

2024 Water, Environment & Transport Conference
Decisions

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Decisions**

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Motions

1. Canal and River Trust Funding

Carried as Amended: 1.1

This conference notes:

The Canal and River Trust was formed in 2012 from British Waterways, and the organisation and its dedicated workforce has worked hard to remove people's perception and image of run-down canals. The Trust's 2000-mile network is close to many people. Canals are not just about boats and boating - the Trust's strapline is "Life's better by water" The Trust has reinvented itself as a wellbeing charity.

More and more people are enjoying canals, and the benefits are clear:

- Health and wellbeing for communities including walks, exercise, and social prescribing by GPs. They are also used by anglers, cyclists, wildlife watchers, somewhere to escape to and relax.
- Volunteers love looking after their stretches of canal.
- Improved economic opportunities for the areas with canals and restoration transformed the towns and villages they go through.
- Flooding reduction – water management, water supply, used for cooling in buildings and heating,
- Important wildlife corridors – supporting biodiversity.

However, in July 2023, the Government announced a reduced grant to the Trust from 2027. This funding reduction is equivalent to £300 million in real terms, and in Canal and River Trust's own words "will threaten the future of the nation's historic canals, leading to their decline and to the eventual closure of some parts of the network" press release on website Government funding cuts put future of nation's historic canals at risk Canal & River Trust (canalrivertrust.org.uk)

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Currently 40% of CRT income (£80million a year) is spent on maintenance and repair of fragile infrastructure. decrease in the amount of maintenance will result in a deterioration and increased risk of equipment breakdowns and failures.

Staff costs are around half (£100million per year) of the Trust's expenditure. Reduction in the amount of income will lead to reduced expenditure on staff, reorganization of teams and risk of job losses.

This conference calls to the WETSGE to

- Request members to write to their MP and support the Keep Canals Alive campaign.
- to raise the issue of potential reorganisation and job losses with UNISON at Regional and National level.

2. Canal and River Trust Operations and Maintenance Review

Carried

This Conference notes.

A review of the Operations and Maintenance functions of Canal & River Trust was undertaken in 2023 with any changes expected to be implemented before the end of March 2024. This involved looking at all the activities and work programmes carried out by the Regional Operations and Direct Services Teams – over 800 colleagues many of whom are members of UNISON and Unite. These teams carry out vital operations and maintenance activities on the waterway network across the country.

- Direct Services are the in-house construction company consisting of construction teams, Mechanical & Electrical teams and two lock gate workshops. Working closely with other teams Direct Services undertake and complete a nationally prioritised programme of projects.

- Regional Operations are the on the ground 'face' of CRT around the country, providing an open, navigable, safe network and are the first point of contact for customers 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

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The Trust is currently looking at ways to save money and work more efficiently as a result of possible cuts in its Government Grant from 2027. This Operations and Maintenance review is considering changes to working arrangements with possible merging of teams or combining workloads and reduction on posts.

This conference calls on the Water, Environment and Transport SGE to:

- To monitor the impact of the proposed changes on safety and operation of the waterway network

- Raise any proposed changes with Management at the Joint National Forum consultation meetings.

- Oppose any changes which impact on safety and operation of the waterway network or result in Job losses.

3. Threats from the public – “I’m only doing my job”!

Carried

Across the Yorkshire & Humberside region we are seeing an alarming increase in attacks on WET members who are simply going about their day-to-day jobs serving the public. These attacks can be both verbal and physical in nature, with extreme cases leading to our members being hospitalised and unable to continue to work in our sector due to the mental anguish this has caused them.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines violence at work as, "any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted by a member of the public in the course of their employment".

Sadly, we are seeing a direct correlation across our WET sectors of negative media reports of these attacks on our members. Yorkshire Water have seen an increase of 140% since prior to 2020. At the Environment Agency, our members have faced attacks for taking lawful Industrial Action. With draconian anti-union laws, it's becoming difficult enough getting members to vote for action, without the unnecessary risk of attacks from members of the public they are serving. Our Transport members are not without their incidents too.

