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UNISON
*Water, Environment
& Transport*

network

The magazine for all UNISON members working in
Water, Environment and Transport

Inside this issue

Bridge the gap
– fighting the
gender pay gap

Going public –
Labour's water
strategy

Bus battles – the
drive for better
bus services



A view from your national officer – Andrew Dobbie



Even amid Brexit, or whatever will happen instead, and the thrashings of the political system, life goes on. While MPs' attention is largely elsewhere, that's when we need to concentrate more than ever on working out what we need as a union, and how we can organise ourselves most effectively to get it. That's what this edition focuses on. Firstly, in carrying on the everyday work of supporting members in the workplace - Charan Sekhon's profile on page 11 describes the great work he and his counterparts across the WET service group are doing to advance equality for all members. This kind of workplace support is the basis of why most members join UNISON, and is always the priority within our Group. UNISON's Bargaining Support unit produces great materials for branches to provide this kind of help; you can find out more on page 8.

As Trotsky said: "You may not be interested in strategy, but strategy is interested in you." Policy decisions made by politicians whether in Whitehall or in the Town Hall have the potential to have profound impacts on members in our group. Catch up on the latest on bus franchising on p10, and on our engagement in Labour's policy to take water companies into public ownership on page 6. We are at the table on both of these issues, as you, our members, need us to be.

Of course, getting a fair deal on pay is always a key concern for members. Faced with a real pay cut, after nine years of them, members in the Environment Agency have voted to take industrial action to press the Agency to reopen pay negotiations. Find out more on page 3. We will always support our members where they feel pressed into the last resort of industrial action, in every way we can.

UNISON's national executive council elections close on 17 May. Please join your fellow UNISON members and vote. If you haven't received your ballot papers, please call us on 0800 0 857857. Find out more at www.unison.org.uk/nec2019.

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EA members vote for action

UNISON is fighting for a better pay deal for Environment Agency members who have rejected a below-inflation offer

UNISON members at the Environment Agency (EA) have voted overwhelmingly to take industrial action after a below-inflation pay rise of 1.3% was imposed on them. More than 85% of votes cast supported taking action, including stopping unpaid overtime and work travel during personal time.

UNISON's national officer for water, environment and transport, Andrew Dobbie, said: "Workers have spoken very clearly to reject this offer. The agency must reopen negotiations to give them what they deserve."

Since 2010, EA workers have faced a 20% pay cut in real terms, as a result of the government's disastrous pay policy – similar to many others across the public sector. Now, despite lofty claims from the government that "austerity is over", they're still being offered only a 1.3% rise. This is less than the 1.5% which is the going rate under government pay policy.

Unsurprisingly, members voted overwhelmingly to reject the offer and yet, the EA still refused to make a better offer or even to reopen talks. Instead, they immediately moved to impose their offer on the very workers they rely on each day.

"We know that it's possible for those working in the sector to get better pay offers," said Andrew. "Colleagues doing the exact same job in Scotland, at the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, have accepted an offer of 3% for the low paid, 2% for high earners. EA workers deserve to be treated like their colleagues in local government and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, who have been given proper increases."

UNISON members at the EA keep the country safe from floods and pollution leaks. They feel that the EA has taken advantage of their dedication to their work.

"It's time for the EA's independent board to step up, restart talks and make sure that this dedicated group of public servants get the settlement that their work merits," said Andrew.

Details of the action will be announced at a future date.
Visit: www.unison.org.uk

About the EA

The EA is a government agency established in 1996 to protect and improve the environment. It has around 10,600 employees in 14 areas around England. Its head office is in Bristol and it has another office in London. In 2017/18 its total expenditure was £1.3 billion.





Bridge the gap

UNISON has launched a national campaign to help tackle the gender pay gap. So how do water, environment and transport employers perform?

When the BBC published the salaries of its top presenters in 2017, it sparked outrage over the pay difference between male and female stars. Three of the BBC's top female presenters, Clare Balding, Victoria Derbyshire and Emily Maitlis, called for the corporation to take immediate action to rectify the gender pay gap.

Since then, all companies with more than 250 employees have been required to report their gender pay gap, with revealing results. The latest figures show that a quarter of companies and public sector bodies have a median pay gap of more than 20% in favour of men. The figures also show there has been no significant improvement since 2017, with only a slight reduction in the gap from 9.7% to 9.6%.

