



Branch Newsletter

October 2006

Positive Steps Forward



UNISON PAYROLL ACTION

On September 7th UNISON representatives met jointly with the senior Trust Executives and the payroll provider *Supporta*. Whilst the current situation is unacceptable to both UNISON and the Trust, the meeting was structured to alert the payroll provider to the seriousness of the problems.

UNISON underlined, in no uncertain terms, the current ill-feeling that exists among staff and the Trust's Director of HR, Seamus Elliott, stressed to *Supporta* the need for an immediate improvement.

At the meeting, the UNISON / Trust partnership enabled a joint condemnation of the problems and the meeting outlined the areas that needed immediate attention from the payroll provider. *Supporta* were left with a perfectly clear picture of the severity of the situation.



Supporta admitted to administrative issues, including personnel shortages and training weaknesses that have contributed to the problem. At the meeting they advised the Trust and UNISON that these problems have now been resolved.

A second meeting held on the 11th October gave UNISON another opportunity to represent staff concerns. Speaking to the payroll provider, it was clear that the joint pressure from UNISON and the Trust have ensured that efforts to resolve the problems have been made quickly and without compromise.

The Trust's HR department have continued to work tirelessly for staff who have been effected by the payroll errors. Whilst some staff have reported that they have had insufficient communication from HR regarding their complaints, the work being done by HR has ensured that the effect on staff has been minimised greatly.

UNISON wish to convey their appreciation for their efforts which have lead to a direct improvement for many staff.

The legal action being pursued will still continue against the Trust until the problem is completely resolved. However, UNISON views the meeting as a positive step forward in defending staff rights to correct pay. This joint approach demonstrates the effective partnership arrangement that exists not only in the Beds and Herts group but across the whole of the East of England Trust.

Important Pay Sheet Information

Currently a large number of staff are completing their pay sheets incorrectly and causing the HR Department to have examine each one in detail and divert their time away from dealing with other payroll issues.

Staff are asked to ensure they complete their time sheets carefully and ensure that all totals are completed in the last line of the pay sheet.

Line Managers are asked to ensure that they are checking *each* of the pay sheets carefully before signing them off.

HR are currently rapidly analysing any reported pay errors and alerting the payroll provider for repayment.

These small considerations will assist the HR Department hugely and allow for the speedier dealing of all the payroll concerns.

Registering Your Payroll Errors

UNISON are still compiling a detailed database of staff who are currently experiencing payroll errors.

This is a requirement in preparation for our legal action against the Trust.

Staff are asked to visit our website and register their details with us, www.bhaps-unison.com/payroll

Staff must still follow guidelines from HR for reporting payroll errors.

Accident Benefit Scheme

UNISON members can apply for this benefit if they sustain an injury or illness whilst at, or travelling to and from, their place of work. UNISON will pay £2.90 per day's absence (up to a maximum of 30 days total of £87) on receipt of a completed and authorised benefit form. So, if you think you are eligible for this benefit then please contact Jackie Robinson (07890357493) and she will send you a claim form to complete and return to her for authorisation. Please note: this benefit is unrelated to any SSP or other state benefits you may also be entitled to.

In addition to Unison's Accident Benefit, members can seek advice about personal injury compensation claims by contacting UnisonDirect (0845 355 0845) and providing their membership number and details of the incident relating to their illness or injury. This information will then be forwarded to Thompson's Solicitors who will determine whether or not you may have grounds to pursue a personal injury claim.

Ensuring all staff's health and safety is one of the key aims of UNISON.

That's why the UNISON branch is seeking even more volunteers to monitor and report on health and safety matters in the work place. Volunteers are welcome from all parts of the Trust; A&E, PTS, Admin staff.

Would you, or someone you know, be interested in becoming a Health and Safety Representative for your locality or becoming an activist for fairness in your working conditions?

Email email@bhaps-unison.com for more details on getting more involved with UNISON's work.



The Future of PTS

PTS services in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire have gone out to tender. The East of England Trust submitted a bid for the 5 year contract and are hoping to be successful despite the competition of four other interested parties – all private contractors. The East of England bid has been successful enough at this stage to progress through to the next level of the process, along with one other private competitor.

