

Solihull UNISON

November 2024

Solihull Members Vote for Strike Action

77% of Unison members in Solihull who voted backed strike action in the recent industrial action ballot. This was in response to a national employers' pay offer of a flat £1,290 - much less than the flat £1,925 offered in the previous two years.

Unison had originally submitted a 10% pay claim for 2024. The vote was carried out among members at Solihull Council, Solihull Community Housing, Town Councils and Academies across the Borough.

Unfortunately the turnout was less than 50% overall so the union was unable to go ahead with the strike action. This requirement was imposed by the previous Government in 2015 as a deliberate way of suppressing the rights of trade unionists to go on strike.

"Nobody wants to go on strike", said Branch Secretary David Williams, "but this is the only way to get the employer to give us the pay we deserve. If we never go on strike the employers can ignore our demands for better pay and conditions."

Since 2010 pay in local government has not kept

pace with inflation, meaning we are all working harder for less money in real terms. In the last year the junior doctors have gone on strike several times and the end result has been that the government has accepted their argument that their pay is too low. This shows that it pays to stand up and be counted.

Unison nationally has now accepted the employers' pay offer and we can expect the back pay to be paid us in our December salaries. For those working fulltime that will be a lump sum of £967.50 before tax. In subsequent months fulltime wages will be increased by £107.50 a month.

Many members have asked why it takes so long every year to agree our pay. Part of the reason is that the employers drag their feet. Unison wants to end this nonsense so that we get next year's pay agreed before April 2025.

Hopefully, the new Employment Rights Act will allow us to carry out our votes electronically and not via paper ballots. This should speed matters up a lot and increase turnout.



Brighton Disabled Members' Conference



Sam May and Karen Moore

living with Autism (ASD), Diabetes and ADHD. They all spoke about bullying in the workplace and the reasonable adjustments they had fought for with the support of the Union.

Although it was a small agenda for conference (just 19 motions), we did not get through them all - only managing 12. It seemed a lot of time was taken up with guest speakers, not starting on time and breaks.

The main debates were focused on the Assisted Dying Bill with a healthy conversation for and against. It was very emotive again with real life experience and suffering of our members, although it showed how the more vulnerable members may feel it is an easy fix to end someone's life.

Hate crime equality and how it impacts our members who identify as LGBTQ+. This focused on the irregular recordings made by police in order to charge perpetrators with the correct crime.

There was a lack of young people at this conference, was concerning . we are fast becoming an aging union with no zest for our youth to join. This became evident when a motion for looking after our youngest members titled mental health matters had a majority of older members speaking about it for themselves.

I left Brighton feeling deflated for the first time in 12 years of attending conferences. This is a conference, along with Women's, where I have in the past come back enriched with empowerment.

This time it has made me think about where our future lies as a union and how we need to educate our youth in trade union history.

Karen Moore

Assistant Branch Secretary

Unfortunately, this was a disappointing conference and very poorly attended. It may have something to do with Edinburgh not being very accessible last year or the fact that Brighton is at the other end of the country.

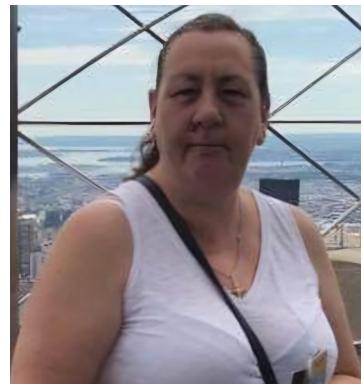
I attended a meeting about neurodivergent members that was informative many spoke about their own experiences in the workplace, including the Labour Minister for South Shields Emma Lewell-Buck. She spoke about her struggles with dyspraxia and only being diagnosed at 27 whilst studying. On her panel were members

A Sad Loss

Some of us recently attended the funeral of Michelle Watts who has passed away after a long battle against cancer.

Michelle served as a UNISON steward for many years working within the small homes at Stapleton Drive and Downing Close for Solihull MBC.

