



NATIONAL DISABLED MEMBERS CONFERENCE

ANNUAL REPORT 2016



**Together we can – disabled
members working in UNISON**

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Chairs Introduction

With a government determined to continue to cut, cut and cut further we always knew 2016 would be a challenging year for disabled people but no one could have predicted the rollercoaster ride that was the last 12 months. Disabled Members have faced some ups and downs and a few 360 degree turns that can all be summed up in three words – Battles, Breakthroughs and Brexit.

Battles: Disabled people have always had to fight for their rights and 2016 was no different. The Conservative government continued its agenda of austerity and, as in previous years, disabled people were seen as an easy target.

Cutting disability benefits was a top priority for the Chancellor's in his budget but Disabled Members didn't take this lying down. One member in particular, Graeme Ellis, took direct action that went right to the heart of government and after an amazing amount of publicity the government changed their mind on cuts to Personal Independence Payments (PiP). And while both government and opposition politicians tried to take credit for this change of policy we all know who it really was that made the difference.

Breakthroughs: Campaigning is central to all our work and we've been successful in raising the profile of disability issues in UNISON and with the wider public.

Disabled Members were active in UNISON's campaign against the Trade Union Bill and although the Bill is now law, by working with other unions and the House of Lords, we won major concessions including retaining DOCAS without which some Disabled Members would not have been able to keep their UNISON membership.

In 2014 you asked us for reserved seats for Disabled Members on the National Executive Committee (NEC). We consulted, organised and campaigned using every tool at our disposal including social media and making videos. And after almost two decades of trying we achieved the two thirds majority needed at National Delegate Conference to secure the seats we had wanted for so long. This was a massive breakthrough for Disabled Members – an achievement we are all be proud of.

Brexit: On 23 June the government held a referendum on the UK membership of the European Union and decision to leave will change the country for ever. While it will be years before we understand the full impact we can be fairly sure it won't make life any easier for disabled people who often rely on EU law to enforce their rights.

Our work: Our work programme is based on motions from last years Disabled Members Conference but this year issues related to government policy, cuts to services, reduced financial and work related support and increasing workplace capability issues have needed our attention leading to a higher than usual workload.

Between meetings your Chairs Group work hard responding to with issues, attending national equality liaison meeting, setting agendas, writing speeches, campaigning, providing advice and guidance, making decisions and supporting national officers to make sure disability issues are a high priority.



Peter, Maggie, Dave Prentis, Angela and Jean

But we are only a small part of the team that make up National Disabled Members Committee (NDMC). People you elected to represent every Disabled Member and improve the lives of disabled people everywhere. And we mustn't forget the National Officers who do so much to support us, especially Lucille Thirlby, Haifa Rashed and Susan Mahwood without whom we wouldn't have accomplished half as much.

Finally, on behalf of all Disabled Members we want to pay a very special tribute to Sue Davey. Sue was Assistant National Officer for Disabled Members for a long time but has retired after an accident last year. Sue is one of a kind, hardworking, dedicated and caring but with a wicked sense of humour that puts everyone at ease. Sue isn't just a colleague but a friend and comrade in arms. We want to say a huge thank you to Sue for everything she did for us and wish her well for the future. Goodbye Sue, we'll miss you.

Now as the end of the year approaches and we reflect on the ups and downs we faced it's time to celebrate our achievements.

And as for 2017. It will be another challenging year. But we'll shout louder, stand stronger and face the battles head on. Bring it on and, side by side with other members fighting for ourselves and each other, we will win because **“Together we can – disabled members working in UNISON”**

Angela Hamilton and Peter Daley (Co-Chairs)
Jean Sowley and Maggie Griffin (Deputy Co-Chairs)

Fighting for the rights of Disabled People

Government policies that are hostile towards disabled people; uncertainty and fear from scare mongering EU referendum campaigns; and ongoing instability from the change of Prime Minister and Cabinet and turmoil in the Labour Party have all made a difficult political backdrop for NDMC to work against.

European Referendum

The EU referendum and Brexit decision could have significant consequences for disabled people. EU directives and regulations have improved disabled people's protection from discrimination and significant pieces of legislation that affect disabled people could be scrapped when the UK leaves the EU. We don't know what will happen but we do know that there are over 300 pieces of EU legislation aimed at improving disabled people's lives that could be at risk. These include requirements for transport and workplaces to be accessible and for national sign language to be recognised as an official language.

Currently disabled people's rights can be enforced in the European Court of Justice but the Brexit decision is likely to make it harder to challenge unfair welfare reform and cuts to disability benefits. Disabled people are also protected by the Human Rights Act and, as feared, not long after the vote to leave the European Union the government has reiterated its commitment to overturn this legislation, making it even more difficult for disabled people to tackle discrimination.

Disabled People are an afterthought

The House of Lords Select Committee carried out an inquiry into the impact of the Equality Act on Disabled People and their findings were damning with the Chair of the Committee, Baroness Deech, stating "Over the course of our inquiry we have been struck by how disabled people are let down across the whole spectrum of life."

The key findings of the report included:

- Reasonable adjustments are not well understood
- Government has failed to implement parts of the Equality Act that would protect disabled people
- Burden on disabled people is being increased by reducing burden on business
- It is almost impossible for disabled people to enforce their rights
- The Equality Act is not a good Act for disabled people
- The Government treat disabled people as an afterthought

The Government's response which was published in July, two months after the deadline, was negative and non-committal. A future Committee will look at the response and how to implement the recommendations of the inquiry.

National Disabled Members Committee Work Programme

The first NDMC meeting each year is a policy meeting where we agree a work programme based on conference decisions, societal and citizenship issues. As NDMC only meets four times, including the policy meeting, much of our work is carried out between meetings and we rely on a great deal of support from our National Officers.

