

2024 National Community Conference and Seminar Decisions

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Motions

1. Supporting Organising in Community Hybrid Workplaces

Carried as Amended: 1.1

Conference notes that in many community workplaces since the COVID-19 pandemic, many employees now opt for complete homeworking or hybrid working (coming into the office two days a week) if they have the option to do so. Furthermore, many charities have closed their offices, forcing their workers to become homeworkers. Many community employers are small organisations with little or no HR or IT capability. As a result, there are particular challenges for them in engaging staff as a coherent team and for UNISON to organise effectively. And reps are very unlikely to have facilities time or other arrangements enabling organising activity.

While we welcome the flexibility this new way of working has brought to the lives of many members, it has created new challenges for organising in these workplaces.

It can be difficult in these workplaces to organise as staff may not see their colleagues in person much or ever. This creates difficulties for reps and members in communicating the benefits of joining a union and how they can get involved in organising activities to colleagues who might be interested. Which is only compounded by employers not granting access to new starters lists or staff inductions even where existing recognition agreements are in place.

As more and more Community workplaces choose hybrid or working-from-home models- it is crucial that UNISON understands how to support employees in these workspaces with organising. Conference welcomes the steps already taken to address these new challenges by sharing concurrent initiatives such as the introduction of good practice digital organising models such as the North West 'Adapt to Win' strategy, the rolling out of new joiner webinars within our Social Care organising strategy and associated campaigning and numerous webinars with partner organisations showcasing the work of UNISON and the value of trade union membership in our sectors.

“Conference believes that much more needs to be done to extend this work and to tailor it to the needs of our members in Community to meet the objectives of our nationally agreed Organising to Win strategy

This motion calls on the Community Service Group Executive to:

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1. Work with the National Bargaining Unit and all appropriate stakeholders in UNISON to refresh and develop existing guidance and policy around working from home and hybrid working.”

In action point two delete “of using online workplace communication tools

2. Distribute information for reps about how to avoid the pitfalls and maximise use of GDPR-compliant online workplace communication tools when organising within Community.

3. Ensure that appropriate digital organising resources are made available to Community members who are hybrid or home workers.

2. Self Employed Or Employee?

Fell

3. Organising to Win in Community

Carried

Conference notes the adoption of the national interim Organising Recruitment Strategy Development (ORS) project recommendations by UNISON and the linked Organising, Recruitment and Retention Plan.

These recommendations include securing:

Disaggregated membership targets of 1% growth in each regional service group;

A 10% increase on 2022 levels of recruitment of stewards, Health & Safety reps and UNISON learning rep roles;

Appropriate training and development for any elected role undertaken as set out in the National Executive Council (NEC) scheme of accreditation.

Conference further notes that the rolling-out of these recommendations requires the full participation of Regional Service Group Executive Committees/Groups to enact their delivery.

Conference recognises that Regional Community Service Group Committees are still at differing levels of development, participation within their regional democratic structures and relationships with branches holding Community members.

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Enhancing these strategic relationships is key to both improving the democratic participation of Community members and growing our activist base both within our Service Group and the wider union.

Conference notes the work that the Community Service Group Executive has undertaken this year in pursuit of these objectives as part of its work plan.

Conference therefore calls on the Community Service Group Executive to:

- a) Continue to work with the National Executive Council (NEC) and the Service Group Liaison Committee to pursue joint initiatives which improve our participation and meet the objectives of UNISON's Organising to Win strategy.

- b) Continue to work with National Self Organised Group Committees, National Young Members and Retired Members Committees in pursuit of the same objectives.

- c) Work with Regional Community Service Group Committees to bring forward recommendations of good practice which seek to meet the objectives of UNISON's Organising to Win strategy.

4. Movement to Online Training in Major Charities

Carried

Since the start of the COVID crisis, many aspects of working life are increasingly delivered digitally.

This has had many positive consequences, including enabling some members to achieve better work life balance through increased home working, and improving work access for disabled members or members with caring responsibilities.

However there are also risks in "digital by default". Some members are less able to operate digitally, and there are risks of widening divides between those with

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necessarily face-to-face front line roles and supporting or office staff able to take advantage of greater flexibility on hours or work location.

One particular trend of concern among members working for major charities is the increasing desire to deliver training remotely. In some cases this is a very suitable method of delivery, but in others this is less clear. For example, training in the use of hoists or dispensing of medicines, where it is important that the person being trained can demonstrate practical and physical competence, not just theoretical understanding, before they can be considered properly qualified.

In some cases, for example in Dimensions, a blended approach of online theoretical training followed by testing of competence face-to-face, has been employed. This has met the concerns of reps across all areas about the adequacy of the training provided, though they continue to press for fully face-to-face training where this is the most appropriate teaching model.

