Inside this issue

Living Wage - putting pressure on the water companies

Strength in numbers – new recruitment drive

Beyond the call of duty – fighting the floods
EDITORIAL

Welcome to Network Magazine – the magazine for UNISON members in Water, Environment and Transport

There have been a number of significant developments across Water, Environment and Transport since the last issue of ‘Network Magazine’. The union got through a huge amount of work on pay reform and the 15/16 pay deal in the Environment Agency. In the water industry we’ve begun our concerted campaign to get every employer signed up as an accredited Living Wage Employer – a campaign which is already bearing fruit. In the Passenger Transport Forum UNISON has been successful in bringing one of the employers back from the brink of exiting national pay bargaining. In this issue of ‘Network’ you’ll find more information about these important topics and insight into all the work UNISON does in water, environment and transport.

I also want to take this opportunity to say how proud everyone at UNISON is of the hard work and dedication shown by WET members during the floods in December and January. It was yet another reminder of how crucial commitment to public service is. Members in the Environment Agency, the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Natural Resources Wales and the water industry all went the extra mile to save homes and businesses. The point was also well made by our General Secretary, Dave Prentis, at the time: “They exemplify everything that is good about public service and they [EA workers] should no longer be in fear for their jobs.

Many members will also be aware of our new national recruitment and organising strategy in the service group which will mean changing the way we carry out some of our work to ensure sufficient focus on maintaining our high density. I know everyone involved in developing the strategy is working hard to deliver on it. This is greatly appreciated.

These and many other issues will be the subject for debate at the 2016 UNISON WET Conference in Brighton. If you are going, I look forward to seeing you there. If not, you can keep up with all the latest by following the UNISON WET Twitter account at @UNISON_WET, on Facebook and on the UNISON website. I hope you enjoy Network Magazine.

Gavin Edwards
National officer

Contents

Campaign – putting pressure on the water companies for a Living Wage 4
Environment Agency workers fight the floods 6
Strength in numbers – recruiting and maintaining new members 8
WET conference 2016 9
Transport forum relaunched 10
Member profile - Brian Scrutton, full time rep at United Utilities 11

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New deal for Environment Agency workers

The negotiations were difficult, but UNISON’s strength in the Environment Agency (EA) secured a pay deal and pay reform package that addresses many members’ most pressing concerns.

Negotiating pay reform and pay deals for our members is never easy, but when an organisation like the Environment Agency (EA) is facing budget cuts the process is even more challenging.

‘At times like this, it’s really important to listen to members and focus negotiations upon the issues that matter most to them,’ said national officer for water, environment and transport, Gavin Edwards. ‘Our consultation with members at the start of the process was invaluable when it came to negotiations.’

Many members identified not being able to move above pay point 3 and the complexity of the system as key concerns in the UNISON consultation.

‘With hard negotiations and industrial strength we were able to come up with a new deal, which included pay reform as well as the pay deal,’ Edwards explained.

Trade union members were then consulted on the EA pay offer and members from all four recognised trade unions voted overwhelmingly to accept the deal.

Although ‘automatic’ pay progression has now been removed, under the new system, workers who are performing well will be eligible for additional reward. The deal also secured the Living Wage for all directly employed and contracted out staff. ‘Thank you to all of the members who participated in the consultation,’ said Edwards. ‘Clearly, this year’s deal is particularly important because of the wider pay reform issues it covers. UNISON representatives will continue to keep members fully up to date on all aspects of the implementation of the new system, including the eligibility criteria and National Negotiating Group (NNG) monitoring of the new system.’

The new deal

The Environment Agency negotiated pay settlement for 2015-16 includes:

Wider pay reform

- Removal of the current pay progression system.
- Compensation for the removal of contractual progression of 2.5%, as a non-consolidated lump sum for staff at or above pay point 3.
- A consolidated increase for staff below pay point 3, bringing them up to pay point 3 or a combination of a move up to pay point 3 (consolidated) and a lump sum if movement is less than 2.5%.
- Moving staff who are between pay point to the next nearest one.
- Moving to a new ‘broadband’ pay structure, which does not have pay points.
- New eligibility criteria for performance-related pay, agreed December 2016.
- The suspension of all local recognition payments for the remainder of this financial year.
- The removal of Market Forces Factors 1, 2 and 3, consolidating them into pay from Feb 2016.

