

**Winning together in UNISON**

**Water, Environment and Transport  
Annual Report 2024**





# 2024 Water, Environment, and Transport (WET) Annual Report

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## **Foreword by Ruth Davies – WET Service Group Executive Chair**

We are pleased to present to you our 2024 Annual Report from the Water, Environment and Transport Service Group Executive.

This report outlines the work undertaken across the Service Group in support of our members, reflecting activity that has been undertaken at all levels – Branch, Regional and National.

It has been a busy year since we met in June 2023. Whilst soaring inflation may have slowed, the cost of living remains high and our wages have largely not kept up with that, leading to an ongoing and sustained impact on members living costs and living standards. Many of our members still face a choice between heating and eating. As a result, branches across our Service Group continue to support campaigning for fairer pay. Details for our Sectors and branches are outlined in the report, and campaigning in this area in has remained a priority.

Alongside our pay bargaining, we have undertaken a wide range of activities in terms of securing the health and safety of our members, supporting members in terms of their pensions, plus keeping workplace equality at the forefront of negotiations with all our employers. In 2023, we held our annual Branch Seminar, plus Equalities Seminar (jointly with the Energy Service Group), with the outcomes from those events aimed at supporting delegates and our branches to develop their own local campaigning and workplace activity plans. In terms of recruitment, we have seen a net growth in our Service Group membership levels – this is good news, although as we know, this is an ongoing activity and membership retention remains essential.

More widely, the focus on water industry services, finances and dealing with sewage remains high. As agreed at our 2023 Service Group Conference, we have commissioned a report into water ownership in England and Wales which we will formally launch this summer. The ongoing prevalence and public awareness of recorded sewage releases into the environment has kept this issue at the forefront of the minds of our members and of the public, alongside the challenges facing our members, particularly those dealing with environmental regulation, working in our three environment agencies.

Transport continues to be a Sector experiencing change, not least owing to uncertainties over funding for services. However, the extension of bus franchising sees ongoing positive progress on bus service provision, working to a position more in line with UNISON policy on green and accessible public transport.

As always, this report contains a high-level summary of work undertaken thanks to the commitment of our lay activists, who are supported by full-time staff at both Regional and National levels. Underpinning all of this is the local support for members that is undertaken in our branches. Many thanks go out to everyone, for their ongoing support and contribution.

Finally, as always, many thanks to members and representatives in your branches, for your continued commitment to UNISON and for supporting our members. We continue to work together in solidarity, tackling unfairness, for the benefit of our members.



**Ruth Davies,  
UNISON Water, Environment and Transport Service Group Executive Chair.**

## **Objective 1: Recruiting, organising, representing, and retaining members**

### **1.1 Membership Profile and Recruitment**

As in other parts of the union, recruitment and retention of members has been a challenge over the last year. However, net member growth has been reported amidst this challenging landscape of around 1% in the last 12 months, with notable increases in specific areas – in the Environment Agency (EA) for example, we have seen modest growth in membership because of last year's pay campaign. The Service Group would like to aim to continue and expand upon this and share best practice in this area across the branch network in 2024 and beyond.

Organising and recruitment is key for the union's democratic processes, and encouraging members to be active in the union is itself a key enabler for successful recruitment. One way the Executive tries to assist branches with this objective is through branch seminars, which provide branches with ideas and knowledge that can be put to practical use in the workplace.

### **1.2 Branch Organisation**

In August 2023 regional colleagues submitted a formal proposal to the UNISON South West Development Organisation (D&O) committee seeking approval to merge the Environment Agency's Head Office (HO) branch with EA's South West branch, as this was the best geographical location for members to transfer to. This was approved, and the migration of the HO branch to SW was completed in October 2023. Some members opted to transfer to branches closer to their geographic location.

The decline in active membership in the EA HO branch and the resignation of branch officers were the key reason why it became apparent that the branch was no longer sustainable in its current form, and members from that branch had to be transferred elsewhere to enable continued engagement with and support for members.

Aside from this, there were no significant changes in branch structures.

### **1.3 Regional Development and Support**

Branches have continued to receive support from UNISON's regional offices, and regional WET structures in regions including the EA Anglian have provided training and a framework for branches to share experience and inspiration. There is a plan nationally to try and bring together the network of regional officials supporting branches to develop and share consistent best practice. Working with Regional colleagues during the Environment Agency pay campaign has shown that working collaboratively is key to delivering for our members across the WET sectors.

## 1.4 Learning

The national UNISON pensions seminar held on 11 March 2024 was well attended and well received by participants, updates covered a range of pension issues including practical information on the differences between Defined Benefit (DB) and Defined Contribution (DC) schemes, as many employers operating businesses in the utilities space are moving to close DB schemes in favour of DC schemes instead.

The UNISON Negotiating Skills Course (Stage 1) took place over 12-14 March 2024 in Birmingham. The course looked at the development of new reps' practical negotiating skills and understanding of different styles of negotiating, the processes of employer negotiations themselves, as well as understanding how to present on and work with the aspects of a new recognition agreement, pay claim, or policy proposal. It also looked at how reps can and should navigate joint union working arrangements, intransigent or hostile management negotiating styles, and post-agreement follow up and implementation work.

The course received positive feedback overall, and discussions are taking place on running more advanced-level training in this area soon, as well as running the introductory Stage 1 course again in 2025.

### 1.4.1 2023 WET Branch Seminar Report

In 2023, the UNISON Water, Environment and Transport Service Group Branch Seminar took place over the weekend of 13-15 October, at the Hilton Hotel, Nottingham.

#### Seminar opening and keynote addresses (Friday)

The Chair of the WET Service Group Executive, Ruth Davies, opened the seminar on the first evening with some opening remarks – welcoming delegates for coming to the seminar, highlighting the importance of member engagement events such as the seminars, and wishing those in attendance a productive and enjoyable weekend.

A late addition to the seminar programme was a guest keynote address delivered remotely from Toby Perkins MP, Labour Member of Parliament for Chesterfield, and the Shadow Minister for Nature and Rural Affairs within the Shadow Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). Toby gave a broad outline of the Labour Party's plans for government in the context of the environment and took questions from seminar delegates on topics including reform of regulation in the water industry, how this may relate to sectors where UNISON organises such as in UK Environment Agencies and the water industry itself, and wider issues such as the relationship between a future Labour government and trade unions.

Jo Galloway, UNISON Regional Secretary for Greater London, then gave a detailed presentation on the Organising to Win project, UNISON's flagship national recruitment, organising and activist development initiative. The project was broadly summarised, including its unanimous support at National Delegate Conferences 2022 and 2023, the recruitment and organising challenges that serve as the context for its creation, its central priorities and objectives, and the broad roadmap for its future development. Service Group membership trends in 2023 so far were also summarised.

### Seminar workshop sessions (Saturday morning)

The first workshop on Saturday morning of the seminar was taken by Andrew Thompson, Policy and Net Zero Transition Lead for Yorkshire Water. Andrew explored the context for industry Net Zero transition in the UK and in the water sector specifically.

The objectives for the sector were presented including current and historical carbon outputs, the challenges the industry faces, the measures being put in place by Yorkshire Water and other utilities companies, Andrew took questions from delegates on wider issues of the decarbonisation of UK industry and the wider economy and was thanked for taking a session at the seminar.



Jim Lewis (UNISON Learning Coordinator) then took a session on aspects of trade union rep negotiating skills. The session was conducted as a largely interactive event where seminar delegates shared their ideas on how to approach the various stages of pay negotiations, from pre-planning stages through to structured pay talks and into post-talks review stages. The session was structured and presented as a truncated version of the multi-day Negotiating Skills course run by the UNISON Learning Unit that will be open to registrations from WET Service Group members in early 2025.

The final session on Saturday morning of the seminar was taken by Donna Rowe-Merriman (UNISON National Secretary). The ongoing Environment Agency pay campaign and associated industrial action was explored, and the key learning points and best practice from this campaign were presented for the benefit of others working in other WET sectors. The key aspects of the campaign including communicating with members, approaches to talks with the employer, strategies that ensured the two successful industrial action ballots met the legal thresholds and that the subsequent actions (including strike actions) were as impactful as possible, were explored in the session.

### Seminar workshop sessions (Saturday afternoon)

The second seminar workshop taken by Jim Lewis from the UNISON Learning Unit was taken at the beginning of Saturday afternoon. The workshop, intended to be centred around the drafting and submission of motions to UNISON's WET Service Group Conference, covered the basics of the practice of structuring conference motions, after which groups of delegates were invited to produce rough drafts of the text of motions based on key areas of concern for them in their branches and workplaces.

Delegates then shared the results with the wider seminar and gave feedback on areas of uncertainty. Complications around the guidelines for 'competent' motions and other aspects of UNISON rules around motions and the role of Standing Orders Committees (SOCs) were discussed.



The late session of Saturday afternoon of the seminar was devoted to the breakout sector meetings for the Water Industry, Environment Agencies, and Transport Sector membership groups represented at the seminar and in the wider Service Group. Each breakout group directed a discussion on the key areas of concern for them in their sector and across the employers in which they organise; officers were present to support these meetings and to note any actions.

#### Seminar workshop sessions (Sunday morning)

The final morning of the seminar began with a session taken by Deirdre Costigan (UNISON National Disability Equality Officer) on securing the legacy of the Year of Disabled Workers campaign that UNISON ran in 2022 and promoting and enhancing disability in workplaces more broadly. The format of the session was changed to allow Deirdre to conduct the workshop remotely via a video link, due to unforeseen circumstances. The session covered UNISON's several bargaining guides in the areas of disability equality, particularly the 'Reasonable Adjustments and Accessibility Passport' guide and the 'Disability Leave' bargaining guide. More widely, the session covered aspects including how reps can make the case to employers for enhancing disability equality policies and explored the other objectives of the Disability Equality Unit around organising (increasing disability equality reps in branches); bargaining (negotiating with employers to adopt versions of UNISON's model policies); and campaigning (to get employers to sign up to the Disability Employment Charter).

Towards the end of the seminar, delegates who attended each of the three sector meetings on the previous day fed back to the wider group on what was discussed, as well as any actions.