Further presentations to the Consortium of health Trust purchasers are planned for the early part of October 2006 and it is hoped that our bid will present itself as the most successful.

The consortium is seeking the bid that delivers the “best value” service to their patients and we feel that the East of England can offer that and more; we have staff who are all trained to very high standards, premises, communication systems and the experience of dealing with patient’s needs. The main areas of concern are the vehicles and the information system. If we are successful in the tender bid it is proposed that a new computer system, that would become live in early March, would be installed. It is also hoped that the Trust will renew more than 40 vehicles in the current fleet in order to ensure that vehicles are no older than seven years old.

Patient Transport Service is about the safe delivery of people, not packages, from A to B with the added advantage of having a team of staff who can also deliver the best quality patient care and compassion to the people they deal with. During this process, the services we provide and the work undertaken by PTS staff every day is now under the microscope and it is important that we live up to the high professional standards of an NHS ambulance service.



Unison has been involved in the formulation of the original bid and the subsequent consultation process from the outset. Two communication items were recently sent to every individual PTS staff member; a formal consultation process letter and a joint Trust/Unison newsletter. This was followed by a series of consultation meetings which took place at a main depot in each of the four main areas; Watford, Luton, Headquarters and Letchworth. The purpose of these meetings was to give staff the opportunity to come along and ask questions, raise their concerns and look for answers. Although the sessions were not as well attended as hoped, those who were able to come along will be able to take the relevant information back to their colleagues. Some very interesting questions came from those who attended and it is intended that a FAQ sheet will be sent out that will hopefully address any queries not answered on the day.

Unison will continue to work with the Trust and monitor the progress of the tender process, and look forward to a positive outcome when the Consortium announces their decision sometime in November 2006.

NHS Cuts Campaign

The Government continue to think up ways of cutting back NHS service provision to the general public. Their “modus operandi” is to close wards and/or departments, relocate and juggle resources, and out-source services such as medical records to companies overseas by using excuses such as “efficiency savings”. UNISON believes that this is outrageous behaviour for any government to demonstrate, but sadder still that a Labour-led one would sink to such depths.



A recent branch survey prompted quite a good response and I would like to thank all of you who took the time to complete and return it. The feedback received shows that there are genuine concerns about these plans and indicated that Unison should be taking an active role in trying to prevent such proposals going ahead.

The Eastern Regional Cuts Campaign Committee, of which Jackie Robinson is the Ambulance Representative, is hard at work developing campaign ideas that we hope members will be willing to take part in, so look out for information of these events as it arrives in your place of work.

Got What it takes?..

The BHAPS Branch of UNISON believe that it is essential for all workplaces to have a designated local Steward in order to provide a “first line” contact for union help or advice.



The UNISON branch is seeking more volunteers to support its continued efforts in ensure a fair working conditions for all staff.

Anyone interested should contact Jackie Robinson on 07890 357493

Regional Ambulance Seminar

The 2006 Regional Ambulance Seminar took place in Cambridge on Friday 22nd September and I would like to thank all those who attended this year - yet another good turnout from the three branches (BHAPS, Essex and East Anglia).



We were kept in good order by our Chair Jenni Saunders and were treated to a selection of interesting and topical presentations from a variety of guest speakers. A group workshop was organised around the topic of merging the three current regional branches into one single unit. Examples of draft structures were provided for discussion and at the end of this session, the general consensus of opinion appeared to be that a single branch was the way forward and is in line with Unison’s rule “one employer, one branch”. Now all we have to do is find a starting point and go from there! Such a change won’t be without difficulties and the proposal to merge the branches would have to go to a membership vote. Following on from this there would be many logistical hurdles to overcome including transitional arrangements

A recent survey aimed at getting women members more active within the branches had been devised by our Regional Organising Assistant, Debbie Smith. Anyone who completed and returned their survey form was entered into a prize draw which was held on the day of the seminar. There were three prizes and it was a BHAPS member who was first out of the hat, followed by two Essex members who took the 2nd and 3rd prizes. Feedback forms have been sent to all those who attended and we will take due note of any comments for when we arrange next year’s event.

Finally, a huge thanks must go to Gwen Williams from the Bury St. Edmunds office without whose effort and exceptional organising talents we would not be able to have this seminar year after year.