NDMC's priorities are set in line with UNISON's agreed objectives. At our policy meeting we agreed to group the 26 motions from conference under the themes of:

- Disability Policy and Campaigns; and
- Tackling Ignorance, Prejudice and Disability Discrimination

A member of the chairs group facilitated each group with support from a National Officer. Each group prioritised their work programme and individual committee members took responsibility for leading the work on individual actions.

Disability Policy and Campaigns

Access to Work

NDMC have closely monitored the impact of changes to Access to Work and have established a direct link with the Department for Works and Pensions to inform them of our concerns on proposed changes and advise on how to improve the current scheme. NDMC, through the TUC, have also been involved in shaping changes to the scheme to the introduction of Personal Budgets and how they will work.

We have updated our factsheets on Access to Work, which include an overview on Access to Work, a factsheet for employees and a factsheet for employers. NDMC have arranged for a workshop on Access to Work and Reasonable Adjustments to be held at Disabled Members Conference.

Bus passes and Passenger Transport

NDMC have worked with the Water, Environment and Transport service group on their campaign for Better Transport raising concerns about concessionary bus passes and the need for improvements to the passenger transport services for disabled people.

Fighting for fair sickness absence and Disability leave

NDMC has reviewed the unions Model Disability Leave policy and will continue to promote it across the union for branches to use with employers

Labour Party

A meeting was held with Debbie Abrahams MP, current Shadow DWP Minister and previous Shadow Minister for Disabled People and two representatives from NDMC attended the Labour Link forum.

National Officers have met with the secretary of Disability Labour to share the concerns raised by UNISON members and to discuss ways forward. We have

invited Disability Labour to attend Disabled Members conference and hope to develop a good relationship with the organisation.

Minister for Disabled People

As requested we have gathered information on the voting records of former Minister for Disabled People Justin Tomlinson, and his recent successor Penny Mordaunt. These have been sent out to regional contacts and NDMC members.

Open University and Disabled Students Allowances

We worked with the Higher Education Service Group (HESG) and other unions to campaign against the closures of the regional centres but unfortunately this was not successful. We continue to work with the HESG and other trade unions to oppose changes to disabled students allowances and to campaign for improvements

Peace, Democracy and Workers Rights in Turkey

This emergency motion was actioned immediately following conference and letters were sent to MEP's and a member of the NDMC met with the rapporteur.

Save Care Now

Two NDMC members are on the Homecare Forum with Matthew Egan, the UNISON staff member who leads on the Save Care Now campaign and they have been bringing a disability perspective to discussions.

Welfare Reform

NDMC are active in UNISON's Welfare reform campaign and ensure Disabled Members voices are heard. The government recently held a consultation on Personal Independence Payments and NDMC submitted an organisational response as well as encouraging Disabled Members to submit individual responses.

Tackling ignorance, prejudice and disability discrimination

Communication

NDMC combined the actions from motions at conference with ongoing work to improve communication for Disabled Members as it is crucial that disabled members' issues are included in a range of media in ways that are accessible to all.

Our Deaf (BSL) Caucus worked hard to create UNISON's British Sign Language (BSL) web site. The site was launched in April and can be found at www.bsl.unison.org.uk

Social media is an effective way for some Disabled Members to keep in touch and in May we launched the National Disabled Members Facebook page. We used this page, which can be found at www.facebook.com/UNISONdisabledmembers, with great success at National Delegate Conference.

We are committed to setting up a Disabled member's e-newsletter and submitting articles to all of UNISON's e-bulletins on a regular basis but need your help to do this. If you have any articles or information you think might be of interest to other Disabled Members' please send them to your regional representative on NDMC or your Regional Disabled Members contact officer.

Domestic Abuse, Hate Crime and Disabled People

NDMC continue to profile the existing guidance produced by the national womens committee on domestic abuse. NDMC have particularly highlighted the fact that Since the Care Act came into force in April 2015 the safeguarding of disabled people within disability hate crime, domestic abuse, to name a few areas covered, has been strengthened and the loopholes in laws previously covering these have been rectified. This legislation gives powers to be able to prosecute, and better protect those affected.

Guidance on rights for Disabled employees

We have reviewed existing guidance, gathered relevant information and we are currently developing updated guidance to be issued to Branches. We have also worked with UNISON's health and safety section to update the guidance on disability for health and safety reps.

NDMC Constitution and Standing Orders

The NDMC have reviewed and revised National Disabled Members Standing Orders and Constitution to bring them into line with UNISON's Rule Book. We have submitted a motion to Disabled Members Conference on these changes.

Reasonable Adjustments

NDMC has reviewed existing guidance and as part of the unions general equality survey produced a specific set of questions on reasonable adjustments. We hope to have the full findings available at Conference. Revised guidance for branches is being worked on.

Self-identification within UNISON

NDMC worked with RMS operations to make sure that members and new members can self-identify as disabled online. We will promote this in facility as part of our ongoing communication plan.

Last but not least! – Fair Representation for Disabled Members in UNISON

At the Disabled Members Conference in 2014 you once again asked us to propose a rule change to secure reserved seats for Disabled Members on the NEC. In order to do this we needed to submit a rule change to National Delegate Conference (NDC).

Following advice from the NEC we submitted this as a motion to 2015 NDC asking the NEC to carry out a consultation and submit the rule change to NDC in 2016. The motion was unanimously passed by NDC in June 2015.

As the NEC had not carried out the consultation before the deadline for motions to NDC 2016 NDMC agreed to submit the rule change as one of our two motions to NDC on the understanding that we would withdraw it if the result of the consultation was not supportive.

The NEC, with guidance from NDMC, issued an online consultation to Regions in May 2015. Although the response was fairly low it was overwhelmingly positive and NDMC decided that the rule change should continue to NDC in June 2016.

We undertook an extensive campaign to gather support for the rule change in the run up to conference including talking to Branches, Regions and other self-organised groups. We were particularly pleased to receive overwhelming support for the proposed rule change from National Black Members Committee.

