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a million voices for public services

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Scotland in UNISON

scottish council activists bulletin Use these stories in your branch newsletter or circulate the pdf version to members

COUNCILS CAN'T SURVIVE MORE CUTS

UNISON members have been campaigning across Scotland as councils reel from another huge round of cuts.

Over 200 trade unionists and community campaigners lobbied Edinburgh council on 12 February against plans that could see 1,200 jobs go 'dressed up as a reorganisation'.

Glasgow UNISON lobbied on 19 February against £29 million in cuts along with other unions and groups including the Learning Disability Alliance.

They were urging the council to use reserves and borrowing powers to avoid cuts while building a mass campaign to get more money from national government.

"There is plenty of money in our economy – it is just in the wrong hands or lying in the banks of big business", said a joint union leaflet.

Aberdeenshire UNISON called the impact of a three year cuts plan 'devastating'.

'There is plenty of money in our economy – it is just in the wrong hands'

Glasgow joint unions

At the Edinburgh lobby John Stevenson, local UNISON President, attacked the austerity policies that have led to 40,000 job losses in Scottish councils.

He told demonstrators: "The vicious circle of cuts leading to fewer jobs, lower pay and less tax coming in, leading to even more cuts is a stupid way to run any economy.

"Add to that the failure to address local government finance and the council tax and you have attack upon attack on council services and the people who provide them.

"Austerity is a choice by Westminster and the cuts to local government are a choice by Holyrood.



'If we don't take a stand now, we won't have a city left', UNISON's Tam McKirdy tells STV news at the Edinburgh lobby

"But even within those strictures, the least we can ask is that our local councillors stand up for the services they were elected to protect."

"Local councils have been an easy target as politicians collude with the myth of us being an army of bureaucrats.

"An army of bureaucrats giving personal care to our most vulnerable and being paid a pittance for it?"

"An army of bureaucrats working way beyond their contracted hours to keep children safe?" he asked.

"An army of bureaucrats

getting up at god-forsaken hours to slog round collecting bins with more and more physical pressure piled upon them?"

"Council services are delivered by people, not computers. A job cut is a service cut", he said.

More on page 3: Speaking up for the workers left behind

One million women demanding change equals hope

One million women demanding an alternative can make a difference. One million women demanding change equals hope, wrote Jane Carolan in the Morning Star during last month's UNISON Women's Conference.

Jane, a UNISON NEC member for Scotland, stressed the potential influence of the union's women members on the outcome of the General Election.

"It is time that we women

started shouting our concerns and demanding answers, because women have plenty to complain about", she wrote.

"We are being disproportionately affected in all areas of life by the austerity economics foisted on this country.

"The country can afford the services that UNISON members provide - services that save, protect and enrich lives - if we stop wasting money on costly privatisations and

pointless reorganisations and make the banks, big corporations and the super-rich pay a fairer share in tax.

"Cuts to funding are becoming critical, to the point that local authorities could be on the verge of collapse - yet if the Tories continue in power there's more to come."

There is an alternative and Jane pointed to the UNISON manifesto 'Securing the Future of Public Services', available on our website.

'It is time that we women started shouting our concerns and demanding answers.' JANE CAROLAN

"We each have a contribution to make. Do not assume that neighbours and workmates vote. Do not assume that they are aware of the alternatives.

"We need a million female members speaking up for public services because they care about the services they



deliver and the services that they use." See the full piece at www.morningstaronline.co.uk/

UNISON wins Comhairle living wage backdating

Western Isles Branch has welcomed the Comhairle's agreement to backdate payment of the Living Wage to its lowest-earning staff to April 2013.

Back in November the Comhairle, following an intensive campaign by UNISON, agreed to pay the Living Wage for 2014 exclusive of Distant Islands Allowance.

However, the council disagreed with the union over its obligation to also backdate living wage payments to April 2013 - which UNISON maintained had already been agreed as part of a national pay award.

Branch Secretary, Alison MacCorquodale said: "UNISON welcomes the Comhairle's agreement to finally backdate payment of the Living Wage to April 2013. We pushed the Comhairle hard to sort this out before Christmas, but they appeared to be burying their heads in the sand."