Branch Secretary's Report

I'm sure you'd all agree that if I were to say it's been a frustrating and busy year so far, it would be an understatement of epic proportions? There we were, painstakingly working our way through the complex and often controversial task of implementing Agenda for Change with what we hoped was the end in sight, when along come the Government and decide to introduce yet another "improvement initiative" for the already beleaguered NHS.

When Agenda for Change was heralded way back when, memories of yet another Department of Health initiative came flooding back to me. Hands up who can remember the infamous Team Bonus Scheme? Keep your hands up if you remember the fun and games we had with that little gem? Briefly, and for those who don't remember it, BHAPS was selected along with Lincolnshire Ambulance Trust to be a pilot site for a Team Bonus Scheme and although Unison worked in partnership with the Trust throughout that process, it is fair to say that all parties found the implementation of certain aspects of the scheme both frustrating and difficult to apply. So I breathed a huge sigh of relief when BHAPS lost out to East Anglia in their bid to be a pilot site for Agenda for Change - although all credit to EA for taking on that task and doing as good a job as they did with it.

So, what have the Government come up with now? Well...they decided, in their wisdom, that there were just too many ambulance trusts in England so have subsequently slashed this number by over 50%. The decision to "reconfigure" the English Ambulance Trusts was based on the findings of a "review" carried out by Peter Bradley, the Chief Executive of the London Ambulance Service, whose own Trust interestingly enough, has **not** been required to merge with any neighbouring bodies - unlike the rest of us. (Who says that size doesn't matter, eh?)

So now we find ourselves as part of the biggest Ambulance Trust in England - geographically speaking - and I know that there have been concerns, at all levels, about job security within the new organisation and whilst I would dearly love to be able to provide you all with a utopian answer to that question - I'm just not able to.

What I do think is essential is that any changes that subsequently occur, do so for the **right** reasons, are beneficial to the Trust, its employees and the public it serves and not just hastily-thought out and detrimental "fixes". Therefore, it is essential to ensure that effective partnership working is maintained within the new organisation. This is a view echoed by my fellow staff side leads; Barry Jarvis and Kevin Risley (East Anglia) and Frank Ward (Essex).

The four of us have met as a regional group for some years now and it has allowed us to maintain effective communication and share information about the differing practices used in the individual trusts. It also provided Essex and BHAPS with a link to an AFC early implementer site. I believe that these early meetings have allowed us to form a sound and solid basis for a relationship which has proved invaluable through the subsequent AFC process, and again in the run up to the merger itself. So now that "we three are one", we must continue to maintain a high level of effective and productive partnership working for the benefit of all employees of the East of England Ambulance Trust, and the public it serves.

To date the staff side leads have been, or are currently, involved in; the interviews for Directors and Senior Management appointments, the development of single policies and procedures, the movement from the former Trust structures across into a single new one, development of and participation in Trust Boards and a Staff Partnership Forum, and participation in Senior Management Team meetings. The four of us are currently having staff side lead meetings on a fortnightly basis but are in almost daily contact by telephone so that we know what is happening at all times.

Maintaining this level of partnership working means that I am having to spend increasing amounts of time away from the local branch area, but please let me reassure you all that this does not mean that I have abandoned my local branch membership. In my absence, the branch activists and officers have been holding the fort admirably. After all, member's problems don't suddenly cease to arise just because we've amalgamated into some sort of "SuperTrust" or I'm not there. I would ask that you continue to seek out your local representatives for first line information.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to say a heartfelt "Thank You" to two particular groups of people. First of all - to every one of the Unison representatives and members who put so much time and effort into seeing the AFC process through to its conclusion. It has been a long, drawn out and often contentious process but they have worked tirelessly to try and achieve the best outcome for every Beds and Herts employee. Secondly - to all my fellow activists and officers who have been keeping the branch ticking over admirably whilst I have been tied up dealing with merger-related issues, and whilst it would be unfair of me to single out any specific individuals for praise, I am certain that all the aforementioned people know who they are and I look forward to being able to thank them individually in due course.

Jackie Robinson - UNISON Branch Secretary.