Conference calls upon the Community Service Group Executive to:

- a) Support reps and branches in pressing for continued face-to-face training where that is the best option to achieve training objectives.
- b) Support reps and branches to push for appropriate assessment, including face-to-face, where an online model is used by the employer.
- c) Gather any examples of good or poor practice which arise and to share and publicise best practice examples with branches
- d) Work with the bargaining support unit to update relevant bargaining guidance on this issue

5. Pay for the Real Responsibilities of all Care Workers

Carried

Conference notes that low pay for care workers doing a difficult and skilled job is the norm in the care sector. Care workers are undervalued by an underfunded, marketised and fragmented social care system which is built to drive down care worker terms and conditions and allows the government to dodge responsibility for the staffing crisis this has caused. There are currently 152,000 vacancies in the care sector, by far the worst vacancy rate for any public service. Social care members

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are spread across UNISON service groups, but a large number are employed by Charities and not for profit organisations.

Conference also notes UNISON's concerted campaign for a national care service which includes a call for a national pay structure for social care. Conference considers Labour's promise to introduce a Fair Pay Agreement in social care to be a positive first step towards dealing with endemic low pay in the sector. But we must be as ambitious for our care sector members as we are for members in other sectors like health and local government. In those sectors, there is a fully job evaluated national structure for all job roles. This means that pay reflects the actual responsibilities that workers have.

Conference notes that UNISON has already commissioned a research organisation to map pay and conditions in social care for all job roles in the sector, giving the union a firm foundation of accurate information on which to campaign on this issue.

Conference further notes that in the care sector, many care workers are responsible for issuing medication. This is a job activity which is not included in the responsibilities, for example, of a Band 3 worker in the NHS. These responsibilities are onerous and can come with significant consequences if any mistakes are made. Conference believes that any fair system of pay in social care should reflect the actual level of responsibility and skills needed to do a job. Such a system should respect the devolved nature of social care, but believes this principle should be put into effect across the whole of the UK.

Even after a future government has, hopefully, boosted social care pay via a fair pay agreement, there will be a need for a job evaluation system which captures the actual responsibilities of care workers. Such a system would also provide a framework for training and qualifications which is currently missing, and allow care workers to progress according to their actual responsibilities.

Conference therefore calls on the Community Service Group Executive to:

- Work with UNISON Labour Link, the National Executive Council and other stakeholders including lobbying political parties in positions of power and influence in Scotland, Cymru/Wales and Northern Ireland to highlight the need for a fully evaluated national structure for job roles in social care, respecting the devolved nature of social care.

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- Campaign with other service groups for the implementation of a fully evaluated national structure for job roles in social care across the UK

- Campaign for full funding from government to implement a fully evaluated national structure for job roles in social care.

6. Organising to Win for LGBT+ Members in Community

Carried

Organising to win for LGBT+ Members in Community

Conference welcomes the initiatives taken to date by the Community Service Group Executive (CSGE) to improve the participation and inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender plus (LGBT+) members in our structures and democratic decision-making processes.

Conference further welcomes the recommendations contained in the national Organising Recruitment Strategy Development (ORSD) project and linked Organising, Recruitment and Retention Plans adopted at 2023 National Delegate Conference which seek to achieve:

Disaggregated membership targets of 1% growth in each regional service group;

A 10% increase on 2022 levels of recruitment of stewards, Health & Safety reps and UNISON learning rep roles;

Appropriate training and development for any elected role undertaken as set out in the National Executive Council (NEC) scheme of accreditation.

Conference believes that Self-Organisation and our Community members who identify as LGBT+ can play an important role in meeting these strategic objectives especially within the Community Service Group where many of us work in LGBT+ specific charities, deliver services to LGBT+ communities and also identify as LGBT+ ourselves.

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Conference further believes that Self-Organisation is a crucial tool for empowering LGBT+ members and other under-represented intersectional groups. It enables us to come together, share experiences, collectively address the challenges we face and feed into the overall negotiating and bargaining agenda of the Community Service Group.

Conference considers it an imperative for UNISON to reinvigorate the self-organisation of LGBT+ members at branch, regional, and caucus levels to maximise their participation, achieve a lasting legacy from UNISON's Year of LGBT+ Workers and enable our LGBT+ members to play a full and active role within our branches and service groups.

Conference additionally believes that a reinvigorated LGBT+ self organised group (SOG) provides a real opportunity to recruit members and get them active in the many roles available throughout UNISON'S structures, particularly within the Community Service Group.

UNISON has successfully recruited at national and local Prides and Community events across the UK and encouraged greater activism. The campaign on Trans equality has trained over 2000 members to be Trans allies in the workplace. The National LGBT+ Committee's Young LGBT+ worker campaign continues to grow, with over 150 young LGBT+ members in a network who are now getting involved in their branch and regional self-organised groups and respective Service Groups.

2024 is Year of LGBT+ Worker in UNISON and provides us with the opportunity to recruit, develop, and organise our LGBT+ members in Community, and to ensure that our joint negotiating and bargaining agendas are reflected in our collective work.