The seminar concluded just before lunchtime on the Sunday with a brief feedback session from delegates, followed by closing remarks from Ruth Davies, the WET Service Group Executive Chair. Delegates were again thanked for attending the seminar, for their contributions, active participation, and commitment to share ideas and experiences for the benefit of other members in attendance. The three recently-retired guest delegates attending the seminar – Ian Brindley, Jackie Hamer, and Richard Sherratt – were also thanked for their attendance by the Chair, who expressed on behalf of the wider seminar an appreciation for them attending the event to maintain their links with UNISON and for the opportunity for WET members to continue to benefit from their many years of experience.



## **Objective 2: Negotiating & bargaining on behalf of members & promoting equality**

### **2.1 Introduction**

It hardly seems possible that twelve months has passed since last WET Service Group Conference. As governments across the UK aren't doing enough for working people, we stepped in to support our members up and down the country. Members deserve a competitive salary and should be treated fairly in their workplaces, so as a union we remained focused on defending, advocating, and winning for our members. 2023 was an historic year for industrial action across the UK, not just for members in the Environment Agency and not just in UNISON, but across the trade union movement.

Fighting to defend our members' rights at work, including the right to take effective strike action, UNISON defeated the UK Government by taking legal action in the High Court which declared unlawful and unfair the repeal of regulations prohibiting the use of agency workers to be used to replace striking workers. This case once again marks another success for the union and its members in challenging laws restricting workers' rights. Also, the union joined the TUC nationwide campaign against the draconian Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023, which aims to remove the right to strike. As a union, we will always fight to ensure our members are free to do the job they love and continue to fight against policies that act as barriers to this. If we are to win the battles of the future, we need to stick together in solidarity!

Our union welcomed new government proposals on flexible working rights, introduced on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 2024. In recognition of the new legislation, it remains an important step forward and offers the prospect of securing the right to request flexible working from day one of employment, and new rights for consultation with workers who make a flexible working request.

### **2.2 Pay**

Pay is a critical issue for our members, on which they look to the union to show that it can make a difference. Therefore, in 2022 and 2023 we commenced a pay campaign in the Environment Agency and secured record numbers of successful industrial action ballots for a better deal for our members. The courage and determination of members in this sector was second to none. Our campaigning delivered a positive outcome which made the EA seek additional funds from the Treasury to improve the 2023/2024 pay offer, and an additional 1.35% was approved by Treasury increasing the total pay award to 6.35% instead of the 4.5 and 0.5% in the government pay policy. In Natural Resources Wales (NRW), after prolonged sets of pay negotiations, members were balloted in January 2024 on the 2023/2024 pay offer and a narrow majority voted to accept a consolidated 5% increase, with the same applying to all allowances (apart from long service award or market supplement).

Members working for the three PTEs which negotiate collectively voted to accept an offer mirroring that of Local Government workers: a flat rate increase of £1,925. Other PTE branches, who negotiated separately, reached similar agreements. The PTEs continue to express a desire to withdraw from National bargaining frameworks, but no formal notice has been received to this effect, so the existing framework continues for now.

In the water industry, branches worked hard to secure average settlements of 6.5% for the 2023-2024 pay cycle, and at the time of writing some companies have commenced pay talks already for 2024-2025. Severn Trent are in the final year of a two-year deal at 5%; Southern Counties Water branch rejected an offer of £1,500 for those earning below £40,000 and £1300 for above £40,000. Yorkshire Water branch is in consultation with members on a 2-year pay deal offer made by their employer from April 2024 at 5% consolidated base pay and second year CPIH+1%.

Further progress in this area can be found in the Water Industry Sector Committee (WISC) report, in section 2.7.

## **2.3 Pensions**

In April 2023 the provider of outsourced services Capita, which provides pensions administration on behalf of the Environment Agency, announced an investigation into a cyber-attack that caused interruption of service to its clients. Capita provides this service for around 450 pension schemes in the public and private sectors. This major data breach incident made headlines nationwide and affected pension scheme members across the country, including UNISON members working in the Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales.

In the summer of 2023, we were informed that UNISON EA and NRW members who are members of the Environment Agency Pension Fund (EAPF) may have been affected by the data breach. The EA was notified in mid-May 2023 about a partial data breach and reported the incident to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). The ICO investigation is ongoing at the time of writing and UNISON continues to support members and keep them updated with developments, including the ongoing ICO investigation.

The poor service from Capita was a factor for Anglian Water's decision to change their pensions' administrator to Barnet Waddingham for their DB final salary scheme which closed in April 2018. The current DC scheme in Anglian Water is administered by Legal & General.

Yorkshire Water consulted on their DB scheme and closed it on 31st March with the transfer of all contributing members to the DC scheme. During consultation with the employer, trade union representatives were able to protect ill health retirement provisions and an increase in employer contributions.

It is looking more likely that the 'WASPI women' may be approaching the last stage in their campaign. The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) in March 2024 published its report that those affected should be compensated. After years of campaigning into changes in the State Pension which was not properly communicated at the time to women born in the 1950s, the prospect of recompense for the injustice is becoming more likely, however solid commitments from the government around this remain to be seen.

## **2.4 Promoting equality and diversity in the workplace**

UNISON continues to make promoting equality and diversity a priority in its organising, bargaining, campaigning, and engagements with employers, and this continued across the WET Service Group over the last 12 months, with some notable achievements made.

As the largest union in the Environment Agency, UNISON continued to engage with the EA on all aspects of its Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion initiatives, and has worked with the employer to help shape aspects of this including its Race Action Plans. The need for the EA to maintain and enhance its pay gap monitoring and reporting work around race, age, gender, sexuality and disability and other aspects was also emphasised.

2023 was the UNISON 'Year of Black Workers', and throughout the year WET branches reflected this equality work priority with awareness events, ethnicity equality campaigning initiatives, and redoubled efforts to bargain with employers to achieve better outcomes in this area. In the Transport sector, West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) made the landmark announcement that the Authority had signed UNISON's 'Anti-Racism Charter', and thereby committing the employer to a range of equality auditing processes around pay, recruitment, training, and other workplace practices, which include ethnicity pay gap monitoring and public reporting.

More widely, equality work continued to feature prominently in the workplan for the WET Service Group Executive, and this was reflected in the priorities in key activist engagement events throughout the year. Exec members organised the dedicated Business & Environment (B&E) Equalities Seminar, which took place in July 2023 and is summarised in detail in section 2.4.1. It emphasised the YoBW campaign with a double-length workshop session, with the other workshops focusing on LGBT+ workers, young workers, women workers, and other areas of equality work. As well as this, the WET Service Group Branch Seminar, which took place in October, included a dedicated session on disability equality. This seminar is reported on in detail in section 1.4.1. The Exec has continued to facilitate the sharing of best practice around equality work, as well as UNISON extensive bargaining and negotiating guidance, and showcased specific examples of disability equality work and support in the Spring 2024 edition of the Service Group's Network magazine.

### **2.4.1 2023 Business & Environment (B&E) Equalities Seminar report**

In 2023 the UNISON Joint WET & Energy Equalities Seminar took place over 14-16 July, at the Leeds Hilton City Centre Hotel.

#### Seminar opening and keynote addresses (Friday)

The 2023 Joint WET and Energy Equalities Seminar began on the first evening of the event by Rachel Wright and Pam Sian, respectively the Chair and Vice-Chair of the B&E Equal Opportunities Working Group. The chairing team introduced themselves along with the other attending members of this committee, welcomed the delegates from across WET and Energy branches to the seminar, and wished everyone a productive, useful, and enjoyable weekend, before formally opening the seminar.

The first evening of the event included keynote addresses and presentations from Karen Loughlin, UNISON Yorkshire & Humberside Regional Secretary, who welcomed delegates to Leeds and gave an overview of the equalities work undertaken in the region by UNISON, reiterated the fundamental importance of this kind of work to everything the union does, and wished seminar delegates well for the weekend in sharing their experience in these areas and taking this new knowledge back into branches and workplaces.

Mary Onafalujo, UNISON National Officer and BCE Unit Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Lead, then gave a detailed presentation on recent work undertaken in regions and branches to influence (or initiate) EDI strategies within employers and ensuring that trade unions in the form of UNISON reps have a seat at the table when the key decisions on these strategies are made. The point was made that this and other work would be aided by establishing Self organised Groups (SOGs) in branches, connecting these via regional networks, and increasing the representation of women and non-white ethnic groups amongst branch reps and officers more generally, to better reflect the workplace membership itself and to have increase this representation and participation in UNISON’s own democratic structures.

Josie Irwin, UNISON Head of Equality, gave the final presentation of the first evening of the seminar in the form of a keynote address to delegates. Josie gave an overview of the organising, campaigning, and bargaining work that the union is engaged in.



Josie expanded on this to note how this includes work to increase the establishment and growth of SOGs in branches; campaigning around ending lower minimum wage rates for workers aged under 25, a day-one right to flexible working, improved leave for carers, the Disability Employment Charter, and other campaigning objectives.

Bargaining guides around these issues and further to support for branches in their negotiations with employers around equality policies and workplace practices was also summarised.

Seminar workshop sessions (Saturday)

Josie Irwin led the first workshop session of the Saturday of the seminar, which looked to address aspects of women’s equality issues in both the UK workforce and wider society, and how UNISON members can engage with the democratic and organisational structures of the union to organise and campaign for change. The workshop began with a broad overview of the current legal and regulatory context in the UK in relation to maternity leave provision and protections, aspects of workplace regulations around menstrual health and the menopause, and aspects of equal pay.

The advantages of negotiating workplace policies around these aspects were also explored, along with how UNISON members can turn conference motions into tangible change in workplaces and wider society. Seminar delegates then took part in a group activity around discussing and feeding back on how UNISON can improve how members and branches organise, bargain, and campaign for improvements around workplace provisions for pregnant

workers and new mothers, followed by an idea sharing exercise around what a good approach to menopause campaigning and negotiating would look like.

The central part of the Saturday of the seminar was taken up by an extended session on anti-racism, and specifically in relation to UNISON's 2023 'Year of Black Workers' campaign. Margaret Greer, UNISON National Race Equality Officer, led this extended workshop, which began with an overview of the key aspects of racial inequality in workplaces, including an emphasis on the ethnicity pay gap but also including other elements of workplace discrimination and harassment, alongside an exploration of how these and other aspects structure the objectives of the YoBW campaign. As well as this was an overview of the need to increase representation and participation of Black Members in UNISON branches and wider national structures, including asking members to update their member records with their ethnicity information, and connecting with regional networks to enhance participation further.



