

The

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Grapevine

UNISON

The Official Newsletter of *Angus Council Branch*

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Nursery Nurses

**NEW OFFER ACCEPTED
AFTER 10 WEEKS OF
STRIKE ACTION**

See page 2



Photograph courtesy of DC Thomson

Remember to use the FREEPOST address for any written correspondence

Unison - Angus Council Branch, FREEPOST SC07380, FORFAR, DD8 1ZR

Nursery Nurses return to work

At the Letham Hotel, on Monday 17 May, Angus Nursery Nurses voted to accept a new offer tabled late on the previous Friday by the employer. The result of the vote was 64 to accept, 12 to reject.

This brought to an end 10 weeks of strike action and brought an outburst of emotion from the nursery nurses. Feelings of relief and frustration were openly on show, both inside and outside the venue. Television cameras covered the proceedings and broadcast the outcome on the local evening news. The new offer is an increase on the previous which was rejected by a ballot at the Meffan, Forfar on 5 May. An increase to the top grades and ex-gratia payments, and clarification on new conditions was all it took, bringing the Angus Nursery Nurses in line with the average local settlement, but nowhere near the top.

This dispute has dragged on for over two years now, when the initial claim was lodged with CoSLA, who rejected it out of hand, claiming that it was a matter for Councils to settle locally. The Councils took a different stance on the matter, refusing to discuss it as they believed it should be settled nationally.

This game of ping-pong lasted for a number of months until it was obvious that action had to be taken by the nursery nurses. In 2003 selective days of strike action and all-out action by certain areas, especially social work, were carried out.



Angus Nursery Nurses (and helpers) crossing the Tay Bridge to show that boundaries can be crossed

This had very little effect on the attitude of the Councils or CoSLA. UNISON were still calling for a national agreement but CoSLA were having nothing to do with it.

In early March 2004 the whole situation came to a head with UNISON announcing that the result of a ballot was for all-out industrial action commencing on Monday 1 March. On Friday 27 February, Angus Council tabled an offer which was rejected by the nursery nurses at a ballot on the following Wednesday. Due to the offer being tabled Angus nursery nurses were not on strike, however the industrial action began on Tuesday 9 March.

Support for the industrial action was good however some members, for their own reasons, did return to work, leaving around 80 - 90 still on strike, but extremely strong and motivated to hold on for the settlement they deserve.

Throughout the strike period nursery nurses have not been resting on their laurels. They have organised themselves into a formidable force, arranging rallies, marches, fund raising activities, and when they were not doing that, they would be on the picket lines, gaining support from parents and local businesses. The Letham Hotel kindly offered their hall for regular meetings, for which nursery nurses and the Branch will be forever grateful.

There were a number of false statements that appeared in the press, usually made by people who should have been well informed on the situation, but who appeared not to have a grasp of the issues. Nursery Nurses and their families and friends are also tax payers and voters and will no doubt continue to make their voices heard. We will not forget those who offered support and those who condemned the strike and the nursery nurses.

Nursery nurses travelled to the Forth and Tay Road Bridges where they walked across to the middle and met up with their colleagues from the other side of the water, showing that boundaries can be crossed - if you want to! They also went to rallies outside the Scottish Parliament and around the burghs of Angus, marching in Forfar from County Buildings. John Swinney, MSP, Shadow first Minister and leader of the SNP talked to the nursery nurses at the Letham Hotel on April 15, reiterating his support. However, in the parliament Jack McConnell said he could do nothing - he was probably too busy picking the colour of paint for his new office at Holyrood. With the number of Councils still to settle reducing, UNISON Scotland decided to bring together the remaining Branches and look at the local offers. This was a climb-down by UNISON and quite rightly enraged the striking nursery nurses. In their defence UNISON Scotland did say that they would keep backing any Branch still on industrial action to the bitter end.

During the strike, UNISON had met with the Personnel Services Manager with very little progress. On 29 April a revised offer was tabled. The following day, at a very emotional meeting, striking nursery nurses were informed of the offer, which they subsequently rejected by an overwhelming majority on 5 May. Following this, the Branch arranged a series of public meetings on the following Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday, where councillors, parents, Angus Council's Personnel Services Manager and the Directors of Education & Social Work were invited.

Before these meetings took place a request from the Council for a meeting on the Monday morning was received. This meeting appears to have been the beginning of the end and the Councillors present at this meeting seemed very willing to settle the dispute. The original meetings did go ahead with some Councillors but no Directors. There were heated debates with views from both sides being aired. We believe that after the meeting some parents did have an impromptu meeting with a person called "Sandy" at The Cross regarding the impasse of the situation. There is no confirmation that this rumoured meeting had any bearing on pay talks, although an increased offer was made on the Friday and was accepted.

If one good thing comes out of this bleak period, it is that the nursery nurses have formed strong bonds with each other which it is hoped will grow stronger in the future.

You can Telephone or Fax the Office

01307 468950

Health & Safety Slips, Trips & Falls

Frequently Asked Questions

Slips and trips are often seen as a joke however in reality nothing could be further from the truth.

Slips & trips are the most common cause of major injuries at work. They occur in almost all workplaces, 95% of major slips result in broken bones and they can also be the initial causes for a range of other accident types such as falls from height.

Key messages about slips and trips

- slips and trips are serious
- simple cost effective measures can reduce these accidents

Statistically - on average

- 33% of all reported major injuries
- 20% of over-3-day injuries to employees
- 2 fatalities per year
- 50% of all reported accidents to members of the public

- cost to employers £512 million per year
- cost to health service £133 million per year
- incalculable human cost

THIS MEANS 1 SLIP OR TRIP ACCIDENT EVERY 3 MINUTES!!