The pay deal

- Full implementation of the Living Wage, both for directly employed and contracted-out staff, where the EA is the sole procuring body.
- 1% pay rise backdated to July 2015, including all allowances.
- Payment of pay progression for the current year, effective prior to migration onto new pay scales.
- The reinstatement of compressed hours as a flexible working option.
- Flexi-time carry-over increased from 15 to 22.5 hours and 15 days flexi-credit in one year.
- ‘If you have any further questions about this settlement, please contact your local UNISON representative.'
Putting pressure on the water industry

UNISON has persuaded four water companies to adopt the accredited Living Wage. A new campaign being launched in April will target the other major water companies so that all their employees can afford to live decently.

UNISON held a parliamentary reception in April to call on all the water companies to pay their employees, and those of their contractors, the Living Wage. At present, only five of the 18 major water companies in the UK are accredited or in the process of being accredited.

‘These companies (South East Water, Dee Valley Water, Scottish Water, Northumbrian Water and Yorkshire Water) have committed to paying the Living Wage to all permanent employees, third-party contractors and contractors carrying out water company business,’ said Clive Craske, Chair of the Water Industry Sector Committee.

‘This has been a real achievement for UNISON and it puts pressure on the other water companies to sign up too. If these four companies can afford the Living Wage, there’s no reason why the other water companies shouldn’t be able to.’

According to a report commissioned last year by UNISON, *A socially responsible water industry?*, the water industry is in a particularly strong position to adopt the Living Wage. This is because the percentage of total income that water companies spend on wages is low compared with other sectors. At 17%, the wage share in water is less than half the 43% production industry average and only two-thirds of the energy industry average.

In addition, research from the New Policy Institute found that less than 10% of employees in the water industry were paid below the Living Wage in 2014, so the investment would not be disproportionately expensive.

At present, profits in the industry are soaring. The 18 privately owned water companies in England and Wales have retained excess profits of £1.2bn over the past five years.

The campaign launch event at the Houses of Parliament on 20th April was sponsored by Alex Cunningham MP, shadow environment minister. Members of the media and the water industry regulator, Ofwat, attended, and MPs were shown the position of the water companies in their constituencies.

The keynote speaker was UNISON general secretary, Dave Prentis.

‘The Living Wage is not a huge ask. It is just ensuring that workers have the minimum they need to live decently. It should be the right of every employee,’ said Craske.
The Living Wage, which has been set by the Living Wage Foundation, is the minimum pay required for individuals and families to live a life free of poverty.

UNISON’s campaign specifically relates to the Living Wage as set by the Living Wage Foundation. The current rates are £8.25 an hour for the UK outside of London and £9.40 in London.

UNISON, and its predecessors, were among the first organisations in the country to support the Living Wage, arguing for its implementation in national and sector-wide pay bargaining and local campaigns. It was also part of our submission to the Low Pay Commission during the process of setting the National Minimum Wage.

Across the UK, there are now almost 2,000 employers accredited as Living Wage employers by the Living Wage Foundation, including some of the largest private companies in the UK, such as Barclays, HSBC, IKEA and Lidl. Over a quarter of the FTSE 100 companies are now accredited.

UNISON has made achievement of a Living Wage for the lowest paid staff a key feature of almost all its pay claims over recent years. Considerable advances have been made in achieving that target, including the Scottish government, which has established the Living Wage within all its public sector organisations.

Visit Living Wage at: www.unison.org.uk for our guide on campaigning, organising and negotiating for a living wage.
Fighting the floods

The floods this winter caused chaos and devastation across Scotland, the South West and the North of England. Environment Agency workers went above and beyond the call of duty to help communities at this traumatic time.

Christmas 2015 was not the festive season that thousands of people across Britain had hoped for. Widespread flooding left many homeless and Environment Agency (EA) staff working around the clock and struggling to cope.

Andy Theaker, a UNISON member who has worked for the agency as an engineer in flood risk management for more than ten years, said that ‘the two months from 23 December to 23 February were incredibly hard for staff, with more serious events than anyone could remember’. Staff from areas other than those related to floods had to be drafted in for this prolonged effort.

Amanda Cruddas, a UNISON member and an environment officer in Penrith, Cumbria, who usually works in pollution management, added, ‘We had to give up our Christmas plans to help out,’ she recalled. ‘Staff from all departments joined colleagues in the flood incident room to keep people safe and deal with the effects of flooding. When I arrived at work at 10pm on Christmas night, there were staff who’d worked all day and wanted to stay on. They had to be persuaded to leave. There was a great spirit.’

Jackie Hamer, chair of the Environment Agencies Sector, agreed. ‘The dedication of the workforce really shone through. Staff from all parts of the agency – both field and office based – volunteered to take on incident response roles, not just in their own areas, but anywhere they could help, even if this was hundreds of miles from home. Personal plans and holidays were put on hold, and long hours were worked, sometimes in very difficult conditions.’