During NDC we used every tool at our disposal to secure support for the rule change. We used social media, made videos, talked to delegates from every Branch and Region and encouraged as many people as possible to speak on the motion.

The rule change was passed with well over the two thirds majority needed and elections for the two seats will be held as part of the NEC elections early in 2017. Anyone wishing to stand for these seats will need to be nominated by a Regional Disabled Members Groups or two Branches to be included in the ballot.

The successful candidates will represent Disabled Members on the NEC and as such disability issues must be their top priority in all NEC meetings. They will need to make sure that Disabled Members issues are considered in all UNISON decisions and campaigns and raise the profile of Disabled Members throughout the union.

They will provide an ongoing link between the NEC and NDMC which is the democratically elected and representative body of UNISON's Disabled Members. The post holders will be expected to play a high profile role in helping the union to fight prejudice, end discrimination and achieve equality for disabled people and advise the NEC on how Disabled Members can be included and what barriers they face in the workplace. The new rule is:

D2.6 Disabled Members' Seats

There will be an additional two representatives, reserved for disabled members, one female, and one general, elected from a national constituency of all regions. No member shall be a candidate for election to the disabled members' seats unless she/he has been nominated by at least two branches or a regional disabled members self-organised group. The period of office will be two years.

Conference Reports

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Conference

The conference started Friday afternoon and delegates were given a warm welcome by members of the National LGBT Committee and South East Regional representatives. They were on hand to provide information on the workshops and advice for new delegates, of which there were many at this year's conference.

The Friday afternoon was mostly taken up by the various fringe meetings and caucus meetings. I attended the disabled caucus, where Gerard and Asha gave us an update on the groups work over the past year. It had been a busy year. They gave thanks to myself and Maggie Griffin for the support at the network day in September in which we gave two presentations to the caucus, one on Access to Work and the other explaining the social model of disability. The caucus also held an election to fill the remaining reserved woman's seat on national LGBT Committee, we elected Katrina Gillman to fill this post.

The main theme of this year's conference motions was around organising around the Trade Union Bill, EU referendum and continuing the fight for better access to health services for LGBT people.

We had three keynote speakers this year: Dave Prentis who spoke about our continuing fight of the Trade Union Bill and urging delegates to keep up the pressure on parliament as the bill moved back into the Lords. Conference heard emergency motion one which highlighted the challenges ahead to ensure we do not lose the gains we have made in LGBT equality.

Conference then debated the motions in the order of prioritisation. There was a lot of engaging debate, some debates we cut short due the use of standing orders asking for the question be put to move along the agenda.

I spoke on motion 43 'HIV and the ageing population.' As people are living longer with the virus, they are having to go back into the closet if they enter the care or residential systems where they face abuse for being HIV positive. The motion was passed.

I spoke against motion 15 'Sharer delegates to Self-organised conferences' as per National Disabled Members' Committee policy for the same motion at Disabled Members' conference in October. The question was put and conference passed this motion.

I was also able to attend the discussion group on Tackling Bi-phobia, it looked at social attitudes surveys which suppressed a growing acceptance that some people are lesbian or gay, but bi-phobia is still wide spread even amongst LGBT communities. The group were able to have an open and frank discussion around coming out as Bi and of the challenges Bi members face with in the work place.

Carl Phillips

National Black Members Conference

I was the sole delegate to a traditionally busy National Black Members Conference, which had over 25 motions and over 500 delegates and visitors. UNISON General secretary Dave Prentis referred to it as one of the largest Black Conferences in Europe. The inaugural Nelson Mandela Award recipient was Margaret Greer.

There were several motions with a Disability aspect-

12: Health care for young Black people,

15: Prostrate cancer, a risk for Black men

16: Prostrate cancer and Black men

24: Black disabled and discriminated (NDMC motion moved by Peter Daley and passed)

26: Black organ donation

Composite B: Mental Health in Black People and the stigma of mental health in Black Communities.

General secretary Dave Prentis confirmed his commitment to Self-Organisation remaining a priority within UNISON if he was re-elected.

Fringe Meetings

I attended UNISON Welfare, and becoming an MP/Councillor taster session. Both were well attended.

Workshops

I attended two workshops: Mental health and Black people; and Freedom of Information requests (FOI), how to do it from a Branch or Regional level.

I took away several points from the FOI workshop:

- Time delays of up to 20 days from receipt to acknowledgement are authorised within the legislation.
- Requests can be refused on several grounds
- costs exceed £450 Local Authority, £600 Government body
- UNISON has a guide to assist Branches and activists.

FOI responses are shared with National Officers and the Regions that they feature or originate from. The information is not routinely cascaded down to the National SOGs so we are unable to make any judgements on Race and Disability issues. Other SOGs have no way of inputting into any of the questions asked in an FOI.

Peter Daley

National Women's Conference

The focus of conference was how women of the future in our union are facing increasingly harsh attacks on pay, terms and conditions, benefits and living standards: we are expected to do more for less.

The Tory government are using Trade Union Bill to attack facility time, right to take industrial action and right to collect subs. Conference noted that trade unions play a vital role in improving employment rights, working conditions of women and advancing workplace gender equality.

Conference felt that the austerity agenda has resulted in severe jobs losses for women within public services. These essential services have for many years been catered for by local authorities where the most vulnerable service users were commissioned to the private sector resulting in poorer care.

Conference called on the National Women's Committee to work with appropriate bodies including Learning and Organising Services to develop and promote a training package for equality officers and representatives to have the necessary skills and knowledge to request and use Equality Impact Assessment data to challenge direct and indirect discrimination that the reduction in flexibility is creating.

Flexible working is being attacked, women workers are being denied time off, employers are wanting to bring in buying annual leave which will add more insult too low – paid women who won't be able to afford to pay for it, causing more stress to their caring responsibilities

Conference is aware of that changes to legal aid and that the Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 mean women have to provide evidence of domestic abuse for more than two years. This can include police caution, protective injunction, letter from the health service, or evidence of residence in a refuge.

