

Unite
Housing
Workers
demand a
minimum
4% pay rise
in 2017!



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Annual Report

March 2017



Introduction

This report covers the period from 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017.

As we close another exciting year of activism and organising for our branch, we have much to be proud of in the last, and plenty to look forward to in the next.

We have three major initiatives, including launching our first ever national pay claim 4 for all, coordinating across several employers, consolidating our power, sharing campaign materials and working closely with reps to build the necessary union organization at their workplaces.

We are also in the midst of a campaign to ensure that our ex-Circle (now Clarion) members remain properly represented in the newly merged supersized association. Despite the underhanded manoeuvring of the association, our membership is increasing in size, and levels of activism are also growing.

With the squeeze on housing comes the demand for unity, so we have embarked on a new initiative to bring together housing association workers, residents, and service users. We aim to work with them to identify and fight for common interests.

All of this has of course been happening alongside the crucial daily work of building our branch, increasing our membership, electing new representatives, and winning victories in numerous workplaces.

The development of such a dynamic and growing branch has only been made possible through the efforts of hundreds of individual members, representatives and officials who were prepared to commit time, thought and energy. The Branch Committee therefore extends its warmest thanks and gratitude to everyone involved. Your dedication and commitment undoubtedly puts us in the strongest possible position for the challenges of 2017.



We hope that you find the report interesting and informative.

Suzanne Muna
Branch Secretary

4 for All! Our First National Pay Campaign!

In absolute terms, the housing association sector, which owns almost 3 million homes, has never been more financially healthy. It has enjoyed yet another year of record growth and is now worth almost £139 billion. It also made surpluses of £3 billion in a single year. HA executives have of course cashed in on this wealth. With top earners on £500k enjoying pay rises of anything up to 40%. Nowhere have our members enjoyed anything approaching such excessive salary increases. Instead, those who have primarily been responsible for creating this wealth have had to face falling salaries, a rising cost of living, pension cuts, and an intensification of their work.



It is time for us to reverse the trend!

On this basis for the first time as a result of our branch's initiative, Unite is launching a national pay claim of at least 4% for all housing workers. All reps will be provided with a starter pack for their pay claim which will include a briefing document with essential information on inflation and the cost of living, Unite's excellent 'Work, Voice, Pay' pay claim guide, campaign materials including posters, leaflets and stickers, and a template pay survey.

We have run specialist training for reps and can arrange further dates to cover pay, negotiation skills and collective bargaining.

Please contact Regional Officer Adam Lambert (adam.lambert@unitetheunion.org) for details. The campaign will be coordinated through Unite's national housing reps forum and locally through the branch

Building our Branch

We are proud to announce that as well as raising our profile across the sector, our branch has grown to almost 3,000 members and around 170 organisations. We have helped to develop our representatives through **interactive Reps Forums** covering topics such as developing pay claims and challenging bullying and harassment and our biggest health and safety issue, Stress. From the stress workshop we developed an action pack for reps and activists which included information, a template survey, and a diary sheet. It is also available to download from the branch website '[Drowning in a Rising Tide of stress](#)'. Our website contains a wealth of information, some produced especially for housing workers so is well worth visiting. We have also provided regular specialist information to reps by email and post during the year.

Our Branch Meetings have been held on the second Tuesday of each month and provide the opportunity for members to raise issues from their workplaces, develop campaigns, and participate in our union's democracy. They are an excellent way for members to make contact and share their experiences. These meetings are open to all members, and are friendly. We would urge members to attend and we can pay for travel and carer expenses.

Our Workplaces

Clarion is a supersized association formed of the merger between Affinity Sutton and Circle Housing. Subsequent to the merger, Clarion stated its intention to give sole recognition to Unison and also to maintain their staff council, ignoring the stated preferences of staff in Clarion's own ballot on representation. While we are of course angered by the attempt to cut Unite out – no doubt borne of their knowledge that Unite is a fighting, democratic union – we nonetheless intend to continue organising and representing our membership there. The decision by Unison to enter talks with Clarion about sole recognition, cutting out Unite and joint recognition, is of course deplorable when we had the combined strength to insist on a continuation of existing arrangements. The decision may well prove to have been shortsighted with the likely loss of their own key organiser at the association.

Thanks to the active engagement of members at the new association, we have recruited a significant number of members plus new reps during the campaign, and reinvigorated union organisation there, placing us in a stronger position for the next phase in the campaign. It is clear that new recruits to the employer are not aware of the benefits of union recognition so we are raising our profile, awareness of the benefits of joining, and engaging members in the democratic process. Many other associations are lined up to merge, for example Peabody and Family Mosaic, and it is crucial that we use such opportunities to strengthen our voice and our impact as Unite members.

As always, our members at **St Mungos** have been very active over the course of the last year. They have won paid training for locums, and have fended off attempts by senior management to remove Unite reps from staff induction. The union blew the whistle over dangerously low staffing levels in one of its services, and this led to extra staff being placed in the service. Members complained about the overuse of suspension and after an intervention by union

reps, the employer is now providing regular data that demonstrates a reduction in use of this measure.