The median pay gap is calculated by comparing the difference in pay between middle-ranking women and middle-ranking men in the same companies. For employers with an average pay gap of 9.6%, for every £10 earned by men, women get £9.04.

To help tackle the issue, UNISON has launched a nationwide campaign,

Bridge the Gap. Dave Prentis, general secretary, explained why in a recent blog: "As a trade union, fighting for decent pay for working people is in our DNA. As Britain's biggest organisation for women, fighting for

gender equality is at the heart of everything we do. It's no surprise then that ending the gender pay gap is a critical priority for UNISON."

In the water, environment and

How well do WET employers perform in terms of the gender pay gap?

Source: www.gender-pay-gap.service.gov.uk

Company	Median pay gap 2017/18	Median pay gap 2018/19
UK average	9.7%	9.6%
Affinity Water	28.6%	27.8%
Anglian Water	16.9%	11.3%
Northumbrian Water	17.2%	17.6%
Severn Trent Water	14.6%	13.2%
Southern Water	9.0%	7.5%
South West Water	10.1%	9.3%
Thames Water	15.4%	12.5%
Wessex Water Services	4.4%	1.5%
United Utilities	15.2%	15.6%
Yorkshire Water	4.7%	6.2%
Transport for Greater Manchester	1.7%	0.2%
Transport for London	10%	9.5%
Environment Agency	2.5%	3.3%

For more information on UNISON's campaign, including an online activists tool and other resources, go to unison.org.uk/bridgethegap

To find out what the gender pay gap is in your organisation, go to <https://gender-pay-gap.service.gov.uk/> and type in your employer's name.

transport sectors, there is a huge variation between employers in terms of their gender pay gap (see Table). The worst offender, with a massive 27.8% gap in favour of men, is Hatfield-based Affinity Water, owned by a consortium of Allianz, HICL and DIF Tamblin. The figure has improved only marginally from last year, when it was 28.6%.

Other WET employers with gaps that are well above the national average are Northumbrian Water, with a 17.6% gap; United Utilities, with 15.6% and Severn Trent Water with 13.2%.

At the opposite end of the scale, the employers with the smallest pay gaps between men and women are Transport for Greater Manchester, with only a 0.2% gap; Wessex Water Services (1.5%) and the Environment Agency (3.3%).

As Dave Prentis writes in his blog: "The gender pay gap is a blight on our society. Ending the gender pay gap means ensuring that work of equal value receives the same pay, and fighting to stop work largely done by women from being considered lower-skilled, and receiving lower pay."

'This is my home'

As the Brexit saga continues, UNISON rep Iggy Pont Lezica talks about how he feels as an EU national living and working in the UK



Iggy Pont Lezica has a cosmopolitan background. Born in Argentina, he moved with his family to the USA, then to France when he was 10. He has French citizenship, but came to the UK in 1999 and has lived here ever since, with his Norwegian wife and their two sons, who are British.

Pont Lezica, an engineer and UNISON rep at Thames Water, says he still loves living in the UK and has no plans to move back to France, or to Norway, as a result of the Brexit vote.

However, since the 2016 referendum he has felt less welcome here. "I know what it's like to be a foreigner – I lived in the US as a child and we were made to feel like foreigners. But until 2016 I was never made to feel like that in the UK. Then last year we had to apply for permanent residency and the Home Office put up as many barriers as possible. That makes you feel unwelcome and also that maybe your future isn't secure."

As a French citizen Pont Lezica was not able to vote in the 2016 referendum: "I have chosen to make my home in the UK, so it's upsetting when you're not part of the decision-making process even though the fallout affects you more than anyone else. This is my home and I've chosen to come here. You end up feeling that

they don't really want you."

Pont Lezica says that UNISON is one of the only unions that is speaking up for members affected by Brexit. Since the 2016 EU referendum, UNISON has been campaigning to protect the rights of EU citizens living and working in the UK, through lobbies of parliament, working with other campaign groups and organising and supporting members to get active in their branch, workplace and community.

UNISON also offers a free immigration telephone advice to members who have come to work here from a country outside the UK, working with the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants.

As Pont Lezica points out, many EU nationals living in the UK are not just here to earn some money before returning to their country, they are fully integrated members of society: "We're deeply ingrained in UK society and to be made to feel like you're not part of it is upsetting."