It is with great concern that we are seeing a large number of these incidents simply not being reported by our members because of low confidence in management that anything substantive will be done or worse still they now accept it as part of their daily role. This motion intends to stop this practise and protect our members.

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Employers know they have clear legal obligations to prevent threats and violence towards our members at work. While they may make all the right noises, they are simply reacting to incidents rather than working on robust protective solutions which would give our members the peace of mind when facing these types of situations.

Conference, UNISON cares about the health, safety, and wellbeing of its members and rightfully we should. We must do more across our Sector to hold employers to account.

Therefore, this conference calls on the WET SGE to:

- 1) Reach out to all WET branches to determine if this picture is replicated nationally.

2. Explore the latest available personal safety monitoring technologies (i.e. bodycams etc) on the market, with the assistance of UNISON's health and safety section if required and share the findings with branches.

3. Report the findings of the above asked to WET conference 2025.

4. Actively seek to invite a representative from the Health and Safety Executive, or appropriate person, to any upcoming WET Health & Safety seminars, or similar events where appropriate, to share the latest developments in this area and best practise to enable branches to collaborate with employers to prevent future incidents.

5. Share, 'UNISON's Violence at Work Charter standards', with all branches and support its implementation.

6. Consider this topic for discussion at the next WET Seminar by asking similar questions below:
 - a) Do employers provide mandatory Conflict Management training for all staff within the WET group.
 - b) Whether employer's focus of Conflict Management training is delivered by, Classroom based face to face or E- Learning module(s).
 - c) Inquire from Branches if they consider employers training delivery methods (i.e. E-Learning over Face to Face) is solely based on costs rather than quality.
 - d) Ask Branches to seek members views on the type of delivery of Conflict Management training they prefer.

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- e) And any other appropriate questions the Executive believe will facilitate a productive discussion.

4. Environment Agency outsourcing study

Carried

This conference notes the increase in the outsourcing of various services from the Environment Agency (EA) to external companies and to the Defra Group services.

The consequences of this appears to be that these services are unfit for purpose, inefficient, and often lead to the creep of Defra terms and conditions of employment into the EA with no, or only limited, trade union negotiation, with there being no UNISON recognition in Defra.

An example of such an outsourced service is Defra's Shared Services (SSCL) which is a service used to manage and provide HR, payroll and finance functions across Defra and associated Arm's-length bodies (ALB) in which the Environment Agency is part of.

Conference believes that apart from the impact on services provided for our members in their employment, our members are directly affected as most of these contractors are non-unionised, preventing TUPE'd members access to meaningful union support and representation when they need it. There is also reputational damage to the employer and additional stress on our members in the EA.. In addition, in supporting members across the EA as they deal with problems linked to Defra sourced providers, there has been an increase in UNISON reps workload, at a time when our reps are already busy.

Therefore, this Conference calls upon the WET Service Executive group, to:

- A. Carry out research into this practice and gather information on the impact of outsourcing on service provision and operating costs;
- B. Use this information to engage with EA management on the likely benefits and costs of bringing the services back in-house;
- C. Investigate ways of mitigating the impact of outsourcing on jobs, pay, and terms and conditions
- D. Explore how the outcomes of this research can be prioritised to implement a compelling case for insourcing and related change.

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5. Continuing to increase participation of Black members in Water, Environment & Transport (WET).

Carried

In 2016 WET conference agreed to look at increasing Black member participation in the service group. When looking at measurements of engagement such as representation on branch and national committees and attendance at service group and Black members' conferences activism levels of Black members in WET remains an area of concern.

At its conference in 2015 conference resolved to undertake a mapping exercise to better identify the representation and engagement levels of Black members in the WET service group and further to identify how many branches have Black members self-organised groups.

Conference notes that UNISON is committed to achieving equality for all and one of the ways the union promotes equality is through self-organisation. Self-organisation brings together members from certain groups that face discrimination and helps the union identify and challenge discrimination and build equality.

Conference commends the work in other service groups and regions in the union that have seen branches come together to organise regional or geographical cluster groups for Black members where union membership has been persistently low and it has been more challenging to organise.

