



Scotland *in* UNISON

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

Proud to be in UNISON – fighting for members' rights and protections

By Kate Ramsden
SiU Editor

It has never been more important to be in a trade union. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the key and essential role that UNISON has played in fighting for the rights of our members, including their right to be safe.

UNISON has acted at every level of the organisation to make sure that our members' rights and interests are prioritised.

From demanding that all our members on the front line have the correct personal protective equipment (PPE), decent pay if off sick, isolating and shielding, and proper testing to halt the spread of the virus, UNISON has been at the forefront and has had some significant wins.

Senior UNISON officials at UK and Scottish level have had meetings with government ministers at both Westminster and Holyrood to press for the measures that our members need to ensure they have adequate protection to do their jobs and financial support when they need to be off work.

In April UNISON secured the agreement of the Scottish

They care for us. But who cares for them?
We do.
Proud to be in UNISON.

#PublicServiceChampions
#ThankyouKeyWorkers



it is probably at branch level that the greatest impact of being in a union will be felt by our members, as stewards and officers respond to the daily queries and concerns of our members on the front line'

Later in April, UNISON Scotland welcomed the decision by care charity Cornerstone to pay full pay to all staff who were forced to shield or self isolate as a result of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result of pressure from UNISON, an enhancement to statutory sick pay (SSP) has now been extended to all community and voluntary sector services, with the Scottish Government providing additional funding to ensure that no staff member is forced into work when symptomatic because they cannot afford to live on SSP.

Continued on page 2

Thank you for mopping hospital corridors.
Thank you for transferring patients to free up beds.
Thank you for keeping the ambulances running.
Thank you for refilling hand sanitiser bottles.
Thank you for logging details onto computer systems.
Thank you for sterilising surgical equipment.
Thank you for collecting our rubbish.
Thank you for checking stocks of medicine.
Thank you for answering emergency calls.
Thank you for helping to keep our streets safe.
Thank you for protecting victims of abuse.
Thank you for taking blood samples.

To those leaving their loved ones to care for ours.
Thank you.

Thank you for keeping patients fed.
Thank you for checking in on our elderly.
Thank you for transporting the frail.
Thank you for caring for key workers' children.
Thank you for preparing hospital theatres.
Thank you for delivering oxygen tanks.
Thank you for maintaining ventilation machines.
Thank you for reassuring worried loved ones.
Thank you for looking after vulnerable children.
Thank you for laundering hospital sheets.
Thank you for absolutely everything you are doing

Government to set up a PPE taskforce to address the significant problems faced by health and care staff across the country in accessing PPE.

Welcoming the move, Tom

Waterson, chair of UNISON Scotland health committee said: "The safety of health and care staff and the people they are caring for is paramount and we welcome the Cabinet Secretary's

agreement to address these concerns as a matter of urgency.

"The creation of a PPE taskforce will allow us to continue to voice our members concerns straight to the top of government."

Standing up for education staff as school return announced

UNISON has stressed that much more work needs to be done before children can safely return to childcare and schools.

It has called for risk assessments, staff training and clear guidance on safe working practices, with trade unions involved in local planning to ensure agreement around the safe opening of schools and early learning centres.

This call comes on the back of a UNISON survey of over 5,000

education staff in Scotland which showed that 83 per cent were anxious about returning to work or, if they are at work, increasing the numbers of children returning to education. Thirteen per cent are losing sleep worrying about it. Only three per cent said that returning to work or increasing the amount of children in schools and nurseries is safe.

UNISON is also calling on education members to consider becoming health and safety reps. in their schools to ensure the risks to

staff and children from COVID-19 are assessed and managed. You can find further information on the UNISON Scotland website at unison-scotland.org/help-defeat-covid19-by-becoming-a-health-and-safety-rep/

Lorraine Thomson, chair of UNISON's education issues group said: "UNISON's survey shows the vast majority of education staff are anxious about plans for more children to return to schools and nurseries.

"A lot more work needs to be done to ensure safe return. The

Scottish government and COSLA must work with UNISON to develop guidance, implement new rules and undertake risk assessments. We cannot send more children back to school until we all know it is safe for them and all staff."

She reminded that education staff can't avoid close contact with children, especially young children. They change nappies, comfort children, give medicines, support children with disabilities, support children in the dining room and playground and classroom.

"The safety of all is vital and we need to all be properly prepared," warned Lorraine, calling for trade union involvement to be a reality on the ground.

