

The

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February 2005

Grapevine

UNISON

The Official Newsletter of *Angus Council Branch*

Office Address: 5A West High Street, FORFAR. Phone / Fax: 01307 468950 Email: office@unison-angus.org.uk

YOUR UNION NEEDS YOU!

AGM 2005 Details

Where? Letham Hotel,
The Square, Letham

When? 6:00pm
Monday 28 Feb 2005

Buffet and Tea/Coffee
available from 5:30pm

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**Show the Employers that
you care about the
erosion of your conditions**

Make YOUR voice heard Attend the AGM

It happens but once a year. The AGM is the only meeting which your union asks you to attend. In recent negotiations, regarding car mileage rates and travel subsistence, the UNISON members present inferred from comments made by Angus Council's representative that the Employer doesn't think there is a strong feeling about terms and conditions as they feel our AGM is poorly attended.

He might have a point! In the last 2 years we haven't even made it over 100 members, and a large number of those

were Nursery Nurses who were successful in battling for better pay and conditions.

Although we are extremely grateful to the members that make it to a meeting which lasts 1 to 1½ hours on average, where were the other 1300+ members?

More members complain about the erosion of conditions than attend the AGM. I invite you all to attend and show the depth of feeling about this.

I challenge you to attend this year!

Remember to use the FREEPOST address for any written correspondence

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

Computer Blamed For Wages Delay!

How original! I'll try that when they want my next Council Tax payment.... wait a minute... if I fail to pay, then they would want the full amount for the whole year. Can I then apply the same rules and request that they pay me my wages for a whole year upfront? Somehow I don't think that it would happen.

Unlike the other 31 councils in Scotland, Angus Council

didn't manage to calculate the figure in time, due to the new computer system! The cynics out there might think that they were holding back the monies to help aid the Council Tax increase for next year! 5.3% increase in Council Tax....2.95% increase in a pay rise.. The figures don't add up! The Council are happy to announce that a Band D property would only be a rise of £1 per week. Well the interest on the back money would help to pay my £1 increase per week.

But what could we do? By the time they told us it was too late to do anything about it. Were they embarrassed?

Typical Angus Council...no wonder the rats are leaving the sinking ship!

Travel & Subsistence Rates Update

The Branch has been trying to negotiate the travel and subsistence rates with Angus Council since last summer.

At the meeting before Christmas, the Personnel Services Manger advised us that he was putting forward a report with cost cutting savings, and that the unions would be consulted shortly. The report landed on the desks of the unions offices.

The report proposed the following:

- A reduction of casual user mileage rates to one rate of 40p/mile.
- The introduction of a rate for cycling at 20p/mile (Users to provide their own bike and safety equip)
- The abolishment of essential users status.

- The raising of the lease car rate to 10p/mile (if an agreement can be reached with the Inland Revenue)
- The abolishment of lunch allowances within Angus Council boundaries.
- The increase of the dinner allowance (i.e. meal after 7:30pm) outwith the Angus Council boundaries.

The Branch rejects these proposals as overall they decrease the members conditions. The Council have 3 options; 1 keep the existing; 2 imposed these new conditions on all staff or 3 impose the worse parts of the conditions on new staff. It is considered that Angus Council will probably do the latter.

Below is a summary of the meeting with Angus Council's Representative, Hugh Robertson, held in mid January 05.

Travel & Subsistence

Meeting with Angus Council Rep

Report by Louise Trayner

Sorry I haven't had a chance to update you on UNISON's meeting with Personnel about the council's proposals on travel and subsistence. Details of the meeting are below, Sorry if it's a bit long-winded again, but I'll try and summarise it as much as possible.

It was put to Hugh Robertson that there's no mention of the Councillors reducing their allowances. He claims they are willing to do so and will put up a report to Committee that they are willing to take the same mileage rates as staff. Whether they're willing to take the same allowances (i.e. none) was not specifically mentioned. I am unaware of any report about a

reduction in Councillors' allowances but it's possible that they are waiting on a response from the unions before deciding what they want to do.