The ongoing issue at St Mungos continues to be the unilateral change by senior management to the way that annual leave is recorded for some shift workers. This change has affected staff working shifts of longer than 7.5 hours, causing them to lose several days of contractual annual leave every year. There was no consultation or even communication about this change before it was made. Reps have raised a collective grievance, protested to the Chief Executive, and are working with Unite's legal department to begin legal action for breach of contract of the affected staff. Unite members are adamant that they will not accept management's cavalier attitude toward staff terms and conditions. We want to make sure members know that becoming active in Unite is the best way to protect their terms and conditions.

Members at **Catalyst** have indicated via an internal survey overwhelming support to participate in the national pay claim '4 for All'. Membership numbers fell briefly due to massive restructuring at the association, but after a union organising initiative, the membership numbers are building, with a much higher profile amongst hundreds of new staff members. The employer remains hostile and has now banned Unite meetings but the fight continues as we look to tackle high stress levels and the deliberate erosion of good quality services to residents.



In the last year, we were pleased to develop our organisation in **Sanctuary Housing**, and as a result have secured a victory over pay when some members were threatened with the loss of a third off their salaries. The campaign stretched across the country with site visits, member meetings, and exposure of the employer's plans in the press. It won a year's protection for existing salaries, buying us time to continue building our membership and reps' structures. The reps are now considering the next stage in their campaigning, working with the branch organizer and with the new activists that have come forward as a result of increased activity. A pay survey is being carried out and already shows that around 67% of respondents are in debt while the chief executive's pay has doubled over the last 10 years to £320k plus £19k in benefits.

At the **Homes and Communities Agency** (HCA), our members won a victory in the long-running campaign over the distribution of the pay uplift. The campaign included days of industrial action, a protest outside head office, and a lobby of the board meeting. As a result of the campaign, the HCA agreed to a

fairer system of paying almost all staff the same uplift and bonuses. The campaign helped boost membership numbers and two new reps have also been recruited.

Our reps at **Thames Valley Housing Association** (TVHA) are having to deal with an increasing number of grievances, many of which are not upheld despite strong evidence. These include some with serious discrimination being alleged. The TVHA reps, branch organiser and regional officer are now discussing a strategy for tackling some of the issues collectively, and developing a member led pay campaign.

Centrepoin t reps and activists are now working to raise the profile of the union, through meetings and a variety of communications to develop a wider active team. The initial results from a survey show that 79% work over 3 hours a month for free, losing at least £250 a year. Such findings raise the imperative for members at Centrepoin to challenge corporate practices and we will be working with them over the coming year to help them do so.

Housing in Unite

Alongside the work we have done at Branch level, we have recognised that housing is an issue across the whole union and the country, wherever the twin evils of low pay and high housing costs meet.

To build our industrial strength, we developed the **Unite National Housing Reps Forum**, chaired by our Branch Chair Paul Kershaw, and now supported by National Officer Siobhan Endean. This brings together reps from our branch with those from other associations such as Riverside, Home Group Thirteen Group, and Your Housing.

More widely, we also lobbied at the top of the union and are now actively involved in the **Unite Housing Campaign** under the auspices of Assistant General Secretary Steve Turner. This brings together construction and housing workers, plus political, regional and national officers. It has already led to the 'Home is a Human Right' campaign.



'Axe the Act' and the 'Housing Association Workers and Residents Network'

Over the last year, the branch has played an important role in the campaign against the Housing and Planning Act. It's a critical issue for the future of our sector, with serious implications for workers and residents alike, including the threat of rent rises, means-testing, sell-offs of social rented homes and the further commercialisation of housing associations.

The Act attracted widespread criticism, but became law in May 2016. It's been unravelling ever since. The government has been pressured to backtrack on 'Pay to Stay', the extension of Right to Buy and Starter Homes. But it remains a threat until it's repealed.

It looks increasingly as though the government is looking to housing associations to drive home its privatisation agenda. HAs are being given more flexibility to switch between social and private housing, with less regulation and no requirement to have local councillors on their Boards. The recent White Paper proposes to confirm HAs as private businesses and allow them to increase rents after 2020.

The government's housing policy is in disarray and the Axe the Housing Act alliance will

continue to fight the changes. But we need to build links with other unions and residents to demand decent housing alongside decent housing jobs. As part of this, toward the end of 2016, we participated in Axe the Housing Act's excellent Housing Summit that brought together a huge range of groups and individuals to develop campaign strategies across a wide range of areas.

The Branch ran the workshop for housing association residents and this in turn led to our own union-community initiative – **the Housing Association Workers and Residents Network**. An open meeting in January attended by almost 30 residents and workers. The Network committed to improving the lives of housing association workers, residents and service users by enabling more wins against housing associations, halting the increasing commercialisation of HAs and ending the exploitation of their workers.