Conference therefore asks the Water, Environment & Transport (WET) Service Group Executive Committee to look at utilising this good practice to support WET branch Black member self-organisation by:

1. Undertaking a further mapping exercise to identify the representation and engagement levels of Black members in the WET service group.

2. Compare this data with that collected in previous surveys to identify areas where Black members from various branches with low levels of Black membership can come together in cluster meetings where geographically possible.

3. Working with regions to facilitate these meetings and ensure that they are properly resourced.

4. Reporting on this progress at the next WET conference in 2025

6. Work Life Balance and the right to Disconnect

Carried

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There have been significant changes to working patterns and practices that have happened since the pandemic, including a large rise in remote and hybrid working, including in the Water, Environment and Transport (WET) Service Group employers.

Greater flexibility should be welcomed where this works for staff. Some disabled women and women with caring responsibilities may find more home working a useful adjustment to give them more control over all aspects of their lives.

However, working from home and flexibility can also present problems for WET staff, by blurring the line between work time and personal time. Being expected to be permanently available can have a particular impact on WET workers' mental health and stress levels. Badly considered and implemented moves to home working can also put women at more risk if home is not a safe place to be.

Conference believes that flexible, hybrid and remote working policies for WET staff need to be actively negotiated and agreed by trade unions. The voices of women must be heard when trade unions talk about work/life balance, as they are more likely to have caring responsibilities which can be affected by new working arrangements.

This needs to include action on the right not to engage in email, telephone and other work-related contact outside of paid working hours. Whilst some countries have enshrined The Right to Disconnect in law, unions should be including this in the bargaining agenda. Right to Disconnect policies can have a positive impact on women workers and those with caring responsibilities, who benefit from a clearly defined separation between working and personal time.

Conference calls on the WET Service Group Executive to work with the National Women's Committee through the Equalities Unit to promote the inclusion of properly supported work/life balance, including the right to disconnect in Flexible working policies.

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

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 WET sectors, raise awareness of LGBT+ rights, challenge discrimination, negotiate LGBT+ inclusive policies and recruit and activate LGBT+ members in the WET industries.

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The year highlights the important contributions our LGBT+ members make to the WET 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 while playing an active role in the repeal of section 28, equalisation of the age of consent, and the introduction of civil partnerships and equal marriage for LGBT+ people, however there is still much to do.

Most recently, the national LGBT+ committee has helped to create the successful trans ally training across our union. This aids 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+ WET members and strive for LGBT+ representation at a 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 WET service group. To achieve this, WET branches 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 within all aspects of the WET industries, for example, adopting trans inclusion policies.

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

Conference calls on the WET Service Group Executive to:

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1. Promote UNISON's year of LGBT+ workers including at national and regional events
2. Encourage branches with 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 within workplaces
4. Follow up on the motions which have been passed by previous WET 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 WET
6. Promote and encourage participation in equality training, and in particular the trans ally training.

8. The importance of self-organisation in WET

Carried as Amended: 8.1

Conference acknowledges the importance of self-organisation within UNISON as it allows marginalised groups within the union to challenge discrimination in the workplace and to campaign in wider society. Conference also notes that members of self-organised groups are a valuable resource to the WET service group as they have knowledge and experience of how our workplaces can be more inclusive. Their work puts equalities at the heart of our union – which is key to our success.

All UNISON regions have a LGBT+ self-organised group that works within the region by supporting local LGBT+ events and awareness campaigns that align with our union's values. However, while there are many self-organised group members working in the WET sectors, self-organisation within WET branches is, at best, patchy and, at worst, non-existent.

On top of this, since COVID 19, there has been a lull in engagement across the self-organisation structure. There have been many contributing factors such as remote working, leading to fewer face-to-face engagements with our branches.

Self-organisation is fundamental to our union: it fosters better understanding, provides support, and creates a safe space to network. Conference believes that strong self-organisation at branch level is key to ensuring the issues faced by our members are considered by employers.

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Conference believes that branch campaigning and bargaining on workplace issues that are important to Black, disabled, LGBT+ and women members is a key way of recruiting and organising members and building the activists of the future. Conference further notes UNISON's work on key equality campaigns such as the Disability Employment Charter.

