

Branch Resources Review –Support For Branches

WHAT HAS BEEN GOING ON SINCE CONFERENCE

The Branch Resources Review (BRR) was set up by UNISON's National Executive Council following a National Delegate Conference decision in 2011.

The BRR Working group was tasked with reviewing the branch funding regime, how resources were applied, and how this might be improved to make the union more effective, while addressing the particular financial issues faced by branches.

At last year's National Delegate Conference in June 2016 motion 121 was carried, entitled "Gateway to the Future: Stable and Sustainable Branch Resources". The Finance and Resource Committee of the NEC pledged financial support to those branches facing financial difficulties through a structured process of budgeting, review and assessment of needs and agreed work plans, thus allowing a collaborative approach.

The objective behind the proposal is to provide vulnerable branches with a strong financial base by way of financial support and assistance but not simply to top up or add to branch reserves. Financial support may be required over a period of time so that branches have the time to embed the changes to ensure the correct level of financial support is made suitably available.

Work is well underway in implementing the actions called for in the motion and this brief update contains information on some of this ongoing activity.

WHERE ARE WE NOW

Branches identified for funding uplift

Motion 121 proposed that branches with insufficient funds to support their objective based budgets and agreed work plans would be able to benefit from a top-up from the regional pool.

This extra funding would be available to branches either up to a maximum of 5% of their current funding level, or such amount as would bring their reserves up to the level of £16 per member, whichever is less.

The union has identified 190 branches which may qualify for such uplift and these have all now been written to by UNISON regional offices.

It is envisaged that most of the funding uplifts as outlined above will or can be agreed and implemented locally through branch /region collaboration and discussion and with the process overseen through a regional lay body.

WHAT CAN YOU DO

If your branch has not been contacted but you believe you may qualify for additional funding, please contact your regional organiser and regional convenor to have your branch funds reviewed.

However, it is recognised that for some branches, the organising and financial challenges they may be facing means they may require a higher level of support. In these cases regions can re-direct and/or support where appropriate, branch bids to other funding streams such as the GFF for example. Alternatively, branches can be invited to participate in a more comprehensive financial turnaround plan which would involve further analysis and evaluation of a longer term strategy and work plan.

NEXT STEPS

Appeals process in place

Motion 121 also called for a national appeals process to be set up for those branches who have not been able to achieve a satisfactory resolution through the regional process. The appeal process has now been agreed and branches who wish to appeal to the national panel will have an opportunity to either attend in person or send a written submission to be considered as will the region.

Your regional office will be able to provide you with further information on how to appeal.

Regional pool criteria reviewed

In addition, motion 121 called for a review of the regional pool criteria to be carried out in consultation with UNISON regions.

Branches are able to apply for additional funding from the regional pool, where there is a demonstrable need to finance a development programme or actions arising from the annual branch assessment process.

The funding criteria require branches to outline intended actions and objectives; how spending and activity will be monitored; and how success will be measured.

These criteria have been reviewed with regions and there is general agreement that they continue to represent a reasonable approach to determining access to the regional pool.

The Regional Pool criteria is available using the following link

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2017/02/18100.pdf>

There is scope however for further work in determining whether the way the criteria are applied also needs to be reviewed.

SIGN UP FOR TRAINING COURSES

Finally, motion 121 called for further training and support to assist branches in maximising their entitlement under current funding rules.

Accordingly, the current education and training on offer is being expanded with new training courses devised with UNISON Learning and Organising Services, including one for activists and one jointly for staff and activists.

These will become part of regional education programmes, as an ongoing tool to aid branches.