



Aberdeen City Branch

October 2018



# mentalhealth MATTERS



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***Help and support is available from your local steward. Find out who they are online!***



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## **Are you OK? UNISON Aberdeen City launches mental health strategy**

UNISON Aberdeen City will put in place a mental health and wellbeing strategy to support its members.

Mental health issues in the workplace have become an important topic for both trades unions and employers in the last few years. It is one of the major sources of sickness absence at Aberdeen City Council.

Low levels of reporting due to the stigma attached to mental illness is a serious and worrying trend. This means people might not be seeking help that could be available early enough to prevent the condition

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deteriorating and becoming a source of long term absence for the member of staff. To counter this, it is important that key staff within the workplace are trained to recognise symptoms and support early intervention.

### **Training union reps to help you**

The first stage in the branch strategy will be holding Scottish Mental Health First Aid training for Stewards and Caseworkers. This is due to take place on the 8th and 9th of November in Marischal College. Anyone handling casework for UNISON should consider applying to be part of the training, **by emailing UNISON Steward Les Tarr on letarr@aberdeencity.gov.uk** as soon as possible. There will be up to 16 places available.

The aim of the strategy and training is not to produce clinically trained people to cure mental illness in the

**Need help at work with mental health?**

**Contact a UNISON steward or talk to There For You on 020 7121 5620.**

**If you're feeling depressed, suicidal, or just need someone to talk to, you can also call Samaritans on 116 123 or jo@smaritans.org.**

work place, but to provide stewards and caseworkers with the tools to recognise symptoms and to direct members to the best sources of help.

### **Why is mental health such a problem?**

There's a stigma around mental health at work. Being stressed and anxious can be framed as your own fault, or something you should just get over. Someone with depression can be accused of being grumpy or just having a bad day. But anyone can suffer from poor mental health, just like poor physical health. We sometimes think of being "mentally ill" as conditions like schizophrenia or suicidal thoughts, developing a sense of fear and "other" about it. But that's just one part of the story.

In 2014/15, 43% of days lost at work due to absence in the UK are caused by mental ill health – some 9.9 million. We don't talk about our mental health enough and often don't receive the support we really need. A survey conducted by the Guardian in 2015 about stress in the public sector found that 76% of people took less than a half hour break per day, and 19% took none at all. A further 77% felt overworked and 53% felt stressed a lot of the time.

Every day dozens of colleagues say "hi, how are you" as they walk past, expecting the usual "fine, you?" If they stopped walking and really listened to you, would they hear more than you're letting on?

SHOW RACISM THE RED CARD 

**I AM  
SUPPORTING**



**FRIDAY 5<sup>th</sup>  
OCTOBER 2018**

**#WRD18**

**Show Racism the Red Card** are holding the fourth Wear Red Day this year. This is a great chance to get involved in spreading the message of anti racism and stand in solidarity.

To take part, all you need to do is wear any red item of clothing, this could range from a red t-shirt to red socks. We would also like to ask that each person who takes part to donate £1 to the organisation. Please take a picture on the day and upload on social media with the hashtags **#WRD18 #StandingInSolidarity #EndRacism #ShowRacismtheRedCard**

Show Racism the **Red Card** is an anti-racism education charity, established in 1996. Working daily in schools delivering anti-racism workshops to more than 50,000 young people every year, while also providing training to teachers. Despite our efforts, young people continue to be victims of racial abuse every day.

## Number of assaults on staff too high, says UNISON

UNISON highlighted the high number of assaults on Aberdeen City Council staff with Councillors.

Staff Governance Committee was also told in September that there were 77 physical assaults on Council staff between April and June 2018. UNISON Branch Health & Safety Officer, Alison Robertson, questioned officers on whether investigations had been carried out into all of these allegations.

Everyone should have the right to work in an environment free from harm. As a trade union, we are absolutely clear that violence at work is unacceptable. Such a high level of assaults needs to be tackled quickly.

If you have concerns about health and safety in your workplace, get in touch with your UNISON steward.