"She always worked hard to support her work colleagues and will be sadly missed by the branch" said David Williams.



Branch Report

One of the big issues I have been dealing with over the last few months has been the breakdown in the payment of pensions to new pensioners.

Most of us have pensions with the West Midlands Local Government Scheme, based at Wolverhampton Council. Last year they introduced a new software programme to help administer pensions. This is an alarming development in itself - in Birmingham the new Oracle software has cost the city over £100m to repair after a botched introduction.

Over the last year the wait for a new pension to be paid has rocketed from around 4 weeks to five, six or seven months. People have been left financially destitute and others have delayed retiring rather than face such a long wait.

I am the Unison representative on the Pensions Committee and I have been very vocal in demanding an end to the delays. They have now recruited new staff to deal with the backlog and the delays are likely to be overcome by next spring.

I have also used my position to demand an end to investment in companies that have profited from Israel's war against the Palestinians and those that make their money by destroying the World's climate.

In Solihull we are waiting to see what the Council does to balance its books in 2025. It looks as if there is a £30m gap between what is needed and what is available to spend next year. Of course this may change once the Government's annual local government settlement is announced. At present we are facing a spending freeze in the current year with an overspend of £7m.

Solihull Children's Services continues to be a troubled directorate, in spite of the additional £20m invested in services to date. The key problem is that the gaps have been plugged by hiring expensive agency workers while experienced staff continue to leave.

At a recent meeting with senior managers Unison was able to ask about the penny pinching demand that staff provide their own stationary

and raised the huge stress that many members are facing in the workplace.

More recently we have been supporting members in the brand new Children's Homes who are undergoing a 'reset' just a few months after the service went live.



In Adult Social Care the Reablement Service has been left in limbo for several months while senior managers decide what to do next. Not a good way of treating a group of workers who put their lives on the line during Covid to help some of the most vulnerable members of the community.

At Solihull College I have been involved in pay negotiations with management. A formal offer is expected in the next week or so which I will then put to a ballot of the affected members.

At Solihull Community Housing new proposals have been put forward for paying for Out of Hours duties. As things stand, management need to offer more before it can be accepted.

The new Government has now introduced its new Employment Rights Bill. This proposes a whole raft of new rights for workers including:

- a.) Day one protection from unfair dismissal
- b.) A right to secure working hours instead of a zero hours contract
- c.) Statutory Sick Pay from day one of illness and no minimum earnings to be entitled to it
- d.) An end to fire and re-hire on worse terms and conditions

For too long the law has loaded the dice against the employee.

David Williams - Branch Secretary

Karen Moore

Assistant Branch Secretary



Since the last quarterly newsletter, we have experienced a large volume of cases within the private sector. This has come mainly from residential settings within the Solihull area that support our most vulnerable service users. The employees that are contacting us are at the bottom end of salary scales almost all are on minimum wages/ sponsorship, Zero hours contracts, receive no sick pay other than statutory and have to comply with basic policy and procedures. These employees find themselves on sanctions very easily and facing dismissal. Thanks to our intervention we have fought hard for our members within these establishments and benefited by a growth in our branch's numbers.

A second issue we have tackled was the ban on the supply of stationary within our own Children's Services. Sam May and I have been out and about in your workplaces offering pens and notepads to those who need them. We have met with senior members to state that stationary is a vital tool of our social workers, family support workers and business support. How can they serve the vulnerable children and their families/carers within Solihull without them. Sam and I are still on the case insourcing more stationary from our fellow branches within UNISON along with regional office to support. If you and any other services find themselves in the same position please let us know.

On the 24th September I attended a Health & Safety and Disability Forum for the West Midlands. It was an informative day discussing stress, hidden disabilities and substance abuse including gambling. The day ended with a emotive presentation from [Andy's Man Club | #ITSOKAYTALK | Andy's Man Club](#). The club was started by the family of Andy who sadly died from suicide due to the impact of his mental health. The group is for men to come together on a Monday night and to talk without pressure to their peers. They have opened several groups since they started but are hoping that with 2025 they can open 50 within the West Midlands. It would be great to think that Solihull UNISON branch could support with one in our community.

