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## **AGM ONLINE 2021**

All members are urged to attend the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the branch which will for the first time ever take place online. Officer presentations have been recorded for you to view in your own time between 22nd - 31st March . A live Microsoft Teams meeting will then follow on Wed 31 March, where members are invited to come in and ask questions & find out more about UNISON Scottish Borders. Additionally members who attend the AGM will be entered in to a £100 voucher prize draw. **Details on how to join online inside.**

# IMPACT OF COVID ON THE WORKFORCE

by Kay Marie Hughes, Branch Secretary

Throughout the first wave UNISON and SBC worked closely together to ensure that our members were protected throughout. We were able to feed back some of the experiences of our members and the difficulties they faced. SBC's response was always swift, when these issues arose and they took part in clear and open dialog.

We worked with Education, representing all non-teaching staff and I attended some of the school health and safety assessments on behalf of the Joint Trade Unions, whilst planning the safe return of staff and children.

We met twice weekly at first, then moving to weekly as time progressed. Although we no longer have weekly meeting, UNISON has continued to be involved with several key services, making sure we get things right for everyone.

When the call came for shielding staff to return to work, we worked with these individuals and HR to find ways to allow the most vulnerable to feel safe in their roles. For those that continued to be high risk, we looked at ways to reduce the risk or when unable to return, offer some protection of their positions.

We saw outbreaks in our care homes, home care services and depots. We continued to support our members, offer advice and raise issues with SBC when needed.

Unfortunately we were required to represent staff whom have failed to follow the Government Guidelines and put themselves and others at risk. We also saw a number of staff who have broken social media policy and have supported members through the disciplinary process. We have also been committed to reaching out to our members by using our own social media and website to warn members of the potential risks of breaking Government Guidance or Council Policy on social media.

Many SBC staff have gone above and beyond what is required of them, whether this is in a work capacity or helping out in their community. We have seen staff who have been unable to work in their usual work place volunteer to work in care, transport waste collection operatives or work in hubs.

This Wave Now after a summer where we saw restrictions reduced, we find ourselves deep within another wave of a much more virulent form of Covid .

UNISON continues working closely with several departments within the council to ensure the safety of our members and the smooth running of the service.

## AGM DETAILS

To watch prerecorded AGM reports from your branch officers at your own leisure please visit:

[usbpsbagm2021.org.uk](https://usbpsbagm2021.org.uk)

We will also be hosting two online meetings for members via Microsoft Teams on Wednesday 31st March.

The first meeting is for NHS members and will run from: 6pm - 7pm.

The second meeting is for SBC and community and voluntry sector mebers and will run from 7pm - 8pm.

For joining instructions email: Terry.Dunthorne@unisonscotborders.org.uk



# ...IMPACT OF COVID CONTINUED

An excellent example of the impact of collaborative working is the recent events within the Enhanced Provision. We were contacted by several members across the Borders who worked with the most vulnerable children, who felt that they were not safe due to the nature of their work and the new more contagious strain of the virus. UNISON and our sister unions, met with HR and Education to convey these concerns and request that they consider reducing numbers of children in the classroom at any one time. We also asked that they offer these workers the same respect as some of our colleagues offering high level care within social care and health.

I am pleased to report that less than 48 hours after that meeting I was contacted by the same members again. This time saying that the majority of the children had been moved to part time, thus reducing the numbers in the classroom. They had also received a new risk assessment which was being strictly adhered to and that they had dates for their Covid vaccines. These staff now feel safe but more importantly they feel valued and listened to by their employer.

There are other departments that have worked in this way, such as Assets and Infrastructure with regular fortnightly meetings with managers of various services. Here we have clear and open dialog which we feel not only benefits our members but also the service.

There are of course, concerns that we need to share with yourselves going forward. We have asked to have an open dialog with SB Cares, after becoming concerned that we do not have a clear picture of the demands the service is facing and the impact on staff and the service moving forward. These are the staff whom have worked diligently throughout the pandemic and continue to do so. I have regular contact from staff who are feeling that they have little left to give.

One example was a member of staff whom was asked to work during her days off, feeling exhausted and unable to cope this request, she described this pushed her over the edge and she went off sick due to stress. As a Union it is our responsibility to raise the impact on Covid on our front line staff. We want to work with SBC and SB Cares to look for ways to support both the staff and the service given the continued pressures. UNISON requires a continued commitment to open dialog through meaningful consultation and joint working. We would like to use every opportunity to discuss how we can all work together with SBC to protect our front line staff as we continue through this pandemic and beyond. Our members need to feel safe and valued by their employer. We can only do this with the continued support of our members and call on them to get more involved with their UNION whether this is as a work place representative or as a UNISON Steward.

## NHS UPDATE

At the start of the pandemic and on behalf of UNISON we pushed our health board and our Scottish government to task on its failure to provide adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) for our NHS staff. We fought daily to ensure our members concerns were held. We found out that staff were having to wash single use equipment and escalated it to the NHS board. We found that our BAME members were disproportionately more at risk from COVID and brought to our HR attention to include a risk assessment to keep our BAME members safe, reducing health inequalities and addressing systemic racism.

We supported our bank staff that were in financial detriment during lockdown and fought for fixed term contracts. We launched a Wellbeing group to give practical and psychological support for our staff through fundraising. Some of the initiatives were supplying 'Refuelling Stations' for our staff, giving out water bottles, snacks. At the height of the pandemic, we were inundated with calls from distressed and exhausted staff, desperate and fearful about lack of PPE, about being ill or self isolating and lack of testing.

# NHS AND COUNCIL WORKERS DEMAND £2K PAY RISE

Newly elected general secretary Christine McAnea joined health members from across Scotland in a live Facebook event on 26 January to demand a £2,000 pay rise for all NHS workers. This followed UNISON Scotland lodging a similar £2,000 pay claim for council workers who are saying they will no longer stand for being the 'poor relations' of the public sector'. The NHS #OneTeam2K campaign would mean at least £1 an hour increase across the whole NHS team with minimum wages in the health service in Scotland going above £20,400 a year for the first time. Tom Waterson, chair of UNISON Scotland Health Committee, said: "Scotland's health workers have stepped up to the plate during these unprecedented times, putting not only their lives but the lives of their families on the line. "Years of pay freezes and below inflation wage rises have seen their pay fall in real terms over the last decade. Now is the time not only to fix this but to show our appreciation to this dedicated workforce." The event launched a new campaign video and outlined details of the next stages of the campaign.

Council workers' claim Council workers have gone above and beyond in "keeping us safe and our services going" during the pandemic and they have signalled they are no longer willing to be treated as the poor relations of the public sector as they launched a £2,000 for 2021/2022.

The full claim includes:

- A £2,000 flat rate increase to all spinal column points, or 6%, whichever is greater (based on a 37 hour week).
- A minimum rate of pay of £10.50 per hour.
- A separate, additional payment towards pay restoration.
- No less than parity with other local government groups.
- All professional costs associated with the role to be met by the employer.
- Looking at ways to achieve a no-detriment reduction in the working week.

Johanna Baxter, UNISON head of local government, said: "The moral and economic imperatives for providing local government workers with a substantial pay increase are overwhelming. "In a country where over 230,000 children are living in poverty and we face an economic depression like no other there is no better way to lift people out of poverty and stimulate economic recovery than putting money into the pockets of low-paid workers who have already borne the brunt of a decade of austerity, it just takes political will to do so. "These workers have gone above and beyond in keeping us safe and our services going during the period of the pandemic. "No longer can they be treated as the poor relations of the public sector when it comes to decent pay and reward."



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