Conference therefore instructs the Community Service Group Executive to work with the National LGBT+ Committee and Regional Community Service Group Executives/Committees to:

1. Encourage LGBT+ Community members to participate and stand for election in their respective branch and regional Service Group Executives/Committees and as workplace Stewards and other representative roles.
2. Encourage branches and regions with Community members to promote Community LGBT + activists within branches and towards leadership roles.

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3. Encourage Community branches to fill the role of LGBT+ officer and offer training.

4. Encourage Community branch LGBT+ SOGs to engage with employer LGBT+ networks

and community Pride events as an opportunity for recruitment.

5. Publicise and promote the work of branch and regional LGBT+ SOGs and caucuses, who are establishing and building on relationships with LGBT+ community organisations and groups where Community members work.

6. Actively encourage regional Community Service Group Executives/Committees to collaborate with their respective Regional LGBT+ groups and share best practice in recruitment and organising LGBT+ members in Community.

7. Support UNISON's priority bargaining initiatives - such as the adoption of UNISON's trans equality model policy in workplaces.

8. Actively promote the Year of the LGBT+ Worker in UNISON through all appropriate Community media.

7. Year of LGBT+ Workers – Embedding LGBT+ Equality in Community

Carried

Conference notes that 2024 is UNISON's Year of LGBT+ Workers and welcomes the opportunity that this provides to promote UNISON as the union for LGBT+ workers in the community and voluntary sector, raise awareness of LGBT+ rights, challenge discrimination, negotiate LGBT+ inclusive policies and recruit and activate LGBT+ members in community.

The year highlights the important contribution our LGBT+ members make to the community service group, to improving employment conditions for LGBT+ workers and to campaigning more broadly on equality for LGBT+ people.

The LGBT+ self-organised group has been key to campaigns to improve the rights of LGBT+ people within the workplace and wider society and has played an active role

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in the repeal of section 28, equalisation of the age of consent, and the introduction of civil partnerships and marriage for LGBT+ people. But there is still much more to do.

Most recently, the national LGBT+ committee has helped to create the successful trans ally training across our union. This helps members to better understand the issues our trans, non-binary and gender diverse members face and how to be allies to them. We are proud of how many members have taken part in this programme and how many trans, non-binary and gender diverse members have become activists because of this work. It also shows that by equipping members with knowledge and empathy, we can facilitate more welcoming and supportive workplaces.

We need to continue to encourage active recruitment and promotion of LGBT+ community members and strive for LGBT+ representation at branch, regional and service group level. By fostering diversity in leadership, we not only provide role models for LGBT+ members but also bring diverse perspectives to decision-making, benefiting the entire community service group. To achieve this, branches with members working in community need to support local LGBT+ Pride events, run awareness campaigns within the workplace and make UNISON's LGBT+ resources visible.

Conference believes that the Year of LGBT+ Workers can be used as a tool to negotiate with employers to improve inclusion in workplaces for LGBT+ members working in community, for example, adopting Trans inclusion policies.

Conference acknowledges that tackling systemic and ingrained discrimination against LGBT+ members in community will take more than one year. Conference further recognises the need to use the success of the year to continue our work and embed the work on LGBT+ equality in all areas of community and when negotiating with employers.

Conference calls on the Community Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Promote UNISON's year of LGBT+ workers including at national and regional events
- 2) Encourage branches with community members to use days in the LGBT+ calendar to promote the work that UNISON does for LGBT+ equality
- 3) Promote and encourage the use of UNISON LGBT+ guidance, fact sheets and model policies in community workplaces
- 4) Follow up on the motions which have been passed by previous community service group conferences to deliver the bargaining agendas on LGBT+ rights and equality in the workplace
- 5) Work with the national LGBT+ committee to run a webinar on the Year of the LGBT+ workers for members in community
- 6) Promote and encourage participation in equality training, and in particular the trans ally training.

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8. Health and Safety in Community workplaces

Carried

Conference welcomes UNISON's Organising Recruitment Strategy Development (ORSD) project recommendations and the linked Organising, Recruitment and Retention Plan which seeks to secure:

Disaggregated membership targets of 1% growth in each regional service group;

A 10% increase on 2022 levels of recruitment of stewards, Health & Safety reps and UNISON learning rep roles;

Appropriate training and development for any elected role undertaken as set out in the National Executive Council (NEC) scheme of accreditation.

Conference notes that throughout our structures in Community, Health and Safety issues are integral to our working conditions and have a direct impact on our ability to safely deliver services to the public and protect ourselves at work.

Conference further notes, and celebrates the invaluable work done on the behalf of the British trade union movement by the Hazards Magazine and Campaign through the Greater Manchester Hazards Centre since its inception and that its tireless campaigning for the health and safety of working people at local, national and international levels is probably unmatched anywhere in the world, exemplifying the value and reach of an indispensable campaigning organisation.

