mainly women, many of them low paid, it is those workers that will care for our sick in hospitals or for our elderly and our most vulnerable children and adults in the community.

It's at a time of crisis that we see who the workers are that are most important to our society and our lives.

The key workers. Carers, cleaners, caterers, nursing and hospital staff, child protection social workers – workers who provide services to care for and protect our most vulnerable.

One such member is City of Edinburgh UNISON's Lorraine Needham, a social care worker. She said: "We feel very scared and vulnerable but we have no choice but to go out to attend our service users who are elderly and have health issues.

"The area I work in has become a ghost town at night, you don't feel safe walking around.

"We are sick and tired of being classed as non-essential workers or, as Boris Johnson says, unskilled workers. We are vital to our service users and do vital care."

**Unions take action - p2**

# UNISON and Cornerstone sign new voluntary recognition agreement

**In a great step forward for Cornerstone UNISON members, UNISON and Cornerstone have signed off a new voluntary recognition agreement.**

This followed referral to the Central Arbitration Committee which promoted negotiations between the parties.

The agreement, signed on 5 March, provides for trade union recognition and facilities, negotiation and consultation and collective bargaining on a range of workforce matters and an agreed channel for dealing with any matters in dispute.

It adopts the principles of the Scottish Government's Fair Work Convention Framework, embedding the fair work dimensions into collective bargaining and partnership working arrangements. This will offer all employees and relief workers an effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment and respect.

Mike Kirby, UNISON Scottish Secretary said: "This agreement establishes new working relations with Cornerstone.

"We look forward to a constructive engagement which will benefit UNISON members and the whole workforce, will contribute to the development of the organisation and ultimately enhance the service to users and carers."

Andrew Lockhart, Cornerstone Chair said: "We welcome this new voluntary agreement. The spirit and intent is to promote and maintain the best possible open, respectful and healthy employment relationship between all Cornerstone's employees and relief workers and UNISON.

"We look forward to working with UNISON towards a common objective that drives the efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the organisation whilst promoting security of employment and advancement of employees (and workers).

"We also pledge to work collaboratively to highlight the issues facing the social care sector to improve the working conditions for care workers across Scotland and how care is commissioned".

*Photo from top row: Andrew Lockhart (Cornerstone Chair of the Board), Jamie Kelly (UNISON Cornerstone Convenor), Robert McKay (Cornerstone Branch Leader), Hazel Brown (Cornerstone CEO), Mike Kirby (UNISON Scottish Secretary)*

# Covid-19: Unions take action

*From Page 1*

Across the UK, trade unions, the TUC and STUC have swung into action to support and advise their members; to work with employers to make sure that the wellbeing of members is protected even as key services are maintained; and to influence the Westminster and devolved governments to make sure that workers do not suffer as they become ill, self isolate or as businesses and services close down.

UNISON Scotland along with every branch in the country has had a key role to play in this, working with employers on guidance and advice for the protection of their workers' health and safety and their livelihood.

As far back as early March, convener **Lilian Macer** called on employers and the Scottish government to play their part, warning that those on zero hours or precarious contracts simply couldn't afford to self-isolate unless they receive sick pay.

"Low-paid workers could be forced to choose between isolating themselves or paying their bills. In our shared interest – caring for each other and keeping each other safe – Scotland is striving to be a Fair Work nation, so the Scottish government should be ensuring that no-one is forced to make that choice," said Lilian.

Lilian added, "The safety of our members is crucial for us as a union. That's why UNISON Scotland is also working with employers and the government to ensure the supply of protective clothing is reaching frontline workers."

UNISON Scottish Secretary, **Mike Kirby,** together with other trade unions and STUC, has also met Scottish Government Minister for Fair Work, Fiona Hyslop, to discuss issues across the economy, arising from the Covid-19 pandemic.

UNISON emphasised acute problems in the care sector, not just of sustainability of business, workforce matters, but the consequences for vulnerable sections of the community.

Mike Kirby, UNISON Scottish Secretary, said: "We told Ministers that there should be no detriment to public service workers irrespective of their employment status, with a need to level up conditions so that workers delivering public services in the direct sector, arms-length organisations, non-departmental public bodies, voluntary and private sectors, have the same levels of economic security, with funding provided by central and local government to give effect to that."

The indications are, that as a result of trade union lobbying, there will be protection built in for workers' rights and their livelihoods as they take the action that is needed to stop the spread of the virus.

