



**Housing
Workers**
BRANCH LE 1111
JOBS AND HOMES FOR ALL



Annual Report



March 2019

Jobs and Homes for All

Introduction

The last twelve months have been a time of intense activity for our branch, with the housing crisis escalating on our streets and work pressures mounting to intolerable levels for our members. Meanwhile, housing associations have again pocketed record-breaking surpluses and inflation-busting pay rises for execs.

Despite the challenges, our branch recorded many achievements worth celebrating, all won by members making a stand. Each victory counts because every win brings benefits to someone, whether through a pay rise for an entire staff group, or a single member holding a workplace bully to account for their behaviour.

Our annual report shows that in 2018/19 we reached out to more workplaces, linked with new housing activists and groups, and brought our sector-wide industrial campaigning to new levels. We have much to be proud of. Our growing membership, improved workplace organising, healthy finances, and active branch committee all stand us in great stead for another year.

We hope that you will be inspired to get involved and help us achieve even more for housing workers and the people they serve.

Suzanne Muna
Branch Secretary

One of the best branches I have been a member of. Keep it up.

Branch Meeting Survey respondent



Strike at the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA)

We start the report with a celebration of three days' of strike at the HCA (now Homes England and the Regulator of Social Housing). The strike in July was in protest at a 1% pay offer across all staff; a feeble offering roundly rejected by members.

Although there are three trade unions at the organisation, Unite members were the only ones to take strike action, and despite the constraints of the Civil Service Pay Remit, were successful in raising the offer to more acceptable levels. It was an excellent victory, demonstrating we can overcome obstacles with enough determination, and that it is possible to fight and win.

Ballot at PBHA

Our congratulations also to the 25 Unite members at Peter Bedford Housing Association in Hackney who were due to strike after management reneged on an agreement to honour future local government pay incremental increases. Peter Bedford management realised the error of their ways following a 100% vote in favour of the strike, and improved their offer to avert industrial action. The

strength of member feeling was clearly on display, and the team of reps were well-organised and consistent with their communication. Ultimately, the solidarity of the membership paid off and was a key factor in forcing the hand of management.

Ballot Threat at Peabody

Peabody Direct members didn't even need to get as far as a ballot, although they were determined to go all the way to strike when the association decided to move its service from Waterloo to Pitsea in Essex. Members objected to some of the transfer arrangements and redundancy terms for those unable to relocate. The determination of Peabody Unite members shone through.

Further anger was stoked when they heard their then Chief Executive, Brenden Sarsfield, refer to them as merely "message takers", displaying his incredible ignorance of the vital skills and experience of his own staff. Then, just as a ballot was being organised, management conceded with a much improved offer. The ballot and activity that surrounded it has laid the groundwork for Unite to grow in numbers and strength at the organisation.

St Mungos Recruitment

St Mungo's bosses have long been trying to reinstate 'race to the bottom' terms and conditions for their staff. Our members have previously defended and improved their working conditions, and services to those in need, following a

strike in 2014. Now senior management want to get rid of the agreements reached at the time and make further detrimental and unnecessary changes.

In readiness for another bout of action and in the face of a growing dispute, a team of reps and activists at the association have been driving up membership through targeted recruitment.



St Mungos Unite reps had a great response on stalls outside a series of staff conferences in London and Bristol in January 2019. This activity has not only increased membership numbers and reinvigorated the activist layer, it has also gained new volunteers to be reps.

Other Workplaces

As well as the disputes that have arisen in the organisations mentioned, there has been an increase in recruitment and activity at Metropolitan Thames Valley, Optivo, Catalyst, and many others. We look forward to reporting on victories won by our members in these and other workplaces.

The message to all associations is that the disgraceful treatment of dedicated, hard-working housing workers continues, but will be met by resistance wherever our branch is active.

Housing Sector Pay Conference

Housing associations regularly book record surpluses and margins well over 30%, while staff pay and conditions are continually squeezed. Employment costs were cut by 6.6% in the year to 2017 alone. In contrast, Chief Executives and the most senior staff in the sector award themselves inflation busting pay rises, pulling further away from the people they manage.

Prompted by a Housing Workers Branch initiative, Unite reps in housing from around the country were invited to two successful pay conferences (October and January) at which they developed a plan of action to fight back. The event allowed us to link with likeminded activists in Thirteen Group, Onward, Riverside, Together Group, and City West Manchester, among others.



Together, we are determined to achieve serious pay increases across the housing sector over the next twelve months, and will be using tools such as a new tailored Housing Sector Template Pay Claim. Unite's national officer and researchers have also produced briefing material on the implications of the re-evaluation of the Social Housing Pension Scheme. The

next conference will be in May 2019 and all reps and activists are welcome. Look out for details in our mailings or contact the branch to be part of it.

Casework Update

At the start of the calendar year, the branch recruited a Caseworker to help members who are in workplaces with no active reps, or where the reps were over-stretched. This meant that members in Hestia, Look Ahead, Notting Hill, Single Homeless Project, Centrepont, St. Mungos, Anchor, Look Ahead, One Housing, Clarion, Catalyst, Evolve, Moat and Octavia all received help from someone with a good understanding of the sector. However, the Caseworker role is also intended to help members develop self-sustaining organisation by electing reps and acting collectively. This has been highly successful with Hestia, Look Ahead, Notting Hill, and Single Homeless Project all electing representatives. The Caseworker role has therefore helped the branch reach out across a much wider range of workplaces.

