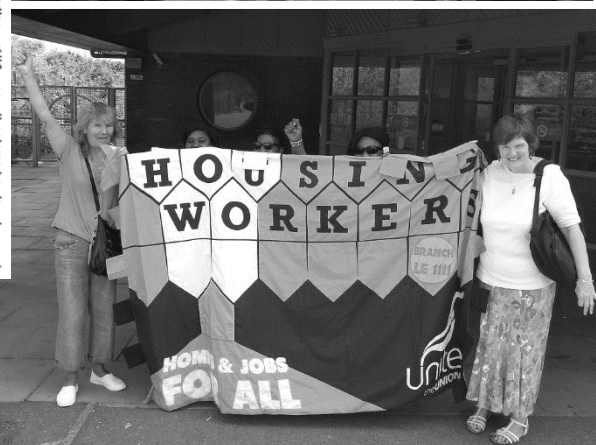


UNITE

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HOUSING
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BRANCH

ANNUAL
REPORT 2020



Introduction

2019 was a year of political turbulence, concluding with little sign of immediate change in the hostile climate for housing workers, or relief for the thousands of rough sleepers and those in insecure housing.

In such times, the need for unity and solidarity between union members becomes crucial, as does the imperative for reaching out beyond branch boundaries and uniting all activists who share our aims.

As will be evident from this report covering the year to March 2020, our members have been undeterred by the challenges they face, and have continued to organise, protest, and oppose injustice.

The Unite Housing Workers branch committee offers thanks to all members who participated in our activities, and who helped raise our profile in hundreds of workplaces. Your actions build a solid line of defence against bullying, discrimination, victimisation, unfairness and inequality, and help make Unite a natural home for all housing workers.

We look forward to working with you and rising to the challenges that 2020 brings.

Suzanne Muna

Branch Secretary

Workplace Organising

Our most important work is the daily task of casework, collective organising, and negotiations. Here we highlight five workplaces where we have been active to represent just a small sample of our achievements in many housing organisations over the last year.



Members at our largest base, [St Mungos](#) have campaigned over the last year against management attempts to downgrade jobs, change working conditions for the worse, and intimidate our activists.

We called on Howard Sinclair, to step down immediately after a misdirected email revealed that the charity had worked with a top London PR agency on a strategy to stop people joining the union and 'erode [its] support'.

Despite 78% of members voting for strike action, our members have been hampered by the anti-union laws. Nonetheless they remain determined. Our members at St Mungo's provide help and support to vulnerable rough sleepers across the South of England, including Brighton, Bristol and London, and are

angry over the way their bosses are forcing through changes which threaten to reinstate race to the bottom terms and conditions that will lead to pay cuts, job losses and de-skilling.

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Questions to the [Sanctuary](#) executive revealed that any pay increase given this year would be around 1%-2% for staff, well below the rate of inflation, while the Executive received 7% - and this on vastly inflated salaries.

Our Sanctuary members have therefore campaigned for improved pay, terms and conditions, focussed largely on care homes. Reps graphically described the ways in which low pay and proposed cuts harmed vulnerable residents, including a wait for 3 days before qualifying for occupational sick pay. Staff were already coming into work when they were unwell.



We also highlighted management bullying, including intimidation targeted at those who had shown an interest in joining Unite. We exposed the great levels of anger amongst loyal staff who feel totally betrayed by what is seen as a kick in the teeth after years of dedicated service.

As part of this ongoing campaign we met with executives from Sanctuary Care, and with Clive Efford MP, and liaised with Mark Francois MP. We also held protests at the organisation's offices, and at Greenwich Council which procures its care services from the association.

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Neighbourhood managers in [Peabody](#) have coped with unrealistic workloads and weak management for an extended period of time. Toward the end of 2019, an ill-considered cost cutting programme led to vital specialist teams being scrapped and the total number of Neighbourhood Managers reduced. The number of Neighbourhood Managers was initially slashed from 80 to 65.