"Staff have skills, they know their jobs and health and safety expertise. They must be included at the start of any local planning of expansion and reopening. Risk assessments and then action to mitigate risks need to be in place to ensure that children and staff are safe. This is no time for shortcuts."

Proud to be in UNISON...

From front page

In Scotland, UNISON has also secured a death in service arrangement for those care home workers whose contracted pension arrangements do not offer death in service cover. The Scottish Government has agreed a one-off payment of £60,000 to a named survivor.

Calls in Scotland for national bargaining for the care home sector have been less successful, however, when this was rejected by the Scottish Government.

Mike Kirby, UNISON Scottish secretary called the decision “a bitterly disappointing setback in tackling the crisis in our care homes,” especially when the Scottish Government has acknowledged that the care home system is broken.

Nationally, Christina McAnea, assistant general secretary has called for a complete overhaul of the care sector once the crisis has passed. “Never again should the concerns of staff, unions and employers be ignored.”

Demands won

However, UNISON Scotland has succeeded in our demands that the Scottish government pass on funding to councils cash-strapped as a result of COVID-19; in our insistence that guidance be fit for purpose to ensure our members safety; and has successfully pressed for testing to be more widely available and accessible for those in rural areas and non-drivers.

But it is probably at branch level that the greatest impact of being in a union will be felt by our members, as stewards and branch officers respond to the daily queries and concerns of our members on the front line of the pandemic and negotiate with local employers to address these issues.

From inadequate PPE, to a lack of proper guidance, to failures to risk assess new situations to protect the health and safety of our members and their service users alike, branch activists have come up trumps in supporting our members.

So as we rightly praise those members on the front line of this crisis – those previously unsung heroes, like our care workers, our refuse collectors, our social workers, our education hub workers, our cleaners and all our other staff carrying on their daily activities to support us all throughout this pandemic – we should also spare a thought for our branch officers, stewards and activists across the country who have also gone above and beyond.

And as we start to come through this crisis, we must never let these front line workers again be forgotten and undervalued. We must find a way to ensure that they are all properly paid for the work they do and that their working conditions are fit for purpose and safe for themselves and the people they work so hard to support.

Campaigns launched to value the essential work of members

As we look to the future, UNISON has committed to making sure that the value and importance of our key front line staff is not forgotten.

It is not enough to applaud on a Thursday night. They must be properly rewarded and their worth recognised.

With this in mind UNISON has so far launched campaigns in local government, health and higher education.

Local government

The campaign for local government workers, delivering vital services during COVID-19 crisis, calls on Scottish Government and COSLA to recognise the financial and emotional toll on the workforce.

UNISON is also calling for sustained long term investment to protect jobs, deliver a reduction in wage inequalities and for local government workers to be engaged in shaping the lockdown legacy.

If you are a member working in local government, please take our survey at <http://tiny.cc/lgsurvey>

Johanna Baxter, UNISON head of local government said: “We need to discuss pay and conditions but only sustained long term investment will protect jobs and deliver a lockdown legacy that reduces wage inequalities – that is what UNISON’s plan will deliver.”

Mark Ferguson, chair of UNISON’s local government committee said: “Local government workers have responded heroically to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis – providing support to the most vulnerable members of our communities, looking after



‘Their extraordinary efforts and the critical value of the roles they perform deserve to be rewarded’

MARK FERGUSON

the children of key workers, collecting our refuse and manning temporary body storage facilities for the deceased (to name but a few examples).

“Their extraordinary efforts and the critical value of the roles they perform deserve to be rewarded and they need to be part of shaping the future of local services.”

Health

Meantime, UNISON has submitted a pay claim to the staff side of the NHS Scotland terms and conditions committee on Tuesday asking the Scottish Government to recognise the extra costs – both financial and emotional – that NHS staff have suffered through this pandemic.

The pay claim is for 1% or £500, whatever is highest, for all staff. The claim is on top of any annual pay increase for NHS staff.

This payment is to go some way to support NHS staff with the extra costs they have incurred as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Willie Duffy, UNISON Scotland’s head of health, said: “This is a very difficult time for so many across Scotland, not least our dedicated NHS staff who quite rightly have received the highest praise from the public.

“Health service workers received the lowest public sector pay award over last few years. It is important that we recognise this and we are calling on the Scottish Government to support them financially to help them get through this very difficult time.”

Tom Waterson, chair of the health committee said: “While pay is down the list of priorities of NHS staff at the moment, the reality is that they are incurring

extra costs – sometimes having to buy extra PPE; extra cleaning of their clothes and materials; buying hand sanitiser; isolating from family; doing extra hours; and additional travel costs during restricted public transport – never mind the emotional toll it is having.