Conference calls on the WET Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Circulate information to WET branches on self-organisation and its role within the union
2. Encourage branches to support the setting up of branch self-organised groups and circulate examples of good practice
3. Encourage smaller branches to look at cooperation with other branches to establish multi-branch self-organised group where possible
4. Raise awareness of key equality campaigns such as the Disability Employment Charter, encouraging WET branches to seek employer sign ups and use it as a bargaining tool to improve workplace rights for disabled members in WET.

9. Dandy - But not as you know it

Carried as Amended: 9.1, 9.2

Conference notes that disabled workers encounter significantly more hurdles than their non-disabled colleagues. We applaud the great work done both within our WET Sector and the Self Organised Groups (SOGs) structures. However, we know there is always room for improvement when it comes to inclusion.

Conference is aware when someone meets the definition of a disabled person in the Equality Act 2010 (the Act) employers are legally required to make Reasonable Adjustments to any elements of the job which place a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage compared to a non-disabled person. UNISON has developed a number of resources to help stewards negotiate reasonable adjustments, including our Reasonable Adjustments Policies and Passports Bargaining Guide and our Disability Leave Bargaining Guide. UNISON is also a founding member of the Disability Employment Charter which we are using both as a campaigning tool and more recently as a way of opening negotiation on these issues with employers.

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Yorkshire Water Branch has a number of our stewards actively engaged with the company's 'Disability and Neurodiversity Network Group', otherwise known as DANDY. The success of this group in breaking down barriers and creating change for our disabled members has been welcomed and is in no small part due to the training, knowledge and skills our UNISON stewards bring to the table.

The network continues to grow on a monthly basis and they are now producing a newsletter to share their disability experiences within the workplace and equally share how managers are responding to their Reasonable Requests.

The group's achievements to-date has inspired many of our disabled members to re-engage with disability issues and has got the attention of non-UNISON disabled colleagues - opening the door to potential recruitment.

Conference, we understand speaking about disability can be a very personal and sensitive issue for our disabled members in the workplace but if this motion promotes a truly inclusive workplace and helps just one disabled member feel more comfortable at work – it's done its job.

Therefore, we call on the Water, Environment & Transport Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Survey branches within the WET sector to:
 - A) See what similar initiatives are run for their Disabled Members.
 - B) Identify whether these groups are Employer or Union initiated.
 - C) Ask if UNISON stewards are represented on them.
 - D) Ask if branches have negotiated a Reasonable Adjustment policy and/or passport with their employer.
 - E) Ask if branches have negotiated a Disability Leave agreement with their employer
 - F) Ask if branches are aware of the Disability Employment Charter and if they have asked their employer to become a signatory
 - G) Share the findings with WET Branches.

- 2) Using the information gathered above set up a meeting with the National Disabled Members Officers or appropriate person(s), to seek their views on how WET Stewards can build on the great work they do within these groups.

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3. Examine the feasibility of setting up and supporting a WET Disabled Members Forum or similar to simplify the sharing of information and success our Stewards are making towards an inclusive and accessible workplace.

4. Share progress on this motion with all WET branches on a timely basis.

10. Paid – ‘Wellness Days’ for WET Members.

Carried

UNISON’S Yorkshire Water Branch and the company’s Occupational Health team have had a strong working relationship over many years, sharing and promoting ideas for a healthy working environment. In a recent meeting the health team shared that a staggering 52% of all referrals are linked to poor mental health.

Conference notes that time away from work is becoming a precious commodity with employers holding all the cards. This shouldn’t be allowed to continue as we see the impact of poor mental health in our members day to day.

Our Branch has responded to this in a recent pay deal by securing a ‘Wellness Day’ in the recent pay offer. This entitles members to a full day off work of their choosing to reset, no matter the length of shift they were due to work. This can be taken without notice on the same day if that was the requirement of the member. In fact, no restrictions were added to this when the branch put the final company offer to our membership.

Mental health days, simply put, are work days that employees are entitled to take off to prioritize self-care and reset.