A strong voice for the workforce has never been more important and our union, UNISON, is leading the way.

# Govt needs to value the work of early years workers

**UNISON has warned that the risks outlined in Audit Scotland's report into the Scottish Government's childcare expansion plans should come as no surprise to politicians.**

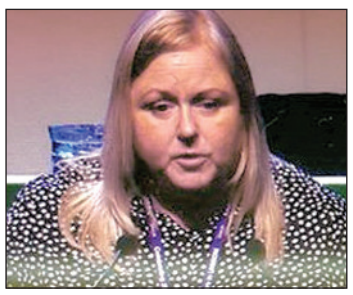
The report highlights very tight timescales in terms of both the completion of building work and the recruitment of staff if the government's expansion plans are to be met.

Around half of the building work required is due to be completed over the summer, and about half of the additional early learning childcare staff still need to be recruited.

It also said that private and third sector providers – which are expected to deliver over a quarter of the hours – continue to report significant workforce challenges that threaten their sustainability.

> **'UNISON has said from the start that the Living Wage is far too low.'**
> LORRAINE THOMSON

In 2018, UNISON Scotland conducted a comprehensive survey of the numbers being trained to deliver the expansion, with freedom of information requests to every council and college in Scotland, which showed there are just not enough people in colleges or in-work training courses to deliver the promised extra hours.



Lorraine Thomson, chair of UNISON Scotland's Education Issues Group, said:

"We warned the Scottish government at the outset that there was a very high risk there would not be enough qualified staff to deliver the planned expansion.

"The fundamental issue is that this service is delivered by a highly trained workforce and to recruit and retain staff requires improved pay and terms and conditions across the sector.

"Sadly, it comes as no surprise that the private sector is reporting significant workforce challenges and UNISON has said from the start that the Living Wage is far too low.

"You can earn the real living wage in many supermarkets without a qualification.

"If the Scottish Government wants to encourage people to undertake training and the responsibilities of delivering a high quality early years service, they need to value the vital work that this highly trained and dedicated workforce does."

# UNISON Women's Conference
# Empowering and inspiring women

By Kate Ramsden

*SiU Editor*

**This year's UNISON Women's Conference, held in Bournemouth in February, set the policy agenda on women's issues for the union for the coming year.**

As an event attended almost exclusively by women, it provides a safe space for women to tell their stories and gives delegates the opportunities to hear how existing government policy impacts on the reality of women's lives.

Scotland delegates spoke on and won support on a host of motions including the gender pay gap, awareness of women's heart attack symptoms, the impact of domestic abuse, workplace support for mothers with sick or premature babies, the crisis in social care and the poverty caused by universal credit.

Two Scotland first time delegates, Alice Bremner Watt and Kay McKerrell made their debut conference speeches.

Speaking on domestic violence Alice warned: "The lack of knowledge, empathy and understanding of the impact that domestic violence can have on an individual's mental health is staggering and it needs to change now."

Two Scotland first time delegates, Alice Bremner Watt and Kay McKerrell made their debut conference speeches.

> **'If we are going to properly tackle the gender the pay gap, we need to look at the cultures within our organisations, alongside the actual rates of pay.'**
> KAY McKERRELL

Kay spoke on the Equal Pay motion, urging, "If we are going to properly tackle the gender the pay gap, we need to look at the cultures within our organisations, alongside the actual rates of pay."

Other Scottish speakers included Lyn Marie O'Hara, one of the Glasgow equal pay strikers. She highlighted the "hidden" inequalities amongst low paid women including inequalities in pension rights.

"Not only do the poorest paid suffer in the years of working, they then may have no pension in retirement," she said.

Speakers gave emotional testimony based on their own real life experiences, or those of families, friends or colleagues.

Others spoke of their work as UNISON stewards and branch officers and the impact of workplace policies and cultures on the lives of themselves and their members.

There was also the opportunity to share good practice in the different branches and regions.

Conference prioritised support for workplace campaigns and bargaining on issues which particularly affect women, such as the menopause, parental leave, and women's health and safety.

These will sit alongside wider political campaigning and lobbying to protect our NHS, to improve our welfare system, and to tackle climate change.

There was also a key focus on promoting the profile of women in the union and in leadership roles, and hearing from inspirational women like assistant general secretary Christina McAnea, president Josie Bird and Labour depute leader candidate Angie Rayner will surely have encouraged delegates to see the possibilities.

