

Grapevine

UNISON

The Official Newsletter of *Angus Council Branch*

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You should have received your **AGM Papers** with this Newsletter.
If you did not then please contact your local steward or the Branch Office by
phone or email at the details above

AGM 2006

The Letham Hotel
28 February 2006

Buffet available from 5:15pm
Meeting commences 6:00pm

You will obviously have remembered about the AGM. It normally lasts no later than 7:30pm and it is your chance to meet fellow members, enjoy the buffet and air your views on current issues! So we hope to see you there, in fact why not convince your colleagues to come as well.

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Strike Ballot Announced

Members are to be balloted on strike action over the Scottish Executives determination to remove the 85 Rule from the Local Government Pension System (LGPS).

This intention was announced by UNISON's Scottish Organiser, Joe Di Paola at the Scottish Local Government Service Group Conference in Glasgow on 10 February.

Nine unions representing 1.5 million workers have agreed to ballot workers over planned cuts to the local government scheme.

UNISON, Amicus, TGWU, GMB, UCATT, CYWU, Napo, NUT and FBU agreed the strategy and this



Joe Di Paola - UNISON Scottish Organiser (Bargaining)

afternoon UNISON's industrial action committee authorised the ballot of one million of its members. The dispute is over the Local

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What Can You Do To Help Save Your Pension?

- Email your MSP and MP. Tell them of your dissatisfaction of the proposals to the LGPS in Scotland. You can use a draft letter which is available at <http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/pensions/pensionsemail.html>
- Recruit your colleagues to UNISON - **There is strength in numbers!**

Remember to use the FREEPOST address for any written correspondence

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

Health and Safety Info

How Safety Reps work within Angus Council

Firstly, let me clear up an issue that has confused some UNISON members in the past. Angus Council has a Safety Officer, Charlie McGlade, who works in the Safety Section which is part of the Chief Executive's Department. The Safety Officer, and the staff in his section, are employed by Angus Council and do not represent UNISON in any way.

UNISON Safety Reps are appointed by UNISON, having been nominated and seconded by UNISON members. These Safety Reps are just that; representatives, and they represent UNISON members. Safety Reps are not known as Safety Officers and should not be confused with the people employed to carry out that function for Angus Council.

The Branch has a Health & Safety Officer (Louise Trayner) who is nominated on a yearly basis, as are all Stewards, Departmental Reps and Safety Reps. Again, this is solely a post to represent UNISON members and is not part of the Council's Safety Section.

How Safety Reps work generally

Safety Reps are different from workplace stewards in that they have certain rights in law that stewards don't. Safety Reps are covered by the Safety Reps and Safety Committees Regulations 1977. This sets out the rights and entitlements of a safety rep.

For example, a steward must be accredited by the employer before carrying out their duties. A Safety Rep is appointed by the trade union and the employer has no say in the matter.

A steward can apply for time off to carry out their duties.

The employer may grant this **with or without pay**, or they may **refuse it**. A Safety Rep is entitled to **reasonable, paid** time off to carry out their duties.

A Safety Rep is entitled to request that the employer form a safety committee and the employer has 3 months within the date of request to do so.

A Safety Rep is also entitled to sit on the relevant safety committee and discuss safety issues.

A Safety Rep is also entitled to carry out the following duties:

- Carry out workplace inspections at least every 3 months
- Investigate problems raised by members
- Investigate accidents, including taking photographs as necessary

These rights aren't exhaustive but as you can see there are a number of issues that stewards wouldn't normally deal with. Safety Reps are entitled to paid time off for training as soon as possible after they are appointed.

Summary

Hopefully that has explained in basic terms what your Safety Reps do, and has removed any confusion that a UNISON Safety Rep is Angus Council's Safety Officer.

