



*Monmouthshire County Branch
Cangen Sir Fynwy*



Tuesday 2nd February 2021 @ 10am
Wednesday 3rd February 2021 @ 12.30pm
Thursday 4th February 2021 @ 5pm

Via Microsoft TEAMS

AGENDA

Apologies

Minutes of the 2020 Annual General Meeting

Matters Arising from the Minutes

Officer Reports

Honoraria

Approval of the Accounts

Election of Branch Officers and Stewards

Motions

Amendments to Branch Constitution

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 2020

**Tuesday 4th February 2020
Room 1, Raglan Training Centre**

**Wednesday 5th February 2020
Mardy Park Resource Centre, Abergavenny**

**Thursday 6th February 2020
Conference Room, The Rhadyr, Usk**

**Monday 10th February 2020
Magor Room 5, @Innovation House**

PRESENT

Jan Davies (Branch Secretary)
Liam Perry (Chairperson)
Marie Bartlett (Treasurer)
Richard Garner (Health & Safety)
Sandra Rosser (Assistant Branch Secretary)
Tracy Finnis (Equalities Officer)

Robin Grant - Steward
Kevan O'Dwyer - Steward
Joanne Davies - Steward

Ryan Williams (Unison)
Rosie Lewis (Unison)

TOTAL - 58 Members of the Branch

APOLOGIES

Colette Baker, LV
Alun Jeremiah

Liam Perry opened the meeting by welcoming members and introducing the officers and Unison personnel present.

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 2019

These were received and approved.

Matters Arising from the Minutes

No matters arising.

Officer reports

Officer Reports were received and approved: officers would be available to answer any questions on their individual reports at the end of the meeting.

No reports were received from the sub-branches

Honoraria

The method of calculation of honoraria was explained as a discretionary one-off payment to elected members of the Committee and stewards in recognition of their voluntary work for the Branch, and it was made clear that no person who received a payment could vote on this item.

At the last AGM, we indicated that we wanted to establish a fairer way of allocating honoraria and presented a proposal which was accepted by our Members, therefore honoraria are now paid as a 50% retainer and an additional amount to reflect the workload undertaken during the year.

An Honoraria Committee was set up comprising the Regional Officer, a Branch Steward (not in receipt of a payment) and the Treasurer, following discussion the group came up with this year's proposed payments.

The table of honoraria payments was presented to the meeting and were approved unanimously. No potential recipient took part in the vote.

Approval of the Accounts

The Treasurer then presented the Annual Statement of Accounts to the meeting.

Income and Expenditure Account

Marie explained the branch has a surplus for 2019 of £308, she briefly highlighted the larger areas of spend.

Balance Sheet

Marie highlighted the balance of reserves of £76,146 which although seems high is made up of an industrial fund of £61,779 which has a restricted use and cannot be used for day to day running costs. The remainder of the balance is on the general reserve at £14,367 which is considered to be low by general Unison standards. The intention would be to try and maintain this level of general reserve by living within the existing budget provision.

Budget

The Budget was presented for 2020 which indicated that central funding is estimated at £38,500 with additional funding of £10,050 from Blaenau Gwent in respect of shared branch office support. The branch has budgeted to spend all of its income in supporting members. Expenditure includes the employment of a branch administrator, office expenses, national and group conferences and education and training.

The accounts were unanimously approved.

Election of Branch Officers and Stewards

Nominations had previously been sought and all returned nominations to date were presented for approval.

Liam Perry stressed the need for more stewards in the Branch and explained that Unison offer training courses to all new stewards, and anyone interested would be allowed paid time off to attend. He went on to explain how much stronger a workplace would be if there was someone acting on behalf of members and urged those present to become involved in whatever capacity they felt comfortable with. The Branch offers full support to all new stewards.

It has also been suggested that we appoint a Green Rep, our constitution at present doesn't include this position therefore agreement is being sought from this AGM to create the post. Hazel Clatworthy, Sustainability Officer for Monmouthshire County Council has expressed an interest in becoming the Green Rep for Monmouthshire Branch.

A vote was taken and all agreed to add the position and support Hazel's nomination.

All nominations for Officers and Stewards presented were also elected by the meeting.

The AGM granted the Branch Committee the ability to fill any vacant posts and approve new officers and steward nominations throughout the year.

Rosie Lewis, Regional Officer

Local Government Pay Offer

Rosie informed the meeting that the employers have made an initial pay offer of a one-year deal of 2% across all pay points from 1st April - this offer was rejected.