More than 50% of disabled women in the UK may have experienced domestic abuse in their lives and this statistic shows that disabled women may be assaulted or raped at a rate that is at least twice that of non-disabled women.

Conference debated young women and the belief that sexism in the workplace is still a force to be challenged and that until it is swept away, women will not achieve equality with men in respect of earnings, status, or power.

Disabled women should be supported and enabled to get or maintain gainful employment and career progression. Many layers impact on disabled women in the work place, caring responsibilities, children and older relatives, accessible support to manage their own disability, financial constraints, workplace sickness.

The TUC have researched disability and employment and published a report 'Disability and Employment' in May 2015. The report uses the social model of disability to study the employment experiences of disabled people in Great Britain, with a particular focus on people with a mental illness.

The report found disabled people consistently fare worse in employment than non-disabled people. Various factors can aggravate these negative outcomes, including the dual discrimination faced by disabled women or the especially pronounced disadvantage faced by people with mental health problems due to inflexible workplaces and ignorance about their impairments. The good news is that there is a lot that can be done to help counteract and reduce artificial barriers to employment.

Conference noted that housing benefit for young women is a right for all to enable them to access safe, secure and of course affordable housing.

Cervical cancer remains the most common cancer in women under the age of 35 and yet screening can prevent up to 80% of cases. The media has said women are being requested to wear high heel shoes for work even when there is no dress code policy, this is typical gender stereotyping and has to stop.

Hillary Mellor

Health Service Group Conference

Conference was opened by the President Wendy Nichols.

Rox Norman, Chair of Health Service Group Executive Committee addressed the conference. He reaffirmed our support for the junior doctors in their ongoing battle. He said we must be extra vigilant against the Tory cuts in the NHS and referred to the tougher conditions with ambulance and paramedics staff working longer hours and students, midwives and all health professionals running up huge debts.

Heidi Alexander, Shadow Health Secretary was a keynote speaker. She called upon conference to join her in showing solidarity in supporting the junior doctors in their ongoing battle with Jeremy Hunt over the 7 days services. She reminded us of the pride we have in our NHS, pride in our union and pride in ourselves. Then Dave Prentis, UNISON general secretary, reminded the conference that a year ago commitments were made on pay. Those promises have been broken and our trust has been betrayed. Our union is now saying to Jeremy Hunt enough is enough. deliver on your promises otherwise we will be joining the junior doctors on the picket line.

Professor Michael West addressed conference on 'developing a positive workplace culture in the NHS.' He believes that the core of the NHS is about compassion that we must first think and foremost create a compassionate culture in our NHS organisation. He believes that what's required is a model of leadership, and believes that the model of compassionate leadership begins with our politicians.

Key motions of interest debated at the conference were:-

- NHS funding, and cuts to services
- Training issues
- Agenda for change, pay, terms and conditions
- Campaigning against privatisation and outsourcing

Karen Walters National Disabled Members Rep spoke on Motion 25 'Impact of Demand on Health Workers.' All staff, no matter what their Band, are struggling to meet targets, whilst at the same time maintaining their high standards. Staff shortages further exacerbate the problems, alongside long 12 hour shifts, often with no breaks. This puts further pressure on our Disabled members, who often fear that the ongoing threat of management and HR taking them down the sickness management route. This motion was carried.

Diane Johnson, National Disabled Members rep spoke on Motion 9 'Fair treatment and consistency.' Disabled people are significantly more likely to experience unfair treatment than non-disabled people, and monitoring and preventing substantial disadvantage to disabled people is a legal duty for employers and a responsibility for us as a union. It was very emotional for me as I expressed my passion in the reasons why I needed to be here to speak on the motion despite having to deal with

2 deaths in the family my nephew and his father, and both funerals taking place on 29th April. This motion once again had all at Conference voting it as being carried.

Karen and Diane visited different focus groups, including 'defending Agenda for Change' and 'Crisis in Mental Health Services.' Karen also attended an evening Fringe Meeting called 'Time to Change – the stigma of mental health' where she learned about 'Fair Funding for Mental Health Services' - a UNISON campaign that has identified that the total budget for mental health services is currently only 13% of the total NHS budget. However, Mental health illnesses/patients are actually running at 23% of total illnesses/patients within our NHS. This clearly demonstrated the unfairness and underfunding of a vital service. Yet this Tory Government tell us they have increased funding in mental health services over their term in office. Clearly this is incorrect and unfair.

The conference closed with the playing of "you'll never walk alone" and a minute's silence in memory of the victims of the Hillsborough disaster. Overall, it was a very forward thinking, friendly and informative Conference.

Diane Johnson and Karen Walters

Communities Conference

The Conference started at lunch time on the Friday with sector meetings for:

- Community and Voluntary Sector
- Housing Association Sector
- Major Charities Sector.

The Housing Association sector meeting discussed terms and conditions for workers in the sector pay negotiations, the impact of the government right to buy and the rents situation. The delegates represented many different areas and sizes of housing associations across the UK.

Roger McKenzie, assistant general secretary was Friday's guest speaker. He spoke about his background of being a housing worker back in 1981 and a member of NUPE. He told us that 500 of UNISON's 800 branches have community and voluntary sector members within them, yet this is the smallest sector conference. He spoke about the Trade Union Bill and outlined what the implementation of this would mean to the trade unions and their members.

The first of the seminars followed for the rest of the afternoon. The choices were:

- Heading TUPE and reorganisations;
- Dealing with Stress;
- Making practical use of the Equality Act;
- How to recruit a new member;
- Training Tasters – facility time without union recognition and campaigning targets and allies; or
- Writing motions and participating in Conference.