If you have been a member of UNISON for more than four weeks and need immigration advice and information, please call UNISON Direct on 0800 0 857 857

Back in public hands

UNISON welcomes the Labour Party's detailed plan for a new, publicly-owned water system, which will benefit workers and consumers alike

Since the UK water industry was privatised in 1989, water bills have risen 40% in real terms and the water companies receive more in tax credits than they pay in tax. And despite the head of the Environment Agency warning recently that England will not have enough water within 25 years to meet demand, billions of litres are still being lost each year to water leakages.

Last September, the Labour Party announced details of its plan to return the water industry to public ownership if it wins the next general election. Shadow chancellor John McDonnell said at the launch, that Labour is "planned, ready and prepared to hand economic power back to workers, citizens and communities to a degree never seen before".

At the 2018 WET conference, UNISON members welcomed Labour's plans for public ownership as the best way to enable improvements in water services.

"Public ownership is working well in Scotland and Northern Ireland and we support this model," said UNISON's national officer for WET, Andrew Dobbie. "We are working to ensure that, if nationalisation was carried through, it would be in a way that supported the people who work in the industry."

"Top of our list is the need for the water industry to guarantee job security. Our members also require improvements to pension provision and assurances that working terms and conditions match the best currently available in the sector and are common across the industry."

There are currently 21 private water companies operating in England. Many are owned by banks, private

equity firms or foreign investment funds whose parent companies are based around the world in countries including Japan, Australia and Canada.

At the Labour Party's launch of its plans, John McDonnell said that a publicly-owned water system would put this essential service back in the hands of local councils, workers and customers.

"We are ending the profiteering in dividends, vast executive salaries, and excessive interest payments," said the shadow chancellor.

"Surpluses will be reinvested in staff and water infrastructure or used to reduce bills. Real investment will allow the highest environmental standards. There will be unprecedented openness and transparency in how the industry will be managed."

UNISON's Dobbie says: "Water is a right, not a luxury. At a time when many millions of households are struggling with their domestic bills, public ownership offers a new fairer way forward for workers and consumers alike."

How does water work in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?

According to the Daily Express, seven out of 10 voters want the control of water supplies taken out of the hands of major companies, many foreign-owned, and put back into public ownership.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have varied forms of public ownership already. Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water is a "single purpose" company limited by guarantee with no shareholders. It was run as a PLC like other companies until the collapse of the Hyder combined utility project in 2000. Scottish Water is a publicly-owned corporation answering to the Scottish government. Northern Ireland Water Ltd is a government-owned company, having been an executive agency within Northern Ireland's department for regional development until 2007.



UNISON's demands

At the 2018 WET Conference, UNISON backed public ownership as the best way to enable improvements in water services. The following issues were prioritised:

- guarantees of job security for the workforce
- improvements to pension provision. Under Labour's plans, water company employees would become municipal workers, so the most logical solution would be for them to be enrolled into the local authority pension schemes
- working towards common terms and conditions across the sector based upon the best currently available in the sector.

UNISON also backs the European Citizens' Initiative, Make Water a Human Right.
For more information, visit: www.bit.ly/eciwater

Bargaining for a better deal

For union reps struggling to get to grips with the latest facts and figures on pay, sick leave or unsocial hours, the Bargaining Support Group is there to help

Being a union representative can be a very stressful job – not only do you have to support members through difficult times and hold your own against management in negotiations, you also need to get to grips with changing legislation and the complicated maths involved in pay claims.

At UNISON, help is at hand from the Bargaining Support Group, whose role, according to Kevin Russell, national officer at the group, is “to try to provide union reps engaged in bargaining with guidance that helps them achieve the best possible terms for members”.

This includes publishing bargaining guides as well as giving advice to reps about specific bargaining issues they are dealing with. “We produce new guides on topics that are just emerging, such as automation in the workplace; in response to new legislation, such as payslip regulations; or in response to court rulings, such as holiday pay. However, most of our guides are revisions to the bread-and-butter topics of union negotiation – pay, hours and leave,” says Russell.

Practical guides

The aim is to make the guides as practical as possible, with the focus on helping reps reach a strong agreement with employers, whether they are dealing with sickness absence, unsocial hours or any of the myriad other issues that face members.