Our claim was for a new minimum rate of £10 an hour, and 10% for everybody else. UNISON also asked for improvements in annual leave and working hours, and joint work on mental health.

UNISON argued that pay settlements elsewhere have been higher, and this pay offer would leave local government further behind other parts of the public sector, as well as the Government's long-term plans for the national living wage.

Since 2010, local government workers' pay has fallen significantly in real terms, and as a result many of our members are struggling to get by.

UNISON called on the employers to think again and make a better offer. They agreed reconvene their full negotiating body to consider the points we made, before meeting with us again for further negotiations. We urged the employers to carry out this process as quickly as possible.

Workers' Rights

Rosie also informed us that UNISON will be keeping a close eye on the political situation, now that we have left the European Union, in respect of workers' rights.

It was noted that two of our meetings were not very well attended, the one in Raglan and the one in Magor - the Magor meeting was added in January when it was realised that the office hadn't in fact closed in December 2019. All reminders were sent out in January and February which included the Magor date. It was suggested by a member that next year we hold a meeting in Chepstow Hospital - it was agreed that we hold some drop-in sessions in the hospital during the year to gauge the interest.

Questions were invited from the floor, there being none and all matters having been dealt with, the meeting closed.

Chairperson's Report

I took up the position of Chairperson from May 2020 when Liam Perry left Monmouthshire County Council for pastures new.

I am greatly looking forward to the challenges that this role will provide. I also accept that this will be a learning curve and am looking forward to what lies ahead.

I take great pleasure from being part of a hard-working and dedicated team of stewards and officers who are always there to support you. However, we are always keen to bring more people on board, so if you've ever thought about being more involved with your union, get in touch. We provide comprehensive training and support for all new stewards.

In the meantime, the most important message during these difficult times is to follow the social distancing rules, wear a face covering when required, wash your hands regularly and stay safe!

Kevan O'Dwyer



Branch Secretary's Report

It's the start of a new year and a challenging one for UNISON members, the services they provide and for the union. 2020 has been a year to remember - for all the wrong reasons. The challenges that the global pandemic has thrown at us has been difficult in the extreme. None of us has faced anything like this before and hopefully we never will again. The overriding factor has been to try and keep everyone safe while delivering very much needed local services.

The feedback we received from managers, leaders & politicians has been nothing but praise for the way in which you have risen to the challenge. It is widely accepted that you, our members, have gone way over and above your work roles. With the roll out of the Covid 19 vaccine we should, hopefully, get back to a more "normal" life by the summer. However, it remains to be seen if "normal" equates to the way we lived and worked before March 23rd 2020.

It is almost inevitable that there is likely to be some significant changes in the way we work, both in the public & private sector.

The financial impact that the pandemic has had, and continues to have, will certainly have a significant bearing on Local Government budgets, the severe financial pressures that we faced previously, will almost certainly be exacerbated by this new position. This will inevitably lead to more efficiency savings, restructures, collaborations, shared services and various pilot schemes. All of this will continue to run alongside the usual representations and advice /support.

With such a difficult financial position, the Authority will be looking at different ways of working to achieve the necessary savings. If there are proposed changes to your sections / departments please contact us. We are not always aware of changes and rely on your help to keep us informed.

There is still a huge amount of uncertainty around the impact that Brexit will have, even though we have now left the EU. Unison will continue to campaign for our current worker's rights to be maintained or protected. We need to ensure that all health and safety and employment protection rights are at the heart of any future employment legislation.

A large part of the current UK employment law is derived from and grounded in EU law. These include issues such as working time, holiday pay, maternity rights and discrimination.

Under the European Union (Withdrawal Act) 2018, these rights will be saved as 'retained EU law'. These rights continue to apply even though we have now left the EU. **However**, unless there are provisions about maintaining existing workers' rights standards in a UK-EU agreement, these rights could be amended or reduced by domestic legislation.

We will re-commence our regular drop-in sessions as soon as the situation allows. Future themes will include free training, stress management and well-being.

Our membership figures are holding steady, but more needs to be done to ensure that those who work for Monmouthshire and are not members, join up! This is not a time to be fighting alone, with all the changes on the horizon there has never been a more important time to be a Unison member.

I have also had the privilege of representing Monmouthshire Unison at Local Gov't Committee, Joint Council for Wales and at the South East Wales Joint Consultative Committee, albeit on a remote basis this year.