Conference acknowledges how the Hazards Campaign has exposed the real extent of work-related ill-health and injury in the United Kingdom, which places an intolerable burden on victims, communities and the public purse. It has exploded government-fuelled lies about a supposed "compensation culture" and "burdens on business" posed by workplace health and safety regulation and its enforcement.

Conference further acknowledges that this work has underpinned many UNISON campaigning and bargaining initiatives and assisted us to recruit, train and educate many Health and Safety representatives.

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Conference therefore calls upon the Community Service Group Executive to:

- a) Work with the National Executive Council (NEC), the National Health and Safety Committee, Learning and Organising Services (LAOS), regions and branches to actively promote the function of Health and Safety representatives in Community workplaces.

- b) To highlight the key role that Health and Safety representatives play in delivering the objectives of ending violence at work across all our sectors.

- c) Highlight and promote the work of the Hazards Campaign and the value their work adds to the understanding of safe workplaces and practices through all appropriate media.

- d) Continue to promote the End Violence at Work Charter in Community.

- e) Encourage branches and regions with Community members to affiliate and promote the work of the Hazards Campaign which is so vital in supporting the development of our Community Health and Safety representatives.

9. Using the Disability Employment Charter in Community

Carried

Conference is proud that UNISON is one of the founding members of the Disability Employment Charter which now has 150 organisations signed up to it, including trade unions, disabled people organisations, public service employers, charitable organisations, and private sector employers.

The disability employment charter was founded because of the disadvantage that disabled people experience in the labour market and workplaces. Disabled people are less likely to be employed than non-disabled people, with the disability employment gap consistently at a rate of just below 30 percentage points. The employment rate of disabled people is 53% compared to 82% of non-disabled people.

This is due to a number of factors including disability discrimination, failure to make reasonable adjustments, inaccessible workplaces and structural ableism. Disabled employees also face a pay gap of almost 20% lower than non disabled employees. On top of this, on average disabled people incur approximately £1000 disability associated costs which works out at about 63% of household income after housing

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costs, according to the disability charity Scope. The cost-of-living crisis has compounded the poverty experienced by disabled people.

The charter outlines the actions that the government needs to take to address the disadvantage disabled people encounter in their working lives, asking for:

- a) all employers with 250+ employees to publish data annually on the number of disabled people they employ as a proportion of their workforce; their disability pay gap; and the percentage of disabled employees within each pay quartile.
- b) increase to disabled people's access to employment programmes and apprenticeships; increase the scale, quality and awareness of supported employment programmes and supported internships; and increase the provision of tailored careers advice to disabled people.
- c) Reform of Access to Work (AtW) including removal of the AtW support cap; ensuring application/renewal processes are efficient, personalised, and flexible; entitle disabled jobseekers to 'in principle' indicative awards; facilitate passporting of awards between organisations and from Disabled Student's Allowance to AtW; and increase awareness of AtW support.
- d) Reform of Disability Confident requiring employers at Disability Confident Levels 2 and 3 to meet minimum thresholds regarding the percentage of disabled people in their workforce; and remove accreditation from employers that do not move up within 3 years from Level 1 to Levels 2 or 3.
- e) Leveraging government procurement ensuring award decisions for all public sector contracts take into account the percentage of disabled people in the workforce of tendering organisations; require government contractors to work towards a minimum threshold regarding the percentage of disabled people in their workforce; and take failure to achieve this threshold into account in future contract award decisions.
- f) The government to require employers to notify employees on decisions regarding reasonable adjustment requests within two weeks; make the option to work flexibly from day one the legal default for all jobs; introduce stronger rights to paid disability leave for assessment, rehabilitation and training; and fund an increase in Statutory Sick Pay to the European average.
- g) The government should require employers to consult and negotiate with disabled people and their representatives on disability equality matters; and provide trade union equality representatives and disability champions with statutory rights to time off to perform their role.
- h) The government should create a 'one stop shop' portal to provide information, advice and guidance to employers on recruiting and retaining disabled people, and to disabled people on their employment rights.

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i) The government should take into account increasing disability prevalence in calculating the disability employment gap, and use the 'prevalence corrected' employment gap measure in monitoring national progress on disability employment.

The charter is primarily a campaigning tool that calls on government, rather than employers, to take the kind of legislative and cross-sectoral action that is needed to radically improve the rights of disabled people in the workplace. Employers are asked to sign up to it to show that they want government to take action and to show that they disagree with the Conservative government's usual argument that employers see stronger rights as a "burden on business" or "red tape".

The percentage of working age people who are disabled is 22% and 23% of the Community workforce are disabled. This means that we are likely to have a similar number of members in Community.

Some disabled members have reported that their employers have agreed to the principles of the disability employment charter but are reluctant to sign up as the call is on the government to take actions. This has been identified in the Community sector particularly within charities which are not permitted to have a political purpose, or undertake political activity that is not relevant to the charity's objectives.