The recently launched Year of Black Workers Toolkit was presented to seminar delegates and over the seminar lunch break, delegates were invited to review the document and discuss in groups how the bargaining and negotiating strategies around racial equality that it outlines may be implemented in delegates' workplaces. The final part of the racial equality workshop focused on exploring what WET and Energy branches have done so far in taking the aims, objectives, and strategies of the YoBW campaign into workplaces, discussing what more can be done in this regard, and developing an action plan from this discussion that delegates can take back into their branches.

The final workshop session of the Saturday of the seminar taken by Penny Smith, a member of the UNISON LGBT+ National Committee, which explored the meaning of the '+' (plus) in defining identities, how this is reflected and recognised within UNISON, and how bargaining and campaigning for workplace inclusion in this regard can be undertaken. The workshop began with a short history of the '+' in UNISON since its inclusion in the union's rule book as an amendment to the LGBT Members section in 2019, and the inclusion in the Bi+ Caucus of the LGBT+ National Committee shortly after. A seminar quiz then took place to explore knowledge and awareness of identities and definitions of the related terms, followed by a group activity around what it means to be a good ally in supporting the pursuit of the inclusion and recognition of people who identify under the plus, what the struggles are in the workplace and in wider society.

The Saturday of the seminar concluded with an evening seminar dinner for all delegates. At the dinner a fundraising raffle was held, with delegates invited to contribute prizes, to raise money for a chosen cause, chosen by the Equal Opportunities Working Group. The cause

chosen this year was 'Feed Leeds Homelessness Project', a local, non-profit organisation staffed by volunteers who distribute food parcels directly to the homeless in Leeds. Delegates contributed a significant number of raffle prizes and the raffle itself raised a total of £640 for Feed Leeds, all of which was donated to the organisation with a letter from UNISON expressing support for the work they do.

Seminar workshop sessions and close (Sunday)

The final half-day of the Equalities Seminar began with a workshop on younger workers and UNISON Young Members, beginning with a broad profiling of UNISON Young Members and young workers more broadly, the roles they often work in, their priorities in workplace policies and practices and other key aspects. The session also covered the challenges to UNISON and the wider union movement in recruiting and organising young workers, such as the lack of stability in the early stages of a typical UK young worker's working life, the costs of union dues, and the lack of young worker representation in trade union structures itself. A special emphasis was placed on the significant development of the UNISON role change, passed at NDC 2023, for Young Members to be defined as members aged 30 and under, rather than 27 and under. The implications of this for organising and developing Young Members was discussed as a separate issue as part of a seminar group practical activity, alongside a broader discussion and feedback on overcoming the challenges to recruiting, organising, and developing Young Members and increasing their participation in all of UNISON's decision-making structures.

The final session of the seminar served as a signposting presentation by UNISON Learning Officer Suzanne Tipping, who introduced the wide range of equalities education and training options available to members via UNISON Learning and the UNISON College. An overview was given of the range courses and learning opportunities on offer, and how these relate to the equality areas delegates had engaged with.



At around lunchtime on the Sunday of the seminar, Equal Ops Working Group committee chair Rachel Wright summarised the areas covered over the course of the weekend, thanked delegates for their attendance, noted an appreciation for the member participation and knowledge sharing that makes it a productive and successful event.

## 2.5 Sector Reports: Environment Agency Sector Committee

### 2.5.1 Committee membership and meetings

The Environment Agency Sector Committee has been able to hold several in person/hybrid meetings over the last 12 months. The membership of the committee during the year was as set out below:

#### MEMBERS 2023/2024

Branch	Non-Manual	Manual	Additional
EA N. West	Sarah Peet	Vacant	Ruth Davies
EA N. East	Kevan Rushton	Paul Breeze	
EA Southern	Jon Griffin	Arie Goren	
EA S. West	Louise Robinson	Jamie McClaughlin	-
EA H.O.	[Merged with SW]		
EA Thames	Andy Theaker	Peter Bound	Mike Tregent
EA Midlands	Greg Marshall	Joe Andrew	-
EA Anglian	Chris Swain	Jonathan Greaves	
EA Labs.	Dave Gardner		
EA H&S Lead	Debbie Bamford		
NR Wales	Kevin Aitkin		
SEPA	Zia Hussain		

### 2.5.2 Environment Agency

#### Overview

The National Negotiating Group and its related committees dictated the main areas of business for the Sector committee. The merry-go-round of change in Defra Secretary has stopped for the time being. Steve Barclay being the latest appointment by Rishi Sunak.

2023/24 was dominated by the pay dispute that lasted nearly a year. A year of strike action and Action Short of Strike Action (ASOS) resulted in a successful pay flex business case which uplifted the final pay settlement. Some of our lowest paid members received up to a 10% pay increase although the deep irony being that the final total pay award (the highest cash settlement in Agency history) still represented a “pay cut” for many when netted off against inflation.

The crucial victory was re-igniting the fight of members, growing the union, and allowing members to recognise their “worth” in the context of the 24/25 and future pay negotiations. Levels of political education across the membership increased and the impact of a demonstrable fighting and campaigning UNISON will bear fruit for organising in the future.

Pay dispute aside, there continues to be generally constructive working relationships between the four recognised trade unions and the employer – possibly a recognition by the Environment Agency that “our” fight is essentially one against government pay remit rather than the Agency itself.

The commitment and professionalism of UNISON H&S reps have demonstrated to the Agency how an effective and positive working relationship between employer and TUs can deliver benefits for everyone – particularly during the recent storm incidents of Babet & Henk.

### Organisational Change

Trade union involvement in many of the larger change projects over recent years has been shown to deliver real benefits and consequently more project managers are keen to engage with the NNG Change Sub Group, and where appropriate, engage a lead TU rep to work with the project.

Change during 2023/24 has been poorly managed by the EA. Trialled as significant change for the organisation, Strength in Place (SiP) have both floundered.

SiP – set to recalibrate regulation, assets and incident response has delivered marginal change and fundamentally been “re-set” again within the organisation. Partly due to the absence of a business case and any target operating model, it is safe to say that those elements will roll forward into 24/25.

Nevertheless, it would be naïve to assume that a re-focussing of effort won’t take place, as the Agency seeks to position itself ready for a potential Transformational Pay Flex Business Case (TPFBC) in 25/26.

As part of this, the Agency approach to incident response remains high on the agenda and it is foreseeable that during the 2024/25 year, the organisation will seek to develop through IMx (Incident Management) a change in how we respond to incidents.

The E&B OneEA programme is about enhancing E&B’s ability to deliver its role, and improving how we tackle the climate and nature emergency. OneEA has attempted to introduce clarity of accountability across Strategy, Chief Scientist, Chief Regulator, Water, Nature & Place and Energy & Resources directorates. It is hoped that this increased line of sight for accountability will improve the Agency response to issues such as the Water Industry sewage discharge scandal.

### Pay

Following on from a year of dispute over pay, the pay campaign 2023/24 is dead (or at least settled) – long live the pay campaign 2024/25. 23/24 settled on an overall pay award to the EA of 6.35 % although that headline figure had varied distribution, with some of our lowest paid members securing awards of up to 10.2%.

UNISON’s pay campaign was steadfast and demonstrably leveraged pressure on Defra & THE Treasury to uplift departmental remits via a pay flex business case. Nevertheless, whilst we should be proud of our activity, there is no getting away from the paradox of this being the highest cash award in the EA for a decade yet simultaneously resulting in a real terms pay cut when set against rampant inflation over the calendar year.

The pay campaign for 2024/25 has begun, with tentative employer discussions. Key pay principles from UNISON are likely to mirror 2023/24 and are set to include (amongst others).



- A meaningful consolidated pay rise to claw back real term pay reductions over 13 years
- A meaningful and transparent mechanism for timely progression within pay scales
- For field ops TM & LTM Level C to receive parity of treatment with staff grades in relation to any performance awards and meaningful conversations to continue with respect to field ops workers moving across onto staff grades
- The introduction of a payment for all roles across the EA where staff have the relevant Chartered accredited status
- To progress seeking accreditation as a Real Living Wage employer and ensure nobody is paid less than the nationally recognised Living Wage Foundation Real Living Wage rate

A stagnating economy, stubborn inflation, high energy and food costs, mortgage and rental market is foreboding for 2024. Underlying causes of economic crisis remain, and we must be ready for dispute once again.

### Pensions

UNISON continues to be represented on the Agency's Pension Committee by Will Lidbetter. The contribution of the scheme member reps is highly valued by the fund and helps to maintain the Committee's focus on prioritising the needs of scheme members.

The most recent triennial review of the pension fund demonstrated a fully funded pension pot capable of meeting liabilities.

### Terms and Conditions

Terms and conditions remain mostly stable within the Environment Agency. The organisation (through the 23/24 pay round) has introduced a growing dependence on Market Forces Factors to address recruitment issues. This has led to an inevitable frustration across a not insignificant number of staff who feel they have missed out or been treated unfairly in the MFF application. The 24/25 pay round will seek to introduce additional MFF's to plug gaps.

The main dichotomy continues to be the contractual elements around incident response. Introduced over the last 18 months, the organisation has introduced contractual incident response requirements for new starters to tackle the resilience issues of a voluntary incident response approach. Nevertheless, the recent dispute has shown the impact that members can still elicit through co-ordinated action.

The Agency is acting responsibly to the "attendance in the workplace" conundrum in a post covid working environment. Unlike the mandated 60% attendance for Defra colleagues, the Agency has adopted a more balanced and needs based approach to office attendance through its Activity Based Flexible Working policy which emphasises business need as the driver for attendance – whether that be training, meetings, mentoring or policy development.

## Health and Safety

A new Deputy Director of H&S was appointed (Dan Hutley) to replace Richard Houghton, Dan came into post on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2024 with a solid H&S background with time spent working as an HSE inspector and policy advisor for the NHS. Currently planning to review the terms of reference for National HSWAG which would be signed-off by NNG. The trade unions have met with Dan and would be working collaboratively to address health and safety issues.

