

The

May 2002

# Grapevine

UNISON

The Official Newsletter of *Angus Council Branch*

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## Leave Year Grievance Lost

### WORK A QUARTER OF A DAY MORE FOR FREE!

Many may have noticed that due to the recent extension of the 01—02 leave year from 30th September 2002 to 31st December 2002, and in the method that the Council calculated the extra days, this has resulted in large majority of our members losing a ¼ of a day in holiday entitlement.

The Branch lodged a collective grievance which was heard on 4th March. During the appeal it became blatantly obvious that Angus Council, your caring employer, would not move on the matter. This was confirmed by letter a day later which stated that *"any alternative would lead to further staff dissatisfaction"* and that there was a precedent set by a neighbouring local authority.

This comes from an employer, who once stated that their employees were their greatest asset. Obviously they are anxious to ensure that you are not at an advantage over employees of another council, and wish to keep the level of dissatisfaction at the status quo.

There is no other route for the branch to take other this matter.

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 20th February 2002 Where were YOU?

Once again, owing to a poor turnout of only 36 members, the AGM was in quorate and not able to make decisions. The magic figure required was 52 members.

The Branch have tried different tactics to lure you throughout the years, including moving locations, free food, chocolates and wine, etc with varying degrees of success. The branch currently has over 1500 members so gathering 4% together should not be a great problem. Many of you will never normally have any contact or involvement with the Union apart from seeing your subscription amount on your payslip, however would you not like to get some value for money?

### GET INVOLVED!

We are not asking you to become an activist but rather a member participating in a democratic process for a couple of hours per year. The Branch, as part of its

development programme shall be distributing a questionnaire with this newsletter which shall be asking the question of non-attendance at the AGM and what you would like to see happen. Please ensure that you complete the questionnaire and return it.

### Do You Know What Is Expected Of You As A Union Member?

1. Pay the correct amount of subscriptions at the correct time.
2. Participate as much as possible within the union.
3. Follow any democratically decisions such as industrial action.

### Remember:

### YOU ARE THE UNION

Without its members there is no union.

## Is The Grapevine Any Use?

This newsletter is hopefully the first of many. It is expected to be published quarterly and shall try to cover items that are current and of interest to the members. There shall be standard items such as Health & Safety which shall appear in most issues. The name, "The Grapevine", is not set in stone and if a suitable replacement was to be suggested then it may take over the mantle.

Any suggestions for the newsletter name or if you wish to enter an article then please contact the Communications Officer at the new FREEPOST address below.

**NEW FREEPOST NEW**  
**Address**

You can now contact the branch at no cost to yourself by using FREEPOST. This is an initiative to try and make it easier to involve the members. The address is:

**Unison - Angus Council Branch**  
**FREEPOST SCO7380**  
**FORFAR**  
**DD8 1ZR**

# As Safe As Houses

## Housing Stock Transfers Have Deeper Consequences.

### What's it all about?

UNISON is opposed to the wholesale selling off of large chunks of the country's council housing stock. UNISON's support for council housing is not just a question of ideological ownership - it makes sound economic sense too. Council housing has a £40 billion asset base and adds to the national wealth.

Large Scale Voluntary Transfers are damaging to tenants, local authorities, services and trade union organisation. UNISON fully supports options that enable investment to take place without homes being sold.

### The issues

The selling off of large amounts of council housing stock adversely affects not just tenants but local authority workers too.

### Large Scale Voluntary Transfers (LSVT)

LSVT occurs when a council sells more than 500 homes to a single body, usually a housing association or a private housing company. This often leads to higher rents and higher housing benefit bills as the new housing associations have to recoup their investment. Public investment would be cheaper and more efficient.

### Workers' rights

Usually the local authority's housing staff will move to the new organisation but building workers and support staff may face redundancy. Depending on how much the council receives from the sale of the housing stock, there may be redundancies in the rest of the authority too.

### The twin track approach

UNISON branches are adopting a twin track approach in their opposition to LSVTs, both campaigning against any proposed transfers and preparing a strong bargaining position if the transfers should go ahead.

### Right To Buy

The RTB scheme should not be confused with LSVTs. Right To Buy gives an individual council tenant the opportunity to purchase the freehold or lease to their council home.