It is important that we support those branches with Community members in making the argument to their employer while also seeking other ways in which the charter can be used, including when it comes to workplace bargaining. Some disabled members report that their branches have used the employment charter as a bargaining and negotiating tool to improve working conditions for disabled members; with employers reporting on the make-up of the workforce, reporting on disability pay gaps, increasing employment opportunities for disabled people, incorporating commitments to disability equality in procurement process and providing reasonable adjustments more quickly. UNISON Barnardo's is one of those examples.

Conference calls on the Community Service Group Executive:

- 1) to work with branches and regions to promote the call to sign up to the disability employment charter to Community employers.
- 2) Provide guidance to branches with Community members on the arguments to make when seeking employer sign ups and on how the disability employment charter can be adapted for use as a bargaining and negotiating tool to promote disability rights in the workplace.
- 3) Collate good practice of how branches with Community members have utilised the disability employment charter to improve working conditions for disabled members working in Community.

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10. Social Care Migrant Workers in Community and the Skilled Worker visa Carried

Conference notes that in February 2022, following recommendations from the Migration Advisory Committee, the United Kingdom (UK) government made it easier for overseas social care staff to work in the UK.

Home Office data (cited by the Migration Observatory) shows that in the year up to June 2023, 77,700 long-term work visas were granted to care workers - a six-fold increase from 12,300 in the year ending June 2022.

Additionally, in the year ending June 2023 Health and Care made up 64% (per cent) of main applicants in the Skilled Worker Route.

In 2022, 99% of care workers sponsored for visas were from non-European Union countries, predominantly India, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and the Philippines.

Many of these workers are potentially UNISON members and many of these migrant workers may also be Black members working within the Community Service Group.

Care worker and care assistant roles were added to the 'shortage occupations list', which meant that – if they could find a UK -based organisation willing to sponsor them – workers could be granted visas for relatively low-paid roles.

Under the rules, health and care workers must be sponsored by an individual employer, which their visa is then "tied" to. This system leaves workers dependent on their employer for the right to work in the UK, making it difficult for them to switch jobs

and less likely to speak out if things go wrong with their employer for fear of repercussions.

This "tied" visa system in the UK care sector, potentially leaves Community migrant workers at risk of exploitation and abuse.

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This system not only potentially affects members in social care within the Community Service Group but our colleagues in other sectors.

As the Kings Fund points out, even with the new recruits from overseas, 9.9% of social care jobs were vacant in 2022/23, only marginally better than the 10.6% vacancy rate in 2021/22.

Conference welcomes the work that the Service Group Executive has undertaken to date to call for a National Care Service which values all its employees equally whether UK citizens or migrant workers.

Conference further welcomes the initiative taken by UNISON to welcome new social care members at the point of joining through its successful online training and development events as part of its over-arching social care strategy.

However, Conference is concerned that whilst UK citizens who work in social care in Community continue to experience poverty wages and unreasonable demands through their working terms and conditions the situation is far more dire for our counterparts that join us from overseas via the 'shortage occupation list' who may fear reprisal and the potential loss of both their employment and visa status should they legitimately raise concerns in the workplace.

Conference believes this fear is well-placed, as evidenced by the increasing media reports regarding the experiences of overseas social care workers that enter employment in the UK via this route.

Conference believes that the Community Service Group Executive has a role to play in highlighting both the continuing parlous state of social care and the issues that face our overseas colleagues who join us to work in Community in the Social Care sector.

Conference therefore calls on the Community Service Group Executive to:

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- a) Work with the National Executive Council (NEC), and other appropriate stakeholders to identify the effects that the Skilled Worker visa is having on the working lives of social care members in Community.

- b) Highlight the issues faced by UNISON Community members who experience problems as a direct result of the 'tied' visa system through all appropriate media.

- c) Work with regions and branches to ensure that Community social care members are signposted to appropriate UNISON support to challenge unfair working practices, treatment and pay as a result of their visa status.

- d) Continue to promote the assistance of the UNISON/Joint Council for Welfare of Immigrants helpline for those members who experience problems as a direct result of their visa status.

- e) Ensure that the issues relating to Community social care members on 'tied' visa conditions are reflected within UNISON's campaigning for a National Care Service

11. Recruitment and Retention Pressures in Housing Associations

Carried

Turnover across the Housing sector has increased markedly in recent years. According to Housemark, while voluntary turnover in the sector has historically averaged 10% a year, this has increased to 14% a year in the last two years, with particularly high turnover in customer-facing roles.

Our members see this where they work. High levels of vacancy increase pressures on staff, where employers had already reduced staffing levels, often merging previously distinct roles such as resident engagement, community development and housing officers. In an article in July 2023, Inside Housing found numerous examples of overwork, burnout, and unsustainable pressures across the sector. A lack of consistency in role description and duties in generic functions between Housing Associations is adding to the difficulty members face in pushing back against impossible workloads.

