

## **Unison Argyll and Bute Council Branch Annual Report 2019/20**

As always, and as has been the case for the Argyll and Bute's Unison activists, for a number of years, 2019/20 has brought its own difficult challenges, pressures and demands for our union.

This Unison branch is certainly well established and we are involved in all that we can be in relation to what happens in Argyll and Bute and we are always attempting to serve our members well.

As has been the case for many years, your branch officers and stewards have worked tirelessly in support of you our members and in promoting our Unions policies and standards.

Branch Executive and All Stewards meetings have been reasonably well attended in the last year and the Branch are continuing to support our stewards by ensuring that they attend the many courses available through Unison Learning, thus ensuring that they are well equipped and confident when representing our members.

Workplace Stewards are a valuable commodity for the Union, particularly in areas like Argyll and Bute where there is such geographical spread and challenges regards communications.

We appeal to our membership in the hope that others will step up and become stewards. The training provided will quickly have you feeling comfortable and there is always support available through the Branch Executive and the full time officials that support the branch.

(I thank Simon Macfarlane and Louise Brown for their support and contributions over the last year)

A number of your Branch Officers regularly attend joint trade union meetings with our colleagues in the GMB, Unite, UCATT and the EIS.

This provides us with the opportunity to agree negotiation strategies and to make improvements regards a consistent approach – underpinning the strength of Unions and their ability to influence the decisions taken by the employer.

Unison remains the largest union represented in Argyll and Bute – We have most members, officers and stewards.

I mentioned communication before and I think in the last 2 years we really have seen significant improvements making Unison Argyll and Bute far more accessible for our members – This was a problem not easily solved given our geography but we now have the Branches web site and a Facebook page up and running, we are regularly pushing out alerts and news items.

We want to be visible to our members and ensure that we do all that we can to update them on issues that may affect them in their workplaces.

Please get on to the website and update your personal details – this will make it easier for us to keep in touch.

We are constantly adapting in an attempt to better engage with our members and this year we've decided on this – a different format for our AGM – This year we are here in Dunoon and will rotate across our major towns and population centres over the next 3.

Moving with the times we've moved away from expensive mail shots and weekend meetings that in the whole were poorly attended and may even consider beaming live feeds to some locations in the future.

We are assisted in the Branch by 2 (full time officers) from Unison Scotland and they are providing excellent support in getting out to the work places as part of our continued recruitment drive and a Branch Mapping exercise as well as providing information, support and assistance to the Senior Branch officers.

The Councils budget has just recently taken place.

We have been and are still involved in combating cuts year on year, doing all that we can to protect jobs through formal consultation processes, involvement on working groups, the Transformation Board, HSCP Partnership forums, HSCP IJB, Policy and Finance Committee,

Departmental Liaison forums and HR and OD / Trade Union Liaison meetings.

This continues to be very time consuming and is most certainly a drain on our resources.

We all have Day Jobs too.

A number of savings proposals were accepted at the Council's budget and some of these will have staffing implications - We have been actively engaged in the formal consultation processes, always with a view to mitigating against compulsory redundancies.

It seems that in Local Government there are still difficult times ahead with reducing budgets and savings targets in business streams where we (The Union) believe there is little scope for further efficiency savings.

We have for some time been in discussions with the employer on what they term a New "Employment Deal" this is actually your terms and conditions. The next round of talks are scheduled for mid-March. The T's and C's are of course precious to us all and something that the Unions and we believe our membership would fight fiercely to maintain.

We cannot afford to take our eye off the ball here but to date we've managed to steer the employer away from pursuing any significant savings through introducing harmful or detrimental changes T's and C's.

We have, in the last year, very successfully played a part in ensuring the employer does all that they can to mitigate against any compulsory redundancies and that they remain pragmatic in their approach to redeployment and voluntary redundancies.

Many of our officers are actively involved in some way or other in the Health and Social Care Partnership and integration and this area is proving particularly challenging for both Parent Bodies, our members in the sector and ourselves in picking through the complexities of this Business Stream

I and other senior branch officers are insistent that Council Employees working in Health and Social Care are treated just as every other Council employee and that their Terms and Conditions are respected.

Two of our Branch Officers are fully trained Job analysts and are part of the Council's Job Evaluation teams and the group looking to make beneficial change to the policies and processes around the scheme and how it's applied in Argyll and Bute.

We will as always look to be involved and engaged where change, redesign or realignment of Jobs and Services is likely and will continue to ensure that management are forced to consult and engage with our members in each and every service area.

Change and adapting to new working methods has and will prove difficult for our members and we, the union, on occasions struggle in assuring them that this an opportunity for them to play their part in shaping their futures. We are constantly encouraging management to engage with, and importantly, listen to their employees as it's they that are best placed to come up with suggestions and plans for improvements in areas where efficiencies are sought.

We know our members take pride in their jobs and the services they deliver and accepting further service reductions will be difficult – the public's perception of the Council worker will undoubtedly bear heavily on their minds and the Senior Branch officers, in recognition of this, are insistent that Argyll and Bute's politicians stand up and be counted.

(They ultimately make the decisions on all of the savings proposals)

I can't think of area of service in the Council that is not requiring of increased investment but there doesn't seem to be any forthcoming and difficult times ensue.

The Branch will continue to do all we can to protect jobs and the livelihoods of our members ensuring that it's the Council that continues to deliver the services that are so important to our communities and the residents of Argyll and Bute.

We are, as a Union, well respected by the Council and its most senior officers. Relations with departmental heads, directors and the HR section are considered healthy and this has proved fruitful. We are not always comfortable with all that we have to negotiate on but we have to be at the table to best represent and protect our members.

We'll continue to focus on recruiting as our strength is undoubtedly in our membership.

There are many threats to the local government employee and having been very poorly treated for many years, we must prepare for the many battles that lie ahead.

Pay Deal negotiations remain and always will be a focus for the union as we strive to secure a fair pay and fair working conditions for our members. The Fair work campaigning that Unison are promoting is all about the environment you work in, how you are treated – how valued you are and the opportunities that are available to you.

I feel that Unison in Argyll and Bute has never been healthier but once more due to retirement and voluntary redundancies we have to grow the Branch. Branch Officers and Stewards have again this year been there for our members when needed – Disciplinarys, Attendance Reviews, Standby Exemption Appeals, Job Evaluation Requests, Health and Safety Issues – All in Days work for a Unison Steward.

Branch Officers and Stewards will continue to play our part in national campaigns on pay, pensions, education, health and safety and welfare.

We'll attend meetings, rallies and conferences with our colleagues in Unison in order to best represent our members here in Argyll and Bute.

We have a fight on our hands but together with Unison - WE ARE WORTH IT.

Kevin McIntosh  
Branch Chairperson