Handling Casework and Unravelling Union Recognition training

Our reps already benefit from an array of Unite training courses to help them become proficient in their trade union duties. This includes workplace, health and safety, and equalities reps training. Alongside this, the branch provides occasional training sessions on a Saturday which focus on a specific aspect of unionism. In October, over 20 reps

attended a session on handling casework, with a smaller but lively workshop on union recognition and navigating union-hostile employers in February. The major benefits of these courses (alongside the learning), is the opportunity to discuss common problems with other reps, and enjoy mutual support with trade unionists from other workplaces.

The third session, 'Winning in the Workplace' will cover campaigning and negotiation skills, and will take place on Saturday 30th March, 11am-2pm, at Unite HQ. Please contact suz.muna.unite@gmail.com if you would like more details or to reserve a place.

Rejuvenating Branch Meetings

In January 2019, the branch launched an all-member survey to understand preferences in relation to branch meetings. The aim is to identify and address barriers to participation, and explore how we can make meetings more relevant and useful, and thus increase engagement.

Members responded with invaluable feedback. Some factors are outside our control, but there were helpful ideas for ensuring that branch meetings are welcoming, and scheduling more activities during daytimes and weekends.

Consider webinars or video conferences for meetings to make attendance easier.

Branch Meeting Survey respondent

The speaker topics suggested by members include disability, freedom of speech, libertarianism, harassment in the work place, and mental health.

The results of the survey will be used by the new branch committee to inform their approach, and we thank everyone who took time to respond. Look out for future updates on how the findings have been implemented.



Solidarity Action

As all of our reps found when they were in dispute with employers, and as part of the wider labour movement, the solidarity of other workers is a major boost to confidence. This is a gift we always want to return and have therefore shown solidarity with various campaigns in 2018 including:

- Unite's Fair Tips Campaign
- The Feminist Library
- Luton Special Assistance Workers
- Fuel Poverty Action Group
- Campaign Against Police Surveillance
- Justice for Colombia
- National Shop Stewards Network.

If you have a campaign that you would like the branch to support, please come along to one of the meetings or contact a branch officer for help.

SHAC and Homes for All Campaign Activity

As ever, members of our branch have been active in a very wide range of housing-related events, fighting against the commercialisation of the sector, the hyper-exploitation of staff, and the lack of concern for tenants, residents and service users.

Our tenant organisation, SHAC (Social Housing Action Campaign), successfully brought together Peabody reps and tenants when our members were in dispute and seeking support, held the second Alternative Housing Awards in early December, and is helping local tenant groups with their campaigns.



We also took part in the Homes for All housing summit in November, with our speakers contributing to the housing association workshop. Such activity is vital to meeting our industrial aims as well as fulfilling a wider social justice goal, and is gaining a powerful reputation for Unite in the housing sector.

Adieu to Adam and welcome to the branch Tabusam!

After years of loyal service to the branch, our Regional Officer Adam Lambert moved into a legal role at the London &

Eastern Office. We were sad to see him go, but happy to know that he will be on hand with advice when we are escalating toward industrial action, or have other collective legal issues.



At the same time, we were pleased to welcome Tabusam Ahmed as our new Regional Officer. Tabusam got to work immediately, and helped with negotiations at Peabody as well as recruitment at St Mungos. We look forward to many years of showing Tabusam around our busy, challenging and very rewarding sector!



John Calderon

In January 2019, we were deeply saddened to hear of the passing of John Calderon, one of our reps at L&Q.

John was a committed trade unionist, and active in the branch and his local community, working hard to improve the lives of others. In doing so, he leaves a legacy of inspiring many others to take up such causes, and will be missed.

Socials - August and December

With all this hard work, we all need to relax! The branch socials offer an ideal opportunity to celebrate our successes together over a drink and some tasty food. The socials took place in August and December in Holborn. We have booked the same venue for 2019 and hope that you will join us.



Thank you!

Our thanks to everyone who has contributed large or small to the success of the branch over the year. The running of such a dispersed, diverse and dynamic branch depends upon the contribution of a vast number of people.

We are unable to thank everyone individually, but need to give a particular mention to Branch Committee members, most of whom are full-time housing workers dedicating time and energy to building a thriving and active branch.

Branch meetings are very good and well organised and very much tailored to our sector and relevant issues.

Branch Meetings Survey respondent

2018 Branch Committee

- Branch Secretary Suzanne Muna
- Chair Paul Kershaw
- Treasurer Kerry Brier
- Vice Chair David Oladele
- Equalities Officer Shaaban Juma
- Political Officer Matt Freeman
- Officer Lynn Hemming
- Officer Aftaar Malik
- Officer Maureen Arthur
- Officer Adeline Aina

Auditors

- Auditor #1 Matt Freeman
- Auditor #2 Roderick Cobley

Contact Us

- Post PO Box 66701 London E11 9FB
- Phone 0796 885 2255
- Email suz.muna.unite@gmail.com
- Web www.housingworkers.org.uk
- Find us on [Facebook](#)
- Twitter [@UniteHousing](#)

Branch Meetings

Our friendly and informal meetings take place on the second Tuesday of every month, usually held at Unite HQ, starting at 6pm. They are open to all members.

You should receive an email notifying you one week in advance of branch meetings, and of other events. If you don't get these, please check your junk folder, or contact the secretary at suz.muna.unite@gmail.com.