In mid-November Peabody recorded increased surpluses and rising margins yet pay and neighbourhood services are being cut. Members decided that it was time for Peabody to pay up.

They launched a sustained campaign, recruiting new representatives, then balloting for strike action. The ballot returned an 88.9% vote in favour of strike action. We also submitted a pay claim for a 7% increase amongst care and support staff. Talks to avert a strike continue.

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A new group of [Notting Hill Genesis](#) activists held their first detailed strategy meeting in September, coming together to discuss working conditions after the merger. Unite's new reps at the association will provide members with a democratic voice through which to challenge detrimental change.

One issue identified was a serious concern over the health, safety and well-being of staff if the Anti-Social Behaviour teams are disbanded and their duties shifted onto neighbourhood officers without due safeguards. Reps continue to liaise with members over the campaign.

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Following consultation with our members, **Catalyst** reps prepared a detailed pay claim, demanded a company equality audit, and improved childcare provision.

Although Catalyst refuses to recognise unions, they have been forced to accept union representation for members in personal cases, and the lack of recognition has not stopped collective action. Members will now seek to grow the Unite base and will continue to demand improved working conditions.

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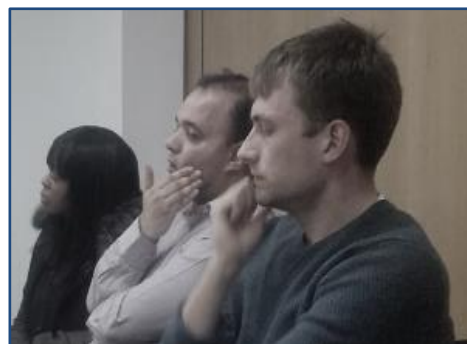
Other Workplaces Our members are active and organised in a great many workplaces, primarily housing associations, but other organisations too. We are proud to highlight in particular:

Centrepoint, The Regulator of Social Housing, Homes England, PBHA, Equinox / Penrose, Metropolitan Thames Valley, East Thames / L&Q, Connections St Martins, and One Housing Group

Our thanks to all members who got involved. Please contact us if you would like to know more about activity in these or other workplaces (details page 8).

Branch meetings

Our branch meetings provide a forum for sharing organising ideas, planning branch activities, and developing Unite's policy on housing and other key areas.



This year we heard from inspiring speakers on a successful Tribunal claim against St Mungos, how 'Women's Lives Matter' by campaigner Sarah Sachs-Eldridge, and on the need to fight council cuts by Labour councillor, Tolga Aramaz. We would encourage all members to join us for these largely informal and friendly monthly meetings. See details on page 8.

Press and Social media

We have increased our online presence, with Facebook and Twitter activity complementing reports on our website and allowing us to communicate with a very wide range of audiences. We also engaged with the press to ensure housing stays high on the agenda. This activity, primarily the work of Branch Chair, Paul Kershaw, is a vital organising and campaigning resource, and we would invite members to visit our website and social media platforms regularly to keep up to date.

Training

Training courses arm our reps and activists with the tools they need for a demanding job. Unite offers an excellent range of courses which can be viewed online (www.unitetheunion.org).

Our branch also offers one-day training sessions with the added benefit of learning from other activists in the housing sector.



This year we learnt campaigning skills through *Winning in the Workplace* and *Unravelling Union Recognition*, and how to analyse employer finances through *Arguing with Accounts Training*. More sessions are planned for 2020.

Social Housing Action Campaign

Hand in hand with our industrial activity is the liaison with tenants, residents, and housing activists made possible by our launch of the Social Housing Action Campaign (SHAC).

In 2019 SHAC conducted a survey of tenants and residents, asking respondents to rate the service they received from their landlords. The responses underlined the ongoing decline in service standards;

a deplorable finding in a sector which recorded a surplus of £3.7 billion in 2019, and which pays top executives an average of £174,000.



