

Unison Inverclyde Branch Newsletter September 2020

# Bread & Roses

Solidarity is Our Strength

Old Library, 30 Bawhirley Road, Greenock, PA15 2BH



## Claim Covid Cash

UNISON Scotland has won your right to full pay with backdating to March.

Sick or isolating ✓

Scottish social care ✓

Lost wages ✓ Page 3

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## Coronavirus Info for Council Members

**Branch Secretary Robin Taggart gives a Coronavirus update for Council members**



The council have issued this guidance in respect of employees having to quarantine following a trip aboard.

“Council employees who have booked holidays abroad must discuss this with their line manager. If a period of quarantine is required, whether known about at the date of departure, or subsequently announced, this will be granted as unpaid leave or where appropriate annual leave or a combination of both. This approach ensures all employee groups are treated consistently and this approach has been agreed with the trade unions.”

This issue was discussed at some length with the trade unions and in particular whether home working could be an option in these circumstances. The view taken by the trade unions collectively was that this would represent a fundamental unfairness. It would effectively mean that those employees who have the capacity to work from home would be receiving more favourable treatment than those who cannot. Another factor was that many of our members who cannot work from home tend to be in frontline lower paid jobs such as learning support/admin in schools, home care, cleaning and libraries – grades 1, 2 & 3. Members who can work from home will usually (not exclusively) be in higher graded posts including team leader and management roles – grades 4 and above.

I hope that as trade union members, regardless of your role in the council, you will understand the reasons why we took the position we did.

## Programme for Government

UNISON Scotland welcomed the recent announcement of a fundamental independent review of adult social care, led by Derek Feeley, which will give consideration to a National Care Service. However the lack of trade union representation on the review group is regrettable.



Mike Kirby, UNISON Scottish Secretary, said: “We note the government is actively considering ways to reward the efforts of NHS staff during the pandemic as part of the 2021-22 pay deal and look forward to reaching agreement on this. The developments announced for supporting the mental health and wellbeing of NHS and social care staff are very positive.

“While a number of measures announced have implications for local services we are disappointed the Programme contains nothing which addresses the scale of the current crisis in local authority budgets or the urgency of maintaining essential local services.

“We await the announcement of a revised date for rolling out the expansion of early years education to 1,140 hours before the end of this year.”

Further details are available on the Unison Scotland website.

## #Claim Covid Cash

UNISON launched its #ClaimCovidCash campaign for workers in social care who only received statutory sick pay when they had to self isolate as they showed symptoms or someone else in their household had symptoms.



To secure the shortfall in pay, workers have to get their employers to make a claim to the Scottish Government's Social Care Emergency Fund. The purpose of the fund is to stop the spread of the virus and to stop workers suffering financial hardship as a result of a reduction in their pay. However certain employers have been "misinterpreting" their role in allowing workers to access the cash, by acting as gatekeepers and controlling our members' access to cash which is rightfully theirs.

When we are presented with these excuses, we challenge them, and have secured the full wages for many workers as a result. We are also making the local health and social care partnerships, health boards, local authorities and the Scottish Government aware of the culprits.

Here's a list of the main excuses:

You were off too soon to qualify. Employers are still arguing absences prior to 27 May do not qualify. This is wrong.

You didn't get a test. It should make no difference. Testing wasn't available in the early stages and still isn't available to everyone.

You didn't test positive. Again it should make no difference. The purpose of self-isolation is to prevent the spread in suspected cases. Every case is treated as suspicious until confirmed or otherwise.

It wasn't you showing symptoms. Public health guidance to self-isolate applies if a member of your household has symptoms.

It wasn't us who told you to stay off. If you receive advice from your GP or the NHS on public health grounds to self-isolate, you should be paid.

Your sicknote doesn't say Covid. So long as you are off with Covid symptoms, this should be sufficient.

You failed to submit a self-isolation note. This should make no difference so long as you informed your employer you were displaying Covid type symptoms.

You're a casual worker. The regulations apply to casual workers and bank staff.

There's no proof of financial hardship. If your monthly pay drops, that is sufficient proof of financial hardship.

We are awaiting the funds from the Scottish Government. This neatly sums up the attitude of certain social care employers to their workforce, many earning the Scottish living wage of £9.30 an hour or less. They remain absent from work on public health grounds at significant personal cost yet their bosses won't even fork out the remainder of their wages in advance of receiving Government funding.

So contact UNISON to claim now if you haven't already done so and encourage your colleagues to claim too.



Further information is available on the UNISON Scotland website

## Labour Link Officer Update

UNISON has always given its members the choice of opting in to its affiliated political fund, that gives them a say in the democratic processes of the Labour Party, or of opting into the General Political Fund, independent of any political party. For those members that choose to opt into the affiliated political fund the following will be of interest.