Yet despite the widespread commitment of staff during the third flooding crisis in five years, the EA faces another battle as it struggles to achieve budget cuts to its repair and maintenance programme.

‘Year on year, we’re having cuts in revenue spending,’ explained Theaker. ‘The result is that the EA is attempting to avoid doing work on facilities that the agency itself doesn’t actually own or have total responsibility for, such as some locks and the Thames Barrier.’

The government has emphasised that it has not cut capital funding to the EA. But the agency has lost thousands of staff since 2010 as its funding has been cut each year, from nearly £850m to just over £700m. That’s a cut in real terms, after inflation, of more than 25%.

‘Adequate staffing levels are important if the agency is to cope with the risk of future flooding,’ summed up Cruddas. ‘There’s so much that needs to be done all year round. Flood defences need to be inspected and maintained. Communities need to be engaged about possible new defences. All this takes planning and skill. We need a well-funded, well-staffed EA all year round if we are to be in the best position in the future to protect people from the risk of flooding.’
Recent incidents of extreme weather – resulting in tidal surges and flooding – have brought aspects of the work carried out by the Environment Agency (EA) into sharp focus. The government’s own scientific advisers have estimated that the impact of climate change will increase the amount of flooding that the UK experiences – four times as many homes will be at risk over the next 20 years.

In 2009-10, total grants to the Environment Agency were £846.7m. The following year these were cut to £799.6m, and then to £749.5m in 2011-12. Further cuts in 2012-13 brought the figure down to £723m.

The Association of British Insurers paid out some £1.2bn after the floods of 2012 followed the country’s second wettest period on record and the EA estimated that the floods of 2007 cost the economy £3.2bn.

Damage left by the pre-Christmas tidal surges on the east coast, which destroyed many existing defences, has caused between £250 and £300m of damage – and this is only one small area of the country.

Government cuts to the EA budget mean that around 1,500 jobs are under threat. Add that to the job cuts which have already taken place, and around a quarter of the pre-2010 workforce will have been lost by October 2014.*

*(This is slightly complicated by the fact that the pre-2010 figure included EA staff covering Wales, but a new Welsh agency – National Resource Wales – was created in 2013.) Scotland is covered by the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency.*
Strength in numbers

Attracting and retaining new members is key to UNISON’s success. Following branch consultation, our new organising and recruitment programme is now driving ahead.

To ensure our union remains a powerful advocate in all sectors we have to make sure our density remains high. This means recruiting more members and holding on to them once they’ve joined.

Last year, all Water, Environment and Transport (WET) branches were consulted to identify what works when it comes to recruiting new members, the issues that make recruitment difficult and what needs to be done to overcome these barriers.

‘This strategy is a response to changing external pressures,’ explained Gavin Edwards, national officer for water, environment and transport. ‘WET branches get through a huge amount of hard work on behalf of members, and this strategy identifies what needs to be done to boost future recruitment and retention and whose responsibility it is to make it happen.’

Challenges

The survey identified many challenges for branches including mass job losses in the environment sector; dispersed workforces and workplaces in some sectors; the ongoing threat of outsourcing in the water industry; the fragmentation of companies into smaller units; as well as a general scepticism across the population towards ‘joining in’ with activities outside of the home.

What works?

In terms of recruitment activities, branches find workplace stalls, individual face-to-face conversations and new starter inductions all good ways of attracting new members.

There was clearly enthusiasm in the branches for the ‘Recruit a Friend’
initiative and UNISON’s commitment to the accredited Living Wage campaign. Campaigning issues also give our reps a reason to hold one-to-one conversations with potential new members.

Potential members are also attracted to joint open days held by UNISON with organisations that offer member promotions such as health insurance, legal and debt advice.

The strategy
The new strategy, which has now been adopted by all WET branches includes:

- the national Living Wage campaign to be used as a recruitment opportunity in all branches
- all UNISON branches to commit to holding a set number of workplace stalls over the next 12 months
- all branches to request a speaking slot at new starter induction events
- recruitment materials produced by national office to be specific to each industry
- national and regional officers to do their utmost to attend recruitment events and other organising opportunities, when requested by the branch
- national office to provide a professionally designed newsletter template for branches to produce branch newsletters
- a monthly ‘league table’ membership report to be emailed to all branches

Each year, at the annual WET seminar, awards will be given to the top three branches

The completion of these tasks will be monitored at each WET executive meeting through the year. Final assessment of the strategy will be made at a session at the 2016 WET seminar.