Key health and safety issues we have been working with the employer to address throughout the year include the following:

### Hire Cars

There has been on-going dialogue with the HSW team on hire car issues, as follows:

- 1) Hire car risk assessment (asked December 2022 and still waiting for it)
- 2) We asked for comms to staff around safety issues with hire vehicles and what to do when vehicles break down. Asked that fleet support members to refuse vehicles that are unsafe
- 3) Issues raised with respect to inadequate vehicle size, when carrying passengers and equipment i.e. is it safe to stack equipment on seats or laps when no boot space to secure items? Some Cat A cars being sent out as Cat B cars. Question whether Cat B cars are adequate for our work and should we be looking at Cat C as a minimum (Ford Focus & Vauxhall Astra size). *Fleet response*. Expansion of hire car options to include category B cars and expanded category C cars for broader usage. Category D cars are designated for carrying equipment as these are larger vehicles
- 4) Safety issues around taking off unpaved roads, plus contractual issues. This would apply to even parking on the road verge as off an unpaved road. *Fleet response*. *Additional advice given via Easinet. (see below)* Guidance is that the individual needs to carry out a Dynamic Risk Assessment. We are not comfortable with this approach as many members might not be trained to carry out a DRA or need reassurance. The issue is to be raised again
- 5) Stress caused by no hand over, with vehicle and control orientation. Not all colleagues are comfortable or feel safe just jumping into a vehicle they have never driven before. *Fleet Response*. Confirmed there is a proposal to engage with Enterprise to arrange physical handovers and vehicle orientation for smoother transactions
- 6) Issue around Enterprise giving names and addresses to unverified members of the public over the phone. (see point 4)

The UNISON H&S lead, Deborah Bamford, is exploring ways to make it easier for members when making a request and is planning to put an information pack together on different scenarios on hire cars. However, we have requested for support from other UNISON H&S reps on this

### Lease cars

Ongoing issues with appeals and ergonomic assessments. Staff are continuing to be turned down for a lease car renewal after putting forward a 'reasonable adjustment' case, but the

reasonable adjustment isn't being taken into consideration. Appeals are escalated to National HSW DD but not upheld due to alternatives being available i.e. hire cars. After years of persistence in challenging the Agency on the unfairness of not pro-rata'ing the frequency of utilisation for part-time staff, we finally had this revised in 2023, and the Operational Instruction have been updated to reflect this change

Issue with end of contract damage charges to their lease vehicle. Listed below are few issues that were raised with our safety lead:

- Suitability of using the BVLRA Fair Wear & Tear Guide questioned
- You can nominally challenge the 'damage' in relation to BVLRA guidelines, but not the costs attributed to each item of damage
- Applicability of the £250 charge to the driver when damage is incurred to an EA asset It should also be noted that lease car drivers are instructed that the lease car remains and EA asset and must be made available to other employees to drive when needed
- DGFS do not support their colleagues, the drivers or line managers contest these charges. Drivers are often left to challenge these costs alone, with no response or assistance from DGFS and nowhere to turn for help
- Many officers have experienced end of contract damage charges relating to previous poor-quality repairs undertaken by approved contractors through the correct reporting routes, some of which were reported as being of poor quality by the drivers at the time of repair
- Current insurance arrangements make it virtually impossible to repair every minor scratch/scuff/dent at the end of the contract, as each individual scratch (25mm or more), dent (15mm or more) and chip (3mm or more) would have to be recorded as a separate 'accident' with a specified time, date, and explanation

UNISON continues to challenge the business and believe that more support is needed from the employer and that DGFS, and DGFS should be more accountable for these charges both in terms of using public money, but also in terms of supporting/representing drivers who now regularly face excessive end of contract damage costs.

### TechnoStress

Issues are continuing to be reported via Airswab of technostress caused by DEFRA imposed systems within the EA MyLeave etc, the concern is more prominent amongst Field Operations members who use iPads. UNISON branches continue to escalate issues raised via Airswab with the business. We believe that extra training is need for staff and more support for Team Leaders.

### Capita Data Breach

The number of Airswab reports has reduced in number. But this issue continues to be raised with our reps. UNISON guidance was issued (July 2023) and we will continue to work with UNISON's national team to address any developments that affect our members.

## Facilities Management – transition to ISS

This year has seen the transition to the new service provider ISS from MITIE.

Communications between Property Estate and TU H&S leads has been good with fortnightly meetings. Anna Tombs (Property Estate) attended a National UNISON H&S rep teams call to chat through the transitional phases, what would happen and when etc.

Anna has asked that the TU H&S reps report any issues they come across in offices or depots and report any issues highlighted by members. Main issues during the transitional phase – cleaning, access to Agency properties by contractors, fire safety, access to hygiene products, helpdesk shortfalls, lack of on-site leadership, security.

## RAAC

In the later part of 2023, the issue of RAAC came to fore and the EA corporate properties conducted investigation to identify which of its estates has RAAC. A report published by the Construction Leadership Council in December 2023 found RAAC in 300-350 buildings. According to the report no evidence that RAAC has only a 30-year life, but a lot of RAAC failure is due to post installation remediation work allowing water seepage into the concrete. Our UNISON reps are monitoring this process with other trade unions.

## PPE – One size fits all Hard Hats

Concerns have been raised with the business on protective equipment (PPE) such as hard hats, seatbelt cutters, vehicle life hammers and unsuitable clothing for women field team members. This is being reviewed and the trade unions are working with the business on a resolution.

### **2.5.3 Natural Resources Wales (NRW)**

In the last few months NRW has agreed some new People Policies, including a Temporary Recognition Allowance for staff who stand in for a role at a higher grade for a temporary period such as sickness absence. Change Management Policies and Procedures have been reviewed along with many of the employer's recruitment policies. All internal vacancies are now advertised to staff at the same grade before being advertised to all staff. NRW has also introduced, for the first time, a Managed Move Policy.

The NRW head office in Cardiff has closed, and staff have moved to a floor in the large Welsh Government office in central Cardiff. Many of the larger office locations are in the process of either downsizing or moving to smaller premises, as the organisation now has an agile working policy, which allows many staff to work from home regularly.

Due to predicted funding cuts, NRW are planning a restructure with a reduction in headcount over the course of the next financial year. We are working in partnership with the organisation to try and reduce the impact on staff and minimise staff exits overall.

UNISON NRW Branch held a series of Annual Meetings in March which were well attended by members. All Branch Officers who were previously nominated were re-elected, although the branch is currently carrying a handful of vacancies due to some established reps retiring.

All reps who required formal re-accreditation attended the required training, and now all reps are up to date on this.

**2.5.4 Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)**

In 2023/24 UNISON SEPA branch has consistently supported and advocated for our members throughout this time whilst continuing with campaigning for better terms and conditions. SEPA is bound by the Scottish Government’s pay policy, which was published in March for 2023/24.

SEPA UNISON branch submitted the pay claim for 2023/24 in June 2023, seeking an inflationary pay rise to reflect the cost of living crisis and the lack of pay progression over the last 10 years faced by our members.

After a handful of successive offers were rejected, a new offer of a two-year deal was offered, with the following headline aspects:

- 7% consolidated uplift in Year 1 (2023-24)
- 3% consolidated uplift in Year 2 (2024-25)
- 2 additional annual leave days
- 1 wellbeing day introduction

This offer was put to members in SEPA Branch and was accepted.

**2.6 Sector Reports: Passenger Transport Executives (PTE)/Combined Authorities (CAs)**

**2.6.1 Membership and representation**

The members of the sector committee are:

- Roger Irvine.....Merseytravel (retired end of March 2024)
- Cassie Bell .....South Yorkshire PTE
- Tony Wilson .....Transport for Greater Manchester
- Tony Thomas .....Transport for Greater Manchester
- Ivan Anson .....Tyne and Wear PTE
- Cynthia Beverley .....West Midlands Combined Authority
- Andrew Page .....West Yorkshire Combined Authority
- Pam Sian .....West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Trade Union Side Membership of the Passenger Transport Forum is as follows:

**UNISON**

- Roger Irvine.....Merseytravel (Retired end of March 2024)
- Cassie Bell .....South Yorkshire PTE

Tony Wilson .....	Transport for Greater Manchester
Ivan Anson .....	Tyne and Wear PTE
Cynthia Beverley .....	West Midlands Combined Authority
Andrew Page .....	West Midlands Combined Authority
Pam Sian .....	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Mary Onafalajo .....	Secretary to the Trade UNION Side
Brendan Caffery .....	Regional Organiser, Yorkshire and Humberside

Pam Sian is the chair of the trade union side and Joanne Grigg, from West Yorkshire Combined Authority is the management side lead. The vice-chair Christopher Brelsford, Unite rep retired in July 2023, yet to be replaced.

In 2023 no formal face to face meetings took place with the Employers side, with the 2023/24 pay claim discussions taking place electronically.

Yet again as part of the 2023/24 pay settlement the employers once again alluded to them withdrawing from the negotiating element of the PTF, there has been no further talks or discussions around this matter. Until formal notice is given of withdrawal the PTF will continue to discuss pay claims nationally.

## 2.6.2 Pay

### Passenger Transport Forum (PTF)

#### 2023/2024 Pay

The negotiating element of the PTF negotiates on pay on behalf of Transport for Greater Manchester, West Midlands Combined Authority and West Yorkshire Combined Authority. The pay offer, which members of the three employers were balloted for and accepted is:

- With effect from 1 April 2023, an increase of £1925 (pro-rata for part-time employees) to be paid as a consolidated, permanent addition on all NJC pay points 2 to 43 inclusive
- With effect from 1 April 2023, an increase of 3.88% on all pay points above the equivalent of point 43 on the NJC pay spine
- An increase in allowances by the same amount – **each employer to consider with regards to local conditions for the payment of allowances**

#### 2024/2025 Pay

The 2024/2025 pay claim was submitted to the employers on 13<sup>th</sup> February as follows:

- An increase of 10% or £3,000, whichever is the greater
- A commitment to reach a minimum rate of pay of £15 an hour over the next two years, with a clear plan for how this will be achieved
- Reviews of the gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps in local government
- Proposal to review Paternity and Maternity provisions

The employers have acknowledged the claim and first pay talks were held on 16 March 2024; no offer has been received to date.

### Canal and River Trust (CRT)

#### 2024/2025 Pay

Last year was a very good result on pay for CRT members as the final pay settlement was 10%+ over 18 months. The trade unions (UNISON and Unite) pay claim for 2024/2025 was submitted early with the prospect of achieving close to what was awarded last year, an ambitious aspiration!! The initial offer from the company was 2% with an increase for the lowest paid of 10% which was rejected by the unions.