To develop the necessary strength, we agreed to create an umbrella body of workers and residents through which to share experience and resources, and create cross-provider campaigns. We also agreed to organise provider-specific networks to develop local campaigns with their own goals and strategies. If you would like to be added to the contact list for the Housing Association Workers and Residents Network, please email me on suz.muna.unite@gmail.com.

Branch Socials

Socials are a good way to chill after all the hard work of the year and allow us to catch up with those we see less frequently. This year, they involved a meal out in August after call banking for Jeremy Corbyn and a sparkly seasonal celebration in December, both of which went down very well. We will keep you all posted on events coming up for 2017/18.

Democratic Participation and Political Activity

Participating in the union's democratic processes is essential to ensuring a healthy union directed by its membership. Delegates from the branch sit on both the Regional and National Industrial Sector Committees, and on the National Executive Council. We also sent delegates to Unite's 2016 Policy Conference. Our Community Campaigns Officer, Glyn Robbins spoke at a fringe meeting on a platform with Labour's John McDonnell to highlight the housing crisis, outlining the political demands necessary for addressing the problems including mass house building and rent control.

A growing number of members have been actively involved in the Labour party since the election of Jeremy Corbyn. His anti-austerity agenda is aligned to Unite's democratically decided policies on industrial and political issues, and is crucial to challenging the narrative of blaming migrants for inadequate provision of housing and other services. This narrative is no more than an attempt to divide and rule workers around the country and we will therefore continue to work industrially and politically to challenge it, and for restoring the public services which have been cut.

With Thanks

Our thanks go to everyone who got involved in the last twelve months. The contribution of a wide range of people has been incalculable and invaluable and all of our reps have done us proud.

We are unable to thank everyone individually, but we would like to give special mention to Gina Osborne, Administrator, Peter Kavanagh, Regional Secretary, Jim Kelly, Regional Chair, National Officer Siobhan Endean, Chris White, National Pay Organsier, Executive Officer Sharon Graham, and Assistant General Secretary and Steve Turner.

Our elected Branch Committee, most of whom also work full-time in housing organisations, part-time Branch Organiser Arti Dillon, and our Regional Officer Adam Lambert, both of whom never sleep, have all worked especially hard over the last twelve months to keep up with the demands of running a large, growing and dynamic branch.

It has been the heart of union organisation in the housing sector and gives us a strong base to build on in the future.

We look forward to working with everyone again in the year ahead.

Branch Secretary Suzanne Muna
(suz.muna.unite@gmail.com)

Chair Paul Kershaw
(kershawpaul@hotmail.com)

Treasurer Kerry Brier
(unitele1111finance@gmail.com)

Vice Chair David Oladele

Community Campaigns Officer Glyn Robbins

Equalities Officer Kingsley Abrams*

Workplace Seat (Family Mosaic) Maureen Arthur

Workplace Seat (Equinox) Vanessa Doidge*

Workplace Seat (Catalyst) Matthew Freeman

Workplace Seat (St Mungos Broadway) Jon Hughes

*Stood down during the year.

Auditor #1 Matthew Freeman

Auditor #2 Jon Hughes

Branch Organiser (PT) Arti Dillon

Regional Officer Adam Lambert

In Conclusion

It has been another year of relentless activity by our members, reps, officers and activists. This has allowed us to develop our organisation in many workplaces, as well as laying the foundations of many new and exciting initiatives. With our Branch members' support, these will form the basis for our programme in 2017/18.

The Year Ahead – Some Dates for the Diary

We will have monthly branch meetings usually on the 2nd Tuesday of the month. A full agenda and confirmation will be sent to those who we hold emails for.

Do send yours if you have not received any.

Unite.LE1111@gmail.com

- **4th March – National Demonstration for the NHS**

12:00-17:00 – Assemble 12pm, Tavistock Square, London WC1

We must fight to save our NHS from destruction; it is one of our greatest achievements and we cannot allow it to be undermined and ultimately destroyed.

- **8th March – International Women's Day public meeting**

18:00-20:00 – Unite House, 128 Theobald's Road, WC1X 8TN.

Unite London and Eastern Regional Women's Committee invites you to 'Irish Women of Resistance, 1916-2016'.

All are welcome, including men, refreshments available.

Book tickets online at www.unite.theunion.org

- **18th March – March Against Racism**

Various events taking place across the country on UN Anti-Racism Day See here for more details, travel information, and mobilising events – <http://www.standupforracism.org.uk/national-demo-refugees-migrants-welcome-stand-racism-islamophobia-anti-semitism/>

- **1st May – International Workers Day**

Assemble 12pm, for the rally and march, Clerkenwell Green EC1R 0DU

- **1st July – National Shop Stewards Network Conference**

11:00-16:00 – Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.

Bringing together trade union and anti-cuts campaigners – all welcome.

- **1st October – 31st October – Black History Month**

and

- **22nd November – 22nd December**

– UK Disability History Month

Both are celebrated by Unite with various events and activities. You can find details and useful resources on the Unite national website: www.unite.theunion.org/unite-at-work/equalities/

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