A particular concern among members is around the increasing involvement of housing association staff in complex problems experienced by residents that should

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fall to social or mental health workers to address; the collapse in provision in these areas is meaning that housing officers are dragged into areas they have little experience of or training in, increasing work pressures.

Increasing concentration on record keeping and (proper) focus on tenant engagement is just adding to workloads where no more staff are employed to carry out these tasks. And adding to all these pressures of new tasking is the continuing limitation on the ability of Housing Associations to raise money through capping of rents at below the level at which their costs are rising.

Conference calls upon the Community Service Group Executive to work with the Local Government Service Group Executive to:

a. Support reps and branches in pressing for realistic work loading and staffing complements with individual employers.

b. Support reps and branches in securing appropriate training for their roles, fully funded by employers and in work time.

c. Work with UNISON Labour Link and other stakeholders including lobbying political parties in positions of power and influence in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to promote the need to secure appropriate levels of funding to provide proper support in the sector.

d. Regularly highlight issues affecting Housing Association members to Community members via all appropriate media.

12. Mandatory Qualifications for Housing Staff

Carried

The Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 will require all executives and managers in housing roles to have housing-relevant qualifications: executives at level 5 (equivalent to a foundation degree) and managers at level 4, equivalent to the old higher national certificate, and above A level. The Government estimates that these requirements will cover 25,000 staff across the housing sector.

While recognising that this is motivated by a wish to professionalise and make more consistent standards of housing support for social housing tenants, these requirements are likely to cause many issues. An Inside Housing survey in

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November 2023 found that most housing associations surveyed did not know how many people would need to be qualified or what it would cost, and the article estimated the cost at between £2,200-£3,300 per person where the apprenticeship levy could not be used. Relevant courses are offered only by a limited number of institutions, whereas housing associations are broadly spread across the whole country so many will struggle to access training near them. Older workers near to retirement may choose to quit rather than go through lengthy training, further exacerbating workforce pressures in the sector.

The UK Government has yet to consult on detailed implementation including any transition period, or how experience and practice can serve as evidence of achievement for this purpose. There is still an opportunity to avoid a cliff-edge where members cannot perform their roles because requirements are brought in too quickly or in an unconsidered way. This would have very bad impacts on the social housing tenants our members serve.

Conference calls upon the Community Service Group Executive to work with the Local Government Service Group Executive to:

- a) Promote a sufficient transition period to enable reasonable opportunity for those required to gain qualifications to complete their learning.

- b) Promote proper accreditation of learning gained through experience and practice so that those who have all the skills already are not required to do all the theory to prove it.

- c) Campaign for all necessary training to be fully funded by employers and to undertaken in work time, as a necessary requirement of the job.

13. Women's Mental Health at Work

Carried

Conference notes that the workforce in the community sector especially in the social care sector is overwhelmingly female.

The additional pressures on women working in the community sector, especially low paid women have seen almost 3 in 5 of these women experience poor mental health where work is a contributing factor. However, for Black women in this sector, it's almost one in two.

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Conference notes that community service group workers are also having to deal with various other stressors such as huge workloads, under-investment, zero-hours contracts and low pay as inflation rises while governments across the UK hold down wages.

All these factors can have a detrimental effect on mental health, especially on women with disabilities and Black women.

Conference notes the work done by UNISON in highlighting the impact of poor mental health and in providing educational materials to assist branches in ensuring that organisations treat mental health with the seriousness it deserves, with procedures that protect staff in general and maximise the assistance given to workers experiencing mental health problems in particular.

The National Women's Committee believes that the community service group committee has a key role to play in improving mental health of women working in the community sector.

Conference calls on the Community Service Group Executive to:

1. Work with the National women's Committee to campaign for mentally healthy workplaces where women can thrive;
2. Promote UNISON's guide to bargaining on mental health to women members working in the community sector, branch and regional women's officers and self-organised groups;
3. Encourage branches to train workplace representatives to negotiate robust mental health work place policies to address the situation.

14. Funding Crisis for Charities

Fell

15. The Real Value of the Charity and Voluntary Sector (CVS)

Carried

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Conference notes the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) campaign for contracts and grants from government and public bodies to be uplifted to cover the true cost of delivery.

Conference further notes that the voluntary sector delivers over £11 billion worth of public services every year.

These are services that are critical to communities, including services in social care, health, culture and recreation, law and advocacy, employment and training, housing, and education and delivered by UNISON members.

Conference knows that these services have been underfunded for many years – and that the cost of living crisis has made it even more difficult for many organisations to continue delivering them, as both costs and demand for support have increased exponentially.

Conference additionally notes that more than 600 charity leaders across the United Kingdom were surveyed by the Charities Aid Foundation in May 2023. The results of this consultation shows that charities have entered a protracted period of rising demand, increased costs and falling donation income.