A revised offer made of consolidated £1500 rise for all. The trade unions are consulting with a recommendation to accept, at the time of writing members were being balloted on this offer. If accepted it will equate to an increase of 4.88% overall salary bill instead of the 2% previously offered.

### MerseyTravel

Roger Irvine, a long serving member of the WET Service Group Executive, retired at the end of March 2024. The PTF Staff Side and SG Executive thanked Roger for his contributions and wish him a long and happy retirement.

The Merseytravel & LCRCA Branch – together with the local branches of Unite and GMB - negotiates pay unilaterally with the employers, although our agreements tend to closely reflect NJC agreements. 2023/24 was no exception, as (following a consultative ballot of members) we agreed an increase of £1,925 up to SCP 40 and 3.88% on higher salaries.

From 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024, all Merseytravel employees will transfer to the LCRCA. From that point, it is understood that our members will become part of the NJC agreement.

### Nexus (Tyne and Wear PTE)

Currently consulting members on the proposed 2024/25 pay claim. UNISON like the NJC proposed claim but need to see what the other unions in Nexus think. Talks commenced in March with a view to settling ideally before July.

### South Yorkshire PTE

2022/23 pay claim saw the mirroring of the NJC claim. As part of the 2023 pay claim and without negotiations with the branch employers offered staff a one-off payment of £1000 for handing their travel passes back – this was taken up by half of those who had the travel pass. New starters also don't get travel passes. Worth noting is that only 50 – 60 members of staff – out of c.300, now receive a travel pass, the branch feels this has now weakened their position on retaining the pass.

### **2.6.3 Equal Opportunities**

The Forum continued to monitor developments relating to all equal opportunity issues.

### **2.6.4 Other Developments**

#### Merseytravel

##### Membership

We have enjoyed a record year of growth in membership. At the time of writing, we have a best-ever level of 565 members. This has been supported by:

- UNISON participation in induction events
- Using training courses for new employees as an introduction to UNISON
- the Joint Branch Secretary giving presentations on pensions to existing employees and taking the opportunity to promote UNISON
- Using the employers' internal communications to enhance UNISON's profile through joint initiatives (e.g. "Blue Monday/Brew Monday", foodbank collections, Holocaust Memorial Day, etc.)
- A surge in membership during the Housing First campaign (see below)

### **2.6.5 Campaigning Issues**

Merseytravel and the LCRCA have commenced a programme of organisational development and restructuring, called In Shape to Deliver. While these programmes, inevitably, bring problems, UNISON has been involved at a very early stage and throughout the development of management's plans; this has helped to mitigate most of the possible negative outcomes.

However, management failed to follow agreed procedures in one particularly difficult case. Housing First is a team dedicated to helping the most vulnerable and challenging homeless people into sustainable accommodation, to give them a chance to turn their lives around. Management announced, with insufficient notice, that funding cuts to this service would result in three redundancies and additional stresses on the service. UNISON managed to use the strong solidarity of our members in Housing First to mount a campaign, with the result that the redundancy proposals were scrapped, and management agreed to the initiation of formal structures to prevent such problems in the future.

After a long campaign, we finally secured the insourcing of the Concierge team in the Merseytravel & Combined Authority Headquarters. A team of around 35 workers from the Growth Platform are also expected to become CA employees from 1<sup>st</sup> April. Our Branch now intends to pursue the insourcing of other groups of workers (specifically, cleaners working at the bus stations and staff at the CA-owned visitor attraction The Beatles Story).

Our Branch has seen a good year of activism, with the creation of a new Young Members' Group, the relaunch of our Retired Members Group and the continued work of our Equality &



Diversity Working Group. Members have also represented the branch on visits to picket lines and on various demonstrations.

### Bus, Rail & Mersey Ferries

Public consultation on Bus Franchising is complete and progress is expected in the coming months. We expect that this will lead to an increase in membership. Our Branch is particularly concerned with the inadequacy of pensions in the Bus Industry, nationally, and we have started to campaign to use the opportunities provided by franchising to improve these pensions.

The roll-out of new Merseyrail trains is complete (albeit with some significant “teething troubles”). The new trains are equipped with battery packs, which enable them to extend their journeys beyond the limits of the third-rail power supply. This has allowed the CA to open a new rail station in Kirkby (Headbolt Lane) with more new stations planned for the next few years.

Our members have been involved in the planning for these developments and the public consultations.

The CA has placed an order with Cammell Lairds shipbuilders in Birkenhead, for the construction of a new Mersey Ferries vessel (the first new vessel in nearly 70 years). We have recently recruited several Mersey Ferries vessels crew, following the decision by Unite to abolish the Mersey Ferries maritime branch.

### Transport for Greater Manchester

Bus restructure – Tranche 2 goes live of Bus Franchising in Greater Manchester on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

We have had an organising to win away day as a follow up to the Working-Class Movement Library away day in October 2023. UNISON had joined a GM Transport reps’ network – we would invite reps to join. This would network around campaigns e.g. ticket office closures, 1<sup>st</sup> Manchester industrial action.

Hybrid working - HR commenced a soft approach in order to bring people back into offices. However, the union felt a meeting with managers and HR does not look like a soft approach. The Regional Organiser have requested that staff need to be given advance notice prior to bringing in any of the proposed changes such as the use of barrier entry data to monitor attendance. The unions have also asked to be present should they be need for managers to meet with a member. Overall, trade unions have asked for consultation surveillance before implementation.

Equalities – The first Women’s Self Organised Group meeting has taken place. The intention was to meet monthly. Looking at family related policies. Minutes had been produced. Fixed Secretary and to rotate the Chair. Question about how UNISON recognise gender identity. Jennifer Whalley, NW Region Women’s officer likely to know. WARMS currently does not hold this data.

An email had been sent to HR re: Probationary period. How many extensions, dismissals. A breakdown by disability, race etc.

The new starter letter from the UNISON Branch had been updated to include reference to the 4-week rule and the TfGM Probationary policy and procedure.

New Branch Chair elected by the UNISON Branch - Impression one hour is not long enough for HR/TU meeting. Half the meeting is 'Strategic' issues / HR data update. The number of Managing Directors etc with the CEO Eamonn Boylan retiring in May 2024 should be known soon. Hybrid working - It was clarified that managers had asked for the barrier entry data to have conversations with some staff. The Data Protection Impact Assessment received by the union referred to space optimisation and the union was not consulted. The union stated it should not be left up to managers how the data should be used. There would be a separate meeting with UNISON to discuss concerns. We wanted sight of any guidance given to managers. A meeting with HR and a manager would not be seen by most as 'light touch'.

Unite had raised the issue of Long Service awards. Unite had a member who recently retired with 40 years' service. There should be recognition of the contribution to the organisation.

A new branch Secretary and Chair were elected to the Unite branch. The union wishes to place on record their appreciation to the predecessors for their hard work and commitment.

Senior Facilities Operations management have held several meetings with Unite, regarding proposed new ways of working for Travelshop staff at the new Stockport Interchange. Unfortunately, no agreement has been found, Regional Officer invited to attend site. Unite will be submitting a Failure to Agree. Both UNISON and Unite are concerned about the level of Out of Hours / Call out / Standby payments that have not increased for some considerable time.

Equalities – Officer reported she had met with the Branch Secretary and a member from the Rainbow network. It was felt we were not a diverse enough workforce.

New EDI (Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion) policy had been agreed with HR. A safeguarding policy was about to be rolled out. Additional leave buying had started earlier this time – January 2024.

There was high level Organisational Transformation work ongoing in the first months of 2024.

#### South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive

Work has continued on the harmonisation SYMCA terms and conditions, pay scales and policies because of the merger of SYPTE and SCR into SYMCA. The Branch Secretary is currently working as a full time representative to deal with these issues.

The Branch is working with management on a new pay structure – the proposal from management would see anyone below HoS level remaining on the same pay whilst those above HoS level would see an increase in pay. Following push back from the branch a pay analyst has now been employed to look at the pay structure. A review of pay protection is ongoing to reduce from 3 years down to 12 months.

The interim HR Director proposed scrapping the flexi balance at the end of each month – to bring balances to zero until staff take a day’s flexi leave – questions have been asked if management will also zero the balance for anyone who is in deficit balance - Management have stated that they are mirroring GMCA Flexi policy. Onboarding of staff started in May.

The Branch have seen an increase in membership, some members have shown an interest in becoming active.

### West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)

International Women’s Day – (IWD) took place on 8 March, an annual worldwide event that celebrates the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women – for each year there is a theme, and this year was #EmbraceEquity, seeking to highlight the difference between equity and equality.

What’s the difference? – Equality involves everyone receiving exactly the same treatment, whereas equity requires fair treatment according to each person’s needs and situation.

What are the WMCA doing to help? – To support Women working in WMCA in recent months we have: worked to improve both our Carers policy and Maternity and Adoption policy, introduced breastfeeding facilities at Summer Lane, and updated our Menopause policy and guidance.

In the Spring Budget, it was announced that there was agreement to a Deeper Devolution Deal securing wide-ranging new powers and a budget windfall in excess of £1.5 billion to level up the region. This is an exciting time to be a part of the WMCA, the deal puts more power in the hands of those who are passionate about the region and with more certainty about our funding in years to come we will be able to work more strategically to boost jobs, business, housing, transport, and the environment.

Highlights of the deal include:

- Along with Greater Manchester, we will be treated as if we were a government department, enabling us to prioritise targets and decide how funding is spent in key areas
- A landmark housing deal worth up to **£500 million**
- Fiscal devolution, including **100% business rates retention over 10 years** – worth an estimated £450 million to us and other local authorities
- **Up to Six Levelling Up Zones** – where priority areas will be chosen by local decision-makers to receive support to accelerate growth, development, and regeneration
- Commitment to **devolving retrofit funding** that will enable the region to prioritise allocations and accelerate the delivery of warmer homes and net zero targets
- **Empowering the region’s transport transformation** through the devolution of bus service operator grants and a new partnership with Great British Railways
- Further influence over key policy areas such as skills, careers, employment support and digital inclusion

- Commitment for round two of the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements, which will come into effect in 2027 and support major projects such as an expansion of the Metro network, new railway stations, and more dedicated bus and cycle lanes

This deal emphasises how important it will be that we work to be better connected, both internally and with our partners across the West Midlands, as we deliver the next phase of the region's devolution journey.