Keep an eye on the Monmouthshire Unison website for regular updates.

We are still desperately short of stewards. If anyone is interested please contact me. There is plenty of training available and I would be happy to provide any advice / guidance / support you may need.

PLEASE COME FORWARD - YOUR BRANCH NEEDS YOU !!

Jan Davies



Get active in your workplace

Assistant Branch Secretary's Report

Where to start

It has certainly not been the year we set out to work our way through! Since the end of March we have had to learn to live and work in very different ways; some of us have been able to work from home, others have been on the front line throughout, many have had to juggle work and home schooling, find new ways to communicate with not just colleagues but loved ones (thank goodness for things like FaceTime, Teams, Zoom and What's App!). One of the biggest challenges I will take from this year is teaching both my parents and in-laws - ranging in age from 69 to 78 - the joys and wonders of a FaceBook Portal!! Being able to connect, even if only digitally, has been a lifeline for many people, who for whatever reason are either on their own, or unable to go out at all.

Working from home was always seen as a luxury in my eyes, but having to adapt my living area to accommodate a work space, that is functional and safe to use, has been a challenge. I can't emphasize enough how important it is to assess our work spaces regularly to ensure it is providing us with a safe and comfortable environment to work in. I know this will have been a challenge for many, but please make time to 'think outside the box' to see where your 'home office' works best for you and your needs. I now have a dining table that is half office with my sit/stand desk and office chair at one end, and dining table at the other - but I know I am lucky to have the space to be able to do this. Even if it is something as simple as a wireless keyboard and mouse or a laptop riser, make sure you have what you need to safely work in this new way.

The one thing I miss more than anything is office banter - who knew just how important that was for our mental health!! Standing in the communal kitchen area making a cuppa and talking to other colleagues from around the authority about anything and everything - I miss that!! So often these conversations helped us get through the daily grind - just by distracting us from whatever issue was on our desk that day. The team I work within now has a daily 'coffee and catch up' Teams meeting booked in for 15 minutes every day, and it is an optional meeting that sits there for when we need it. I hope you are all managing to stay in touch with not just your teams but the wider work community, and that maybe one day someday in the future we can get back to trying to find where our coffee mug has gone in the kitchen cupboards . . . !!!

Stay safe, stay well, and be kind.

Sandra Rosser

Health & Safety Officer's Report

I don't think anyone could have predicted this last year, and what staff have had to do to get through it so far. It's been pretty non-stop in countryside access, with what we have been trying to achieve for years, to get more people outdoors walking and exercising, would happen overnight with the lockdown.

As the Health and Safety Officer things haven't sat still either, I've put down a couple of the recurring themes below, if you have a concern though please get in touch.

Home working

When this pandemic kicked off it was all hands to the pumps and make do with what you have, but this has now been almost a whole year of working differently. Make sure that you have the tools you need to work safely. Try and make sure you have access to the right equipment, ideally home should be set up nearly as well as in the office, desk, adjustable chair, separate keyboard and mouse with either a laptop stand, and/or monitor. If you haven't got access to this equipment speak to your manager as some should be made available to you, if you don't have the space at home adjust your working to reflect this, talk with your manager, you should ideally as a minimum, without the correct setup, take a good break, go for a walk, or similar every 2 hours or more often, depending on how you are feeling, or how many distractions there may be (especially with schools being off).

Sitting hunched over a laptop for hours at a time will put pressure on your neck, shoulders, wrists, hands, with the resulting headaches, sore muscles and potentially aggravated Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI).

Office working

Some offices are available for working in, but these should only be used if you really need to, this could be for legitimate work reasons, or for wellbeing reasons for instance. If you are being told to work at an office and you don't believe it is necessary then let us know and we can look into it further.

Risk assessments

Make sure you are aware of your areas risk assessments, especially the Covid ones. Where changes have had to occur due to Covid, this may have had an impact on other activities that make them higher risk. For example, you may find that due to social distancing that more lone working is being undertaken, or making sure a new colleague is taught what they need to know and are looked after, not left to tackle a hazard on their own.

Keep practices up to date, to keep you and your colleagues safe. If it doesn't feel right ask your manager in the first instance, if you need further advice please let me or one of our reps know.