Progressive employers know only too well the benefits of Mental Health Days for their staff:

- They see their staff as holistic beings—not just productive workers.
- Their staff’s good mental health has a direct impact on productivity.
- It secures retention of staff.
- It demonstrates they care about staff’s wellbeing and not just the company’s bottom line.
- It shows they are valuing their contribution.
- It gives their staff a chance to recharge and reset their minds.

Conference, the time has now passed for our members in the WET Sector to stop feeling intimidated when they ask for time off due to mental health, or fear the stigma or backlash when they return to work. Therefore, we seek the WET SGE to:

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- Reach out to WET Branches to see if similar agreements have been achieved and share findings with Branches.
- Encourage WET Branches to add 'Mental Health Days' to their Pay Bargaining.
- Consider the inclusion of 'Mental Health Days' as a subject for debate and discussion at the next WET Seminar.

11. Divest the SEPA pension fund from fossil fuels

Carried

The failure again of the latest COP climate talks, COP28, to provide an unambiguous statement on the phasing out of fossil fuels is both 'dangerous' and 'devastating', leading climate scientists have stated. One climate scientist said that it is a "tragedy for the planet and our future" whilst another scientist described it as "the dream outcome" for the fossil fuel industry.

Having investments in fossil fuel companies no longer makes sense financially, socially and planetary, because:

Fossil fuel stocks were already on a long-term downward trajectory, and COVID-19 has accelerated this process. Meanwhile, renewables stock prices are growing by up to 20% a year. The Fossil Fuel age is ending, and financial markets know it. If pension fund committees don't move their members' money out of fossil fuels soon; lowering prices, financial instability and likely bankruptcies could cause huge losses.

Engagement with fossil fuel companies is not working. This is especially undeniable in the case of local authority pension funds: their scale is too small to fundamentally change the core business model of fossil fuel majors.

Change that is both good for the planet and good for returns is possible. Six local government pension funds, half of all UK Universities, and over 1,250 institutions representing over \$14.5 trillion in assets have already committed to going fossil free (Divest, 2021 UKDivest_Report.pdf).

Conference calls on the WET Service Group to ask UNISON to put maximum pressure on the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to:

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Request the Falkirk LGPS to divest all shares in fossil fuels immediately.

This is because the Scottish Environment Protection Agency should be joining in the vanguard of the divestment movement and sending a clear message to all environmental protection agencies around the globe. Having the weight of UNISON behind this request would significantly increase its chances of success.

12. Green Living in WET

Carried

Conference, as a Service Group that is widely affected by the worsening climate crisis the planet is engulfed in, our sector is uniquely skilled to set the right examples to reduce carbon emissions, add value to Green UNISON's campaign and potentially influence government policy.

Historically climate change has always been talked about as a problem for future generations, however, we are seeing the effects of this here and now. According to the Meteorological Office (Met Office) the most recent decade (2009-2018) has been on average 1% wetter than 1981-2010 and 5% wetter than 1961-1990 for the UK overall – and the amount of rain from extremely wet days has increased by 17% when looking at the same periods. The Met Office also predicts that intense rainfall associated with severe flash flooding could become almost five times more likely by the end of this century.

Our members across all of Water, Environment and Transport will feel the impact of these predictions and increased rainfall. Within our sector we all have a vital role to play in campaigning for greener policies and working with our employers to ensure workplaces are more sustainable for the future and informing our members of global warming issues which will impact on their families.

Our sector had a great presentation at the WET Seminar in Nottingham 2023 which focussed on de-carbonisation and how companies within the sector can work collaboratively to help save our precious planet. Conference, this should be the beginning of our conversation and not a one off!

UNISON's Green Week, held annually, in September was well received as the union sets the bar for green thinking and is a crucial opportunity for our members to raise awareness in our sector and to tap into the many Green UNISON'S resources available. There is no better time than now!

Conference calls on the Water, Environment & Transport Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Keep pushing WET branches to fill UNISON's Environmental Officer posts by explaining the crucial role they bring to the branch and national debate.

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2. Consider setting up WET Sectors Green Network Forum to link in with Green UNISON's policies, to address climate challenges in the sector and share good practices from branches.

