



# Branch Newsletter

January 2007

## UNISON Branch Merger

Following the recent merger of our Trust with East Anglia and Essex Trusts, UNISON proposed that the existing three branches merge as a single united union. To do so would create one of the single largest union branches and ensure that member's interests were protected as aggressively as possible.

Plans have been underway for some time to create a new 'super branch'. All being all being well, it is hoped that the transition from three individual branches to a single one for the East of England membership will take place on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2007.

For this reason, our final UNISON branch bulletin will contain reports from senior union activists on their thoughts and achievements as we enter a new, stronger phase of member representation. Members should be assured that although the Trust merger has brought about uncertainty, the union merger will only serve to create a more powerful negotiating tool with the larger Trust.

## The Future of PTS



We are currently awaiting the outcome of the Trust's bid to retain PTS services in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. Seven hospital trusts are currently deciding whether they should award the contract to our Trust, or whether they should choose a private supplier. It is anticipated that the decision will be announced by 12<sup>th</sup> February after a series of repeated delays which has created frustration for staff.

Regrettably, the commissioning consortium that advises the NHS Trust's awarding the PTS service have recommended that they should use the private company, *Medical Dispatch Ambulance Services*.

The consortium has said they are seeking the bid that delivers the 'best value' service to their patients and we feel that the East of England Service 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.



UNISON firmly believes that the Patient Transport Service is about the safe delivery of people, not packages, 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. UNISON has been involved in the formation of the original bid and the subsequent consultation process from the outset. We out rightly condemn any suggestion that the cheapest provider should be used.

Despite the consortium's recommendation, the final decision rests with the hospital trusts. We remain hopeful that they will come to the correct decision and remain with the East of England Ambulance Service and not a private company. Recently, UNISON has been involved in local and national media events, including TV and radio interviews to underline our position and represent our PTS staff.

Whilst PTS staff will be given the opportunity to transfer over to the new company, the loss to the organisation should not be underestimated. If the hospital Trusts choose a private company then the face of our Ambulance service will change forever. UNISON will continue to oppose any form of privatisation to the NHS.

## What does UNISON actually do for me?

Periodically, employers make changes to the working practices and conditions of their staff. It is the job of the union to ensure that these new policies are completely fair to the staff. To do this, our senior UNISON branch officers, along with the HR department, are incorporated into the development of any new strategy for the Trust. This includes working on new policies with the Trust's Directors, arguing for amendments where staff interests are being affected, and being involved in the selection process of senior management and Director level appointments.

UNISON is ideally placed to be the voice of staff when new changes are made to the Trust. A great deal of work is done without being formally publicised and staff will be more familiar with the actions of UNISON when they need workplace advice or support in the event of an inquiry. UNISON is supported by the Trust's board and an effective relationship between the two exists ensuring that our members are an integral part of the Trust's development.

Agenda for Change is probably the best example of our ability to represent staff interests. UNISON was able to ensure that at every meeting operational road, dispatch and PTS staff were present to create a new contract that has, by and large, ensured a fair and financially beneficial contract for all our staff.

The face of unions has changed dramatically over the years. We now pride ourselves on the ability to negotiate with the Trust without the need for aggressive disputes. The Ambulance service merger highlighted this relationship and UNISON and its members were openly invited into the high level meetings. Within the meetings, we were able to directly influence the outcomes for staff and this is something that the Trust should be commended for.

Without a strong union, employers would be free to make unlimited changes to the way their staff work. As a new era for UK Ambulance services dawns, UNISON will continue to be a proverbial 'pain in the backside' for anything that is detrimental to our members.



## Got what it takes?..

UNISON believes that it is essential for all workplaces to have a designated local Steward in order to provide a 'first line' contact for help or advice. The UNISON branch is also seeking more members to become involved in negotiating fairness within the high level meetings.

Whilst union work is voluntary, you are reimbursed for travel and other expenses when you represent staff. The outcome of knowing that you are part of developing the Trust in partnership is highly rewarding.



For this reason, people with a confident but rational manner are ideally suited to represent staff on issues that they feel strongly about.

Anyone interested should contact Jackie Robinson on 07890 357493 for an informal discussion.

## Branch Chairman's Report

It was with some pride and sadness that on January 11<sup>th</sup> 2007 at 22.00 hrs I brought to a close a small piece of history, because it was at this time that I closed the final branch meeting of the Beds and Herts UNISON branch. With the new branch forming under its new name for the East of England it would perhaps be a good time to look back at how our branch has moved forward.

When I had the honour of being elected Branch Chairman some 3 years ago we were a very old fashioned branch, modern technology had not been grasped we had no real communication with our members or other branches. It was decided very quickly to get our own web site, send out newsletters and meet with the other ambulance branches around us.