These were very useful and informative sessions with full participation from all the delegates in each session. In the TUPE seminar, disability leave and sickness monitoring was touched upon when disabled members are involved in the selection of TUPE and reorganisations.

Much more still needs to be done with employers to recognise the difference between disability leave and being able to attend appointments to maintain yourself as a disabled person, and being sick and unwell.

The last session on Saturday morning was a panel session for question and answers on "Everything you ever wanted to know about UNISON Community". The panel was made up of Wendy Nichols, Dave Johnson and Kevin Jackson. Many questions were asked regarding the structure of the community sector and how members can participate and be on the regional committees.

It was commented on that the community sector was the Cinderella of the union and the poor relation. 'We support the most vulnerable and we are the lowest paid.'

Disabled members caucus meeting.

The disabled members held a caucus meeting in the lunch break. They discussed the accessibility of the venue and fed that back. Caucus meeting time was an issue. Some delegates may not have had any time to have any lunch as the caucus meetings were back to back in the lunch time. Disabled members may have needed more time to eat and so it would have been better to put their meeting at the beginning of lunch times. It was also felt that the equality seminar was too focused on one strand of diversity.



Jean Sowley and Wendy Nichols (President)

The conference business commenced on the Saturday afternoon and concluded on Sunday. It was chaired by the President Wendy Nicholls. There were two motions on the agenda from the National Disabled Members Conference:

Motion 4 Good Care Costs moved by Philip O'Shea

This motion covered the inadequate funding for care, calling on councils to sign UNISON's ethical care charter, which sets out a commitment that ensures the health, safety, and dignity of the UK's most vulnerable people. Paying a real living wage and not the renamed minimum wage disguised as the new national living wage.

Motion 11 Preserve Our Terms and Conditions moved by Jean Sowley

This motion talked about how housing associations had to make cuts to balance their books after the government imposed cuts to rents and the right to buy. The motion highlights the concerns that disabled workers are being targeted in reorganisations which focus on capability including sickness absence which sometimes should have been marked as disability leave. Productivity of work which can mean that disabled workers can be at a disadvantage and at higher risk of being made redundant.

Both these motions were carried. During the conference the disabled member's delegates spoke to almost 1/3 of the motions to ensure that disability issues were included. One amendment fell during the conference as there was no one to move the amendment. The conference was debated an emergency motion in the wake of a House of Commons select committee report into the Kids Company collapse which made headlines earlier this year.

The union called for more financial transparency from charity trustees and protection for UNISON members and other staff; guidance for union reps who fear their charity


might be in difficulty will be produced and it was recommended to work with the Charity Commission and employers' organisations to promote proper consultation.

Another guest speaker during conference was Anna Turley M.P. for Redcar and a labour shadow minister. She told the conference that "Your role has never been more valuable; your voice has never been more valuable, and unlike this government, we value your voice and we value your experience."

She talked about the problems facing society and our members including:

- underfunding of social care, where staff in both care homes and home care are paying the price;
- low pay, which has been problem across the sector as whole;
- housing associations, who provide two million houses for five million people in affordable homes which are now under threat from extending the 'right to buy';
- attacking the voice of charities, and unions

The last 10 months, she said, had shown her the limits of parliamentarianism, especially in opposition, and the lesson was clear: to get things done, "we have to work with everyone, and across the trade union movement."



**"There's no cavalry to rescue
us
No knight in shining armour
It's down to us
We have to organise
And stand up for ourselves."**

Jean Sowley and Philip O'Shea

TUC Disabled Workers Conference

UNISON's delegation was made up of the President Wendy Nichols, Kim Silver (who held a UNISON seat on TUC Disabled Workers Committee) Carl Phillips, Kathleen Kennedy, Iain Scott-Burdon, Kevin Rogers, Jean Sowley, Hillary Mellor and Jacqueline Jones.

Jean Sowley moved UNISON's motion **Breaking Down the Barriers**. The motion highlighted the importance of unions being a positive voice for disabled people. It called for the TUC to develop guidance for unions to use with employers and / or sectors to recruit and retain disabled workers. Having a positive voice and images of disability to change employers' mindset to disabled workers and understand the value they bring to the workforce.

UNISON delegates spoke on other motions:

- Kathleen Kennedy spoke to motion 4 about Positive about disabled people-two tick scheme and the flaws of the scheme;
- UNISON put an amendment to motion 5, Organising Disabled Workers and the Trade Union Bill. Kim Silver moved the amendment;
- Iain Scott-Burdon spoke to motion 15 Access to Public Transport and brought personal examples into his speech; and
- The motion Disability Discrimination in Pay and Progression was amended by UNISON and Carl Phillips moved the amendment

There were motions that highlighted a wide variety of topics, including: actions needed to resist government attempts to cut funding to schools and colleges; the need to reinstate disabled students allowance; the importance of the social model of disability; how people often feel unable to declare their disability to their employer; the attack on trade unions and the trade union bill; and disability hate crime.

The motion Work Capacity Assessments and links to suicide was selected by the conference to go forward to the TUC Congress in September.

There were 3 emergency motions added to the agenda: Budget cuts to disability benefits; Sarah Reed campaign for justice; and Staff cuts at the Equalities and Human Rights Commission.

Conference opened on Thursday morning with 25 unions attending, with delegates, facilitators, visitors, assistance dogs and services. It was a packed auditorium. Frances O'Grady, TUC General Secretary was the first speaker. She spoke about the forthcoming referendum and the accessibility to vote.

There was a reminder as to how far the trade unions had come in turning the tide of the Trade Union Bill, a look forward to the results of the EU Referendum and the collective agreements that will be needed whichever way the vote goes.

Sean McGovern gave the chair's address and reflected on the past year's work. The Annual Report was taken in bite size chunks between conference motions.

On Thursday afternoon the Shadow Minister for Disabled People Debbie Abrahams MP addressed the conference. She spoke about the statistics of claimants who had died because of the change in Disability Living Allowance and benefits. The cuts to disability related issues and Access to Work were also covered. Following this there was a two hour session on her disability equality roadshow.