#### Awards for TfWM our Transport Directorate

The West Midlands Rail Programme, a flagship partnership led by Transport for West Midlands and the West Midlands Rail Executive won the Acting as One Team award at the Spotlight Rail Awards.

The rail programme brings together organisations from across the rail industry to build new stations for the people of the West Midlands, including the newly developed Perry Barr and University stations, three new stations on the Camp Hill line in south Birmingham and two new stations on the Walsall line at Willenhall and Darlaston.

TFWM have also been shortlisted as nominees for both national and regional awards at the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation (CIHT).

At the national awards, the Commonwealth Games Transport Team was nominated for both the Collaboration and Team Award for all their brilliant work in the run up to and throughout the Games.

On top of that our infrastructure project for Sprint Phase 1, has also been shortlisted for the infrastructure award.

At the CIHT Regional Awards we have been nominated multiple times for both the Best Large Project Award and the Collaboration Award for the Birmingham Commonwealth Games 2022 project (Transport for West Midlands, West Midlands Combined Authority) and Sprint Phase 1 (Transport for West Midlands and AECOM Ltd).

#### Carbon Literacy Training

Throughout the year, the West Midlands Combined Authority runs Carbon Literacy training to educate staff on what climate change is, its impacts and how we are advancing climate change through our day to day lives. By looking at the case studies, you learn about the dangers of the climate warming, as the ice caps melt and raise the sea level, displacing millions of people, to the mass deforestation and removal of our natural carbon storage systems.

The training also encourages you to be introspective of your own lifestyle as climate change is also fuelled by everyone's day to day activities as they drive alone into town, eat a steak for lunch and go shopping for new clothes. Most importantly, you discover how climate change disproportionately impacts underprivileged communities around both the globe and the region and how we have a moral responsibility to help shoulder the load.

## Single Settlement - The West Midlands

Within the detail of the Autumn Statement, there was a pivotal moment for devolution with confirmation of a formal agreement with the West Midlands for a department-style single funding settlement.

The commitment to what was a key element of our deeper devolution deal, agreed back in March, is a significant step-change in our relationship with Government and an essential rewiring of the way our region receives its funding.

For the West Midlands, this is a seismic shift in power and influence away from Whitehall that will give local leaders greater financial flexibility and certainty over the delivery of funding for transport, housing and regeneration, adult skills, retrofitting buildings and local economic growth.

Funding will be allocated to us over a multi-year Spending Review period, improving our ability to lay the long-term foundations for inclusive economic growth across our region. How it is calculated will seek to deliver the principle that we are no worse off in terms of the quantum of funding received than we would have been had the single settlement not been in place.

## WMCA

A new collaboration to improve road safety has been launched by TfWM and transport technology company VivaCity. This collaboration is the first UK Road Safety project of its kind. 32 existing sensors across local West Midlands authorities will be upgraded to include the Near Miss feature.

The Near Miss feature combines object speed and path data to understand interactions between two road users to estimate the likelihood of a collision. This will help us identify and diagnose dangerous sites and hotspots on the road network.

## Multiply

Multiply, is a government funded programme offering you free and easy to access courses and initiatives. Through Multiply, we want to boost people's confidence and ability to use numeracy effectively in daily life, at work and at home.

Across the WMCA area Multiply is available to working adults aged 19+.

## New Policies introduced

Vetting Policy (ahead of transfer of the OPCC into a Mayoral Combined Authority)

## Policies currently under review:

Flexible working legislation (April 2024): The newly approved Employment Rights Bill (Flexible working) means Employees can make a flexible working request twice every 12 months (which was previously one) and employees can make a request from the first day of employment

rather than after 26 weeks as is currently. WMCA currently reviewing Flexible Work Policy and procedures.

### Staff Diversity Networks

As an organisation that values diversity and inclusion, WMCA aim to foster an environment where all staff are valued, respected, and encouraged to contribute to their fullest potential. In line with this goal the organisation has encouraged the development of voluntary, employee-driven diversity networks that benefit both staff and the organisational goals. Staff diversity networks can harness the power of inclusion.

Networks can:

- Provide a safe space for employees to have real, honest conversations on work-life experience
- Provide a forum for networking and sharing experiences about working at WMCA
- Connect and empower individuals across the organisation by providing a sense of community, cultivating an inclusive culture, and raising awareness of diversity and inclusion in the workplace
- Form part of the consultative process across a wide range of workplace issues (where relevant/needed) and generally act as a resource hub for information
- Give a collective voice on issues that matter
- Locate areas in need of improvement and suggest areas in need of policy and attention
- Generate ideas and serve as sounding boards for targeted campaigns

They are open to all staff who are passionate about the agenda. These networks are independent, and staff led but the Equality team is on hand to support, along with the wellbeing and inclusion group to help shape the wider agenda and affect change. WMCA currently have 4 staff diversity networks:

- Race4Equality Network
- Disability Diversity Network
- LGBTQ+ Network
- Women's Network

Collaborative working continues with both the Branch and the Organisation to ensure best outcomes for the employees and the Region of the West Midlands.

### West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA)

Like all most other employers WYCA continues to offer hybrid working for all non-front-line staff.

Other areas of note are:

## Membership

Membership continues to improve with management being the best recruiter, (see below). At the time of writing membership stands at 541.

Changes to T's&C's (moving us away from Green Book), which were agreed by members in April 2023 came into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024. The changes are straightforward. One of the changes is moving the annual leave year from fiscal year to calendar year and moving to booking leave in hours rather than days – this has caused a lot of complaints as staff do not agree with the leave calculations.

## Mayoral Election

The current West Yorkshire mayor Tracy Brabin is up for re-election in May 2024. Tracy Brabin is standing again as the Labour candidate but at the time of writing no announcement has been made regarding any other candidates.

We are expecting 2024 will be quite a year, but one in which we will remain true to our cross-cutting priorities of 1) equity, diversity, and inclusion and 2) carbon reduction in all that we do, and 3) customer excellence.

One thing for sure is that many of the milestones this year will bring about permanent changes to our organisation. This will be another big year for our transformation, created by people in this organisation and changing us forever.

## Anti – Racism Charter

WYCA signed UNISON's Anti Racism Charter in December 2023 – becoming the first CA and transport organisation. You can read more about the charter via this link: <https://yorks.unison.org.uk/2023/12/15/west-yorkshire-combined-authoritybecomes-first-to-sign-unisons-anti-racism-charter/>

## Staffing

Recruitment was 'paused' from November until 1st January due to new systems being implemented, however, it should be noted the staffing levels at WYCA are on the increase. Worth noting is the Internal Leadership Team, which now consists of 1 CEO and 10 Directors – 4 women and 7 men, all but one are white. The union have challenged the lack of diversity within senior management. Also, Senior Management Leadership continue to increase – The 22 members of Internal Leadership Team, all are white (12 female and 10 male).

## Equalities

The WYCA's vision is to be a leader recognised nationally for its focus and commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), with the following statement.

*“The West Yorkshire Combined Authority celebrates the difference of all the people we serve, work with and employ. The organisation will hold itself to the highest standards in relation to EDI and we will evidence our commitment in the following ways:”*

- The Combined Authority will not tolerate behaviours, actions or words that discriminate on the grounds of race, age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership or disability
- All training for staff on EDI will be mandatory
- All staff will be set an annual objective about how they must promote EDI in their work, and we will monitor compliance of line managers with this requirement
- We will monitor and report the protected characteristics of our staff to ensure we represent the communities we serve, and we will set targets where analysis show we have more work to do
- We will monitor and report our services to ensure fair and equal access in line with census data and we will set targets where we identify gaps

WYCA has the following Staff Network Groups (SNGs):

- EMBRACE – open to all staff who self-identify as BAME
- Young Employee Network (YEN) – set up as a safe space for colleagues under 31 years of age to support each other
- PROUD@WYCA – open to all staff who self-identify as LGBT+
- Gender Equality Group – open to all staff
- WeCan – open to all staff who self-identify as having a disability
- Employee Engagement Panel – made up of representative from each directorate
- Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Network

## 2.7 Sector Reports: Water Industry Sector Committee (WISC)

### 2.7.1 Committee membership and meetings

The Sector Committee met four times since the 2023 conference. At the time of writing, a new constitution is proposed and being discussed with the committee once approved, it will be introduced at the sector annual meeting in July 2024. Current membership of the Water Industry Sector Committee (WISC) for the year remains as set out below:

<b>Rep name</b>	<b>Branch/Company</b>
Colin George	Affinity Water
Charlie Pridham until October 2023, replaced by Sam Pattison	Anglian Water
John Sampson	Dwr Cymru Welsh Water
Alan Turnbull	Northumbrian Water
Linda Turner replaced by Jason Bowles	Portsmouth Water
Patricia McArthur	Scottish Water
Paul Gibbons	Severn Trent (Central Water Branch)
Rebecca Fuego	Southern Water (Southern Counties Water Branch)
Nicolas Gardner	South West Water
Ignacio Pont-Lezica	Thames Water



Brian Morgan-Scrutton	United Utilities
Natalie Mladenovich-Haigh	Yorkshire Water
John Jones	NEC Rep (Co-opted)

## 2.7.2 Pay

The following table shows the status of pay negotiations and awards in 2023-2024:

Company name	Increase rate
Affinity Water	7.5% on basic pay and allowances that are taxable and pensionable.
Anglian Water	The settlement was for 14 months (1 <sup>st</sup> Feb 2023 until the end of March 2024) equating to 9%, an average of 7.7% to base pay and allowances effective from 1 April 2023.
Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water	6.2% pay increase for all staff.
Portsmouth Water	One year deal, from April-June paid at 7% uplift and 6.84% from 1 <sup>st</sup> July 2023. Changes to working hours from 36.25hrs to 38hrs per week. Those that opted to change working hours to 38 will see an increase in pay of up to 12%.
Scottish Water	8% pay rise agreed, after an industrial action ballot. At the time of writing members were balloted on a pay and grading system, if rejected the union will ballot for industrial action.
Severn Trent	1 <sup>st</sup> year an increase of 7.5% from 1 <sup>st</sup> July and related allowances and pay banks.  2 <sup>nd</sup> year (2024-25) Either November 2023 CPIH or 5% whichever is higher, which will apply to all salary and related allowances. A guaranteed minimum bonus of £1,000 for level 1s and £1,5000 for L2s.
Southern Water	<b>The increase was applied from 1<sup>st</sup> April, instead of 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023:</b> 8% for all staff earning below £28,500 and 6% for those earning above £28,501.
South East Water	6.6 pay award for all staff.
South West Water	All employees earning £40k or less received 7% which was backdated to the beginning of January 2023 instead of 1 <sup>st</sup> April. Those earning above £40k received a flat rate £3,000 plus a bonus of £500. Additional one extra day holiday for all staff.
Thames Water	Members were balloted on the final offer and accepted a 7% pay increase for all staff. The pay settlement was achieved in December 2023, backdated to July 2023 after months of negotiations. Delay was attributed to financial challenges in Thames.
United Utilities	£1,800 (full-time equivalent) or 7.5% base pay increase (whichever is worth more).  <b>A one-off unconsolidated payment of £1,000 for all collectively bargained colleagues (subject to normal deductions)</b> A commitment to conduct a comprehensive review of standby arrangements starting in the next 12 months. In the meantime, an increase in certain standby retainer rates from 1 April 2023 as outlined below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• weekday rate of £20</li> <li>• weekend rate of £35</li> </ul>
Yorkshire Water	An average increase of 7.6%, plus an extra wellbeing day.

