

BUSINESS SUPPORT - COUNCIL JOB CUTS

Southend Council aim to save £1 million a year by restructuring 'business support' services across the organisation. This affects over 150 existing posts and threatens to cut 28 jobs. The plan is to centralise roles which are considered to be 'admin', hoping to make savings by cutting across specialisms.

UNISON is supporting members who face uncertainty and the threat of redundancy and will give everyone the individual representation they need. We are also questioning the impact of the proposals. 'Admin' and support jobs aren't just

filing or paper shuffling – they're a vital support for front line services.

We wonder what will happen in your team when your 'admin' colleagues are

removed and put into a generic 'business support' team? We bet we all have to shoulder the added tasks that they can no longer do!

Restructures and cost savings aren't a victimless crime! They can cost our members their livelihoods but they also make it harder and more stressful for the staff who are left to deliver the services our community needs.

If you want to help defend all our jobs and services for the future – join us!

<https://join.unison.org.uk/>

Disabled Members Officer: What I do and why

My name is Jill Henson, I am a Business Support Officer in the Department for People, based, usually at any rate, at Civic 1. I am the branch Disabled Members Officer. I am myself disabled, I am Spina Bifida (happy to expand on what that actually is and how it affects me if you wish to ask me; but won't dwell on it here).

In my role, I focus on issues relating to disability and work to improve policies and practice relating to disabled members within workplaces. I support members in attending Absence Review Meetings, in accessing appropriate equipment and other support to enable them to carry out their jobs and in ensuring that reasonable adjustments are being made by the employer. A great resource for members and their managers alike is the government's Access To Work service: <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>.

As we all know, the last 15 months has been a very challenging time, but it has also forced managers to be more flexible in their approach to how and where work can be done. This has really helped us as disabled members, as we don't have the travelling time and all the energy that undertaking and

UNISON's Disabled Members Conference

Conference happens once a year and is a space to discuss and vote on issues relevant to disabled members and feed them into the wider union. You can find Conference information here - <https://www.unison.org.uk/events/2021-national-disabled-members-conference/>

Any disabled member can put themselves forward - get in touch if you are interested - it would be brilliant to get our branch represented at this year's conference. **But don't delay too long!** We will meet all expenses and assist in getting time off to attend. Email unison@southend.gov.uk with a subject of 'Disabled Members Conference'

planning this involves. Sickness absence has actually reduced for us - on a day when you're feeling a little below par and would not be fit enough to travel to the office, we can still sometimes work from home, which is beneficial to both the individual and the employer.

Jill Henson, Disabled Members' Officer

National Conference 2021 Report

This year's national UNISON conference was held online for the first time. Our Branch Secretary, Claire Wormald attended as a delegate and reports on some of the key debates:

• Motion 72: the Branch Resources Review

This branch had mandated a vote against, as we felt what this motion proposed was insufficient, incomplete and we felt all our branches deserve better.

Over 20 people wanted to speak for and against as the decision would impact on the resources for branches and therefore on the ability of the union to organise around cuts and job losses. The review of branch resources had been requested 2 years ago as branches are doing 80% of the work with less than 23% of the funding from national subs. This formula had never been reviewed despite fragmentation and privatisation increasing the number of employers we have to deal with. Over 20 years, our branch has gone from 1 to 118 employers to deal with just as facility time has been cut.

Branch activists were reporting burnout due to the constant tidal wave of case work & 'restructures' with ability to push the organising agenda on the edge of a precipice, so this was a heartfelt and passionate debate.

The vote to move conference business was placed early on and was carried, due, many believe, to the gremlins in the electronic voting system. The motion was passed - if we are lucky the 0.5% increase in branch funding this motion offered might buy a few more UNISON lanyards but not much more!

• Motion 25: Securing an Equal and Sustainable Post Pandemic Settlement –

A lively debate with amendments calling on the unions to come out fighting, saying that members cannot carry the financial can for this crisis and that we need to strengthen union solidarity. Another amendment highlighted the importance of the unions being part of an international movement on climate change, with the global south suffering due to the richer countries emitting 50% of CO2 and the global south 7%. This makes the decision by Johnson to reduce the foreign aid budget from 0.7% to 0.5% even more despicable as this country adds to the underlying issues creating the poverty and thus the need for aid.

• Motion 59: Tacking climate change –

Another really interesting motion which made me realise how little as a branch we do about this (although we did join in the climate strikes called by Greta Thunberg). We need to get some green reps (yes they exist!) and start organising workers to put pressure on the COP26 summit this autumn in Glasgow and of course influence the council locally.

• Motion 27: No back to normal for disabled workers –

After years of saying no to requests of reasonable adjustments to include working from home employers are now realising this is doable. Disabled members reported back great advantages to this, but also were clear this is not an excuse for the employers not to provide reasonable adjustments back at work and that equipment must be provided for the home environment.

• Motion 6: Trade union recognition for outsourced workers:

A lack of union recognition leads to lowering of pay and worse conditions. It notes the recent fire and rehire tactics emerging in some areas despite the fact that these companies are being supported with public money - but using tactics like this to squeeze profits out of workers. There have been some wins over this recently including Norfolk street cleaners.

Claire Wormald, Branch Secretary

THERE FOR YOU

Financial assistance: National welfare support

If you are a UNISON member and you are experiencing financial difficulties, whether due to coronavirus or other circumstances, our national welfare scheme 'There for You' can offer you support, including one-off grants. You can find details of the benefits and how to apply at our 'There For You' web pages -

[There for You \(UNISON Welfare\)](#) | [Member support and services](#) | [UNISON National](#)

School uniform grants	COVID-19 response fund
Other financial assistance	UNISON benefits calculator
UNISON budget planner	Help with debt



Black Members' Education Weekend 2021

At the Five Lakes Resort, Colchester Road Essex CM9 8HX

Starts 4.30pm on 12 November Ends 2.00 pm on 14 November 2021

This weekend is open to any Black Member in the Eastern region who is involved in their branch or the Self Organised Group – or thinking about getting more active. There will be a range of workshops during the weekend including:

- **Tim Roberts – Regional Secretary**
- **Thompson Solicitors - Race Discrimination workshop**
- **Developing future leaders in UNISON**
- **Developing your confidence and strategies for progression**
- **Anti Racism – Organising Black workers in the workplace**
- **Impact of long Covid – resources for Black members**

The Eastern Region Black Members Self Organised Group Annual General Meeting 2021 will be held during the weekend.

This event is free for members. Your branch will pay your registration fee, your travel costs and any additional expenses you incur due to childcare or facilitation costs. If there is sufficient demand then a crèche will be provided. Partner rate of £120 is available where you wish to bring your partner and you are sharing a room. The member is responsible for this cost not UNISON and will be asked to pay the hotel direct to secure the booking.

What to do next?

Contact your branch and ask for approval to attend. Complete the application form and then send it to your branch to authorise. Please return your completed form by Friday 23 July 2021 to easterneducation@unison.co.uk. Any problems, please contact Andrea Shute on easterneducation@unison.co.uk or 01245 608905.



Contacting UNISON during the Pandemic:

The Covid 19 pandemic means that our UNISON office is closed to visitors. To contact UNISON, please email us at unison@southend.gov.uk or leave us a message on 01702 215980. You can also follow us on social media:



Unison Southend



@unisonsouthend



unison_southend

There is also a national helpline on 0800 0857 857