3. Continue to work with WET Branches to develop the great work done in UNISON's 2023 Green Week, for 2024 and beyond by promoting the unmissable opportunities of Green UNISON's events, newsletter, training, and resources to engage fully with this debate.

13. Women Health & Safety Reps

Carried

UNISON has approximately 5,000 Health and Safety representatives across the union working hard to defend members' health and safety at work.

Over the past few years health and safety has emerged again as critical for protecting members' rights at work, especially in the Water, Environment and Transport (WET) sector. However, the gender balance of Health and Safety representatives in UNISON does not reflect the gender balance of our union.

Women's health and safety is never more important – whether it is advising on maternity rights, menopause, endometriosis, breast cancer, undergoing cancer treatment, pelvic organ prolapse and any other relevant medical conditions including stress, burnout, carers responsibilities, women's safety equipment, exposure to hazardous substances in their work and at home, for example when cleaning, or in areas where there is a traditional bias towards female workers – we need women representing women!

Building women's confidence is an underlined key factor in convincing members to take on the rep role.

Working women are more likely to be exposed to hazards like issues around lifting or exposure to chemicals at work and at home because they have traditionally had greater domestic and caring responsibilities.

Women are:

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- more likely to be in low-paid, unsafe work and this may affect their working conditions and the hazards they are exposed to.
- more likely to stay in the same job longer than men so may have a longer exposure to the hazards that are present.
- more likely to work in jobs where trade union representation is weaker and there may be less worker consultation and participation which is an important factor in successful risk prevention.

Conference calls upon the WET Service Group Committee to:

1. Work with the National Health and Safety Forum to emphasise the key issues for women in the WET sector workplaces.
2. Work with the National Health and Safety Forum, and any other relevant body, to encourage women working in the WET sector to become health and safety representatives.
3. Maintain and improve recruitment levels but also to target 'hard to reach' and lower paid women members. Only by a targeted approach can we ensure that we offer the protection and opportunities of UNISON and encourage more women working in the WET sector to join and take on active roles within our union.
4. Promote and continue to engage with "Be on The Safe Side".

14. Creation of a Modern and Customisable Recruitment Video to Enhance UNISON's Membership Drive

Carried

UNISON, as a leading public service union, has always been at the forefront of advocating for workers' rights and welfare. In a rapidly changing work environment, innovative and effective recruitment strategies are crucial for UNISON's continued growth and influence. UNISON Branches in the Water, Environment and Transport sectors recognise the need for such innovation in our recruitment strategies. Branches across our union face significant challenges in their recruitment efforts, including the substantial workload involved in creating industry-specific recruitment

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materials and the critical need for these materials to adhere to UNISON brand guidelines and values. This situation often results in varying levels of quality, duplicated efforts and inconsistent messaging, which can dilute branches impact and effectiveness in attracting new members.

We propose that UNISON commissions the creation of a short, impactful recruitment video. This video should be designed in conjunction with our SOG's with the flexibility to allow for retrospective customisation, enabling different industries and branches within our union to tailor the messaging and visuals to their specific audiences without compromising on brand consistency.

The creation of a customisable recruitment video would represent a strategic investment in our union's growth and influence. Such a video would significantly enhance our recruitment efforts across our branches and various types of social media, allowing a more modern recruitment focus, reducing the workload on our volunteers and staff while ensuring adherence to our brand guidelines. Moreover, a compelling and professionally produced video can serve as a powerful tool in attracting young members, effectively communicating our values and showcasing the benefits of joining UNISON while simultaneously demonstrating a future vision of Trade Union representation in those sectors.

The video's content should include but not be limited to:

- A clear, engaging message that communicates the benefits of UNISON membership.

- High-quality production values that reflect positively on our brand.

- Features that allow easy customisation for different sectors and branches, such as modular sections or adaptable text and imagery.

This motion therefore calls on the Water, Environment & Transport SGE to:

- 1) Commission the Development of a High-Quality Recruitment Video: A short, impactful video that succinctly outlines the benefits of UNISON membership, the

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importance of collective action, and the support and resources available to members.