Karen Moore

Retired Members' Annual Meeting

The Solihull Branch Retired Members are meeting for their annual meeting AGM on Wednesday 11th December at 11 a.m. in the Byron Room, 1st Floor, Core Library. A buffet is provided. It would be very helpful if you could tell Liz Dean in advance so she can work out the catering numbers.

The retired members section is open to Unison members who have retired from active employment. Just ask the branch for a form to apply and return it with a cheque for £15. That gives you retired membership for life. The retired members meet every few months and organise days out to interesting places.

If you have an e-mail address, please will you send your details to the Branch Office. Your data will be kept secure, but it will help the Branch to keep costs down (even a 2nd class stamp costs 85p these days) and e-mail enables us to contact members quickly. It's much more efficient than 'snail mail' too. It's a very good way to find out about any social events planned for the future!

Liz Dean - Administrator



Solihull Unison has supported MAP for many years. Our previous Branch Secretary, Jolyon Jones, asked us to support MAP in memory of himself before his sad death.

Now, more than ever, we believe it is important to give the ordinary working people of Gaza the basic medical care they need. Please go to their website to donate as much as you can at this time of crisis. Here is a statement from the charity:

Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP) works for the health and dignity of Palestinians living under occupation and as refugees.

We provide immediate medical aid to those in great need, while also developing local capacity and skills to ensure the long-term development of the Palestinian healthcare system.

Nowhere is safe in Gaza, and children are on the frontline. As Israel's bombardment and devastation continues, hunger and disease are putting even more lives at risk. But you can help provide the vital medical supplies, emergency food and humanitarian aid needed to save lives.

Your Local Union

Unison is based on the first floor of The Core in Solihull town centre. Just get in touch first to ensure somebody is there.

At present we have three of us working fulltime for members - David Williams, Karen Moore and Leo Morgado.

We also have an office with other unions at the Blue Bell in Chelmsley Wood - which should be handy for many of you if you want to get some face-to-face advice.

We are regular visitors to all the main workplaces across the Borough and Liz Dean (shown right) makes sure we are in the right place at the right time.

We are happy to meet you in person—at home, at work or wherever suits you best.

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Email:
unison@solihull.gov.uk



Facebook:
[Unison Solihull Local Government](#)

Website:
www.solihullunison.org

Instagram: [@solihullunison](#)

YouTube: [@solihullunison](#)

WhatsApp Channel:



Leo Morgado

Recruitment and International Officer

Recruitment

Solihull UNISON branch has 1857 members all working in different ways to support our communities and also being part of those communities. We have been attending Tudor Grange Schools this year as part of a national strategy in order for more workers to join us.

Having face-to-face conversations with colleagues will always be a key way for all of us to understand that collectively, we are always stronger than as individuals. We will continue to attend as many workplaces as possible in order to have those conversations so that others can also become part of UNISON. Together we can organise and demand better conditions for all workers and for our communities.



UNISON can only win with active members on the ground identifying issues and organising. Could you be a workplace contact, steward or other role? Please contact the branch if you want to be able to influence change for the better.

International

Internationalism doesn't take our focus away from domestic matters. A global fight for justice and freedom can inspire us to make changes in the United Kingdom. It is why UNISON has allied itself with so many different movements from around the world and all based on trade union solidarity.

Workplace Day of Action for Palestine, 28th November 2024

UNISON nationally and as a branch, are affiliated to Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC). PSC have encouraged a Workplace Day of Action on 28th November. At our branch meeting, we agreed on a motion that will support this. Please go to our website at solihullunison.org for more information and also to PSC at palestinecampaign.org

Leo Morgado

Unison's Workplace Representatives

Solihull Unison has a number of members who are workplace stewards. If you ever have a problem at work they should be your first 'port of call':

Maurice Barlow, Andy Wilkins

Sharon Burford, Richard Whitmore, Teresa Paddock

Emma Christie, Sam May, Craig Taylor

Marcia Fieldhouse, Mo Shazad

Kevin Fagg

Sarah Miles

Julie Robinson

Alan Synott

Sharon Simmonds

Solihull Council House

The Core

Children's Services

Adult Social Care

Veolia UK Ltd

Solihull College

Solihull 6th Form College

Everyone Active

St Peters School

If in doubt - contact the Branch Office on 0121 704 6048.