Four-fifths (81%) of charities say that demand for their services has increased compared to a year ago, while fewer than two-fifths (38%) of charities have high levels of confidence that they can afford to meet the current demand for their services and only half (55%) of charities are confident they can meet their current overheads, including energy, rent and supplies.

Staffing is emerging as a major issue for many charities with three in five (60%) struggling to recruit or retain suitably qualified candidates or volunteers and 70% of charities now say that the rising cost of living is affecting workforce morale, compared to 53% at the start of 2023.

Conference believes that these findings also reflect the experience of UNISON Community members in England and across our nations/regions as service deliverers and charity employees.

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Conference therefore calls on the Community Service Group Executive (SGE) to:

a) Work with the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) in England and other appropriate overarching sector bodies in Scotland, Cymru/Wales and Northern Ireland to campaign for the uplifting of public body grants and contracts.

b) Work with UNISON Labour Link, the National Executive Council and other stakeholders including lobbying political parties in positions of power and influence in Scotland, Cymru/Wales and Northern Ireland to highlight the issue of uplifting grants and contracts from public bodies and the impact this has on the survival of the charity sector, Community members and the services we provide.

16. Sick Pay in Social Care

Carried

A significant number of UNISON's social care members are in the Community Service Group.

Conference notes UNISON's ongoing campaign for a National Care Service and national terms and conditions for social care workers in England. This campaign includes an explicit call for improved sick pay in social care, including full wages for periods of self-isolation. UNISON is campaigning on this issue on the grounds of fairness and as an infection control measure.

Care workers who need to take time off because of illness are doing the right thing and they should not be penalised financially for doing so. Social care is already an underpaid profession and failure to pay sick pay is simply wrong. But this failure also puts recipients of social care and co-workers at risk. Many people receiving social care are elderly and/or have conditions which place them at particular risk from viral and other infections. The lack of sick pay in social care places significant financial pressure on care workers to attend work when they have Covid-19 or other transmissible conditions. During the pandemic this contributed to avoidable loss of life of care recipients and other care workers. Delivering improved sick pay would help to keep people safe from potentially dangerous infections.

The Community service group should continue and intensify campaigning for all care workers to receive improved sick pay. All care providers should be mandated to do the right thing, keep people safe and deliver significantly improved sick pay, equivalent to arrangements in local government and the NHS. This to be fully funded by central government and form part of a national fair pay agreement – a building block towards a national care service in England.

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Conference recognises that social care workforce issues are devolved in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and believes improvements in sick pay should be delivered across the UK.

Conference therefore calls on the Community Service Group Executive to:

- Campaign with other service groups for the implementation of a National Fair Pay Agreement in England for social care which includes the provision of improved sick pay for care workers.

- Campaign for full funding from government to improve sick pay in social care, including additional funding allocated by the UK Government for all devolved administrations.

- Work with UNISON Labour Link, the National Executive Council and other stakeholders including lobbying political parties in positions of power and influence in Scotland, Cymru/Wales, and Northern Ireland to highlight the issues of sick pay in social care across the UK and work for a resolution of this issue.

17. Outsourcing

Fell

18. Social Care and Wellbeing Support for Young Members in Community

Carried

Conference notes the well-documented crisis in social care, with low pay, high vacancy rates, job insecurity and poor working conditions creating a 'perfect storm' in which employers are unable to recruit and retain staff, workers are underpaid and overworked, and local authorities are in danger of being unable to fulfil their statutory obligations to provide care services.

For example, the Skills for Care report published in October 2023 found that the job vacancy rate in the sector was 9.9% in 2022/23, compared with the national vacancy rate for the UK workforce.

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According to the Kings Fund, young workers make up 8% of the social care workforce, and the high rates of staff turnover are exacerbated in this group: in 2021/22, the turnover rate among social care workers under 20 was 53 per cent and for those aged 20–29 it was 43 per cent. These conditions have a significant impact on workers' wellbeing in the sector.

Conference notes the 2022 report by UNISON's National Young Members Forum which found that 80% of young UNISON members had experienced a mental health problem in the last year, and further notes the extensive research showing that people aged 18-24 are one of the groups most affected by the cost of living crisis. Conference believes these factors are likely to exacerbate the impact of the social care crisis on young workers in social care.

Conference recognises and welcomes the work done to date by UNISON and UNISON's Community Service Group Executive in seeking to improve working conditions for all workers in social care, and in campaigning for a national care service. Conference believes the most effective way to improve wellbeing in the sector is to have a well-funded national care service with nationally agreed pay scales and high working standards.

Conference asks the Community Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Work with the National Young Members Forum to understand the numbers of young UNISON members working in social care, the roles they hold, and to map where they work;
- 2) Work with the National Young Members Forum and other relevant parts of the union to develop a strategy to increase UNISON membership among young social care workers;
- 3) Consider surveying young members working in social care to identify the specific issues they are experiencing at work which have led to large turnover rates in social care particularly among young workers;
- 4) Publicise UNISON's welfare service There for You and other support available from UNISON to young members in the social care sector;
- 5) Promote the National Young Members Forum's campaign, Young Members Mental Health Matters, to branches and members in the Community Service Group;
- 6) Work with the NEC and other relevant sections of the union to continue to campaign for a well-funded national care service with nationwide pay scales, and a long-term workforce plan.