“Our NHS staff are going above and beyond to look after us in this time of national crisis, it is only right the Scottish Government look at how they can financially support NHS staff through this difficult period.”

Higher education

UNISON in higher education is calling on all members to write to their MPs asking them to press the UK government for an urgent financial injection, to give the sector a fighting chance of coming out of this crisis; and to demand that it underwrites higher education for all our sakes.

National executive member Davena Rankin, said: “Universities need stability. They’re doing vital research right now on vaccines, antibody tests and tracking systems, and our country is relying on the sector to train the key workers of tomorrow.

“The livelihoods of three quarters of a million people who work in higher education have been plunged into uncertainty, along with the £73 billion a year universities generate for our economy.

“The government must protect university staff, protect the jobs they love, protect the students and communities they support, and protect the economy they’re helping to build.”

You can email your MP here: http://tiny.cc/UNISON_HE

Celebrating work of carers in the pandemic

By Debs Clarke

Regional organiser

Every day during the pandemic we are reminded of the true value of Scotland’s care workers.

Quality care has continued to be delivered by our members throughout the pandemic with superhuman stories emerging every day from the front line.

It is important to reflect that care staff working without the safety net of the NHS to protect them had no PPE or appropriate training on infection control to cope with a pandemic. The ever decreasing pool of staff meant the responsibilities were huge and at times felt insurmountable but still they continued to turn up to work despite significant personal risk.

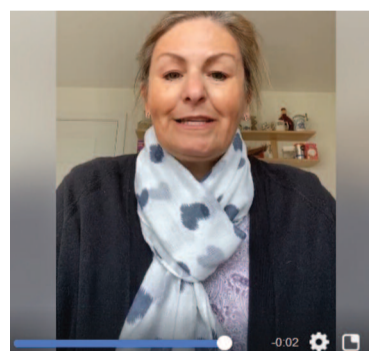
Social care was in crisis long before the pandemic arrived as thousand left the sector for better pay. Many care workers are heavily regulated but have no access to occupational sick pay, or any death

in service benefit and wages are poor. The majority of care workers are women who have no effective voice at work; given that background it highlights just how dedicated they are.

As the weeks went by care workers were largely left to fend for themselves with no choice but to “make it work” as best they could.

Their employers responded by producing reams of guidance documents and poor risk assessments that made them feel they were “doing their bit” but it did nothing to support the front line in their constant battle to interpret mountains of confusing and contradictory advice which frankly they had no time to read.

UNISON was quick to react to the call from members for advice and support as branches began to receive hundreds of calls a day. The Scottish living wage was promised along with parity with their colleagues in health and local government on sick pay. Over the



Debs Clarke in one of her regular video messages on the UNISON Care workers for Change - Scotland Facebook group.

weeks these turned out to be empty political promises some would say publicity stunts!

It took sustained pressure from UNISON Scotland to deliver normal pay for care staff when following public health guidance and isolating at home as many were left to cope on £95 a week!

The Scottish living wage however has still not made it into the pay packets of many care staff

as local authorities have not passed on the money. UNISON continues to apply pressure to deliver this vital pay uplift to carers.

UNISON worked successfully to get PPE to the front line and has since achieved clarity on testing with care staff now seen as a priority.

It has taken a pandemic where hundreds of vulnerable people have died in care homes for care staff to be recognised as essential workers,

Only now has society woken up to the reality of the vital role these mostly low paid, unvalued workers undertake.

Warm words from government saying they are “equal to their NHS colleagues” does not mean anything unless translated into rewarding them as professionals for the skills and abilities they bring to the role.

UNISON continues to call on the Scottish Government and providers to come together to recognise and reward this workforce under the ‘Fair Work’ umbrella at the very earliest opportunity.

STUC call to tackle inequalities faced by Black communities highlighted by COVID-19

The STUC Black Members Committee has echoed the concerns of UNISON Black Members that Black and minority ethnic communities remain over-represented in the “at-risk” communities identified by the Government, with Black people in the UK over four times more likely to die from the virus than white people.

It has written to the Scottish Government urging urgent action

to address health, social and economic inequalities, including to immediately record, analyse, and publish the disaggregated data on the number of Black and ethnic minority (BME) deaths in Scotland that have occurred as a consequence of COVID-19.

It also called on the first minister, at her daily televised briefings, to acknowledge and to condemn the rise of racist rhetoric that has been seen during this pandemic.