# Fond farewell to East Renfrewshire's Mark and Gerry

By Steven Larkin

*East Renfrewshire Branch*

**UNISON East Renfrewshire said a fond farewell to two of our long-standing branch officers in Mark Kirkland and Gerry Green as they retire.**

Gerry joined East Renfrewshire branch in April 1996 when the new branches were formed following the reorganisation of local government. Gerry has helped numerous members throughout his time within our branch.

He also held the post of branch chair for 10 years before moving onto being the branch welfare officer in the last few years, a post he shared with another steward who he mentored in that role.

Mark became active in East Renfrewshire branch 14 years ago as a steward within the Environment Department and then became the lead steward in Environment leading on lots of issues including on health and safety in the work depot.

Mark then became the branch chair in 2012 and supported the branch through a period of constant change due to numerous reorganisations in East Renfrewshire Council.

Although Mark has now retired, he has stayed in the branch as the branch treasurer.

Our branch wishes both Gerry and Mark a long, happy and healthy retirement from their work life. They will always be welcome in the branch office.

# ‘You played the crucial role in saving Blairvadach’ says UNISON

**In an excellent example of joint campaigning between UNISON and their local community, Glasgow City Council has been forced to reverse their decision to close Blairvadach Outdoor Education Centre.**

Glasgow City UNISON thanked the people of Glasgow and beyond for their crucial role in keeping the centre open. The council reversed the decision to close the education centre after weeks of effective campaigning by UNISON members and people across Glasgow and beyond.

Brian Smith, branch secretary said: “The huge opposition to the closure of Blairvadach was the reason for the change of position by the city council.

“We thank all those who signed the petition, lobbied their political representatives, contacted the media and were prepared to come to the protest.

“You played the crucial role in saving this important education service for the children and young people of Glasgow.

“UNISON members at Blairvadach are also to be congratulated on their efforts over the last two weeks.

“They are overwhelmed at the support they received from adults and children who had use the centre, from the city’s teachers and education support workers and from other Outdoor Education practitioners across Scotland.

“The City Council leadership’s promise this week to now develop Blairvadach must secure and enhance the centre for generations to come whilst protecting our members jobs, wages and conditions. UNISON will be engaging with the council management on that basis and will be scrutinising the impact of the new proposals when they come.”

# Communications awards celebrate excellent work across branches

**UNISON Scotland celebrated the high standard of communications and campaigning work throughout its branches as it presented its annual Communications Awards at the union’s February Scottish Council.**

The standard of entries was praised by the judging panel who commended all the activists for their efforts and highlighted how important their work was to the entire union.

This year’s judges were Jane Aitchison, Vice-chair of UNISON Scotland’s Communications and Campaigns Committee, and committee members David Stainthorpe, Dumfries and Galloway branch and Tom O’Hair, from NHS Carstairs branch.

Jane paid tribute to Sam Macartney, a member of the Communications Committee who was due to be a judge but who passed away suddenly just over two weeks before.

Jane said: “We will sadly miss him on the Communications Committee, for his contribution as someone who had a real grasp and clarity about what it is to be a trade unionist and how to engage members and colleagues alike – and just for being Sam.”

Scottish convener Lilian Macer (second left) presents the Disabled Members with the award for their ‘Be Reasonable ‘ campaign

Jane praised activists for the tremendous standard of work and congratulated them all in helping to build a stronger union.

She also thanked the sponsors of the Awards, the Communications and Campaigns Committee (CCC) UIA, Liverpool Victoria, Lighthouse Financial Advice, and TC Branding Group.

The winners were:

## Best Printed Category

UIA Gold Award - Scottish Borders public services
CCC Silver Award – NHS 24
CCC Bronze Award – LGBT+ Committee.

## Best Campaign

CCC Gold Award – Young Members Committee for “How’s yer heid” and their mood manual
CCC Silver Award – Scottish Disabled Members Committee for their “Be Reasonable” campaign.
TC Branding Group Bronze Award – Renfrewshire UNISON for their Home Care campaign and Manifesto (see this page).

## Best Online Presence

CCC Gold award – Fife Health
CCC Silver Award – NHS Glasgow Clyde and CVS
Lighthouse Financial Bronze Award – NHS 24.