Branch Labour Link Officer, Francesca Brennan gives her thoughts



### Local Government – Time for a serious discussion

“UNISON members understand what it means to serve. Our work enriches communities, improves human experiences, saves lives. But yet we can all be guilty of forgetting, due to the relative lack of glamour in public service, that our workplace roles are invaluable ingredients of civilised society. Local government is like good parenting – it looks after you so well that you can sometimes take it for granted.

Every time a UNISON member goes to work, somebody’s life is vastly improved as a result. People find it easy to talk about public spending but public saving is the real essence of local government.

When the costs of projects to improve childhood wellbeing, for example, are offset against money that can potentially later be saved on healthcare and criminal justice spending, there is nothing but a strong case in favour of investment in local services.

Yet on 20th August our union was forced to call for ‘serious discussion’ about the long-term sustainability of local government,

stating that a £1bn funding gap in Scotland is putting local government in crisis. UNISON is now asking for Scottish Government to engage in a discussion about the role of local government in Scotland and it should be a discussion they take very seriously.

Full details of the Unison Scotland Website article about Local Government Serious Discussion is available on the Branch website.

Unlike our local councillors who have worked hard to stave off cuts to council services here in Inverclyde, I feel that Scottish Government is hesitant in valuing local government, reluctant to treasure our public services and highly resistant to awarding proper funding. A bit like the businessmen in The Apprentice TV series choosing winners solely on their ability to make money and not on any other skills, qualities or lasting impact they may have, the SNP’s continued failure to invest in local services is short-sighted, dated and negligent.

So I sincerely hope that Scottish Government heed UNISON’s warnings before it is too late. After all, the financial cost of living in a civilised society will never be more than the human cost of losing that society’s privileges.”



## **Bullying and Harassment**

The following article is a general guide and as the Branch covers a variety of employers there will be variations in the policies of the employers, as always contact your Workplace steward in the first instance for advice.

Bullying and harassment are common problems affecting many members at work. But both bullying and harassment are unacceptable, and the law makes it clear that all employees have the right to work in a safe environment.

Your employer is responsible for creating and maintaining a safe workplace, free from bullying, intimidation and harassment. Employees are protected by a combination of employers' policies and legislation.

If you or someone you know is affected by bullying and harassment, contact your UNISON representative for advice.

**What is bullying?**

**Bullying includes:**

offensive, intimidating, malicious, or insulting behaviour;  
abuse of authority which violates the dignity of an individual or a group of people;  
creating a hostile environment against an individual;  
the undermining, humiliation or injury of an individual.

The bullying does not need to relate to a protected characteristic (discussed below) but unless it does, or is of a sexual nature, it is not prohibited by the Equality Act 2010 (or, in Northern Ireland, under various pieces of equality legislation addressing a protected characteristic).

**What is harassment?**

Harassment is defined as unwanted conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of people in the workplace or of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

To be protected under the Equality Act (or in Northern Ireland under various pieces of equality legislation addressing a protected characteristic), it must be related to gender reassignment, disability, age, sex (or be of a sexual nature), sexual orientation, race, religion or belief (and in Northern Ireland political opinion) or nationality. It may be an isolated incident or come up again and again.

Harassment includes bullying if it relates to one of the protected characteristics listed above.

A key factor in determining whether harassment has occurred is whether the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to the recipient.

A few examples of bullying/harassment could include:

making offensive or intimidating comments;  
withholding information so the job cannot be done properly;  
unreasonable or impossible deadlines or workloads;  
overbearing supervision or unjust criticism;  
blocking opportunities or making threats about job security.

**What can you do about bullying and harassment?**

There are a few simple steps you can take if you are affected by bullying at work:

keep a written record or diary of all bullying incidents, including past incidents – no matter how small they appear;  
speak to the bully or harasser (if you can): they may not have realised how distressing their actions are to you – if you are unable to do this, ask your UNISON representative to raise it on your behalf;  
speak to your employer – your UNISON representative will be able to advise you on the best way of doing so and accompany you to any meetings with your employer.

Moved house, changed your name or started a new job?



# Remember to update your membership details

You can update your details online at:  
**[unison.org.uk/my-unison](https://unison.org.uk/my-unison)**



Now more than ever, is the time to ensure that we hold the correct and up to date details for you, particularly your email address.

The Branch is always looking to improve communication to our members and we're asking all members to register with myUNISON. This is a fairly easy process and only takes a few minutes.

All you need to do is visit <https://www.unison.org.uk/my-unison> and follow the steps for registration. You will require your UNISON membership number.

Once you register you can update your personal details, including adding an e-mail address if there isn't one already on your membership file. Alternatively you can contact the Branch Office on 715900.

Branch members who have an up to date email address on their membership file will receive emails with links to future editions of the Branch newsletter and also any important information which is emailed to members which is especially important given the current circumstances.