Should you require more information, please e-mail healthandsafety@unison-angus.org.uk

Louise Trayner

TUC CALLS ON BOSSES TO LISTEN TO HEARING ALERT

The TUC has teamed up with RNID to ask Britain's 28 million workers and their managers to 'break the sound barrier' and take the charity's new telephone hearing check by calling **0845 600 55 55**. The RNID initiative is aimed at the four million people in the UK who could benefit from wearing a

hearing aid, but who currently do nothing about it. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: 'Many older workers are struggling to get by at work either because they are too ashamed to admit to their hearing loss or because they have no idea what to do about it. Many may also be reluctant to advertise it for fear that their employers may treat them less favourably as a result. But good bosses know that it makes sense to do all they can to help employees be as productive as possible at work and so most will I'm sure be keen for their staff to take RNID's hearing check.'

RNID chief executive John Low said: 'Both noise induced and age related hearing loss can take a real toll on people's confidence in the workplace. RNID's telephone hearing check is a simple and non-intrusive way of finding out whether digital hearing aids and practical changes to your work environment could help you stay in work.' He added: 'Simple solutions such as amplified telephones and loop systems for hearing aid users can make the world of difference to someone with a hearing loss and enable employees to perform at their best.'

You can Telephone or Fax the Office

01307 468950

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Government Association's (LGA) proposals to cut pension rights, while refusing to agree protection for all but a few existing scheme members.

The new scheme would have people working as teaching assistants and police support staff losing out, but not the teachers and police officers they work alongside.

Talks to try to resolve the dispute, involving the government, the LGA, local government employers and the unions, have been taking place for the best part of a year.

UNISON general secretary, Dave Prentis, said this dispute is the biggest issue UNISON has faced for decades.

"It affects the rights of one million of our members who have paid 6% of their salaries into their pension scheme for decades to save for their retirement and are now being told that the deal is off," he said.

"The local government employers, the LGA and the government should be in no doubt of how serious we are. All we are asking is for members of the local government pension scheme to be treated fairly: the same way as other public sector workers.

"The clock is ticking, but there is a window of opportunity and I would urge everyone concerned to make

Pension Ballot

**The ballot opens on the 14 February for two weeks
Strike Action possible from 28 March**

the most of it."

The average pension for the scheme is £3,800 a year, but for women who make up 72% of scheme members, it is less than £2,000 a year.

The ballot opens on the 14 February for two weeks. Thereafter, if the result is "yes" for strike action then this will take place from 28 March 2006.

UNISON have challenged the Scottish Executive to produce the legal advice and the financial advice they have received on the Local Government Pension scheme and the 'Rule of 85' for discussion with local government employers and trade unions.

Joe di Paola, UNISON's Scottish organiser (Bargaining), said "Following Tom McCabe's statements in Parliament and in the media on the legal advice they had received saying that the Rule of 85 is discriminatory. Both ourselves and CoSLA asked for sight of that advice at our meeting yesterday and were refused.

"As Mr McCabe acknowledges, he

has seen the advice from UNISON and CoSLA. If the government is so sure of its advice that they are prepared to reject two contrary opinions, why are they frightened to show it to us?"

Both UNISON and CoSLA believe that the rule of 85 does not conflict with the EU Directive and have legal opinion to confirm this.

This view was further strengthened when Katharina von Schnurbein, the EU's spokeswoman on employment, social affairs and equal opportunities, said the Scottish Executive was wrong. She cited Article 6 of the directive, which states that governments can treat people differently on the grounds of age in certain circumstances.

Von Schnurbein added: "It's an artificial debate [and one that] is only going on in Britain. The directive has no influence on pension value or pension age. It is completely up to the member state. If they think it is reasonable for people to retire at 60, under EU law that is perfectly legal".

CONTACTS PLEA - NO EXPERIENCE REQUIRED

The network of workplace contacts has grown by 1 since the last newsletter thanks to Tara Watson in Social Work at Ravenswood, 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.

I would like to be a Workplace Contact

Name: _____

Workplace Address:

Contact Phone No: _____

You can Email the Office

office@unison-angus.org.uk

Snippets



what out of date. Angus Council are not very forthcoming with information to UNISON on

Have You Moved? Tell Us!

With the recent changes to members workplaces, i.e William Wallace House, Kingsmuir, etc, our Branch records are some

member changes and we rely on members, stewards and our contacts for information. To inform us of the changes please contact the Branch office by phone, fax, mail or email.