The committee has highlighted

the health inequalities which are already faced by Black and minority ethnic communities, exacerbated by institutionalised discriminatory practices embedded within the UK and Scottish health systems and which impact on the way in which Black and minority ethnic communities access and receive treatment. Inequalities which have now been starkly exposed by the coronavirus pandemic.

Black and minority ethnic Workers are also employed at a

higher rate within the key workers category identified by Government and yet are more likely to be paid less than their white counterparts. They are over-represented in roles and jobs which put them at even greater risk to being exposed to illness and disease.

Chairperson of the STUC Black members committee, Usman Ali said, “We believe it is essential that this data is published but more importantly, we need our governments, our

public bodies and agencies and employers to take action to address the endemic inequality as a matter of urgency, now, so that our futures are more secure, equal and fair.”

Planning for Disability History Month

By Andy Crosbie

Despite the challenges COVID-19 has brought to our daily lives both within the workplace and wider society our Scottish Disabled Members’ Committee is continuing to work, where reasonably practicable, on the workplan it agreed at its annual policy seminar just three weeks before we went into lockdown!

As part of this, the committee is promoting Disability History Month, an annual event held between 22 November and 22 December. We are planning an online campaign for this event, and as part of this, we are looking for case studies of how your branch or employer has supported Disability History Month previously. If you have a story to share please email kathleenunison@gmail.com

In January 2019 UNISON published an organising guide to all branches across the UK on how to organise events for this important event. Look for [Disability History Month at unison.org.uk](https://www.unison.org.uk).

Malawi health staff thank UNISON

Malawi health staff at Machinjiri Health Centre have thanked UNISON members for their solidarity during the coronavirus global pandemic.

UNISON branches across the UK have raised funds so health staff at the clinic can distribute free soap, buckets and other cleaning materials. The staff can also promote good hygiene.

UNISON Scotland’s Gordon McKay, who was president of UNISON 2018 - 2019, chose Machinjiri maternity clinic as his presidential charity.

He and Wilma Brown – UNISON member in Fife Health Branch – raised funds to build a maternity ward, they have also built a strong relationship with Machinjiri health staff and the wider community.

Malawi is the one of the poorest countries in the world.

Issa Imedi Jafali, a community



worker in the region who has been helping UNISON Scotland said: “A lovely day here today on Thursday 21/05/20, when we went around Machinjiri Health Centre distributing hand washing materials that helps contain the

spread of COVID-19 in our rural communities.

“We are so grateful for the donation received from UNISON Scotland.

“Our massive thanks goes to the lovely management, branches

and members of UNISON Scotland.

“Speaking on behalf of the Senior Chief Machinjiri, GVH Nsomba appreciated your thoughts and kindness during this time of the pandemic.”

Keyworkers: Voices from the front line

As UNISON members face a new and unprecedented challenges in the workplace, Scotland in UNISON asked three front line workers what the changes, challenges and positives have been for them in responding to the pandemic.

Aberdeenshire UNISON home care member **Shona Craig** describes how things have changed for her since the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Shona said, “Our work changed dramatically in the early days. We had to use PPE but at the start we didn’t know if it was the right PPE and we didn’t have enough of it. Guidance was thin on the ground and everyone was unsure about how best to protect ourselves and our clients.

“There was no testing for people coming home from hospital so we didn’t know who might have the virus. We had to be watching out the whole time for symptoms. We were all really anxious about catching the virus and passing it on to our clients or taking it home to our families.

“As time has gone on things have got better. Ourselves, our union reps and our managers had to really push for it, but we now have the right PPE and that makes us feel much better. We are able to

It has been great to be able to call on the knowledge and support of the union’ SHONA CRAIG

wear a mask if we think it’s needed, and we have enough masks to do that.

“Clients coming out of hospital are being tested twice before they come home, so that makes us feel safer.”

Asked what has helped, Shona said that they have had really good support from their own line managers who have gone above and beyond.

She added that having UNISON there for advice and back-up has been really important.

“It has been great to be able to call on the knowledge and support of the union. They have taken up issues on our behalf and helped to get us the and guidance that we needed. And they have given us the backing to take up issues for ourselves and our colleagues.”

Occupational therapists in community practice teams in Edinburgh are now only dealing



Shona Craig
Home carer



Andrew Verrechia
Operating practitioner



Kirsten Hey
Occupational therapist

with emergency, essential, and life and limb work.

One of them, **Kirsten Hey**, has also been working in a care home as part of the commitment and flexibility staff have shown in the crisis.