We achieved all these aims quite quickly, although communication via newsletter did suffer as the result of Agenda for Change arriving which did take up a lot of time and effort by a lot of union members who we should thank for all their hard work. A big thank you must go to the team lead by June Felstead who was seconded to the AFC office as a full time staff-side lead.

We also witnessed the arrival of yet another small, unrecognised union called the ASU, which spent most of its time putting down UNISON and AFC, which incidentally it has since recommended its members to accept. With the ASU making big declarations about how it has achieved so much for its staff, the branch took the decision that we would not enter into the same arena, that we would simply and quietly get on with representing our members in a confidential way.

We felt that confidentiality to the member who came to us was of far greater importance than scoring points over other unions. We would let our actions for our members be the way to prove ourselves; to steal a line from the dreaded road craft, "quite efficiency is the hallmark of a professional".

We have come a long way in three years, not always as well as we would have liked, but I do believe that we have handed the branch on in a very strong and respected way. The Trust management team have grown to listen and respect our views and we have achieved a good working relationship with them.

The team that I have had the pleasure of working with is so vast that to name them all would have taken a whole page in its self so to all of you I say "Thank You". There has to be one special thank you and that goes to Jackie Robinson as Branch secretary who has worked tirelessly to take the branch forward through the years. She continues to promote our interests within the structure of the new East of England Branch, with the help of Stuart Reeves.

There will still be local reps in your areas for you to contact, only the name and the structure of the branch will have changed. Once again, a big thank you to everybody who supported Unison Beds and Herts Branch.

Mark Cook-Abbot, Branch Chairman.

## Branch Secretary's Report



As this is to be our last year as the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire branch I thought I'd report back and reflect on some of the significant changes and events that have taken place whilst I've been in this role.

I would just like to start by saying a huge thank you to everyone who has helped not only me, but the branch as a whole, to provide sound representation, advice and guidance to the membership of this branch and, in a number of ways, all other Trust employees. If I inadvertently forget to thank anybody in particular then please accept my apologies now and this generic, all-encompassing 'THANK YOU VERY MUCH'

I took over in 2000 and stumbled blindly into the role believing, rather naively, what the two previous secretaries had told me - that all it would involve was a *"bit of filing and pointing members in the right direction"*. Dave Perrin was the Branch Chairman at that time and I can state, with complete confidence, that if it hadn't been for his help and support, I would have crumbled under the realisation of my 'chosen' pathway within days.

When I sadly waved Dave off to pastures new, I was relieved that Mark Cook-Abbott, a Bedfordshire-based steward of some years took his place. It was good to know that experience was replacing experience of an equal level, and Mark has remained on hand providing support for myself and the branch to this day.

In my time as Branch Secretary, I have seen a variety of staff undertake representative roles with varying levels of activity. Some are more vocal than others, whilst some are quieter, more reserved but this doesn't mean that they do any the less for this branch. Each and every representative has brought something worthwhile and valuable to this branch and have been very much appreciated by their members, their fellow reps and myself.

This branch, like any other, is nothing without its membership and this must never be forgotten - hence the reason why so much effort goes into negotiating, bargaining and representing your rights as employees within the organisation. I appreciate that these efforts may not always be visible to you all. This may have been as a result of past failings as a union to use effective methods of communication.

However, communication has improved, there is no doubt about it. Having the right person in the right place to deliver a quality service to the membership is key, and with this in mind we appointed our Branch Communications Officer, Darren Meads, to make these differences. An effective website was developed and we now produce regular newsletters. It would be nice to have more input from our members in these forums but as long as there is a source of relevant and current information out there for you to read then I feel that this is a good starting point.

Agenda for Change - well, where do I start? I will just say very simply, that June Felstead and her team have been outstanding in their efforts to see through what has been a contentious, long and hard process. June oversaw the AFC process for the staff-side from the start, and her team members have worked diligently to ensure fairness of application and, whilst it is acknowledged that not everybody has been satisfied with their banding outcome, there has never been any doubt that without this strong union team, the outcome would have been very different.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July this year, Beds and Herts Ambulance Trust amalgamated to form one of 11 'Super Trusts' following the release of the Bradley Report which recommended the downsizing of UK Ambulance Trusts from 31 to 11. The report resulted in the original 31 individual UK ambulance Trusts being slashed by well over 50% to make regional-level organisations.

UNISON have been instrumental in setting up the National Ambulance Partnership Forum to provide an arena for national discussions between Ambulance Trust's senior management and Ambulance staff trades unions. There are 12 staff side seats at this forum, 9 of which have UNISON representatives in them including Essex's Frank Ward, who is also the Eastern Regional delegate for UNISON's Ambulance Sector.