“We know that reps are frequently juggling a horrendous workload with limited time, so the guides are liberally sprinkled with templates such as model letters, agreements

and surveys which can be easily picked out and adapted to local circumstances. And the guides try to offer negotiators easy-to-reference benchmarks to target for their negotiations, such as the average rate for call-out payments across the economy or the best terms achieved for compassionate leave arrangements in the public sector,” says Russell.

One UNISON rep who has benefited from the group’s services is Jennifer Walley, area organiser for UNISON North West, who contacted the Bargaining Support Group to assist with last year’s pay claim for housing association Places for People. UNISON members there work in a range of jobs, including gas fitters, plumbers and health and safety officers.

Hugely impressed

“I’d heard about the Bargaining Support Group but I had no idea how much help they could be – I was hugely impressed with the range and quality of information they provided and with how quickly they responded,” says Walley.

“Kevin provided me with a model pay claim to use as a framework so I knew what information to include and how best to present it. He also made sense of the company’s accounts for me, which is a big relief when statistics isn’t one of your strong points, and provided information on how the company was performing compared to other housing associations,” she explains.

As well as providing the information for the initial pay claim, the team helped Walley respond to senior managers’ comments on the claim,

which enabled her and the other union reps to hold their own in the negotiations.

Even though Walley and her team didn’t win as big a pay rise as they’d hoped for, they did manage to persuade Places for People to agree to two important improvements – to review the pay of members affected by a previous restructure and to bring the annual pay negotiations forward to allow more time for discussion and negotiations.

And just as importantly, the support from the Bargaining Support Group gave the local stewards the confidence to draft and submit this year’s pay claim themselves.

So if you’re a rep struggling with the nitty-gritty of issues affecting your members, from submitting a pay claim to bargaining over carers’ rights in the workplace, Russell and his team are there to help you (see Box for contact details).

For more information

All the latest versions of the Bargaining Support Group’s guides, along with bargaining materials from UNISON’s units for Health & Safety and Equality, can be found on <https://www.unison.org.uk/bargaining-guides/>

New guidance always appears in UNISON’s weekly e-activist bulletin to reps, and is often featured on UNISON’s twitter and Facebook pages.

For any further assistance, contact the group on bsg@unison.co.uk

Recent guides from the Bargaining Support Group

Pay claims

A summary of the latest key economic developments affecting pay bargaining, including links to UNISON's model pay claim, intended to be of particular assistance to branches in representing private sector and community/voluntary sector staff who are not covered by the major national pay claims.

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/03/Pay-claims.docx>

New starter lists

Revised guidance on using new starter lists for building recruitment, including a range of model letters and additional advice on responding to employers who claim that they cannot provide a list because of the General Data Protection Regulations.

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/01/Using-New-Starters-List-Guidance-ver-2.docx>

Workers with caring responsibilities

New advice on bargaining over carers' rights in the workplace, including a model carers' policy that can be used as a basis for negotiations.

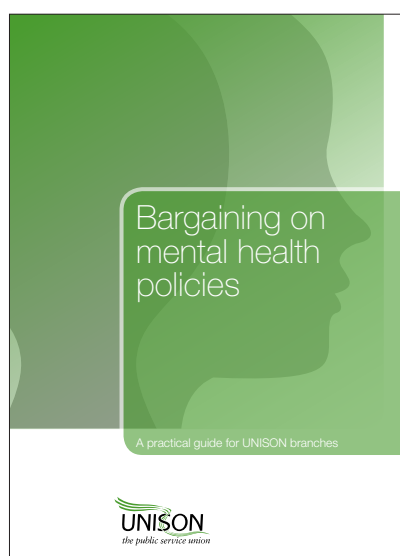
<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2018/06/Carers-policies-guide.pdf>

Mental health

Guidance to assist branches in ensuring that organisations treat mental health with the critical importance it deserves, that procedures protect the mental health of staff in general and maximise the assistance given to workers

experiencing mental health problems in particular.

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2018/05/25005.pdf>



Payslip regulations

With effect from 6 April this year, new payslip regulations will come into force across England, Wales and Scotland. This short guide seeks to explain the changes being made, how the extra information can assist in checking that staff are receiving the pay to which they are entitled and the opportunities to press for pay reporting that goes beyond the basic legal requirements.