She explained: “We are working from home and using a rota to respond to work. I asked to be redeployed and am doing back shifts in a council care home, mainly as a care worker, but using my OT skills for manual handling, seating assessments etc.”

For Kirsten, the biggest challenge has been the anxiety staff feel about the risk of infection, mainly the fear that they might infect a service user.

IT problems, the bugbear of all local government workers, have also been a challenge with staff having to go into the office to

dock laptops because the IT doesn’t always work at home.

However, Kirsten had praise for how the union and others have responded: “What has helped is the frequent good quality info from the UNISON branch health and safety officer along with the availability of PPE, supportive managers, sensible service users and families who understand why we are reducing service to emergencies only.”

The biggest change for **Andrew Verrechia**, an operating department practitioner in theatres at the Victoria Hospital in Kirkcaldy, has been the increase in the wearing of full PPE on a regular basis. “It’s a long day when a lot of it is spent decked from head to toe in it.”

He also highlighted the pace of change to routine. “The ever-

changing climate of government advice which seems to vary from week to week and government to government, bringing changes to working practices, has sometimes seen emotions run high as staff try to adapt to new ways of working.”

“Tragically we have also had to come to terms with the death of a colleague who was a patient in the department at the time.

“Our procurement staff have been run off their feet dealing with the constant flood of supplies, including the supply of full PPE equipment. We have never gone without and they have performed heroically to ensure our safety.”

Andrew feels the biggest help has been the team working together and supporting each other. “It is sometimes easy to forget that healthcare workers share the same fears and anxieties as everyone else regarding this situation”, said Andrew, so the mutual support has been very welcome.

He also singled out constructive engagement between unions and management which has ensured that non-work related issues like school closures have been dealt with sensibly and supportively, as have self-isolating and shielding issues.

Campaigning in social care during lockdown

Stewards in Bon Accord Care, Aberdeen's arms-length care service, along with fighting fund staff and led by area organiser, Karen Davidson, are at the forefront of UNISON Scotland's new organising initiative.

Building on the huge influx of members, especially in social care, the initiative looks at engaging with staff on issues of workplace safety, pay and job security to encourage activism amongst new members.

Karen explains, "With lockdown, UNISON Aberdeen City Branch faced a huge challenge. A fighting fund project had been set up to

engage and organise members in Bon Accord Care.

"The project was just beginning and Bon Accord stewards, along with the organising staff, faced the challenge of adapting the organising strategy they had planned to implement. We were unable to visit workplaces, prospect in areas where we knew staff would be congregated or hold members meetings.

"With the issues in social care around the lack of PPE and information to workers being sporadic we decided to trial a health and safety themed webinar.

"The organisers on the team attempted to phone every

member. No mean feat when members work patterns were not known. With persistence we did it, and the first webinar ran on 7 May with several sessions to accommodate shift patterns. Most sessions were well attended and had full engagement from the members.

"A follow up webinar was held on 26 May adapting the session to fit the changing issues members were telling us about.

"This was another success. The members told us their concerns, asked questions for us to raise with management and agreed to share a H&S survey with their colleagues to help us recruit new members and attend another

meeting where we can feed back management response.

"The whole experience has been intense, from coming up with a plan, agreeing and practising scripts for phone banking, delivering the webinar and following up members afterward. So far, we have had two members tell us that they would like to be more involved in the branch.

"It's still early days but we will continue to build on the relationships we have developed over the phone with these members and hopefully, as we roll out fortnightly webinars with members' meetings in between, we will continue to build membership and activists within Bon Accord Care."

Denis Goldberg: Making life better for people. Is that not what the revolution was about?

By John Stevenson
Retired member

Tributes poured in across the world last month on the news of the death of veteran anti-apartheid campaigner and honorary UNISON member Denis Goldberg.

UNISON Scotland had a long friendship with Denis and we were continually inspired by him.

He was sentenced in 1964 in South Africa alongside Nelson Mandela for his part in the struggle against apartheid. On his release 22 years later, he continued to work to overcome the apartheid regime.

He visited us often and, in Glasgow at the launch of his book in 2008, he said of Scotland: "After being released from prison, my goodness, it was like being at home, of being enfolded by people wanting to help. Which is why I am here today".

We were proud to support his charity Community HEART, managed by UNISON member



Photo: Brian Purdie

Denis Goldberg at a Community HEART fundraiser with Cathal, son of UNISON Scotland policy officer Stephen Low

Isobel McVicar, which has contributed to better access to education, HIV/AIDS projects, supporting those affected by violence against women, health projects, and housing projects.