On May Day, after we marched proudly alongside comrades from across the trade union and socialist movement, we made our way to a picket of the UK Housing Industry awards at the Grosvenor Hotel. Once there, we hosted our own 'Alternative Housing Awards', offering 'Tarnished Trophies' to name and shame housing association executives for their poor performance as landlords and employers.

Further activity is already planned for 2020, much of it highlighting the downward trend of neighbourhood services through staff cuts, downgrades, and impossible targets. We would urge all members to get involved in these events which will be advertised soon.

Unite Democracy

Reps and activists have invested time in maintaining a healthy democracy at every level of Unite. Our delegates attended the regional and national Industrial Sector Committees, National Regional Disability Committee, and the Executive Council. We also sent delegates to the Unite Rules Conference in June,

and the Not for Profit Sector Conference in November.

These committees help develop Unite policies on issues as diverse as workplace organising, conference rules, and international solidarity, and we have played an important role in ensuring our sector and our region are fully represented.

Resolutions

We regularly agree resolutions on issues presented by members. Over the last year, we resolved to offer solidarity with the Communication Workers Union, the Stansted 15, climate change protestors, those involved in the Sudanese revolution, and residents affected by the fire at the Barking flats. We celebrated the life of Lyra McKee, supported 'no cuts budgets' in local authorities, and called on Unite to hold annual conferences, and give greater recognition to Unite Community.

We welcome motions for discussion at branch meetings. These should be sent to the Branch Secretary or Branch Chair one week ahead of the branch meetings which occur on the second Tuesday of each month, except during August and December.

Events

Alongside participation in constitutional activities, we encouraged members to attend the excellent conference on *Undercover Policing and Trade Unions* organised by COPS, the Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance, in

November, and the Trades Union Congress seminar on housing.



One of the highlights of our year is the National Shop Stewards Network rally at the Trade Union Congress in Brighton - Speakers included leading union general secretaries and trade unionists in dispute. The NSSN continues to call on unions to oppose austerity in all its forms and defy anti-union legislation.

Donations and Affiliations

The donations and affiliations agreed by the branch offer a means to forge links across the labour movement and help raise the profile of important causes.

In 2019, we affiliated to various local trades councils, as well as Justice for Colombia, Tamil Solidarity, and the Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance.

We helped to support other workers and activists through donations to the BEIS, Lincolnshire Health Visitors, Hackney Council, Bromley Council Libraries, and Colloids strike funds. We also gave financial support to the Battle for Deptford documentary, the Barking Reach Residents, and Lyra McKee Fund.

Branch Socials

To help us survive all this activity, we hold two annual social events. This year we were joined by members of SHAC in August and by the Bromley Libraries strikers in December.



Both events were very well attended and great fun, and we are already looking forward to seeing friends again in 2020.



With Thanks

It is of course impossible to acknowledge each individual contribution, but we are nonetheless grateful to all who helped in 2019. The contributors include branch members, Unite's regional and national officers, administrative staff, and elected officials from across the union.

No branch activity would be possible however without the dedication and sacrifice of our branch committee members, many of whom hold full-time jobs and representative's roles in their own workplaces.

We thank everyone who invested precious time and energy in helping to make ours a thriving, financially stable, and successful branch.

2019 Branch Committee

- **Branch Secretary** Suzanne Muna
- **Chair** Paul Kershaw
- **Treasurer** Kerry Brier
- **Vice Chair** David Oladele
- **Disabilities Officer** Patrick Atkinson
- **Political Officer** Don Locke
- **Officer** Jack Jeffery
- **Officer** Lynn Hemming
- **Officer** Aftaar Malik
- **Officer** Maureen Arthur

Auditors

- **Auditor #1** Roderick Cobley
- **Auditor #2** Gloria Olayinka

Contact Us

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- **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 each month, except August and December when we hold social activities instead.

The meetings are usually held at Unite HQ and start at 6pm with welcome and refreshments.

Branch meetings are open to all members and you do not have to hold a representative position to attend.

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