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/02/New-payslip-regulations.pdf>

Hot-desking

New guide intended to provide branches with arguments for resisting the introduction of hot-desking into office practices or responding to its use with a checklist

of steps to minimise the most damaging consequences of hot-desking on staff.

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/01/Hot-Desking.pdf>

Negotiating for working parents

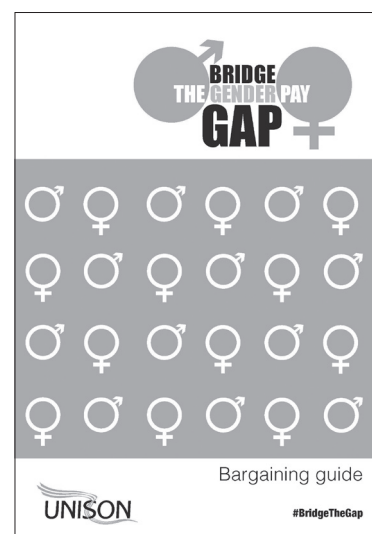
A new in-depth guide providing advice and information for negotiations on behalf of working parents, and incorporating a model family leave and pay policy.

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/03/Negotiating-for-working-parents-03-2019.pdf>

Gender pay gap

Guidance on how to use the gender pay gap reporting regulations to drive real changes in organisational policy that advance equality in the workplace

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/03/25466-1.pdf>



Battle for the buses

Greater Manchester was the first mayoral authority to explore the new powers offered by the Bus Services Act. Now others are following, but they face opposition from private firms

The Tees Valley has joined Greater Manchester in exploring the opportunities provided by the Bus Services Act to make local bus services more affordable, reliable and accessible. However, private bus companies are putting up a fight to prevent the re-regulation of services.

The Bus Services Act became law in April 2017, giving Mayoral authorities powers to reform the current bus market (see Spring 2018 issue of WET magazine). One of the key powers is the ability for transport authorities to fully specify bus service standards within all or part of their area. This is known as franchising and is similar to what already happens in London (see Box).

In December 2017, Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, became the first mayor to make a commitment to use these new powers. Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) set aside £11.5m for 2018/19 to prepare the business case for a franchising scheme alongside other options that could improve bus services in the area.

But a final decision on whether to go ahead with franchising in the region has yet to be made. A poll commissioned by the Better Buses for Greater Manchester campaign found that 76% of residents support re-regulation of buses, with only 5% disagreeing. The campaign is running a petition asking Burnham to stick to his word and go ahead with franchising.

However, the bus companies - under the banner of One Bus, which represents the 18 Greater Manchester bus firms - have come up with a 'partnership proposal' as an alternative to franchising. The proposal offers £100m to be

spent over the next three years on improving services.

Meanwhile, in Tees Valley, Mayor Ben Houchen has agreed to funding for a £150,000 study into franchising bus services in the region. In June 2018 he said: "People rightly demand that our bus network should be modern, accessible, affordable, and everyone should be able to use it. That's why we need to look at all options on the table - including bus franchising."

The cost of setting up such a model has been estimated at £4m by the Tees Valley Combined Authority.

Andrew Dobbie, UNISON's national officer for WET, says: "Mayor Burnham stood on a platform of franchising Manchester's buses, and we look forward to him delivering on it. It's great to see Teesside's Conservative Mayor Ben Houchen climbing on board too. This really is not a matter of politics - just a question of getting bus services that meet the needs of their communities. The bus company needs to serve the people, rather than the opposite."

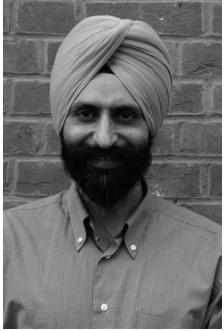
The arguments for franchising

- With one body running the network, it can introduce a simple ticket card for passengers to use on any bus or tram with a daily cap on spend.
- Local authorities can set and enforce the timetabling of buses across the region, making buses far more reliable.
- Fares become cheaper and more consistent. In London, where the bus network is regulated, fares are £1.50, for a journey which could be an hour plus.
- Profits from popular routes can be used to subsidise less busy routes so all communities have a decent service. This is done in London and across Europe.
- Bus networks can be expanded to run desperately needed evening and weekend services.