Most slips occur in wet or contaminated conditions. Most trips are due to poor housekeeping. The solutions to both are often simple and cost effective. A suitable assessment of the risks should identify the necessary controls and these should include (in no particular order):

- prevention of contamination
- management of spillages and cleaning regimes
- effective matting systems
- choice of suitable footwear
- design of workplace and work activities
- maintenance of plant and the work environment
- specification of appropriate flooring

- housekeeping
- effective training and supervision

It's not only accidents that should be reported to your employer; near misses should be reported as well. Many employers will have an Incident Report Form, similar to an Accident Report Form. All near misses should be reported here and also reported to your line manager.

Many people feel foolish in reporting near misses, especially if they have not been hurt. However, reporting your near miss could save someone else from being hurt later. How often after an injury has occurred have you heard someone say "I tripped there as well?" If your employer doesn't know that something is causing a problem, then they can't fix it.

So please report all accidents and near misses to your employer.

This article is based on information available on the HSE website at:

www.hse.gov.uk

BRANCH AGM 2004

Brief Update

The Branch Annual General Meeting took place on Monday 23rd February 2004, in Forfar Academy.

There were approximately 100 members present which allowed the meeting to be quorate and officially take place.

After the formalities of agreeing the minutes of the last AGM, the guest speaker, Joe Di Paola, UNISON Scotland's Local Government Officer, informed the meeting of the progress, or lack of progress, concerning the local

authorities Job Evaluation scheme.

A number of members had questions regarding this subject and some lengthy discussion took place.

Apologies must go to the members who were present for the temperature in the hall and the problems with the sound system. It is hoped these problems will be rectified for the next AGM.

If any member has a suggestion for the venue of the next AGM, then the branch would be glad to consider it.

Subscription Errors

Earlier this year an incorrect amount for UNISON subscriptions may have been deducted from your wages.

This was a result of problems with Angus Council's new payroll system, which reduced a large number of members to the minimum subscription. Some members didn't pay anything.

The system should now be fixed however if you are still affected please contact the Branch Office.

Currently the Branch do not intend to request the money from the affected members, instead believing that it is the fault of Angus Council and they should ultimately bear the cost of rectifying their errors.

You can Email the Office

office@unison-angus.org.uk

Snippets



Are You Due To Retire?

If you are about to retire then please contact the Branch Office as soon as possible. The branch have a policy of paying the one-off subscription for the retired members section for any member who is retiring, however **we need to know!** Contact the Branch Office for further details.

Pay Claim for 2004

To date there is no further information on the pay negotiations for this year, since the initial joint claim by the local government unions. That claim is

- A flat rate increase of £1000 per Annum on all Spinal Column Points, underpinned by a Minimum Wage of £6:00 per hour with effect from 1st April, 2004.
- An increase of 5% on all Spinal Column Points with effect from 1st April 2005.

The settlement should run for a period of two years from 1st April, 2004 to 31st March, 2006 in accordance with the Scottish Executive's financial settlement timetable for local authorities.

Social Work Under-Represented

Since the departure of Pete Travis, the Branch no longer has a Departmental Rep in Social Work. This, in effect, means that members in Social Work are seriously under represented as there are only 2 Workplace Stewards.

There are 266 members and it is obvious that this would be an impossible task for 2 Stewards to represent adequately this number of members. PLEASE seriously consider becoming a Workplace Steward. Training would be made available and Branch Officers would be only too glad to assist you.

If you are interested then please contact the Branch Office where the Branch Secretary would be pleased to meet with you to discuss what is involved.

TRAVEL & SUBSISTENCE ALLOWANCES have you got a gripe? then tell us

A working group from the Branch Executive met Angus Council's Personnel Services Manager recently and were asked to discuss any problems members have with Angus Council's Travel and Subsistence.

Before the group can respond, it will seek a further remit from the Branch Executive on what should be discussed and what the Branch's position is on these matters.

Before the next meeting of the Branch Executive, we would like members to let us know of any problems or issues they have with Angus Council's Travel and Subsistence. These can be any issues you have with them, be it that you find them difficult to understand or that you

don't agree with them.

You may agree with the Inland Revenue's suggested mileage rates for casual users of 40p per mile, or you may not. You may think any problems you have with the Travel and Subsistence allowances are insignificant or even petty, but please let us know about them.

Angus Council Personnel Services have received queries and complaints on issues that are not the same ones that the Branch usually has complaints about. Therefore we would like to know the true and full extent of these problems, particularly as these are likely to vary between different Council departments.

You can respond either by using the Branch's Freepost address or by e-mailing the Branch Communications Officer at communications@unison-angus.org.uk.

The Communications Officer will then pass the information to the Working Group prior to the Branch Executive meeting on 8 June.

Please submit any responses by 5 June so that the working group can properly collate the responses and look at any common themes.

Members will be kept informed of any developments through future issues of this newsletter.

NB: These discussions are with Angus Council and will cover Angus Council employees only. However, we would be glad to hear from other Branch members working out with Angus Council, who could let us know about their own terms and conditions for comparative purposes.

MORE CONTACTS WANTED

The network of workplace contacts is slowly starting to grow, however there are still a great number of workplaces that have no representation or contacts, especially Social Work. I can only ask again for members to help themselves and their fellow colleagues by offering to be a contact.

The workplace contact only has to aid with the distribution of local Branch literature as and when they receive it. There are NO meetings to attend apart from the AGM and 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 complete the slip and send it to the Branch Office using the FREEPOST address.

NO EXPERIENCE REQUIRED

Workplace Contact

Name: _____

Workplace Address: _____

Contact Phone No: _____

You can visit the branch website