Latterly we called for support for the Denis Goldberg House of Hope arts and culture education centre where he lived in Hout Bay.

UNISON Scottish secretary Mike Kirby was with him on a trade union visit to South

Africa in 2000.

He said: "I saw first hand the power of the emotion and respect he generated in those who had come through the struggle against apartheid.

"Whether we met his former comrades like Ahmed Karhrada, the trade union and government officials, the people of Soweto, Denis was greatly acknowledged for his historical role and his continuing endeavours."

Supporting retired members through COVID-19

By Babs Fulton

Retired members secretary

Members of the Scottish Retired Members Committee are grappling with increasing success with the video technology to continue to meet during the COVID-19 lockdown.

We are exploring ways that we can help our members through these times and looking to our future so we can hit the ground running when things start to ease down bit by bit and get back to some form of normality.

The way things have been unfolding through this crisis has put into sharp focus the degree to which society and government routinely discriminate against older citizens. We are preparing to redouble our campaigning to get older people their proper place in society.

While everyone is having to deal with the changes that Covid 19 has made to our day to day lives, those



UNISON Scotland retired members committee

of advancing years and those with disabilities are more likely to have more problems and challenges arising from lockdown and it may well be that some of our retired members are struggling to cope.

It is worth remembering that UNISON There For You (UNISON welfare) is also available for retired members. You can contact the service on thereforyou@unison.co.uk or 02071215620.

The Scottish retired members committee (SRMC) is made up of 16 retired members representing most sectors, nominated from their

branch to be elected through our Scottish Council.

Some key players

Jean McBride from North Lanarkshire branch is our hard working minute taker. Jean also works hard at bringing forward our health and social care issues for older people and brings to the forefront her knowledge and experience in motions for our conferences.

Rose Jackson from Edinburgh City Branch represents our members on the Scottish Pensioners

Forum (SPF) and is the vice chair. Rose and the SPF met up with the Scottish minister for older people and equalities Christine Mckelvie, to look at a way forward and discuss proposals that the government has to help those that have been placed on lockdown for 12 weeks and more due to health reason. This is a great opportunity to input the concerns of our retired members into these discussions.

Jo Mclean, Lothian Health Branch, is our delegate to the national retired members committee. Jo is a strong voice for us in Scotland. Morag Houston, NHS Glasgow, Clyde & CVS is our delegate on the Scottish Committee where she puts forwards the issues for our retired members. The branch also funds our *Mac Senior* newsletter.

We also want to thank Liam Chalmers, Dumfries & Galloway branch retired members, without whom the

production of our *Mac Senior* would be impossible.

Other active members include Ron Kerr from Dundee City Branch. He and Gray Allan of Falkirk manage to get newsletters to their retired members so it is great that some branches are not forgetting retired members at this vulnerable time. Thanks also to Barry who volunteered to help print and post letters. **Keep Safe All!**

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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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Moray welcomes gen sec to AGM



Dave Prentis with Karen Donaldson

UNISON Moray welcomed Dave Prentis, general secretary of UNISON, to their AGM on 11 March.

Earlier that day, Dave had unveiled a defibrillator, purchased by the Moray Branch for public use and located at the council annexe main entrance, ensuring access to a defibrillator at both ends of the Elgin High Street.

Dave paid tribute to the branch, thanking them for donating the defibrillator and for all they do for our members and our union. "I am so proud of all we achieve together."

The suggestion to donate a defibrillator had come from steward, David Eddie, who also proposed the location.

Speaking at the AGM, Dave highlighted that by working together as a collective we have a stronger voice; year on year UNISON membership has increased since 2010.

"UNISON has a caring nature, with more female members than male. We will still take industrial action, but it will be a gentler approach that is highly effective."

He reiterated that the branch has a strong collective voice and he thanked branch secretary, Karen Donaldson, for her hard work. Dave also urged the members in attendance to consider becoming a steward or a workplace rep, saying: "It is about standing up for fairness and what is right."

"We need to think about how we hold the governments to account and how we are going to work together for the next five years to make changes for the better."

Karen said, "This was his first visit to Moray so it was a good chance for Dave to get an insight into local issues the branch deals with."

Dave also attended a meeting between branch representatives and the Moray Council leader and chief executive where there was discussion around budget cuts, pressures in the local area, facility time and much more.

Of course Dave, along with assistant general secretary Liz Snape, couldn't come to Moray without visiting a whisky distillery, so Karen and John Frew (fighting fund local organiser) took them on a tour of Benromach Distillery in Forres. "A good start to the day," said Karen.