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19. Pensions in Housing Associations

Carried

Pension provision in housing associations is extremely variable. Some members are in the Local Government Pension Scheme as a consequence of TUPE arrangements dating back many years; others in the sectoral Social Housing Pension Scheme; but most, especially newer staff, are now in defined contribution arrangements of varying quality.

We are now seeing pensions coming under sustained attack by employers as they seek to remove the entitlements of those still in defined benefit arrangements. At Clarion, for example, disgraceful tactics of fire and rehire are being used to remove the entitlements of those who are members of the LGPS, who will be placed into the much worse defined contribution scheme upon reemployment. The employer argues for this on the basis of fairness- because newer employees have DC arrangements, so should longer-standing staff. UNISON Members decisively reject this levelling-down argument.

As there are significant differences in the DC arrangements between different HAs, there is scope for work in negotiation to press for improvement of the worse schemes so they are closer to matching the best available. This would achieve meaningful improvements in pension provision for those involved.

Conference calls upon the Community Service Group Executive to:

- a) Support members facing threats to their own pensions, including supporting lawful industrial action.
- b) Publicise threats to pension entitlement where they arise and the action members take to resist these.
- c) Support members in their efforts to improve the terms of the defined contribution pension offered by their employer.
- d) Produce guidance on pensions issues tailored to the particular issues faced by Community members

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20. Engaging and Developing Black activists in the Community Service Group Carried

Conference notes the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO) report Home Truths published in 2020 which indicated that 68% of Black charity workers had experienced or witnessed racism in the sector. This is despite Black workers making up only 9% of the charity sector workforce, lower than both the public and private sectors. This report concluded that civil society did not simply have a diversity problem, it had a racism problem.

Conference further notes that in pursuit of this report ACEVO in England and Cymru/Wales has taken a number of positive actions around encouraging of ethnicity pay gap reporting and the publication of data by large-scale grant funders. Alongside this it has launched the Home Truths 2 project which seeks to work with civil society stakeholders to move forward with meaningful positive action to challenge racism.

Conference is encouraged by these initiatives taken at the highest levels of our management to promote awareness and address the issues of racism and inequality.

UNISON is a union that has equality at its heart and is committed to breaking down the barriers that exist to Black Members' participation in our structures. Within UNISON, 14% of activists in the Community Service Group identify as Black. It is vital that the union continues to engage and support our Black activists in Community, not least when a high percentage of Black workers in our sectors report experiencing racism and there continues to be a low level of ethnicity pay gap reporting across our employers.

Conference welcomes the initiatives that UNISON has taken during 2023 Year of The Black Worker including the creation of a leadership programmes for Black activists, targeted to those who haven't been involved in the union previously and towards certain groups of Black members in UNISON, including those who work in Community employers.

Conference believes that the Community Service Group must continue to work towards ensuring the any legacy of the Year of the Black Worker results in increased participation, activism and engagement with our Community Black Members and acknowledges their diversity and intersectionality.

Conference therefore instructs the Community Service Group Executive to work with all appropriate stakeholders to:

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- 1) Continue to actively promote the Year of the Black Worker Toolkit to Community members;
- 2) Work with regions and branches to publicise and promote UNISON's various leadership, training and development programmes for Black workers and encourage members to get involved;
- 3) Work with regions and branches to actively promote anti-racism training within Community structures
- 4) Provide opportunities for Community Black members to network and organise
- 5) Ensure that Community bargaining guidance and resources are appropriately inclusive of the issues relevant to Black members.
- 6) Continue to negotiate ethnicity pay gap reporting with Community employers and support UNISON's campaign for mandatory ethnicity pay gap reporting

21. Welcoming Migrant Workers in Community

Carried

Conference welcomes the re-launch in May 2023 of UNISON's Migrant Workers Network.

Conference notes that this is a new, informal network of UNISON members with a first-generation immigrant background including overseas and migrant workers who have subsequently naturalised as British citizens who have Indefinite Leave to Remain.

Conference further notes that increasing numbers of migrant workers are joining UNISON as members across our housing associations, charities, and social care sectors.

Ensuring that our members are welcomed, supported and organised are key principles which underpin our over-arching organising approach along with providing space where members with shared experience can raise issues of mutual concern.

Conference calls on the Community Service Group Executive to:

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- a) Continue to promote the Migrant Workers Network through all appropriate media.

- b) Work with regions and branches to promote and encourage the development of our network of Community Migrant Workers.

- c) Work with regions and branches to signpost and encourage Community migrant workers to self-identify and participate in UNISON Self Organised, branch and regional structures.