### What does it all mean for me?

Large Scale Voluntary Transfer of council housing adversely affects many people, including tenants, local authorities, services and trade union organisation. Here's what the selling off of large chunks of the country's council housing stock could mean to you:

### Tenants

- Rents will rise faster than inflation for the next 30 years, particularly for new tenants
- Will eat into pensions and make getting a job less attractive
- Tenants left with more debt than the cost of repairs

- Private investment costs more
- No democratic accountability
- Less security of tenure
- No statutory consultation rights
- Easier to be evicted

### The council

- Job losses
- Increased overheads for other services
- Weakens local economy
- Increases the depth of the poverty trap for the most vulnerable
- Loss of integration between services - housing no longer part of the 'council family'
- Assets sold at much less than market value
- Massive transfer of ownership of land and homes to the private sector
- Loss of local democracy
- Loss of community asset

### Council staff

- Loss of jobs in IT/legal/human resources
- Smaller and weaker union
- Higher running costs and greater threat of privatisation
- Reduction of service and efficiency
- Increased workload
- Greater liaison difficulties
- Contrary to Best Value

### The Government

- Very expensive in the long term
- Huge rent allowance cost
- Makes housing benefit reform more difficult
- Weakens democratic accountability
- Creates future unaccountable monopoly issue
- Rents not linked to strategy of making work pay
- Seen as continuation of 'Conservative' policy

### Council Tax payers

- Increased overheads so higher Council Tax bill
- Pick up benefits bill
- Pick up costs of redundancies
- Future capital investment may be less
- Loss of community asset

Remember to use the FREEPOST address for any written correspondence

Unison - Angus Council Branch, FREEPOST SCO7380, FORFAR, DD8 1ZR

# Are you one of the 250?

The Branch now has a total of 20 reps, the highest total since the Branch was formed in 1996. We now cover 9 out of 15 Council departments, as well as Tayside Valuation Joint Board (TVJB) and Tayside Careers. In forthcoming newsletters, the Safety Reps will be outlining the type of situations particularly relevant to their members.

Each Rep tackles different problems, as not all jobs or workplaces are the same. For example, Steve Milne of Social Work is currently involved in developing a lone working procedure, while Robert Thomson and Ian McIntosh of Tayside Careers are responding to proposals to replace all PCs with laptop computers.

Three of our four new Reps – Ian McIntosh (Tayside Careers), Jimmy Adams (Education) and Bill White (IT) are currently

attending Stage 1 Health and Safety training at Dundee College. In later issues, they'll be describing how they got on and which part of the course helped them most. All reps undergo this training, which takes place 1 day per week for 10 weeks.

Although the training gives the Reps a good grounding in Health and Safety, the best person to assess the risks and problems of a task is the person who carries out the work. That's YOU.

I said at the beginning of this article that the Branch has never had more than 20 reps. When you realise that we have 1500 members, it doesn't seem enough. Break that down further and there are significant gaps in our coverage. See for yourself below:

• Angus FE College	0 reps	39 members	• Leisure Services	0 reps	66 members
• Chief Exec's	2 reps	41 members	• Planning & Transport	0 reps	38 members
• Contract Services	3 reps	89 members	• Property Services	1 rep	59 members
• Education	2 reps	255 members	• Roads	2 reps	40 members
• ECP	0 reps	37 members	• Rossie School	0 reps	54 members
• Finance	1 rep	98 members	• Social Work	3 reps	341 members
• Housing	1 rep	103 members	• Tayside Careers	2 reps	63 members
• IT	1 rep	22 members	• TVJB	2 reps	40 members
• Law & Admin	0 reps	41 members	• Voluntary Sector (Housing Associations etc)	0 reps	40 members

As you can see about 250 members do not have a Safety Rep at all. In other areas, the numbers give a false reading. Just think about the number of different workplaces in Social Work, or the different types of jobs in Contract Services.

I hope I've shown you the need for more Safety Reps. If you're interested, please leave a message in the Branch Office (name & contact number). If you still have some doubts, please read

further issues of this newsletter to see how our new Reps got on with their training. Hopefully their experiences will show you that it's not so daunting after all.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Louise Trayner, Branch Health & Safety Officer

## Joint Futures

The position in Angus Council has been raised by UNISON at the Social Work Consultative Group and the response from the employer is minuted as follows: *"we will adopt a partnership model, but retain a distinct identity for the Social Work Department. In most cases, there will be joint management and aligned budgets. Terms and conditions for staff will remain as they currently are. A joint staff forum will be established"*.