Rossie Resolved

The situation at Rossie Secure Accommodation Services has finally been resolved after a number of months of wrangling over changes to working arrangements and pay structures. The solution has meant the implementation of new work rotas with financial compensation included.

UNISON

Angus Council Branch How your Union works

This is the first in a series of brief articles about how UNISON works and how you contribute to your union. Each article will concentrate on one of the various committee structures that exist throughout UNISON.

UNISON members may vote on issues such as the forthcoming election of the union's General Secretary, for which papers will be issued shortly. UNISON members may highlight issues by contacting their steward. If necessary, it can be notified to the Branch Executive to be dealt with. They may also nominate stewards for the forthcoming AGM in February, or at any time throughout the year. Any member can be nominated as a steward, so if you are keen to become involved in UNISON, why not consider seeking nomination?

Since being nominated to the post, the Branch Communications Officer has implemented a number of measures to try to inform and involve members. This has included setting up a website and a newsletter. He has also managed to recruit workplace contacts – ordinary members who don't wish to become stewards, but who are happy to distribute information throughout the workplace and make sure it reaches the members. These people also help the Branch keep records updated by informing us when people have left the Employer or changed workplaces. Workplace Contacts have proved extremely valuable in helping the Branch to communicate with members. It would also help the Branch greatly if you would remember to update any home or workplace details if these have changed. This way we can make sure that you receive newsletter, AGM papers etc.

UNISON is a member-led union. Although we have full time officials we are not organised in the same way as other unions. Branch duties are carried out by stewards and Branch Officers who are not employed by UNISON, but by the organisations comprising the Branch, such as Angus Council.

The Branch Secretary could be considered to be the equivalent of other unions' full time Branch officials. Each Branch has a Regional Officer. However, Regional Officers cannot take action or become involved with Branch issues unless invited to do so by the Branch.

Stewards : Each department may nominate one or more steward (depending on number of members). Stewards must be nominated by two UNISON members and must be renominated annually at the AGM. If more than the allowed number of stewards is nominated then an election will be held in that department to determine who will become a steward.

Departmental Reps : These stewards will elect from their number a Departmental Rep who will represent that department on the Branch Executive Committee. In addition, other Branch members from outwith Angus Council, such as Tayside Valuation Joint Board and Angus College also have representation on the committee.

Branch Officers : A list of our Branch Officers can be seen on the website and on the AGM papers being issued shortly. Branch Officers must also be nominated by two UNISON members and must be renominated annually. In the event of more than one nomination for each post, an election will be held at the AGM. You do not have to be a steward or Departmental Rep to be a Branch Officer.

Branch Executive Committee : The Branch Executive is the local committee for each individual branch. The committee comprises the Branch Officers and

Departmental Reps and meets approximately every 6 weeks. The committee will make decisions on behalf of the Branch where authorised and consult members where necessary. Members of this committee sit on joint Council/Union committees giving UNISON's position on issues affecting the members.

It is also members of this committee who form working groups to discuss issues raised by members and pursue these with the Employer. At the moment, stewards have been carrying out research into fuel issues such as car running costs and taxation, while holding meetings with Angus Council to discuss this.

Stewards receive minutes of the Branch Executive meetings and updates on things like the pay claim. They are expected to distribute such information back to the members.

If members have a problem, their first point of contact should be their steward. The steward should be able to help them, but may have to contact other stewards or Branch Officers who have more experience in some subjects.

When stewards meet at the Branch Executive committee then information is shared. For example, at a recent meeting it emerged that members in one department were not being paid a lunch allowance in accordance with Council rules as their posts allegedly didn't qualify. Another steward who had previously tackled this problem was able to provide a list of posts that don't qualify for a lunch allowance and thus prove that these particular members were entitled to a lunch allowance, in accordance with Council rules.

The above is a brief explanation of what the Branch Executive Committee does. Future articles will explain about national committees and conferences and how the Branch feeds into those.

You can visit the branch website

www.unison-angus.org.uk