## Recruitment Prize

The Liverpool Victoria Special Recruitment Prize went to Fife Health for a productive campaign that included a high-profile sponsorship of an ice hockey team taking UNISON to the wider public and the players to the hospital (for visits) resulting in 162 new members.”

## Chris Bartter award for creativity in communications

Presented by ex-chair of the Communications and Campaigns Committee, John Stevenson, the Chris Bartter award for creativity in communications went to UNISON Shetland for their excellent and imaginative calendars which provided a 365 day reminder of members’ contributions to their union.

And not just any old calendar; the branch holds a competition for their members and gets some amazing entries. They then couple the photos with information about the branch, the union’s principles and its affiliated organisations.

# North Ayrshire branch talks menopause

**In yet another step forward for UNISON in highlighting the impact of the menopause on workers, North Ayrshire UNISON has agreed Menopause Guidance with their employer.**

The guidance was formally endorsed by the council in September 2019 with an official launch event with the council and the joint trade unions.

North Ayrshire ‘Let’s Talk Menopause’ member workshop

Branch secretary, Louise McDaid said, “Although this guidance is an excellent tool for our members, the branch will be moving to have this guidance uplifted to a formal policy document.”

The branch followed this up with a hugely successful member learning workshops in February “Let’s Talk Menopause.”

Louise said: “There was marvellous feedback from our learners.

“Our learning provider, Ruth Devlin (Let’s Talk Menopause) was absolutely brilliant and participants spoke very highly of her knowledge and humour when delivering the workshops.”

The workshop included signs and symptoms of the menopause, how to cope with symptoms, menopause within the workplace and reasonable adjustments with opportunity for Q&A afterwards.

Comments from those who took part were:

“Excellent course, very informative”

“I would highly recommend this course to others…… this is a topic that is important to talk about all round and certainly something that may affect each and every person on some level at some point in life.”

“Very informative, supportive and inclusive.”

“Tutor extremely knowledgeable and had a sense of humour which helped.”

The branch has now shared their local guidance across Scottish branches to support local negotiations on menopause guidance.

# Big wins for East Renfrew home carers

**East Renfrewshire UNISON’s Home Care campaign, a bronze award winner in this year’s communications awards, has secured some big wins for their home care members.**

This includes two regradings in a year, taking pay up by £1.20 per hour for most members and an agreement by the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) to pay for home carers SSSC registration.

The branch’s HSCP Steward Lynne Rankin explained that this campaign began with a scathing care inspectorate report of East Renfrewshire’s Care at Home service, with the work and commitment of home carers one of the only positives about the inspection.

HSCP Stewards and local organiser, Joe Pearce, organised several meetings with home care members to find out their main concerns about the job they do. From these meetings and a survey, a Home Care Manifesto was put together with a series of “asks.”

Lynne said: “In East Renfrewshire HSCP, there are around 200 home carers with no set workplace and a variety of shift patterns, so we were delighted when our meetings attracted nearly 60 members and a few non-members who quickly signed up to UNISON.

## Home Care Manifesto

“We listened to their concerns and created the Home Care Manifesto to present to management as a tool to negotiate better working conditions for workers.

“Working with the other unions, we took the Manifesto to a meeting with management and from that we achieved some quick wins that delighted our member, and encouraged some members of other unions to join UNISON – the union fighting for Home Care!”

The initial wins included permanent contracts for all staff and new posts advertised to help recruitment; at least one extra uniform for staff; job evaluations to be undertaken for all home care posts; a commitment to looking at UNISON’s Ethical Care Charter; and working in partnership to offer a pre SVQ course to members anxious about undertaking a qualification for registration.

Lynne added: “Throughout this whole process we have worked to build a network of members. We will now support the active members to become a voice for their colleagues and encourage them to attend a branch Pathways course later this year as well as developing a regular Home Care newsletter.

“We’ll continue to press management to meet the remaining Manifesto targets and will be scoping out a social event for this dispersed workforce to help build peer support networks.”

# Young members weekend welcomes new young workers

**UNISON Scotland's Young Members Committee was delighted to welcome a number of new people, representing young workers from Stornoway to Edinburgh as they came together for their annual training and development weekend in Perth.**

The weekend covered a number of topics including sexual harassment in the workplace, communications, speech giving skills, and how the union works.

There were also planning sessions as the host region for this year's National Weekend which is due to be held in Glasgow in May.