UNISON had lobbied the council since 2012 to become a Living Wage employer. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar was one of only two councils across Scotland which had not fully implemented it.

Branch Organiser, Flora Somerville, said: "This will make a real difference to our lowest paid members - Decent wages for working people is at the core of a healthy local economy."

The branch is committed to ensuring the Living Wage is fully consolidated into pay scales.

Women's prison plans scrapped

The Scottish Government has scrapped plans for a new women's prison following pressure from campaigners including UNISON.

The union represents many workers in criminal justice services.

During the campaign, Stephen Smellie, Deputy Convener of UNISON Scotland, and Chair of the union's Social Work Issues Group said: "Prison is a very expensive way of not solving problems. Committing large sums of money to expanding prison capacity is to spend money on failure.

"Far better than spending some £60m on a new institution, with associated running costs, would be investment in the services which can help tackle the root causes of women's offending - poverty, substance and alcohol misuse, mental health problems, histories of domestic and sexual abuse.

"Spending which attempts to tackle these represents a far better use of public resource in a time of acute pressures on public spending."

UNISON and the General Election Challenge parties on what they'll do for our people

Just months of potential political campaigning away from a general election in May, UNISON's number one campaigning priority for the first half of the new year must be to ensure a change of government at Westminster.

It is not uncommon for elections to be described as the most vital in a generation. However, given the Tory plans for public spending there can be little doubt that the outcome of this election will have a huge impact upon UNISON members, their families, communities and the public services in which we work.

In Scotland the 2015 general election marks the start of a three year programme of elections with the Scottish Parliament in 2016 and the Scottish local government elections in 2017.

There has been a failure of late for politicians of the mainstream political parties to offer a compelling vision for the future, partly a consequence of a convergence to the centre, which makes it harder for voters to distinguish between them, even as they continue to knock lumps out of one another and their records.

The Scottish Referendum campaign of 2014 saw a resurgence in political engagement, voter registration and activity which translated into a remarkable turnout.

During the election campaign we will strive to keep UNISON policies and objectives fore and



In the first of a series of articles on the web and here, UNISON Scottish Secretary Mike Kirby lays out UNISON's plan to get our members' issues at the centre of the election debates.

centre of the political debate. UNISON priorities are an end to Tory austerity, fair employment and trade union rights, pay and public services.

Most public services are devolved with the Scottish Parliament having responsibility for health, education, local government, police, fire & rescue and the community and voluntary sector. However, the decisions taken by the government at Westminster on public spending affect all nations of the UK.

If we needed any reminder of the impact on UNISON members of another Tory led government, the Autumn Statement made it clear that they plan to reduce public services to a level not seen since the 1930's. As the UK government's own Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) put it;

"Between 2009-10 and 2019-20, spending on public services, administration and grants by central government is projected to fall from

21.2 per cent to 12.6 per cent of GDP and from £5,650 to £3,880 per head in 2014-15 prices. Around 40 per cent of these cuts would have been delivered during this Parliament, with around 60 per cent to come during the next."

The precise targets for these cuts have not been identified and therefore it is difficult to work out the Barnett consequential in any detail. However, even if there is some protection for schools and health spending, the consequences for the already stretched Scottish budget will be hugely negative.

The UNISON Scotland Damage series has brought an important focus of the impact of austerity on the public services workforce and the quality of delivery of services to vulnerable communities.

Our UNISON 'Worth It' pay campaign has brought an important focus on the impact upon members and the wider community of pay restraint and cuts in the real value of earnings. This has included

contrasts with top pay and the impact of higher cost of living on members.

The OBR revised down its forecast for earnings growth for this year and next and the measure of real earnings forecast does not return to its pre-crisis level within the next five years. The OBR, while choosing its words carefully, is clearly sceptical about the Chancellor's post-election plans for further austerity.

This theme was picked up by the Institute for Fiscal Studies which poured scorn on the Chancellor in its assessment of the Autumn Statement:

"How do we get to this sunlit upland in which we have a budget surplus? Spending cuts on a colossal scale is how, taking total government spending to its lowest level as a proportion of national income since before the last war...it is surely incumbent on anyone set upon taking the size of the state to its smallest in many generations to tell us what that means.