It will remain as an Agenda item for the Consultative Group and members will be updated as soon as further information is available.

As any impact will be in Tayside as a whole, a suggestion has been made to both UNISON's Regional Officer and the Head of Local Government that Angus Council Branch should link with Dundee City and Perth & Kinross Branches. We are currently awaiting developments on this subject.

Kate Leiper, Branch Secretary

You can Telephone or Fax the Office

01307 468950

# Got A Problem?

## Who Are You Going To Call?

When a problem arises at work then your first contact should be your local UNISON Workplace Steward. If you do not have a steward then please use the second option and call the office (01307 468950). As we do not employ any staff in the office you may get an answering machine however your call shall be returned as soon as possible. The last line of contact is UNISON DIRECT (0800 505050). In most cases they shall simply contact the local office and leave a message on the answer phone also.

As with the Health & Safety Reps, this does raise the issue of insufficient workplace stewards. Once again if you wish to help by becoming a steward you shall be given full training and support by the Branch. Contact the Branch office for further details.

### Remember:

When you have a problem your line of action for help is:

- 1 Local Workplace Steward
- 2 Branch Office (01307 468950)
- 3 Unison Direct (0800 505050)

## Are You Reading This And Are NOT A Member?

### STOP BEING A FREELoader ON YOUR COLLEAGUES

If you are reading this and are not a member then stop living off someone else. Stand on your own feet with our help. For this miracle to happen simply contact the local Workplace Rep or the Branch Office for an application form. The union can provide you with information, guidance and help on various matters, including representation at meetings if this is required. However none of this help can be back-dated so join now to avoid disappointment. With greater membership the Branch has greater leverage with the employer. You can make the difference.

## Moving House

### INFORM YOUR LOCAL BRANCH

Moving house is a very stressful time. There is all of the people you need to inform, the doctor, dentist, etc.

When moving please remember to inform your local UNISON Branch Office. Simply send us a note with your name, workplace, old and new addresses. This is also true if you move workplace location.

# Snippets



### Health & Safety

In future newsletters, we'll be running a series of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) on health and safety. In the meantime, why not log on to [www.troubleatwork.org.uk](http://www.troubleatwork.org.uk) - the UNISON sponsored website answering questions on health and safety and general rights at work.

### APT&C Pay Award

The 2002 pay award is a £500 increase across all spinal points. This was part of the 1999 agreement and was applied on 1st March 2002. Negotiations for the 2003 pay award are to begin shortly.

### Fuel Allowances

Under the Single Status Agreement, fuel allowances are now be agreed at a local level. The Branch have been approached by the employer who are asking to commence negotiations. The Inland Revenue are putting pressure on the Council to use their rates which are currently 40p/mile and 9p/mile for casual and lease car users respectively.

### Nursery Nurses Pay Award

This ongoing saga continues, however there has been pressure applied by the Scottish Executive upon COSLA for a speedy conclusion to this matter.

### Claim Back the Tax You Are Owed!

Many would have received a Tax Refund Claim Form with your payslip in April. This Company, Personal Taxations Services is also fully endorsed by UNISON Scotland. The quoted average refund for members in Scotland so far has been £121.31. For further details contact your Workplace Rep or the Branch Office, or on the web at [www.taxbuddies.com/pts/unidd.htm](http://www.taxbuddies.com/pts/unidd.htm)

## BECOME A CONTACT IN YOUR WORKPLACE

Unfortunately we do not have contacts in every workplace therefore we are currently looking to create a network of contact persons to aid with the distribution of local Branch literature. The contacts will only be requested to hand out literature as and when it is received. You would not be asked to carry out any other UNISON duties unless you wished to become a Workplace Rep or Health & Safety Rep, etc. If you are willing to help then please contact the Branch Office.

## SICKNESS & HARDSHIP

If you, or any of your UNISON colleagues are in any hardship or you know of a member who has been off work due to illness for a few weeks then please contact the Branch Office. We may be able to help!

You can Email the Office

[kate.leiper@qick.com](mailto:kate.leiper@qick.com)

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