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## Preparing for TOM in 2019

This year saw the first phase of the Target Operating Model result in up to 370 job cuts. We lost many friends and colleagues through voluntary severance and early retirement or new opportunities.

It was a challenging campaign bringing out the very best from branch activists and members. Our stewards supported people across the Council to ensure employment rights were respected and they got the best possible deal. Negotiations behind the scenes ensured our members' interests are upheld.

We had victories with changes to the Business Services proposals to reduce job cuts, ensuring management upheld the commitment to no compulsory redundancies through open-ended redeployment, and minimising pay impact.

Branch Secretary Kenny Luke said: "We look forward to positively engaging with management as we enter another budget year, and remain ever vigilant and determined to, at all times, protect and promote our members jobs and conditions of service."

## Victory for UNISON strikes in East Dunbartonshire as Council halts devastating cuts to terms and conditions

UNISON has withdrawn planned strike action in East Dunbartonshire following crunch talks last week with East Dunbartonshire Council.

Strikes scheduled for September have been called off and action short of strike has been suspended. East Dunbartonshire Council had previously proposed to cut employee terms and conditions as follows:

- 3 days annual leave;
- less pay for working late nights /early mornings;
- removal of enhanced overtime rates;
- drastic cuts to the voluntary redundancy payments framework.

All out strikes were held on 2, 22, 25 and 26 June 2018 and action short of strike in the form of work to rule and overtime ban was commenced thereafter.

Thanks to this pressure from trade union members a new deal has been reached with the Council.

Simon Macfarlane, UNISON regional organiser, said: "This is a tremendous position to be in given where we were last November when the council unilaterally took a decision to reduce our members' pay and conditions. Spectacularly strong, colourful and vibrant strike action by the joint unions in June and solid action short of strike has led to a transformed landscape. Annual leave, overtime rates and unsocial hours payments have all been maintained and a much more realistic position has been offered on voluntary redundancy terms.

"It is now up to our members to democratically decide whether they accept this offer. Our advice is that they do. UNISON members in East Dunbartonshire Council and Leisure & Culture Trust have achieved so much for themselves through growing confidence in collective action and realising that organising yourselves in your union gives you strength."

# UNISON to ballot members on 3% pay offer

After months of negotiations, UNISON and the Joint Trade Unions will ballot members on the latest pay offer for 2018/19.

The final revised pay offer was made by COSLA offering a 3% pay increase for all local government workers earning up to £80,000.

Carol Ball, vice chair of UNISON local government committee said: "UNISON has worked hard to get where we are, but this revised offer does very little for the lowest paid workers like care workers and support for learning assistants. These workers rightly feel they have taken the brunt of austerity over the last 10 years, with pay cuts and job losses. UNISON will continue to campaign on their behalf. A decade of pay cuts has left local government workers very angry. In

the end our members make the decision and we will be balloting them to ask what they want to do.

"UNISON campaigns have made real progress. It is only through our action that we have seen the end to the public sector pay cap, we have got more money on the table from employers, and the employers have agreed that all local government workers should be treated equally. UNISON will continue the campaign for all our local government members, especially those on the lowest pay."

This offer covers 2018/19 only and any final deal will be backdated to 1 April 2018. If you are taking VSER, make sure to claim your pay when a deal is settled. Consultative ballots will be issued to members in the coming weeks.



## Soraidh leit, Deirdre!

**Joint Branch Secretary Deirdre Macdonald** will be retiring in October. With a previous career at the Council as an Adult Literacy Worker and a long history of trade union activism, she has been a stalwart of our movement since the days of NALGO. A steward since 2002, Deirdre became Branch Service Conditions Officer in 2008 and then Branch Secretary in 2016.

It is with sadness that we say goodbye to Deirdre, but we are pleased to say that she has every intention of joining the Retired Members' section!

Kenny Luke will remain the sole full time Branch Secretary for the rest of his term until elections at AGM in March 2019.

# ESSENTIAL COVER

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