"How will these cuts be implemented? What will local government, the defence force, the transport system look like in this world? Is this a fundamental redesigning of the role of the state?"

The role of the state, or the state's contract with the citizen.

That's what UNISON will continue to strive to protect by challenging all political parties on what they will do for our people.

Branch launches conduct pack for nurses

Lanarkshire Health UNISON has launched a resource pack for nurses in a proactive move to support them in meeting the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) codes of conduct.

As well as NMC information, the pack - designed to be wipeable and comply with infection control precautions so it can be used at work - contains a host of useful UNISON material.

"I had noticed an increase in nurses being referred to the NMC and felt that we should perhaps be more proactive in trying to prevent referrals rather than having to react and present cases for members", said branch secretary Margo Cranmer.

"We held a meeting of our nursing sector and have produced resource folders which we are delivering to all wards on the three acute hospital sites as well as to all of the primary care sites."

The folders contain the NMC



Margo (left) launches the pack with Executive Director NMAHP, senior nurses, and stewards Margaret Anne Hunter, Lynn Li and Mary Neilson.

code of conduct, NMC guidance on raising concerns, administration of medicines standards, guidance on clinical documentation, staff governance standard, as well as information on UNISON professional indemnity cover.

Other UNISON information

includes guidance on literature search, There For You, benefits, UNISON Be Safe forms and duty of care handbook

And since these packs will go out to all staff, the branch has included the all-important UNISON application forms.

"We plan to continually add

information to the folders such as infection control and tissue viability information", said Margo.

"This allows us to have continual communication with members and potential members."

The folders have been approved by the Executive Director of the Nursing Midwifery & Allied Health Professions Research Unit (NMAHP) and the NMAHP Senior Leaders.

Margo added: "We have delivered some folders to some areas and they have been very well received by staff and senior charge nurses.

"We also plan to adapt the folders for Allied Health Professionals and other staff groups. We also hope this will help as a recruitment tool."

UNISON slams student mental health nurse freeze

UNISON Scotland reacted with 'disappointment and concern' last month following the Scottish Government announcement that it planned a freeze next year in the number of student nurses received onto its intake in mental health nursing.

Gordon McKay, chair of UNISON Scotland's Nursing and Midwifery Sector Committee said: "In the last decade we have

seen a huge increase in dispensed prescribed medication used in the treatment of mental illness.

"Along with other rises there has been an increase of 229% in drugs prescribed for use in dementia, and on average one Scot in eight now uses an anti-depressant every day."

"In the last five years however" said Gordon, "at the same time as this steep climb in the use of medication, and as needs have become more complex, there has

actually been a reduction in the number of registered mental health nurses working in the NHS in Scotland.

"While medication clearly has an important role to play in the treatment of mental illnesses it is the highly skilled involvement of nursing staff that makes the biggest difference to people when they are at their most vulnerable.

UNISON will highlight the need for more mental health nurses in our campaign for a more caring and compassionate Scotland.'
GORDON MCKAY

"UNISON Scotland will continue to highlight the need for more mental health nurses as we continue our campaign for a more caring and compassionate Scotland."



Speaking up for the workers left behind

From page 1

An Aberdeenshire branch press release warned of the effect on staff left behind after previous job losses.

Branch secretary Inez Teece said: "In many areas where people directly serve the public we are seeing increased levels of stress and sickness.

"This is bad for our members but also bad for the services that the council provides", she said.

"What we are seeing is that cuts are not cost effective, and really don't make economic sense in the long run. Further job losses will only make matters worse and UNISON will fight to protect jobs and services."

Keeping the plates spinning

UNISON Scotland presented MSPs with the human cost of cuts across all services before the parliament's public services debate in January.

An MSP briefing highlighted the race to the bottom in social care. It showed how corners are being cut to give the impression that services are being maintained - whether it's food sampling, inspections, hospital cleaning or the time elderly people are allocated for care.