National Retired Members' Conference

The branch sent Gill Butler and Hilary Halliday as delegates to the October Retired members conference in Llandudno.

Our first event was a meeting for self organised groups. These meetings are open to retired members who identify themselves as Women, Black, Disabled or LGBTQ+. At each meeting there is an election to select the two delegates to attend the relevant self-organised group conference. There is also a report for consideration by the National Retired Members Committee and inclusion in the Annual Report.

On this occasion Gill and I attended the meeting for Women members. The results of the election were Maggie Morrissey and Rosie McGregor with a reserve place for Paulette Rennie. It was interesting to hear the proposed nominees and their points of view on various topics. Amongst the topics debated briefly at these sessions the debate centred around pressure for an emergency motion for winter fuel payments; a WASPI update motion; discussion around the qualifying threshold for pension credit and concerns about the bureaucracy of the application process. There were various suggestions about the membership fees for retired members and the payment of an annual fee as opposed to a one time fee.

There was a choice of discussion groups which only delegates attended.

Digital Exclusion Discussion Group - An excellent speaker from Derby outlined how they had liaised with the local Council for Voluntary Services .A “Tea, Talk ‘n’ Tech” cafe supporting older people who might lack confidence, equipment or knowledge in getting connected to digital services - served with tea and patience. The service is staffed by volunteers but need paid staff to organise them. They also need to acknowledge the costs associated with obtaining support both inside the venue and outside customers in order to refurbish computers.

Debate around how to influence organisations and provide phone services where members of Union and members of the public would be available to talk to someone e.g. for banks and G.P.

Online triage and appointment systems. How do you keep all the options open so that you can choose one method?

How do you understand the language of digital literacy if you didn't use them at work or in any other context? Members will frequently have what is deemed to be obsolete software and no means to upgrade or change e.g. the BT ‘digital voice “programme to switch landlines to an internet connection. People are being coerced into using the system of the organisation they are dealing with. In addition to issues of digital literacy are the increases in isolation and resultant mental health issues brought about by decreased interaction with staff at most of the services that are used in daily life.

Some innovations are taking place, in Scotland at Food Share where IT devices are taken to Food Banks to help people access services.

There are also examples of staffed information hubs in hospitals.

Many Unison members will need provision for Broadband where price increases have continued unabated.

West Midlands Regional Meeting endorsed the addition of emergency motions on the Winter Fuel allowance and Social Care cap.

Issues for communication and participation with retired members versus prohibitive postage costs and branch staff time were also discussed.

There were 20 agenda items tabled for the final agenda at conference to be debated and voted on. It was clear that a large range of issues could not be discussed over a one and half day conference. My impression is one of committed retired members regionally and nationally with limited resources at their disposal and apparent limited influence within the wider union. The issue of standing orders - the legal basis for our constitution is not fully understood by members but does have an impact on which agenda items are considered for inclusion. Our role does not appear as influential or powerful as we would want it to be. There is poor administrative support nationally too. In. In a time of massive change for the provision of public services I feel we need to be more active than ever. A huge range of items was submitted for consideration - all of them highly relevant to not only retired members but all members. We continue to have a voice through our union and long may it continue to be so. (Number of national Retired members is 167,669.)

West Midlands Region prioritised the following items :

- Pay compensation to WASPI women
- Pensioner Poverty
- Keeping retired members in Unison
- Communicating with retired members
- Digital exclusion
- Training and Support for Branch and regional members .

The results of the national voting will be reported verbally at the next branch retired members meeting .

I am very grateful to the branch for enabling us to attend and for the support of Branch staff especially Liz Dean for the travel and administrative arrangements.

Hilary Halliday