Passionate about equality

Charan Sekhon, equalities officer, branch welfare officer and health and safety rep for the Environment Agency's East Anglia branch, on what motivates him



Q: What is your role in UNISON?

A: My equalities role is to look at any issues for members that may be related to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). For

example, a lack of progression within the EA, workplace adjustments for members suffering from disabilities, supporting LGBT+ members, gender equality issues or issues related to work visas or immigration.

I'm a senior environment officer for the EA, and I'm also working on an EDI project for them, which fits in well with my UNISON work.

Q: What made you decide to become active within UNISON?

A: I've been a UNISON member for 19 years and active since about 2006.

There are two reasons why I became active. Firstly, when I first joined the EA 19 years ago, I felt my work should have been recognised and rewarded in a better way. There were issues related to lack of progression and help I received at a local level was useful so I wanted to give something back.

Secondly, health and safety has always been a subject close to my heart – I found out there was a possibility to develop my skills in that area with UNISON. I became an H&S rep, then I completed a foundation diploma in H&S through UNISON.

The management at the EA see this training as a really positive thing as

it helps in making the workplace safe for all and I also use this as a recruiting tool for UNISON, telling people that being active in the union and taking up training opportunities can help their career. People often think that being a union activist can hinder their career, so I want to reassure them that that's not the case.

Sometimes people ask "Why should I spend money on union membership?" They should look at the bigger picture. It's not just about your rights, it's about your wellbeing, family and community. You can be passionate about making the world a better place while at the same time developing your career. I am proud of being part of one big UNISON family that not only supports members but also helps so many communities in the UK and abroad.

Q: Tell me more about the EA diversity work you're involved in

A: We are looking at our workforce and whether we are reflecting the communities we serve. People think East Anglia region is not ethnically diverse, but when I looked at the census data in depth, it shows a different picture. As per current projections, East Anglia as a whole has over 12% BAME population, while only 3% of the EA's workforce in the region come from a BAME background.

"Being a union member is not just about your rights, it's about your wellbeing, family and community. You can be passionate about making the world a better place while at the same time developing your own career"

The diversity project aims to change that by engaging with different communities and raising awareness of the EA's functions and jobs.

Q: What do you like to do when you're not at work?

A: I am a local councillor in Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire, and I spend a lot of time on charity and community projects. I am the founder and chairman of SEVA Trust UK, an educational, health and environmental charity which runs projects in Bedfordshire and in India supporting low income underprivileged students and families. I am also a qualified yoga teacher and run free community health classes in Bedford. I am very passionate about the environment, equality and social justice so if I ever get free time, I try to use that to make a small difference in the above areas.

Have your say

Do you have any stories, opinions or photos you would like to share with other members in the water, environment and transport sector? If so, we would love to hear from you.

Please contact Andrew Dobbie, national officer:
a.dobbie@unison.co.uk

How UNISON can help

UNISON has a wide range of benefits to help members during times of difficulty. In the first instance, make contact with your branch's welfare officer, who will be able to advise you. Support services include:

UNISON Direct – the UNISON helpline can process straightforward queries and put you in touch with your local rep, branch or region if you have a problem at work. The helpline can also provide factsheets on issues such as: health and safety; employment rights; and professional issues.

There for You (UNISON welfare) – Members experiencing financial and emotional difficulties can contact our welfare charity, There for You, which provides a confidential advice and support service for members and their dependants. It can also arrange emergency support or grants for members in a crisis, who are facing issues such as debt, eviction or domestic abuse.

Legal services – UNISON provides the broadest range of legal help to union members in the UK. Members receive quality legal advice for non-work and employment issues at no extra cost to members and their family. This service includes: a free 30-minute telephone interview advice service on any non-employment issue.

UNISON Debtline – This confidential helpline is to help you manage money and deal with debt. We offer free confidential advice to help you clear your debt. The service is provided by Payplan – specialist debt management experts.

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£1.30
a month

Annual salary	Monthly cost
Up to £2,000	£1.30
£2,001 - £5,000	£3.50
£5,001 - £8,000	£5.30
£8,001 - £11,000	£6.60
£11,001 - £14,000	£7.85
£14,001 - £17,000	£9.70
£17,001 - £20,000	£11.50
£20,001 - £25,000	£14.00
£25,001 - £30,000	£17.25
£30,001 - £35,000	£20.30
over £35,000	£22.50

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