"Preventative work is being abandoned as staff focus on the basic statutory functions", said the briefing.

Staff are being moved around to manage one crisis after another. "Keeping the plates spinning" is a very common comment from staff, the union told MSPs.

The briefing warned of growing levels of stress and related health issues and junior staff having to take key decisions, without support from more experienced staff.

Cuts in support staff mean front line staff have to spend more time on paperwork, made worse by poor IT systems.

Often they face violence from service users, frustrated by service cuts and delays.



Clockwise from above. Budget Lobby People Make Glasgow on 19 February; Glasgow campaigners turned out to support City of Edinburgh on 12 February along with Lothian Health Branch. *Glasgow photo courtesy of Billy Knox Photography.*

Join the STUC lobbies of party conferences No to Austerity, Yes to Decent Work

This is the message the STUC is taking to all party conferences with lobbies and leafletting events. As we went to print, there was a lobby of the Tory Party conference in Edinburgh on 20 February.

Get along to the next lobbies at:-
Labour, 7 March - Edinburgh,
Lib Dems, 21 March - Aberdeen,
SNP - to be confirmed.
See www.ajustscotland.org for details

Stornoway call centre jobs saved

UNISON has helped to ensure 27 jobs are retained at the Consumer Advice Direct (CAD) call handling centre in Stornoway after members were issued with redundancy notices.

Flora Somerville, UNISON Branch Organiser, met recently with local politicians and senior management from Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) - which currently contracts out the delivery of the consumer advisory service to CAD.

Flora said: "We understand that following our intervention, a further one-year contract is being negotiated which safeguards our members' jobs for twelve months whilst consideration is given to the longer term.

"There was the additional risk that under a new contract, CAD would opt not to continue in Stornoway and that jobs would transfer to Glasgow.

"We have however received assurances from CAS that they are fully committed to keeping the Stornoway call centre in operation."

Letters dated 1 January 2015 had been issued to all staff advising them that CAD 'decided to make them redundant' with effect from 31 March.

UNISON, Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE) and Outer Hebrides parliamentary representatives have since been in discussions with CAS about their intentions for the call centre.

Located at Gleann Seileach, Stornoway, Citizens Advice Direct handles consumer calls from all over Scotland and deals with hundreds of enquiries each day.

HIE originally invested over £400,000 in the call-centre, taking the view that the company would expand in future.

Skills Development: Recruiting at pensions roadshows

by James Corry
Skills Development Scotland branch

UNISON Skills Development Scotland branch made great use of the pension changes to recruit members.

Activists worked in partnerships with SPF, UNISON Scotland and Skills Development Scotland to run a series of pension road shows held in Edinburgh, Dundee, Glasgow and Lanarkshire.

A final one is planned for

Inverness for 3 March 2015. The aims of the event are to inform staff about changes to their pension scheme.

UNISON activists were there to answer questions, remind people that UNISON had worked hard to negotiate the new pensions scheme and to use the events to talk to potential members.

Branch pension champion Bernadette Lavelle said, "We have been working in partnership

with Skills Development Scotland to inform 1,200 staff across the country about the new pension scheme which starts on 1 April 2015.

"The branch has secured the offer of free independent financial advice, paid for by the employer, for those who wish additional support with their financial retirement planning. It's important that UNISON plays its full role in helping members to understand the new scheme."

Branch pension champions provided members with the rationale behind the changes from their trade union's perspective.

Bernadette added: "The sessions also provided us with the opportunity to remind both members and potential members of the negotiated changes UNISON was able to secure and the wider benefits of being a UNISON member and, of course, to get a few more Join UNISON membership forms filled out."

UNISON Scotland Communications Awards 2015

Scotland's best in communications



by John Stevenson
SiU editor

It's all very well representing and organising but if members don't know it's happening they can't be involved.

That's why communicating and campaigning is so important and the great work that goes on in the union was celebrated at the Scottish Communications Awards last month.

The judging was tight this year and the narrowest of margins separated many of the entries.

This was recognised by Jane Aitchison, vice chair of the Communications and Campaigns Committee who said: "A good starting place is to congratulate all the entrants for the work they do – especially when we know so much communications work is done in activists' own time."