Many aspects of disabled people's lives and needs were covered in the roadshow. These were introduced by different committee members to set the scene before open sessions for questions and case studies. These were: social security; employment issues; accessible and affordable housing (introduced by Kim Silver); and the Media, Health and health inequalities.

Jean Sowley gave information on the Care Act, how hate crime is now covered by the Act and should be reported to the local authority safeguarding team or the police. Kevin Rogers gave examples of accessible and affordable public transport and Iain Scott-Burdon spoke about education for deaf children and the support they need.

Debbie took many notes from the information that was given from delegates from the floor. The session was packed with problems, case studies and information sharing that will give the Shadow Minister a clear understanding of the problems facing disabled people.

Straight after conference finished on Thursday evening, the TUC held a social with two poets and a singer. The entertainment was well received and made a great end to a busy day in conference.

On Friday the guest speaker to conference was John McDonnell MP, Shadow Chancellor. His address gave us some background to him becoming a Labour MP in 1987 and some of the posts he has held. He went on to remind us of the "nothing about us without us" campaign, spoke about the disabled people face finding work and how many disabled people die before work is found for them. The Labour Party opposes the government and works to defeat them over disability issues. The address was well received by conference.

All the motions and emergency motions were completed by the end of conference. Sian Stockham was elected on to the TUC Disabled Workers Committee as UNISON's representative. It had been a most successful Disabled Workers conference.

Jean Sowley

Water, Environment and Transport (WET) Conference

The keynote speaker this year was MP for Stockton North and Shadow Minister for the Natural Environment, Alex Cunningham. He presented a balanced speech, covering the three parts of WET.

He stated that it is “Thanks to UNISON’s hard work, that the water industry is becoming the first multi-company industry to adopt the living wage.” UNISON have used their ‘Making Waves’ campaign with the Living Wage campaign to call on all UK water companies to sign up as accredited living wage employers. There are a few who have yet to sign up and we need to push these companies to do this.

The timing of the Conference, the Sunday before the Referendum, made it a natural place to remind us that the referendum was “monumentally important” and he expressed his delight that UNISON was campaigning to remain in the EU stating that “None of us should be in any doubt that we have the campaign of our lives on our hands.”

He went on to say that remaining in the EU would protect workers’ rights against a government bent on eroding them as well as being the best framework for trade.

His concerns about the LGPS and other pension schemes, which were no doubt covered in much greater depth at Local Government Conference, were echoed by executive chair Ruth Davies who warned it is “still a battleground”.

Cuts to the Environment Agency were another issue that was raised during his speech, when he said: “The Tories have been willfully negligent in their approach and response to floods.” As someone from Yorkshire Water, we know this all too well.

Chris Haywood

National Energy Conference

There were a few issues for those of us who travelled on the Sunday due to rail strikes but we all managed to arrive safe but tired.

Conference which started on Monday was Chaired by UNISON Vice-President, Carol Sewell. The Annual report was accepted.

Two motions, 3 and 4, fell as there was no one to move them. Amendment 6.2 fell as there was no one from the LGBT group to move it.

Young Members withdrew their amendment to the National Disabled Members Committee motion, Mental Health at Work and it went through as did all other motions that were moved

The speaker was the Shadow Energy Minister Alan Whitehead MP for Southampton.

He spoke about future plans for the energy sector, including more help for renewable energy, including water and wind farms. He also spoke on Fracking and how we should not use this and about the need for more help for vulnerable customers.

Irene Humphries

Local Government Conference

Sundays morning's session began with a welcome from Unison President, Wendy Nichols followed by a report from the Standing Orders Committee (SOC), the Local Government Service Group Executive (LG SGE) Annual Report and a report on Recruitment and Organising. The debate focused on organising, facility time and housing and motions on school support staff.

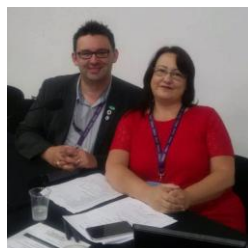
On Sunday afternoon the focus of the debate was pay, terms and conditions, and equality issues. Craig moved National Disabled Members motion 29: The Fight for Fair Sickness Absences Procedures and Disability Leave which was passed unanimously. Angela spoke in support of motion 39: Negotiating Equality in Local Government in a Climate of Ever Harsher Cuts and motion 3: Single Status and Equality Legislation.

The guest speaker on Monday morning was Jan Willem Goudriaan, General Secretary of the European Federation of Public Services Unions, whose speech was particularly relevant given the result of the EU referendum later in the week.

Craig spoke in support of amendment 4.2 on Youth Services and Youth Workers, highlighting the impact of the cuts on young disabled people. Our motion 30, Home Care Workers, was scheduled to be on the agenda but unfortunately we did not reach it so it was not moved.

Monday afternoon included guest speaker Nick Lowles from Hope not Hate as well as short film, Death on a plate, highlighting the importance of meat inspection and the risk from TTIP. The film was graphic in parts but certainly hit home. Debates focused on TTIP, Devolution, pensions and housing before returning to emergency motions that were not heard the previous day. Angela spoke about the reasons why Disabled Members think it is important to have a longer term pay strategy.

Disabled Members Caucus, held on Monday lunchtime, was well attended. It was conducted in an informal and open way to allow people to feel comfortable talking and provide assistance for new delegates.



Issues discussed included the Social Model of Disability and the proposed rule change to National Delegate Conference. Several delegates made videos to promote the rule change, promised to speak in favour and talk to branches to gather support.

Craig Martin and Angela Hamilton

National Delegates Conference

Disabled Members had a rule change on the agenda: Reserved Seats for Disabled Members on the NEC; and Motion 70 Access to Work. The rule change was scheduled for Thursday afternoon while Motion 70 was on the remaining order of business.