We were asked to give a response by 10 February as the Councillors want to include the proposals in the budget. The union response was that we can't do that as it's not a long enough timescale to formally consult members. We pointed out that we had been trying to speak to Personnel about these matters for most of the past year so we have no intention of being hurried into a decision now. The decision by UNISON is now to take it to the AGM. The Personnel manager didn't see much point in that as he said hardly anyone turns up anyway. So if you were unsure of whether to go to the AGM, please go, if only to show Personnel and the Council the strength of feeling on this matter. Papers for the AGM will be out shortly

but for your info it's on Monday 28 February at The Letham Hotel.

It was suggested that the Council will suffer recruitment and retention problems if they implement their proposals. Hugh Robertson didn't agree as he said Dundee City Council have implemented these proposals and haven't suffered any problems. UNISON's Regional Officer did not think Dundee had actually implemented this although there are proposals being put forward. In any case, she pointed out that Dundee is a geographically different council from Angus, with Angus having more remote areas that staff might be expected to travel to. She suggested that any problems being experienced with Travel and Subsistence are due to a failure to manage it, or through inconsistencies of management.

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You can Telephone or Fax the Office

01307 468950

Lease Car Users Tax Claim

A member receives £535 While others are told to go away

In the last newsletter there was an article regarding the claiming of tax back from the Inland Revenue on the difference that the Council pays and what they allow.

There has been a mixed response about this. Some

members have been willingly refunded from the Inland Revenue, and a number of members have been refused.

One member received a Christmas present from the Inland Revenue when a cheque arrived for £535 just before Santa did, and a group of other members received a total of £400 between them. Gordon Watson of Social Work hasn't been so lucky. He has applied three times now and has been refused on each occasion, even though he provided more and more information at each application. The Branch is to seek clarification why there are these variations in decisions.

(Continued from page 2)

The UNISON side stated again that we didn't feel this was acceptable to our membership. Personnel thought there were winners as well as losers but did say that there is undoubtedly a saving to the Council otherwise they wouldn't be doing it. In particular, the hope is that because there is a proposal to increase lease car mileage rates then lease car users will want to accept the whole package, even though they may lose out elsewhere e.g. the loss of lunch allowances. We were also told at this point that either the whole package is accepted or none of it is, we can't decide on which parts are acceptable.

The UNISON working group is from departments who all have to carry equipment, so we asked about a supplement for that, similar to the proposed supplement for passengers. The response was that the Inland Revenue allowance a tax free amount for carrying passengers. It was conceded that even though any equipment allowance would be taxable, employers are not prevented from paying this. However, the council don't propose to include an equipment allowance. Incidentally, the Roads Supervisors have weighed their cars unloaded and with equipment and found it to be around 10 stone of a difference, easily the equivalent of carrying 1 passenger.

With regard to subsistence, we were informed that the Personnel Manager won't authorise any lunch allowance for his staff, they're expected to organise their work around this. UNISON accepts this should be done where possible so as not to incur

unnecessary expense. However, the 3 reps there were from Roads, Housing and ECP, all departments who have to visit remote areas, work in inclement or dirty conditions and who are subject to call outs or who will arrange to be visit several sites in one day in order to minimise mileage. I should say at this point that when we gave examples of the conditions our members worked in or the types of jobs they're expected to do, we were told "you're talking about a few individuals out of 5000 staff". Naturally this didn't stop the Personnel Manager using his own staff as examples.