For full details of the recruitment strategy and the targets for your industry contact your UNISON branch representative.

Water, environment and transport service group conference 2016

10am start at Brighton Centre, Kings Road, East Sussex BN1 2GR

All branches are entitled to be represented at this annual conference. Please contact your branch secretary if you would like more. Branch details are available on the UNISON website.
Reinvigorated forum builds strength

After several years of diminishing members, the Passenger Transport Forum is growing again, as workers and management recognise the value of national pay bargaining.

For the last year, UNISON has been working to save and reinvigorate the vital negotiating body for the transport agencies – the Passenger Transport Forum (PTF).

Recent developments show that work is finally paying off. Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) had been on the verge of leaving the PTF in 2015, but the trade unions persuaded them to pause its exit and get involved in improving the forum’s terms of reference. At the start of March 2016 we finally got the great news we had all been hoping for: TfGM would be remaining in the PTF, including negotiating pay and conditions. This is a great success, in particular for the trade unions at TfGM who were so well organised throughout the campaign.

It is also very welcome that new management at the Newcastle and North East Transport Authority, Nexus, announced in February that they wished to re-engage with the forum, following a period of absence.

In December 2015, a subgroup of the PTF redrafted its terms of reference to ensure the forum is focussed on issues relevant to employees and the member organisations. It also updated details to reflect recent changes in the responsibilities, structures and names of those organisations.

The new draft terms of reference were agreed in February 2016 and some minor revisions will be signed off at the next PTF meeting in May 2016. This meeting will be hosted by TfGM.

‘We are delighted that TfGM has decided to reverse its decision to exit the PTF and re-engage,’ said Pam Sian, Chair of the PTF trade union side. ‘TfGM management worked constructively to assist in the redrafting of the terms of reference of the PTF and we think that helped in bringing them to their final decision. Industrial relations between the trade unions and employers in the PTF have been positive over a period of time and we believe members’ best interests are served by strengthening the forum.’

Included in the new draft is a new name for the Forum: Urban Transport Employment Forum. ‘Despite a name change, the new draft and newly named forum will maintains the negotiating link with the terms and conditions of workers, through the PTE Green Book,’ explained Pam. ‘Member organisations acknowledge this implies no change in the way terms and conditions of employment are negotiated.’
When Brian Scutton signed up to join UNISON, he had no idea that eight years later he would be a full time rep leading 1,400 members through pension negotiations at United Utilities.

**Q. When did you first get involved with UNISON?**
**A:** In my last job, I was made redundant and while there were no unions there, my name was put forward by the workers to be their employee representative at this difficult time. It gave me a bit of a flavour for helping colleagues and making sure they’re treated fairly. I started reading up a bit on trade unions and the important work they do in protecting workers.

I joined United Utilities in 2008 in the accounts department. It was while on the Manchester Gay Pride event that year that I visited the UNISON LGBT stand and signed up as member. First I became LGBT officer, then I got more involved in my local branch and I’ve been seconded as full time rep for the last year and a half.

**Q: What negotiations are you currently involved with?**
**A:** Last October, UU announced a proposal to close its defined benefit pension scheme, which affects 40% of UNISON members in the company’s workforce.

UNISON has 1,400 members at UU spread across the north west of England. Communicating clearly with all members has been key in this situation. You need to keep both sides informed and balance the views of all members.

There have been fortnightly meetings and a lot of work went into preparing a consultative ballot and then an industrial action ballot.

After lengthy negotiations, the company has now agreed to withdraw the proposal until actual figures are available in June rather than the assumed costs they were basing their proposals upon. It has been a major achievement.

**Q: What are the greatest challenges of your role?**
**A:** One of the greatest challenges is trying to be in two or three different places at the same time! This week, I’ve got three meetings I should go to all at the same time and I’ve got to prioritise which is most important.

You have to be really organised to be a union rep and you’ve got to want to help people. Being an outgoing person is a definite advantage, as you have to be able to communicate with people at all levels of the organisation. I’m really passionate about organising recruitment events.

Having proper independent training from UNISON has made a huge difference to my role.

Facilities time is a big issue for union reps and it’s really hard for them to balance work and union duties.

**Q: How do you relax?**
**A:** Well, I’m getting married to my partner Barrie in June, which is exciting and we’re busy planning our wedding. Barrie works for the NHS but until he met me, he wasn’t a member of a union. Now we go to UNISON LGBT meetings together!
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