Craig and Angela spoke on a number of motions including Challenging Poverty and Attacks on Democracy and made sure Disabled Members had a high profile throughout the conference.

We were informed on the evening before conference that the National Executive Committee (NEC) were opposing our rule change. We therefore launched a major campaign to secure support from as many branches as possible. This involved using social media and the conference app, talking to as many delegates as possible and getting articles published in as many regional newsletters as possible. Angela and Craig would like to thank every member, both disabled and non-disabled, who helped with the campaign.

The first Disabled Members Caucus meeting was held on Tuesday lunchtime and was very well attended, especially as it clashed with Women's caucus. We followed a fairly relaxed format so that people felt comfortable speaking and able to get involved. There were a number of issues discussed including the new process of requesting reasonable adjustments for conference, issues with high backed chairs, drugs policies that are being introduced in some employers that could impact on Disabled Members and of course our rule change.

By Thursday morning we were hearing that support for our rule change was high but we still weren't confident it would get the two thirds majority needed so we kept on campaigning.

The Equality Fringe on Thursday lunchtime was chaired by Angela, the first time Disabled Members have been asked to do this. The topic was Equality: Raising our game in our branches and it was extremely well attended. Khadije Campbell gave a really interesting presentation on UNISON's successful Challenging Racism in the Workplace campaign and how it can be adapted to tackle all types of discrimination at work, which was followed by a lively question and answer session.

Before conference restarted on Thursday afternoon we were informed that the NEC's position on our rule change, which was third on the agenda, had changed from 'oppose' to 'leave to conference'. Although it seemed our campaign was working we still weren't sure if we would get the two thirds majority needed.

Angela Hamilton moved the rule change and there were numerous members lined up to speak in support and only one against. The member who spoke against didn't really oppose the change but wanted clarification on some points. Ash Dhobi delivered an extremely passionate and supportive speech on behalf of Black Members as did NDMC co-chair Peter Daley who was representing his Branch.

Maureen Le Marinel then spoke on behalf of the NEC setting out their considerations of the rule change before stating that it was up to conference to decide. It was after this speech that a Point of Order was put. Angela took her right to reply to respond to the questions from the delegate who spoke against and address the NEC's concerns.

Everyone who had spoken or was waiting to speak in favour remained at the front for the vote. We didn't get two thirds of the vote. We got about 95% of the votes with only a handful of delegates voting against. Emotions ran high, with tears of joy, laughter and shouts of thanks from all those involved.

At the end of the session General Secretary Dave Prentis and Assistant General Secretary Liz Snape came out of their way to congratulate us on our success and have their photo taken with Angela.



Dave, Angela and Liz

Disabled Members have been asking for this rule change for sometime so it was an amazing result that led to us changing the Disabled Members Caucus scheduled for that afternoon into a celebration.

Unfortunately, after that things didn't go quite as smoothly. The result of the EU referendum meant the atmosphere in conference on Friday was quite deflated with many delegates being visibly upset. The debate on immigration became even more important and although we were scheduled to speak a point of order was put before we had the chance.

As for Motion 70, despite being successful in getting it reprioritised, we didn't get that far on the order of business so it fell off the agenda. All in all the conference was a success for Disabled Members and if we had to sum it up in two words they would probably be "We won".

Angela Hamilton and Craig Martin

National Delegate Conference 2016 Newsheet

This year's National Delegate Conference came with the EU Referendum vote taking place on the Thursday. The run up to that vote gave much speculation, which influenced the mood of conference.

This year as always there was a great combination of guest speakers from various parts of the world who I managed to interview for the news sheet. I asked them to tell me about what was available to support disabled workers into and in employment in their country.

Domingo Perez, general secretary of the Nicaraguan public service union and Maria Nela Gaitan general secretary of the Roberto Herrera health centre branch of the health union FETSALUD, shared with us that there is no discrimination in the country.

Nicaragua has laws and collective agreements that states companies of any size should have no less than 15% of their staff being identified as disabled workers. There should be no barriers to the roles that they hold.

The government has given priority to disabled people for health care, aids and adaptations, and if a disabled person's home is not appropriate for their needs it will be made bigger or repaired so that the disabled person is not disadvantaged.



Jean (r) with Maria Nela Gaitan and Domingo Perez

Jeremy Corbyn joined conference on Wednesday and was hugely popular for photos and selfies, which he gave time for.

The caucus meetings were reported in the daily newsheet and there was much support and discussion around the rule change for disabled members to have allocated seats on the NEC.

There were many things covered by the newssheet, including fringe meetings, general disability issues and information, encouraging branch self-organisation and advertising the disabled members network days and conference.

As always I enjoyed the work of the newssheet, it's a busy time on and off the conference floor but the buzz and overall experience of conference was great to be a part of.

Many thanks to all those who agreed to speak to me, or be interviewed, giving me their opinions on disability issues that I could report on, as well as the officers who supported my work. It all contributed to an interesting and informative Disabled Members newssheet.

Jean Sowley

Labour Link Forum

Forum began on Friday and we had no speaker as we felt it would not be right having Angela Eagle there when she had announced she was standing for Labour Leader. We then started the motions and Craig Martin moved the motion from the National Disabled Members Committee. The motion was carried.

There were workshops in the afternoon relating to the Trade Union Act and Labour Link. In the afternoon there were Labour MPs and MEPs who told us about themselves and took questions from the floor.

Dave Prentis spoke to us about a meeting he had with Jeremy Corbyn and the letter he received from Jeremy. On Saturday morning we finished off the motions and finished early.

Irene Humphreys

Caucus Reports

Black Caucus

Chelsea Skervin and Peter Daley were elected as the representatives at NDMC Conference in October 2015. Peter was also elected as one of the two NDMC Chairs.