Best Campaign awards, sponsored by Uia

Uia's Gold Award went to the **Scottish Young Members** for a campaign that used the key issue of housing and young people to reach out and promote the union, using genuine research, street campaigning, great materials and a major recruitment pay off.

The Silver Award went to **Aberdeenshire** for the best planned out and evaluated campaign. In an object lesson in building on an issue – this one was the social work contempt of court issue - the branch went out on a programme of visits to social work workplaces using that issue to engage staff and recruit members and contacts.

The Bronze Award went to the **Makingitwork** campaign from **Police Staff Scotland** that used great graphics and harnessed Facebook and twitter highlighting



Uia's Sara McLelland presents Aberdeenshire's Kate Ramsden with the Silver award for campaigning. The Gold was won by the Young Members who were unable to be present.

cuts but also valuing what members do.

Best printed

The Communications and Campaigns Gold Award went to **Scottish Borders Public Services Branch**. This was a lively newsheet, edited by Campbell Hogarth and Shirley Burrell, with great headlines that has been at the root of building a brand new joint Health and Local Government Branch.

The Silver Award went to **Police Staff Scotland** for a well laid out magazine edited by David Malcolm that covers all the main issues for members and got bonus points for its monthly frequency.

The Bronze Award – sponsored by the TC Branding Group – went to **Aberdeenshire branch** with the best designed magazine, edited by Morag Lawrence, that

makes great use of local and national news. The feature on austerity was great example of using Scottish resources.

Best online presence

The Gold Award went to a new site from a not so new branch, **Dumfries and Galloway Local Government**, which has an eye-catching design, a host of information and good use of video www.unisondumfries.org.uk.

The Silver Award sponsored by Thompsons Solicitors went to **Stirling Local Government Branch** for a well designed and well thought out website with lots of useful information for members. www.stirlingunison.co.uk

The Bronze Award sponsored by Lighthouse Financial went to a new website from the **University of the West of Scotland Branch** that is crisp and clean with lots of



Martin Edgerton from LV presents Lindsay McNaught, Gas Branch Scotland, with the special recruitment award.



Dumfries and Galloway's Phil McGroggan picks up online award and Campbell Hogarth of the new Scottish Borders Public Services branch wins gold for the best printed publication.



useful and topical information. uwsunison.org.uk

Recruitment Award

The Liverpool Victoria Recruitment Award this year went to **Gas Branch Scotland** for harnessing the Lock holiday pay case to recruit 200 members which is a huge success given the

size of the branch.

Sponsors

Thanks again this year to the sponsors of the communications awards. Gold took away £150, Silver £100 and Bronze £50 each.



Stop dumping on waste management staff

UNISON Scotland surveys of staff working in waste management across Scotland's local authorities have revealed a workforce under pressure facing increasing targets and declining budgets.

In a report **Dumped On – Working in Scotland's Waste Management Services**, the union details the experience and expectations of a workforce trying to do their job in a constantly changing environment.

Waste management has



become a more demanding task in recent years as demands for more and more complex recycling have been put on staff at the same time as budgets have

been put under pressure.

These burdens are set to increase as targets for more waste to be recycled or reused are going up and council budgets are being squeezed still further.

UNISON Scotland Head of Bargaining and Campaigns Dave Watson said: "The job is treating rubbish – It shouldn't mean getting rubbish treatment. Councils and the Scottish Government should start realising that. They can't expect staff to meet more stringent targets when they are being cut back.

"Waste management staff are vital for both environmental health and the health of the environment. Every political party claims they want to increase recycling rates and is signed up to the idea of a Zero Waste Scotland. They need to be prepared to put their money where litter is.

"The aim is that more waste is reused and recycled rather than put in landfill – well if councils and

government want less waste – they are going to have to invest in more people to make that happen."

The report is the latest in UNISON Scotland's 'Damage' series showing the real day to day effects of austerity, on jobs like cleaners, OTs, home carers and hospital porters. Check the reports out on the website.

We want to hear your news
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