The Personnel Manager also consistently refers to it being as cheap to buy a roll in Forfar as it is in Montrose. Equally consistently, we told him that our members are not necessarily working in towns but are just as likely to be in remote areas with not many facilities. I put forward the situation where we may be working in The Glens and the only place to use facilities and get something to eat is a hotel, which undoubtedly costs more than a roll from Saddlers. ECP also pointed out that as they have members dealing with contaminated water, they use these facilities in order to wash their hands. I also pointed out that these places very often only allow customers to use the facilities so staff have to incur additional expenditure. The Personnel Manager does not accept this as a proper argument. Nor does he accept that staff who've worked out in the cold or rain all morning may wish to have a hot meal and sit inside at lunchtime. Apparently he thinks the car is sufficient for this.

We agreed it was obvious that no response could be given by UNISON before 10 February. As that is when the budget discussions will be, we were told that the Council had the option of budgeting to include the existing allowances, imposing the new allowances on all staff, or keeping the allowances for existing staff and imposing the new ones on any new staff. UNISON stated we'd seek legal advice on this as there is case law where a group of employees had taken their employer to court for unilaterally reducing allowances and won. There was an inference that if Council Tax had to be raised then the voters could be told it was due to unions not accepting reductions in terms and conditions. It was pointed out that our members are voters too and that should not be forgotten.

So that's where it was left. The Personnel Manager was to go back to the Councillors and tell them he doesn't see any of the unions agreeing before 10 February and the Councillors must then decide how they want to proceed. UNISON will take the matter to our AGM and I understand other unions will also be consulting their members or reps shortly.

Once again, if you have any comments please let me know and I'll take them to the next Branch meeting on 15 February. I think we should make a stand on this and not accept the gradual erosion of our terms and conditions.

Thanks, Louise Trayner

You can Email the Office

office@unison-angus.org.uk

Snippets



also an enormous lack of stewards and Health & Safety Reps within most of the Council departments and

backing the current General Secretary, Dave Prentis, and we would ask you to do so as well. We would also urge you to vote YES to retaining the Political Fund, as without one UNISON would virtually be gagged. The pension ballot is to do with proposed changes in England & Wales. You may ask why this will affect you, well if this goes through there then you can bet your back pay (when you get it) that these changes will be implemented in Scotland also.

Election Duty

In a recent email from the Director of Law and Administration, Chief Officers were reminded that members of staff must gain permission from their line managers if they wish to carry out election duties, and book "appropriate leave".

the other services covered by the Branch. Once again there has been no nomination for the Branch Chair and it is hoped that Alan Fegan will once again take up the post, even though he is retired.

If any member wishes to take up any of the vacant posts as listed on the AGM Papers, then please contact Kate Leiper at the Branch Office for further information.

Therefore please use your vote!

After enquiring at the Elections Office about the "appropriate leave". The Branch was informed that Angus Council have a policy of allowing staff time off to carry out election duties with no loss of holidays or flexitime, and that all Chief Officers were aware of this. The only stipulation was that the reduction of staffing levels should not affect the service.

Democracy Galore

Currently there are a number of ballots taking place within UNISON. Members are being asked to make their mark by electing The General Secretary, deciding on the Political Fund and protesting against the potential changes to their Pensions.

Indian Ocean Tsunami

Angus Council are offering to help the disaster by allowing you to donate through your salary to the DEC.

This all sounds very good until your read that they will charge you 1% administration fee for this!

Branch Nominations

There are a number of vacant positions within the Branch. There is

It is imperative that you vote on all of these matters. The Branch are

Why not donate to the DEC directly, and give them an extra 1% instead, to help this worthy cause.

PENSIONS

are you looking forward to poverty?

Proposed Changes In England & Wales Could Affect You!

Currently there are proposals to change the Local Government Pension Scheme in England and Wales. The changes affect such elements as raising the minimum retirement age to 65, raising the employee contribution rate to 7% & abolishing the "85 Rule". It

is the Government's intention to put this through Parliament in April 2005. It is expected that the same rules will be applied in Scotland one year later.

UNISON are campaigning against these changes and are to ballot the members on this subject. The TUC have organised a day of protest on Friday 18th February. More information will be in the next issue of "The Grapevine" Newsletter.

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