The Caucus reps met with members at the Network Day in June and submitted two motions onto the 2016 National Disabled Members' Conference motions agenda: 'Supporting Black members with Dyslexia and Dyspraxia' and 'Supporting Black members with sickle cell, Thalassemia and Lupus'.

Deaf (native British sign language users) Caucus

One of the biggest achievements for us and, for UNISON itself this year, is that we finally made our website fully accessible for deaf members and, that we have our own British Sign Language (BSL) page with several BSL clips of general information as well as a few key issues.

We worked with other committee members to monitor the situation of the government's Access to Work grant. This has already affected lots of deaf members, whose funding has been cut impacting on their work performance when they have no communication support. The changes also affect the lives of disabled members in general.

We are concerned as Access to Work does not pay for interpreters' mileage costs and they are considering directly contracting with BSL interpreters and taxi firms. We don't agree with this as we have currently have more of a choice of interpreters to pick from specialising in different areas such as in courts or in hospitals. Not all interpreters can do everything. If Access to Work want us employ one interpreter that would not support our work and skills.

Access to Work currently doesn't have a fixed cost for BSL interpreters. Some Deaf people only receive £25 per hour towards interpretation costs which is worrying us as far as we know most interpreters charge a minimum of £30 plus travelling mileages – how does this work? That's why we continue to work with UNISON and the National Disabled Members Committee to try and change the way that Access to Work can provide a better service and support for Deaf people in the workplace.

Denise Lightbody, one of our Deaf caucus committee members will be leaving us after attending Disabled Members conference for the last time this year after so many years.

During her 10 years on the National Disabled Members Committee, she has worked so hard to share information about the Deaf communities in the UK and spread out information to old and new members about UNISON everywhere she travelled to.

She will be greatly missed by the National Disabled Members Committee, past and present.

Iain Scott-Burdon

Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Caucus

The LGBT caucus has been heavily involved with the work of the National Committee work plan. We have participated in the working groups of the committee.

Carl was elected to attend the TUC Disabled Workers Conference and spoke on behalf of the delegation moving an amendment. This was great opportunity to promote to other unions how UNISON works with self organisation.

We held a network day in June at UNISON Centre, where we gave an update on the work plan, and a good discussion was held around various issues including young disabled LGBT people and the housing benefit cap. The group decided to send a motion to conference on this issue. Due to the time of year unfortunately this wasn't as well attended as we could have liked. The caucus are working the Head of Membership Participation Unit on how we can ensure more members are able to get involved with the caucus at a national level.

We have attended as many Pride and LGBT events as we were able to. Carl was able to attend the launch of the Come Out of the Shadows event, which is a new three-year initiative promoting a positive LGBT image spanning the Liverpool City Region. It is funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner and will run for the duration of the Liverpool Pride festival between 23 and 31 July.

Sam Sharp & Carl Phillips

Women's Caucus

On 29 June the Disabled Women's caucus gathered together from various regions around the country bringing with them a variety of knowledge and experiences. There were six women who attended along with me as chair and Maggie Griffin to support.

The co-operation, enthusiasm and support amongst the women in the group was great! It was such an inspirational experience. Ideas and subject matters were bantered around until we came up with something the whole group felt strongly about.

Everyone contributed something, a word, a phrase, a sentence or guidance. Some of the motions were partly written which got us off to a great start. As the group contributed ideas they flowed thick and fast.

Particularly helpful were the flipcharts that we used and there was careful attention paid to the wording into what we wanted the motion to say and what we were asking NDMC to do. We felt that the motions themselves would bring out some very passionate debates at conference as they did in the room!

The three motions that we put together are:

1. Impact of menopause on disabled women
2. Trade Union Act and disabled women activists
3. One size does not fit all

On Thursday 4 August the Disabled Women's Caucus met again at UNISON Centre in London. this time to discuss the motions that we felt we could amend. On the day we were expecting six women to attend but unfortunately due to work commitments, illness and other issues only two women were able to join myself and Maggie. However, this did not diminish the discussions and debates that took place. And of course we were guided by the most wonderful helpful Haifa.

We were very delighted to find that all of our motions were accepted by the SOC. So well done to those who helped to draft them. Having looked at the motions we decided on three that we thought would be enhanced by an amendment.

Again the group worked really well together, full of enthusiasm and passion for what we were doing. And myself and Maggie would like to thank those who attended for their contributions

Kathleen Kennedy – Chair of NDMC's Women's Caucus
Maggie Griffin

National Disabled Members Committee 2016

Eastern

Kevin Rodgers
Suzanne Williams

East Midlands

Karen Bennett (Until May)
Zulf Hussein

London Region

Maggie Griffin (NDMC Deputy Co-Chair)
Kim Silver

Northern

Angela Hamilton (NDMC Co-Chair)
Cath McGuinness (Disabled Members rep on National Women's Committee)

North West

Graeme Ellis
Liz Cameron (until July)
Lisa Dempster (from August)

Northern Ireland

Siobhan Donnelly
Ann Donnelly

Scotland

Kathleen Kennedy
John Nesbit

South East

Sarah Barwick
David Yates

South West

Craig Martin
Lucinda Dixon (until March)
Karen Rice (from June)

Cymru/Wales

Irene Humphreys
Peter Williams

West Midlands

Jacqueline Jones
Hilary Mellor (Disabled Members rep on National Women's Committee)

Yorkshire and Humberside

Neil Marsden

Jean Sowley (NDMC Deputy Co-Chair)

Black Members Caucus

Peter Daley (NDMC Co-Chair)

Chelsea Skervin

Deaf Caucus

Iain Scott Burdon

Denise Lightbody

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Caucus

Carl Phillips

Sam Sharp

National Black Members Committee

Kuldeep Bajwa

Peter Sharma

National LGBT Committee

Louise Ashworth

Kaz Williams

National Women's Committee

Viv Thomson (until April)

Rona Ellison

NEC

Irene Stacey

Sian Stockham

Polly Smith