For information on how you can get more involved as a young member, contact Wendy Hudson on w.hudson@unison.co.uk"

If you are a UNISON member and under 27 years of age you are automatically entitled to participate as a young member.

Why not get involved and help us campaign for the issues affecting young workers? Our young members group works to encourage recruitment, organisation and participation of young workers. The group also provides a powerful voice for young members and the opportunity to develop their skills and knowledge.

# There for You - help for members in hardship

there for you
supporting UNISON members when life gets tough

**UNISON's dedicated welfare charity – There for You – is responding to the national coronavirus crisis by offering practical help to members experiencing financial hardship.**

Please get in touch with your branch if you are a member in need of welfare support at this time. The branch will pass all welfare support requests to There for You, so that there is one, consistent process.

Branches are also encouraged to donate to There for You.

If you require advice and/or are unsure if someone would be eligible for support, call 020 7121 5620 or email thereforyou@unison.co.uk

# Black Members AGM: What it means to be Black in Scotland

**Black workers in Scotland's NHS still face challenges gaining promotion, UNISON Scotland's Black Members AGM was told in November.**

This is despite working in the NHS for generations in jobs from porters to clinical professionals "providing an essential service to the whole community".

The AGM focussed on 'Building on our Success" and "What it means to be Black in Scotland". It heard that Black History Month was gaining support each year in Scotland with more people becoming involved especially younger people.

It highlighted the contribution of Black people in Scotland, from serving in the armed forces, health service, manufacturing, retail, hospitality, politics, to owning their own businesses.

"Events during Black History Month came from a wide spectrum of the arts, storytelling, music, dance, to sport and is proving very successful", said Peter Sharma, Black Members secretary.

Chairperson Rakiya Suleiman added: "Campaigning to build UNISON membership is ongoing, building our Black Members organisation is vital to achieve our collective aims of improving opportunities and changing lives."

In December, UNISON Scotland sponsored Celtic Connections in the Community programme (a partnership with BEMIS, Scotland's support body for the ethnic minority voluntary sector). The finale and main performance featured Les Amazones d'Afrique, an all-female supergroup of acclaimed West African singers dedicated to ending women's inequality and oppression, whose founders include Mariam Doumbia (of Amadou & Mariam) and Angélique Kidjo.

On the wider front, the AGM backed the continuing fight for **Justice for Sheku Bayoh's family** as a public inquiry into his death in police custody in Kirkcaldy approaches.

It also highlighted the tragic story of seven-year-old **Zane Gbangbola**, who died in the floods of 2014 in Surrey.

A flash flood brought water from a neighbouring field into the family's house. With the water seeped gas that, lighter than air, rose upstairs. Zane died. His father Kye suffered a heart attack and is now confined to a wheelchair.

His mother Nicole was downstairs and, because the gas rose, was able to raise the alarm.

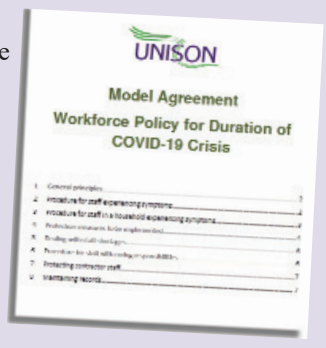
It was later revealed that the field near Zane's house had previously been used for landfill, where deadly hydrogen cyanide can lurk. Yet an inquest decided that Zane had died of carbon monoxide poisoning – even though no sign of carbon monoxide was found.

UNISON and the Fire Brigades Union are calling for an independent inquiry.

A protest march last month was postponed because of the coronavirus situation, however a petition had over 109,000 signatures at the time of going to print and you can still sign it at 38.degrees.org.uk.

# Model workforce Coronavirus policy online

**Most UNISON branches are part of agreements which cover their whole sector (eg Health or Local Government). Some branches though have stand alone agreements with their employers.**




These branches will be discussing with employers how people can continue working in a way that protects them and those for whom they are delivering services

To assist with this UNISON's bargaining unit have drawn up a Model Coronavirus Policy which can act as a starting point for negotiations.

Branches can access the model policy at https://unison-scotland.org/model-workforce-policy-for-duration-of-covid-19-crisis/

## We want to hear your news

*SiU* is your paper, we want to hear your stories. Contact Kate Ramsden (editor) katearamsden@gmail.com, Danny Phillips d.phillips@unison.co.uk, Trisha Hamilton t.hamilton@unison.co.uk

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