2. **Ensure Customisability for Sector-Specific Messaging:** The video should be designed with modular segments that can be easily customised to include sector-specific information, testimonials from members, and messages from branch leaders, allowing for tailored recruitment efforts across different industries and branches.

3. **Adhere to Brand Guidelines:** The production of the video must strictly follow UNISON's brand guidelines to maintain consistency and professionalism in our communications, reinforcing our identity and values as a union.

4. **Facilitate Easy Distribution and Use:** Provide the necessary tools and training for branches to customise, distribute, and effectively use the video in their recruitment campaigns, both online and in face-to-face engagements.

5. **Evaluate and Report on Effectiveness:** Establish metrics to assess the video's impact on recruitment efforts and report back to the membership on its effectiveness and any adjustments made to improve its reach and impact.

By supporting this motion, This conference will be taking a significant step towards modernising our recruitment efforts and strengthening our union as a whole.

15. Health and Safety Seminar

Carried

This conference calls upon the WET Executive to work with UNISON's H&S section to organise a one day seminar to allow branches to highlight the many H&S issues experienced by UNISON members covered by the WET Service Group to assist in a work programme which will improve the working lives of our members.

16. The best way to protect the environment - retaining the Environment Agency

Carried

1) The best way to protect the environment – retaining the Environment Agency

Conference, the Environment Agency is the foremost environmental regulator in England. We tackle waste crime and pollution incidents, regulate major industry and contaminated land, manage our flood defences and plan for drought and we protect our fisheries and enhance our habitat.

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Our 13,000 dedicated staff, work hard to deliver the best for the environment but the introduction of Operator Self-Monitoring for the Water Industry has made that job harder. The recent high profile news items regarding sewage discharges to our rivers and seas and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events due to climate change and the associated flood impacts have brought intense scrutiny on the Environment Agency.

Conference notes the likely shift of the political landscape with the forthcoming general election, but a potential incoming Labour government is not without concern to our members working in the Environment Agency. Previous shadow environment ministers and indeed the Leader of the Labour Party, have spoken openly about a “new super regulator” to crack down on sewage pollution or a new “flood resilience taskforce”.

Conference believes that the skills and competences required to tackle environmental challenges are best served in an efficient and empowered Environment Agency. Appropriate pay and remuneration of employees including many UNISON members is an important part of this formula.

For 12 years or more, the Conservatives heralded themselves as the “greenest government” ever. That claim is “greenwash” of the highest order – but don’t be fooled, the Environment Agency is not the problem. The problem is chronic underfunding and a political culture in hoc to polluting companies who put profit before our precious environment. The situation for our members working for Natural Resources Wales and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency is not dissimilar to that of our members in the Environment Agency.

For a potential incoming Labour government to really be the greenest government ever we need a properly funded and integrated Environment Agency which places evidence-based regulation at the heart of its environmental agenda.

We call on the WET SG Executive to:

- Continue to lobby central government to protect the Environment Agency and resist the creation of separate bodies.
- We also call on UNISON to campaign for a fully funded Environment Agency and strengthening of our bargaining machinery with a view to negotiating a fair and improved remuneration that employees deserve.
- Work with Labour Link and other appropriate channels within UNISON to raise this issue with opposition representatives to ensure our concerns about the Labour Party’s proposal to split the Agency is registered.

17. A call for tougher measures on illegal raw sewage discharges by the water industry

Carried

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This service group conference is deeply concerned about the levels of illegal sewage discharges by the water industry into rivers. We believe that the current prohibitions against the illegal dumping of sewage waste are woefully inadequate. Worth noting is that releasing sewage into rivers and seas is allowed in the UK to prevent pipe systems becoming overwhelmed, but only when it's raining heavily.

In May 2023, it was reported in the Guardian that there is no requirement by the water industry to report on the volume of their discharges, but it is only required by the regulator to provide data on the number of discharges and the length of times they lasted. In 2020 alone the water industry discharged raw sewage into waterways 400,000 times and made a profit of £2.2 billion in the same period. Rather than reinvest this money, instead it was used in paying dividends to shareholders and executives' bonuses.