UNISON National Health Conference 2007

Unison is holding its Health Conference in Brighton from the 21st - 24th April 2007. I have provisionally booked accommodation for four representatives, or members, to attend (2 as sharing delegates and 2 visitors). Delegates and visitors would also be invited to attend the pre-conference delegate meeting and meal which is booked for the evening of Saturday 21st April.

The size of the individual branch memberships denotes the number of delegates that can be sent. With a membership of less than one thousand we are only entitled to send one delegate, or two to share the role between them. As a branch we have found that sharing is the most beneficial way to approach Conference as it gives two people the opportunity to take part instead of just one, as well as allowing each one to have a break from the proceedings from time to time.

The purpose of attending Health Conference as a delegate is to represent the branch view on a whole range of topical issues. As a delegate you will be expected to vote on key issues that affect the health sector membership. You will sit in the main arena with other delegates from your region although not all necessarily from the ambulance service. The number of visitors any branch can send to conference is only restricted by that branch's funding availability. A visitor does not vote and sits in the visitor's arena within the main hall.

Conference can be a very interesting experience and if you think you might be interested but are maybe put off by the responsibility of voting then come as a visitor instead. This way you will get a "feel for how things work" then the following year you may feel that you are ready to assume the delegate role. There is nothing scary about being a delegate - you are not acting alone as the branch will have already have discussed what their mandate for any particular issue would be in advance.

Your Pension Is Changing

NHS staff are being asked to comment on proposed changes to the NHS pension scheme arrangements for England and Wales, unveiled jointly by NHS Employers and healthcare trade unions.

Under the proposals, most staff will have to pay more to their contribution rate. Currently they pay 6% which will increase to 6.5%



UNISON has agreed to recommend the acceptance of the new NHS Pension deal. However, all members can make their own decision in an upcoming ballot. It is vital staff views are heard on this important issue.

Key areas of proposed changes:

- Contribution Rates
- Key benefits
- New scheme for new starters at a date to be decided post 2007
- Future option to move to new scheme for existing arrangements
- New arrangements for future valuations and governance

The proposals would retain a pension age of 60 for existing members of the NHS Pension Scheme and retain a final salary pension for both existing and new staff.

All UNISON members will be receiving ballot forms starting the week beginning October 23rd 2006. These must be returned by November 5th 2006.

For full explanation of the changes visit, www.bhaps-unison.com/pensionproposals.pdf

National Partnership Forum

Before, during and after the reconfiguration of the ambulance trusts in England, Unison have pushed for a forum where the new Chief Executives could meet with the recognised trade unions in order to further develop sound partnership working practices. This aim has been achieved and the first meeting of the aforementioned National Partnership Forum (NPF) will take place on the 7th November 2006.

There will be 12 seats for each side. The 12 allocated to the staff side will consist of 3 x Full Time Officers (one each from Unison, GMB and TGWU) and the remaining 9 seats will be made available to the lay representatives. Unison's Ambulance Sector hopes to secure 6 of the remaining 9. Following a meeting of the Unison Ambulance Sector on the 10th October, six lay reps were selected including one from the eastern region. So congratulations go to our Essex colleague, Frank Ward, for achieving one of the Unison seats on the forum.

This is a positive move forward and Unison welcomes this forum as a means to develop a uniformity of standards across the country as well as improving partnership working in all new Trusts. We have been lucky that, here in the eastern region, we have all enjoyed fairly open and mutually respectful relationships with our Management teams. However, this is not necessarily the case across the country but there is always hope that this will allow both unions and employers the opportunity to have their say and set out their expectations for the future.

Quick contact details

Branch Secretary:	Jackie Robinson,	07890 357493
Branch Vice Secretary:	Stuart Reeves,	07786 511438
Health & Safety & AFC guidance:	June Felstead,	07903 585081
Communications & media support:	Darren Meads,	01707 880920

Our website at www.bhaps-unison.com keeps members up-to-date with all of the current issues and member benefits.

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New Memberships

With more than 1.3 million members working across the public services, being part of UNISON means that members have the full weight of Britain's biggest trade union behind you.

UNISON is the only union to be recognised by the Trust's management. Staff wishing to join should contact Jackie Robinson on 07890 357493.

Join Britain's biggest and fastest growing trade union and together we'll improve your working life.

www.unison.org.uk



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