In the water companies' multiple year's deals are becoming common across the industry. For 2024/2025 pay talks are ongoing, at the time of this report pay consultation is ongoing in some water companies. The initial offer to members in Southern Counties Water branch was rejected, no further update yet.

The Committee continues to hold discussions on various industry wide subjects including Ofwat pricing review, health and safety standards through the industry. The Committee recently set-up a WhatsApp group to exchange information and share best practice on pay, and other terms and conditions across the industry. This has been a useful tool and received positively by the Group.

Furthermore, in the last year there has been exchanges of information on pensions, recruitment, company re-organisations, particularly concerns around environmental pollution from sewage discharges which have attracted public attention and those working in field operations having to bear the brunt of this and the assault they face by the public whilst carrying out their job. UNISON conducted a survey around this issue, the result will be used to engage with water companies.

Unfortunately, we received the sad news of John Sampson (Welsh Water Branch Secretary) death in April 2024, our thoughts and prayers with his family. Flowers was sent to his wife, Linda from WISC.

## **Objective 3: Campaigning and promoting UNISON on behalf of members**

### **3.1 Water Industry Report**

2022/23 witnessed a growing level of public interest in the future of water companies in England which continues to attract high levels of media coverage, mainly on the persistent dumping of illegal raw sewage into rivers and seas polluting the environment, thereby causing public health concerns. There is growing public anger on the health of the environment and society felt that the water industry has not been managed adequately in the past. What we're witnessing now is the result of water complacency after 35 years of privatising the industry.

The issue of sewage discharges has become a national crisis, in a series of opinion polls it has emerged that the public are now in support of re-nationalising the water industry. Many are worried and concerned about the state of the industry and are asking whether the country needs a new model, with stronger regulation and enforcement. UNISON agree with this notion as the union position has always been to bring water back into public control.

Towards the end of 2022, government published an Environmental Improvement Plan, but this does not go far enough. More decisive action is needed rather than words, the reform of the industry should be a priority to whoever forms the next government post-general elections. UNISON is keen in pursuing a case for transformation of the water sector but believe it should not be at the detriment of those that work for the industry. As part of our ongoing campaign for renationalisation, we commissioned research into the current state of the water sector. That report will be launched at this Service Group conference, and we are looking forward to seeing all delegates attending the WET SG conference to join us in taking forward our campaign for a change from the current business model which is not fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We almost saw the collapse of Thames Water last June 2023; a rescue package was quickly secured from its shareholders to keep the business afloat. Thames Board members were invited for questioning by EFRA last December on the financial performance of the company. At that session it became known that the £750m injected into the business in June was a loan not equity as we were made to believe. The future of Thames in its current form is not certain as the company continues to face difficulty in financing its debt. To remain a viable business, the company has been lobbying the regulator Ofwat and government to increase customer bills within the next AMP period.

Last year we saw a reduction in headcount as part of its recovery exercise, currently morale in the business is low as staff are facing uncertain futures with the possibility of further restructures as the company struggle to find the much-needed investment.

Due to high public interest on environmental issues caused by the release of raw sewage into seas and rivers, workers in the industry have seen an increase in public assaults, our recent survey found that 1 in 10 workers had been physically assaulted by the public in doing their job. UNISON condemn this act and believes that workers should not be put at risk in doing their job because of water bosses reckless spending and lack of adequate investment.

Effective work through the All-Party Parliamentary Water group to broaden the circle of stakeholders we can influence, and the Consumer Challenge Panels which CCWater

organises to understand the work of each water companies will be our focus in 2025, with branches being able to bring their local expertise to bear on discussion. Furthermore, our latest report on water will be launched at this conference. Post-conference the recommendations from the report will be used as a campaign tool to lobby and influence government processes and policies working with other stakeholders in this area.

### **3.2 Environment Agency (EA) Report**

In 2023, we reported on the industrial action by our members in the Environment Agency. Due to that action, 2023/24 settled on an overall pay award of 6.35% although that headline figure had varied distribution, with some of our lowest paid members securing awards of up to 10.2%. With member's determination, our campaign put pressure on Defra and the Treasury to uplift pay remits via a pay flex business case. Whilst we welcome this improvement in pay uplift, as the highest cash award in the Agency for a decade, we should not forget that it still not enough to make up for years of pay restraints.

We have continued to make the case that the EA organisation has already been cut to the bone in terms of its funding and staffing numbers, which hinders the organisation's ability to respond in testing circumstances, hopefully will inevitably return.

### **3.3 Transport Report**

The Mayor of West Yorkshire Tracy Brabin decided to take control of the buses in the biggest shake up to public transport in the region for decades, as recommended by the Combined Authority at its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> March.

Routes, frequencies, fares, and overall standards for buses in the region will be set by the West Yorkshire Combined Authority – not private operators, who will instead be contracted to run services on the Combined Authority's behalf. But the current deregulated system has seen a decline in patronage over many years and the increasing use of public funding used to support services.

Despite the action the Combined Authority has taken through its Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), bus services in the region remain too infrequent and unreliable to meet passengers' needs, with West Yorkshire ranking bottom for customer satisfaction according to a survey released by Transport Focus yesterday.

A franchised model will allow the Mayor and Combined Authority to better deliver on ambitions for a greener, joined-up and easier to use transport network as part of a better-connected West Yorkshire.

The Mayor's decision follows a three-month consultation which revealed that nearly three-quarters of the people and organisations which responded supported franchising.

To ensure a smooth transition, franchising will be introduced in phases, with the first franchised buses up and running in parts of Kirklees, Leeds, and Wakefield from March 2027.

In the meantime, the Combined Authority will continue with its BSIP, which has seen the introduction of the £2 Mayor's Fares, increased frequencies on key routes, investment in bus stations and shelters and new bus services launching across West Yorkshire.

A new package of bus improvements for services across the region is also set to be announced in May.

An open member meeting organised by UNISON was held on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> January 2024 on the Tories new anti-strike Minimum service levels legislation. This would affect the Transport Industry. The TUC also held a national rally on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2024 in Cheltenham against the Tories new anti-strike legislation. There was non-compliance talk from some unions. If Labour Party form the next government post-general election, we hope they would repeal this legislation.

Gaza – workplace day of action had been called by Stop the War. The December 2023 UNISON NEC statement had been produced calling for workplace activities. Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> February 12.30 p.m. was the activity at TfGM. Ceasefire now! Posters were held and a collection for MAP (Medical Aid for Palestinians).

The UNISON Branch took part in a Fossil free Greater Manchester protest and was publicised to members on Friday 23 February 2024 at the Manchester Town Hall. The aim was the for the Greater Manchester Pension fund to move to being fossil free within 2 years.

### **3.4 Political and Stakeholder Engagement**

In an election year, we saw continuously devastation in Ukraine and the horrific war in Israel and Gaza. Our thoughts and prayers are with those families and friends impacted. One not to miss is the drones sent directly to Israel from Iran, which was not expected and very worrying, at the time of this report.

A particular priority this year has been seeking to ensure effective engagement with Ofwat, Defra and Shadow Labour Environment Secretaries in 2023-2024. UNISON and other sister unions through the TUC continues to hold positive engagement meetings with the regulator Ofwat. In March, Officers met with Steve Reid, Labour Party Shadow Secretary for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and discussion was around Labour's reform plan for the water industry and broader plans around protection for workers and trade union rights. That first meeting was positive, and we aim to continue building relationship with the Minister and he is also keen to engage with UNISON including senior lay reps.

### **3.5 Communication**

The Spring 2024 edition of the UNISON Network Magazine, which looks to highlight examples of key work taking place across the Service Group, explored important issues in the industries that WET members work in and give details of major campaigning work across the Service Group and the wider union, was published in April 2024.

This issue of the magazine included a feature on the Environment Agency pay campaign and industrial action, a report on the Government’s decision to curtail the HS2 rail project, an exploration of the work of Welfare Officers in WET branches providing mental health support in workplaces, profiles of UNISON senior key reps and staff officers, and details of key national campaigns including the 2023 Year of Black Workers campaign and the Organising to Win project.

The electronic version of the magazine was emailed to all WET Service Group members at the start of April 2024, and branches were advised on how to order printed copies from the UNISON online catalogue (stock code 3542).



**Objective 4: Developing an efficient and effective union**

**4.1 Introduction**

At a national level, the Service Group Executive met four times since the 2023 WET conference. The Executive is made up of lay members elected to serve for a period of two years (2022-2024). The current SGE 2 years tenure will come to an end after the National Delegate Conference (NDC) in June 2024, and the newly elected SGE members take office at the Executive annual meeting in July 2024.

The Water, Environment and Transport Service Group is represented on UNISON's National Executive Council (NEC) by John Jones. John reports in writing to the Executive on the activities of the NEC.

**4.2 Retirement**

Congratulations to Roger Irvine who retired at the end of March 2024. The Executive recorded thanks to him for years of contribution on the SGE and support to the membership in Merseytravel. Roger will be invited to the next WET Branch seminar weekend in October 2024.