The review of Ambulance Trusts prompted a review of our current ambulance branch arrangements. This was foreseen by our three regional branches who have met regularly for some years and were therefore in a good position to commence the consultation process about our own branch merger. Consulting our members has been done over a period of many months through seminars, newsletters, word of mouth and committee meetings. The outcome of which appears to be a move in favour of an amalgamation of the branches and this is where we find ourselves today.

The impact of the Trust merger and the planned amalgamation of the three UNISON branches into one has resulted in a relentless increase in workload of branch officials. Fortunately, I was joined last year by Stuart Reeves who, as my Vice Secretary, has been assisting me at a local level as well as carrying out his duties as the branch Equal Opportunities and Young Members Officer. A very big thank you to Stuart for 'keeping the wheels on and turning' in Beds and Herts.

So now, as we wind up our current branch in favour of the new single one, we have a whole heap of work to do, including the setting up of sub groups to look at harmonising our current branch practices and policies in much the same way as the trust are doing. An Inaugural Branch meeting (details of which will be available shortly) will be held and a transitional Branch Committee will be elected.

This will not be a simple transition and whilst I feel a little sad at the prospect of no longer being an individual branch it should also be remembered that there will inevitably be many future benefits that come from being a member of a single, harmonised and forward-thinking branch.

Jackie Robinson  
Branch Secretary.

## 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](mailto:email@bhaps-unison.com) for more details on getting more involved with UNISON's work.



## New name - New website.

The merger of the UNISON branches currently serving staff of the former Beds & Herts, Essex and East Anglia Trusts will ensure a more powerful representative ability to the union.

To keep members up-to-date with the latest changes and campaigns, our newsletters will be published regularly.

Our new website can soon be seen at [www.EEA-UNISON.com](http://www.EEA-UNISON.com) and will continue to be the primary source of information for members.

## Health & Safety Officers Report

The Beds and Herts Branch of UNISON is soon to be no more!

We have all worked hard throughout the years as Branch Officers especially our Branch Secretary, Jackie Robinson.

We have achieved a remarkable partnership-working environment within the Trust's management, which I'm sure will continue in the new branch.

As Health & Safety Branch Officer I have had input in all areas of Health and Safety within our service. Several major health and safety changes have been implemented within the Trust by UNISON. Our role in ensuring the best possible health environment for our staff will continue unchanged.

In my role as Agenda for Change staff side lead, I had input in all aspects of the Agenda for Change process and this further enhanced the partnership working culture. Although I did throw my dolly out a few times, we got there in the end!

A big thank you to all the staff side that were involved in the Agenda for Changes process, we could not have done it without you all. Our new branch will get off to an excellent start with the great people involved in its formation.

June Felstead  
Health & Safety Branch Officer



## Branch Vice Secretary's Report



2006 was a productive and fast paced year for me. I started the year, my 1st term as Branch Vice Secretary by doing a data cleanse of the membership, I believe a key to any effective membership organisation is communication with it's members, I also appreciate that members do not always update the branch with changes to circumstance as neither do Region.

In April, the Branch mutually supported the Local Government Pension Scheme strikes, supporting the picket lines in a united front for fairness and equality of our colleague's pensions. I attended the Herts Police picket in Welwyn Garden City, with a hob and kettle I borrowed to supply those on the picket line with hot drinks on that cold April day.

In August, I attended the *Chelmsford V Festival*, as a regional delegate. UNISON Eastern Region has a stand at the V Festival every year, manned by regional young representatives. I did get the opportunity to wander, listening to some of my favourite bands whilst handing out literature on UNISON. I also spoke to many of the festival goers, many of which still in full time education about the benefits of Trade Union Membership.

On 1st November, Jackie and I attended Westminster with the Eastern region to lobby local MPs as part of the 'Keep the NHS Public Campaign'. As a result Jackie and I were printed in national media.

I would like to thank Jackie, Mark and June for supporting me in my role as Branch Vice Secretary, without them I would have been lost. I would like to thank all of the reps for their continuing support and hard work also. I look forward to standing in the new branch as Young Members Officer, and look forward to working with you all in the future.

Stuart Reeves  
Branch Vice Secretary.

## 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 biggest 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 can improve your working life.

[www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk)



## Quick contact details

Branch Secretary:	<b>Jackie Robinson,</b>	07890 357493
Branch Vice Secretary:	<b>Stuart Reeves,</b>	07772 479434
Health & Safety & AFC guidance:	<b>June Felstead,</b>	07903 585081
Communications & media support:	<b>Darren Meads,</b>	01707 880920

Our website at [www.bhaps-unison.com](http://www.bhaps-unison.com) keeps members up-to-date with all of the current issues and member benefits.

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