

Branch Secretary's Report to Annual General Meeting – March 2024

The year 2023 continued to be an extremely difficult year in the working lives of UNISON members. The cost-of-living crisis has been particularly hard for those UNISON members in low paid jobs.

Our members continue in protecting and caring for the most vulnerable, keeping communities safe and well, whether in social care, cleaning, schools, refuse collection, community safety and many more services, both in the council and also in the private, voluntary and independent sectors.

The current financial crisis is putting a great strain on the ability of the public sector to provide the services that we have all paid for. In the London Borough of Enfield, the services to the public are being reduced year on year.

I know the levels of stress members have faced, worried about their health and that of their families, financial hardship, job cuts and redundancies. As with last year, our branch reps have worked incredibly hard to provide support for members during these difficult times. As well as supporting members with workplace issues, the branch has been working and campaigning to protect jobs and services across the council.

The Numbers

Currently we have 2498 full working members which is broadly similar to last year's figure. Of those 2498 members, 1305 work for the London Borough of Enfield with the remaining 1,193 working for the other 214 employers.

In addition, we have 403 retired members.

Although still primarily a Local Authority Branch, we currently organise across 215 separate employers.

Stewards/Activists

We have currently 40 activists of which 29 are ERA-accredited stewards and 11 are Health & Safety Representatives. The Branch is currently trying to ensure all its stewards are ERA accredited. With regards to Health & Safety, we are trying to encourage more activists to undertake basic training.

Case Work

The amount of casework has continued over the last 12 months, mostly as budget pressures across the Council and in schools, begin to bite. Representation of individual members is our core activity alongside management policy/strategy meetings. We have represented approximately 218 members at disciplinary, grievance and other management meetings.

This continues to put an enormous strain on those undertaking casework. It would not have been possible to service this many cases if we had not been working virtually.

We estimate that over the same period we have given advice to members on over 1500 occasions. This highlights the extra workload and stress that our members are

enduring as result of the cost-of-living crisis. We always aim to give excellent support to all our members on any issues and are proud to assist. Our UNISON solicitors continue to represent members in a variety of legal matters. The help we give to individual members ranges from early intervention preventing the use of formal procedures to successfully pursuing litigation and resulting in significant compensation payments.

Welfare Support

Our National Welfare Fund continues to support and make grants to members facing financial hardship. This has been extremely useful in providing emergency relief to our members in dire need. This year our members have had to face significant cost-of-living increases. Applications for fuel grants have been oversubscribed. UNISON Welfare had to distribute funds on a first come first serve basis. The Branch continues to be an official distributor of foodbank vouchers and has seen reliance on foodbanks continue to increase during 2023/24. The Branch Welfare Officer has supported our members with applications for financial assistance.

Branch Office

The Branch Office has been relocated to the first floor of the Civic Centre by the LBE, to make way for the refurbishment of the 2nd floor in the Civic Centre. The move has been a success, and we are more visible to staff working in the Civic,

The office staffed on a part time basis with someone in every day of the week. However, staff can be reached via email each day and we hope to respond within 48 hours.

In 2020 we refreshed our I.T. and enabled all office staff and caseworkers to work from home and to access our virtual office. All staff now have the ability to attend meetings via Zoom or Microsoft Teams. This method is becoming much more popular with all employers and frees up valuable travel time.

Branch Committee

The Branch Committee meets on Teams every 4 weeks to discuss the major challenges facing our members. All activists are members of the committee and are invited to attend. The Branch Committee is also attended by our UNISON Regional Officer and Regional Organiser.

Management Meetings

UNISON meets every fortnight with the Head of H.R. and relevant managers to discuss all proposed reorganisations and changes to policies that affect staff. This gives us the opportunity to challenge the plans and change the way things are implemented. We also meet regularly with both the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council to ensure that our members are represented at all levels.

Paul Bishop