Wellbeing

At a recent H&S meeting the sickness rate figures were highlighted, sickness absence due to psychological reasons, stress, anxiety, depression to name a few, have increased this year. This is despite a large number of staff being off on furlough for a large part of the year. Make sure you are looking after yourselves, looking out for your colleagues and keep communicating. Your health is more important than your work, talk with your manager to manage workloads, expectations or to just take a break when you need to.

It's ok to say No to that extra piece of work, or that extra hour, or that ringing teams call.

If you need to talk with someone, or want advice, there are vast amounts of help out there use the Supportall practical support section, or give us a call, a number of us will be happy to help.

As I have already said, if you are at all concerned, please give us a call. Look after each other and stay safe.

Richard Garner



Equalities Officer's Report

In normal times, UNISON is committed to achieving equality in our workplaces, in our union and across society and promotes the understanding that groups of people who face prejudice are stronger through organising together in order to fight discrimination.

In February 2020, I represented the branch as a delegate at the National Women's Conference in Bournemouth. Everything changed soon after that, and the remainder of 2020 has not been normal, and has presented unprecedented challenges for everyone; the restrictions placed on our normal day-to-day lives, and the different ways we have been required to work have affected us all. In the uncertainty of these times, more than ever, Unison has been working, to ensure members rights. Members of course who are so often, putting themselves at risk, in the frontline of public service delivery, working with the most vulnerable in our communities.

We have all brought to the crisis our own coping strategies and personal resilience, and we should not make judgement on our colleagues who may be dealing with situations in a different way to us. The factors that specifically affect each one of us are individual and personal, and often private.

It is important to support your colleagues, and when issues need attention raise them with Unison, your experience and feedback can only contribute to a wider understanding and a better outcome for all members.

For Unison, equality has always been a high priority in our negotiating and campaigning work, but now more than ever Unison is the voice both of the workforce, and for the workforce. Council staff are at the front line and they have much to offer, be it locally or regionally in discussions about how employers, and government deal with the crisis.

Unison at a local level is dependent upon an active membership, take time to consider what you could do to get involved to promote equality, both during the pandemic and in the future.

Tracy Finnis



Welfare Officer's Report

2020 has been difficult for everyone and 2021 does not look any brighter at the moment, however there have been people who have experienced huge changes in their circumstances. As the representative Welfare Officer for Unison There for You I have been able to provide access to a Covid 19 Response Fund offering grants of up to £500 for those families which have been affected by being furloughed or experiencing poverty.

Unison also offers financial help for those who may have experienced Bereavement, Relationship Breakdown or suffering a long illness. I have been able to assist with members completing the application form for support. I have also been able to assist our members to receive either the Winter Fuel Grant or School Clothing Grant.

There for You will also support our members to obtain equipment due to disabilities.

I have managed to sign post individuals to the Benefit Calculator which can help those on very low incomes and is very easy to use.

I'm glad that I have been able to help those who need the help, plus I know that just by giving someone a quick message to see how they are can help people who may be feeling lonely in these desperate times.

I am always available to assist any member with queries on any financial help that is available through Unison or guide them and will continue to be here in these difficult times.

Laura-Jane Marchrones



Officer Nominations

At the closing date the following nominations had been received:

Branch Chairperson	Kevan O'Dwyer
Assistant Branch Chairperson	Joanne Davies
Branch Secretary	Jan Davies
Assistant Branch Secretary	Sandra Rosser
Branch Treasurer	Marie Bartlett
Health & Safety Officer	Richard Garner
Equalities Co-ordinator	Tracy Finnis
Welfare Officer	Laura-Jane Marchrones
Young Members Officer	Vacant
Education Co-ordinator	Undertaken by Branch Admin
International Relations Officer	Sian Stockham
Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator	Undertaken by Branch Admin
Communications Officer	Undertaken by Branch Admin
Membership Officer	Undertaken by Branch Admin
Retired Member's Secretary	Vacant
Labour Link Officer	Sian Stockham

The above-named Officers are nominated unopposed and are deemed elected, subject to AGM approval.

Steward Nominations

Monmouthshire County Council

Mandy Stone

Robin Grant

Helen Cox

Simon Mansfield (H&S)

Karen Roberts

Hazel Clatworthy (Green Rep)

Deserie Mansfield

Marc Fennessy (Enquiry)

Adult Services

Children's Services

Deri View Primary School

H&S Llanfoist Depot

Chepstow Comprehensive School

Resources

Enterprise

Youth Enterprise

Capita Symonds

Carwyn Davies

Peter Deidun

Haberdashers Monmouth Schools

None received

Monmouthshire Housing Association

The above nominations have been received and are therefore elected.