There is a duty to protect the environment, but the government has failed to hold the water industry accountable and ignored negligence at the heart of the water industry. According to a BBC Panorama programme last year, which referred to a leak document showed some incidents to be serious category 2 incidents, but the Environment Agency downgraded those incidents to the lowest level, category 4. Conference notes that the Environment Agency funding has been cut to the bone which has hindered its ability to identify and investigate dry spills.

It is appalling that the water industry wants to increase customer's bills by an extra £156 a year, whilst water bosses are pocketing millions in bonuses. Members working in the sector are facing a rise in attacks from the public because of this environmental disaster, which was not caused by frontline workers. UNISON is conducting a survey, and the result will be presented to the industry so they can put in place mechanisms to protect employees.

Whilst Ofwat has been given new powers, these powers do not go far enough. The proceeds of fines must be reinvested in infrastructure. Conference notes we need strengthened regulation and a programme of investment in wastewater and sewage infrastructure fit for the 21st century and an enforcement to boost regional jobs, local communities, and improvements to the environment. There seems to be no end to this downward spiral, and if action is not taken it will lead to redundancies, cuts in pay and reward for members.

Therefore, this conference calls on the WET Service Group Executive to:

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- Work with Labour Link to positively campaign on this matter in finding a lasting solution to the raw sewage discharges.
- Use the recommendations from the published water report 2024 to progress the UNISON position on renationalisation of the water industry.
- Monitor the impact of public abuse on employees in the water industry and seek to counter any adverse effects.
- Lobby Defra and the Treasury to cease making cuts to Environment Agency funding and ensure that it has enough employees to significantly improve monitoring of the threats of inadequate storm water and pollution from sewage.
- Report back on progress to WET SG Conference 2025.

18. Bus Services and Reduction in Passenger levels post-Covid

Carried

Conference condemns the ever-increasing amount of disappearing bus services in our communities and the consequent impact on UNISON members employed in the public transport industry. Many parts of the country apart from London, have seen declines of more than two thirds on the level of bus provision and commuting has dropped by almost 50% since the Covid19 pandemic.

The lack of funding from central government also attributes to cuts in services which disproportionately impact those living on low incomes, disabled people and those from ethnic backgrounds who are less likely to own a car, as well as the elderly who have had to give up their vehicles due to their age or health. According to the National Audit Office, there has been a 38% reduction in local authorities' financial support for bus services across most of England between 2010 and 2019.

Conference notes that since the introduction of the National Bus Strategy in May 2021 Greater Manchester has managed to bring its buses back under public control, UNISON welcome this practice and hope to see other transport authorities do the same for a well-regulated service to protect workers jobs.

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Conference recognises that more than a decade of austerity has led to cuts in pay, terms and conditions of workers in this sector.

We believe members working in the transport sector should not pay for government failures; we call on the Service Group Executive to:

- Ask branches and regions to lobby local MPs in protecting bus services and jobs in the sector.
- Continue to support Campaign for Better Transport in the 'Save our Buses' campaign.
- Encourage branches to organise locally based campaigns to raise awareness of this issue.

19. Workplace Pensions in the Bus Sector

Carried

Conference notes that before deregulation of the Bus Industry in 1986 many bus services were run directly by Local Authorities, therefore the employees were members of the Local Government Pension Scheme.

Since deregulation, bus company employees have been enrolled in vastly inferior Defined Contribution Schemes by their private sector employers.

When they retire, it is likely they will have a relatively poor income in Retirement and will probably lead to pensioner poverty.

Conference therefore calls on the WET Service Group to work with Labour Link and other Trade unions in the Bus Industry to campaign for the introduction of a National Sectoral Collective Defined Contribution Scheme for the Bus Industry with significantly improved Employer contributions.

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20. Self-Regulation

Carried

WET Conference 2024 recognises what UNISON predicted that self-regulation of the water industry has been an unmitigated disaster resulting in sewage discharges all over the UK during all weather conditions.

We call upon the WET Executive to lobby an incoming government to overturn this legislation and work with organisations such as surfers against sewage to highlight the scale of the problem to improve the environment for all including many UNISON members who enjoy outdoor swimming in watercourses.