The Branch reserves the right to fill any vacant posts and approve new officers and steward nominations throughout the year





We still have vacancies for Stewards across all workplaces so any nominations or volunteers would be very welcome. Full training will be offered to anyone volunteering.

Officers of the union take the lead on specific areas of activity and work in close liaison with our Stewards and Workplace Contacts to ensure that we deliver effectively for our members.

Specific training is available for many of these positions so don't feel that you will be on your own if you stand, or persuade a colleague to stand. There is only one qualification for officers, they need to be a member of the union; having an interest or experience of the specific areas of activity would of course be welcomed.

Stewards are the backbone of UNISON; they act as a link between members and the union in our workplaces. All new stewards have the right to paid time off for training which UNISON provides. New stewards also have the backup of more experienced officers should the need arise.

Your workplace will be a much stronger place should you nominate someone to act on your behalf, and remember different stewards get involved to differing degrees, so don't worry if you feel you don't have that much time, just being a presence in the workplace is often enough.

If you are interested please contact Karen in the UNISON Office:

UNISON Office
18 Maryport Street
Usk NP15 1AE

Tel: 01291 675502

Email: unisonmon@btconnect.com

Website: www.unisoningwent.org.uk

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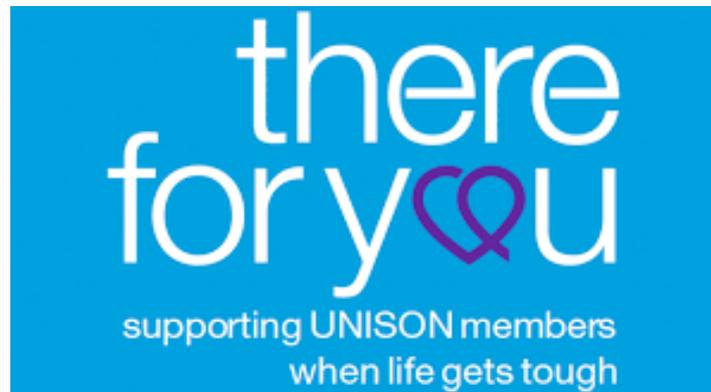
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UNISON WELFARE



(Charity registration number: 1023552 / SCO38305)

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To be eligible to apply for financial assistance, you must have been a member of UNISON for at least four weeks and up-to-date with your subscriptions. Also, that the financial difficulties that led you to apply occurred after you joined. Partners or dependants can also apply.



It's been a tough year for people right across the world, as COVID-19 has swept around the globe - and with no sign of it disappearing any time soon.

UNISON members have been among those facing the daily battle with the pandemic - not just in their work keeping our vital services going, but also on a personal and domestic front.

There for You is UNISON's unique welfare charity and, in the summer, introduced a new fund to help members who were struggling financially as a direct consequence of the new coronavirus.

The first round of the COVID-19 response fund ran from May to July and distributed over £250,000 in grants to individual members in financial difficulty due to the pandemic.

Such grants have made a massive difference.

The charity is now delighted to be announce it has re-opened its COVID-19 response fund from 16 November.

Grants of up to £500 will be made to help members in financial difficulty as a result of coronavirus. Grants can support with day-to-day living costs: for example, if you or your partner are furloughed or shielding and relying on statutory sick pay.

To apply on line visit Unison's website: www.unison.org.uk and follow the links for the COVID Fund, alternatively you can request an application form from the Branch.



Application for Hardship Fund COVID 19

Monmouthshire County Unison Branch recognises the impact that COVID-19 has had and continues to have on the economy. We also recognise the impact that this situation may have on your personal finances.

As a branch we have taken the decision to set up a fund to help members wherever we can. If you have been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis and are in need of financial help please contact the branch on 01291 675502 or by email at unisonmon@btconnect.com to request an application form.

Obviously this is a fairly limited resource but an application to the branch fund does not preclude you from making an application to "There for You" (Unison's national welfare arm). Any application we are unable to help with will be passed to our Welfare Officer, (with your permission), to be processed under There for You.

ALL APPLICATIONS WILL BE HELD IN STRICTEST CONFIDENCE

**Jan Davies
Branch Secretary
Monmouthshire County UNISON
01291 675502
unisonmon@btconnect.com**



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