**4.3 The 2022-24 WET Executive members and sub-committees are:**

Environment Agency (7 seats)

- Ruth Davies..... Female seat
- Dee Smith ..... Female seat
- Vacant..... General seat
- Gregory Marshall..... General seat
- Amanda Cruddas ..... General seat
- Vacant..... Male seat
- Vacant..... Male seat

Water Industry (9 seats)

- Rachel Wright..... Female seat
- Vacant..... Female seat
- Vacant..... Female seat
- Vacant..... General seat
- Vacant..... General seat
- Vacant..... General seat
- Vacant..... Male seat
- Stephen Crispin..... Male seat
- Vacant..... Male seat

Transport (4 seats)

- Wendy Dunwell ..... Female seat
- Roger Irvine..... Male seat (Retired in March 2024)
- Andrew Goring ..... General seat
- Graham Ramsden ..... General seat

At last year's SG conference, a revised constitution was carried which allowed additional seat in Transport, this now brings total seats for this sector to 5 instead of 4.

Co-opted From Sector Committees (3 seats)

Natalie Mladenovich-Haigh.....Water Industry Sector  
Greg Marshall.....Environment Agency Sector  
Pam Sian .....Passenger Transport Executive Sector

Sub-Committee Membership

- i) Policy and Strategy Sub-committee  
Natalie Mladenovich, Ruth Davies, Greg Marshall, John Jones, and Pam Sian
- ii) Business and Environment Equal Opportunities Working Group  
Rachel Wright, Pam Sian, Ruth Davies, and John Jones
- iii) NEC Appeals Panel  
Andrew Goring and Pam Sian
- iv) UNISON National Health and Safety Committee  
Stephen Crispin, (Andrew Goring sub)
- v) Service Group Liaison Committee (SGLC)  
Chair or Vice Chair represent the Service Group at the SGLC
- vi) SLGC LGPS Forum  
Roger Irvine (now retired)



## Action on motions passed at the 2023 Water, Environment and Transport Conference

### 1. Time to Shine a light on Dark Practices (Yorkshire Water Branch)

#### Summary of motion

Conference notes that due to ever increasing expectations on our members more and more work is done out of normal working hours and in some cases routine inspections on wastewater treatment works is becoming the norm in hours of darkness.

Of particular concern to our members are those sites with inadequate lighting, security or access when our members are being instructed to risk their safety carrying out essential maintenance to the plant. This practice cannot continue. It is just a matter of time before a serious accident occurs.

Our members have correctly flagged these hazards internally through the right H&S reporting channels, but this is falling on deaf ears and is not being given the attention it requires. This is due, in part, to the ever-increasing costs to the business leading to conflicting spending priorities. This doesn't help alleviate the real concerns of our members one bit.

#### **ACTIONS**

##### The SGE is called upon to:

- 1) Ask and collate information from other Water Branches on how widespread this issue may be amongst their members.
- 2) Explore with the UNISON'S H&S committee and liaise with the Health and Safety Executive if appropriate, to produce a Fact Sheet or a Standard for Good Site Lighting. This can then be used for H&S Inspections by Stewards and with management for improvements to sites not meeting the standard.

#### **STATUS/PROGRESS**

Completed.

## 2. Supporting our Disabled Members During Sickness Absence Meetings (Yorkshire Water Branch)

### Summary of motion

Having trained reps to support and guide our members during sickness meetings is essential in obtaining a good outcome. Some managers in the water industry may be competent with day-to-day business but when it comes to understanding and applying Reasonable Adjustments under the Equality Act 2010, they often flounder resulting in disabled members being wrongly invited to stage 1 sickness meetings far too early, leading to unnecessary stress and upset.

Yorkshire Water branch has responded to this situation by writing a Policy, The Tailored Adjustment Plan (TAP). The policy is based on UNISON's Reasonable Adjustments, Bargaining Guide and Accessibility Passport. The company has welcomed the policy.

Our disabled members have enthusiastically welcomed the document and the company appreciate the value and benefits this policy brings to supporting their disabled employees.

### **ACTIONS**

#### The SGE is called upon to:

- 1) Promote and circulate UNISON's Reasonable Adjustments, Bargaining guide and Accessibility Passport Document to all Water, Environment and Transport branches.
- 2) Consider inviting a member from UNISON's National Disabled Members team to explain in greater details the workings and benefits of this tool at the WET seminar 2023.

### **STATUS/PROGRESS**

- The relevant bargaining guides were circulated to branches, equality officers/contacts and others on several occasions in 2023/24.
- UNISON's National Disability Equality Officer gave a presentation workshop at the WET Seminar 2023, which included a practical run-through of the guides and other resources and training offered by UNISON.

### 3. The Fat Cats are Still Smiling (Yorkshire and Humberside Region)

#### Summary of motion

Conference is only too aware of the ongoing mismanagement of water companies' finances.

A decade ago, UNISON published an illuminating report, 'The water industry: a case to answer'. We believe it's due time to shed more light on these private water companies and show who is truly reaping the benefits.

Pay for our members is stagnant with inflation spiralling out of control. This is a complete recipe for disaster.

Conference calls on the WET SGE to produce, or commission, a report to better clarify the financial makeup of water companies. This report can be used for Publication, Education & Negotiations. Lifting the lid on the drain of profits that are disappearing out of the back door, rather than being reinvested in new assets and providing a safe and secure future for our members.

#### **ACTIONS**

##### The SGE is called upon to:

Conference calls on the WET SGE to produce, or commission, a report to better clarify the financial makeup of water companies. The report should include but not be limited to:

1. A clear and simple overview of the financial model(s) used by water companies.
2. Highlighting the amounts of monies being siphoned off in dividends.
3. Rates of Redundancies.
4. Health and Safety Record.
5. Fines for pollution.
6. Any other elements as the SGE believes would add value to the report.
7. Publish both CEO-to-Employee pay ratios and, Executive-to-Employee pay ratios where available.

#### **STATUS/PROGRESS**

- This work was commissioned, and a new report produced by PSIRU (Public Services International Research Unit) (Public Services International Research Unit). The report will be launched at conference on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> June and the recommendations within the report would be taken forward after the service group conference. An update on progress will be reported in 2025 to conference.
- Apart Thames Water reduction in headcount by 180 in 2023, no other Water company announced redundancies. Severn Trent brought back in-house some services that were previously outsourced

#### 4. Securing the Legacy of the Year of Black Workers in WET (National Black Members Committee)

##### Summary of motion

Black Workers up and down our society often find themselves in low-paid, insecure work, with poor terms and conditions. Despite the Westminster Government denying that Institutional Racism exists in our society, we know that it does.

With UNISON having an estimated 185,000 Black members, it is imperative that we build upon our long history of achievements in tackling inequities in our society by taking concrete action to enable Black members to take the next step in our journey towards justice.

ACTIONS	STATUS/PROGRESS
<p><b><u>The SGE is called upon to:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Work with the NBMC and other Self-Organised Groups to understand the number of Black members in the Service Group, and work to encourage those that do not have their ethnicity recorded in their membership data to update this.</li> <li>2) Work with the NBMC and other Self-Organised Groups to analyse and interpret the data captured from (point 1), to create and implement a strategic plan to work towards ensuring Black members are represented proportionately within the structures of the Service Group from Branch to Executive levels.</li> <li>3) Work with the NBMC to develop an action plan for supporting Black members to become active within the union and their workplaces.</li> <li>4) Work with the NBMC and Branches to capture Ethnicity Pay Gap data from employers, and support Branches to work with those employers to develop a strategy to reduce the pay gap, with the long-term aim of eradicating it.</li> <li>5) Work with the NBMC and UNISON's Learning and Organising Service to develop a training and development plan to ensure that all activists within the Service Group receive training in 'Defining Black' and the 'Race Discrimination Protocol'.</li> <li>6) Work with Branches and the NBMC to collect the data around the number of Race/Equality cases within the Service Group, analyse the data to identify any commonalities between the cases and work to develop toolkits to tackle these issues.</li> <li>7) Support Branches within the Service Group to negotiate with employers to get them to sign UNISON's Race at Work Charter.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work was undertaken with the Equality Unit to confirm that the UNISON Equalities Survey included questions on Service Groups and member ethnicities so that this data could be used to gauge the accuracy of the make-up of SG membership against that reflected in member records.</li> <li>• Discussions have taken place with the Equality Unit to interpret this data and to work on an action plan.</li> <li>• The 2024 edition of the WET Network Magazine – sent to all WET members – included a YoBW section with a prominent notice encouraging Black members to have this reflected in their member record and link up with regional self-organised Black members groups.</li> <li>• The 2023 Equalities Seminar included a special extended workshop session on all aspects of the priorities of the Year of Black Workers campaign, including:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Supporting Black members to become active in branches and in the union's democratic structures.</li> <li>➤ Bargaining with employers to introduce UNISON's Anti-Racism Charter, which includes commitments on ethnicity pay gap reporting and strategies to close gaps.</li> <li>➤ 'Defining Black' and the 'Race Discrimination Protocol'.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## 5. Work-life balance, mental health, and the Right to Disconnect (National Women’s Committee)

### Summary of motion

Conference notes the significant changes to working patterns and practices that have happened since the pandemic, including a large rise in remote and hybrid working, including in the Water, Environment and Transport (WET) sector employers.

Conference believes that flexible, hybrid and remote working policies for WET staff need to be actively negotiated and agreed by trade unions, who can meaningfully consult WET staff, and can negotiate fair and positive arrangements that work best for the WET workforce as a whole.

Conference believes all workers in the WET service group should have the Right to Disconnect and that UNISON has a key role to play in improving work/life balance for workers in the WET service group.

### **ACTIONS**

#### The SGE is called upon to:

- 1) Highlight the gendered impact of flexible, hybrid and remote working policies for workers in the WET service group.
- 2) Promote UNISON’s bargaining guidance on work/life balance and hybrid, remote and flexible working to women members in the WET service group and branch and regional women’s groups.
- 3) Work with the National Women’s Committee (NWC) and the National Executive Council (NEC) to support a campaign for legislation on the Right to Disconnect.
- 4) Seek to promote the voices of women members in UNISON campaigning and bargaining on work/life balance.

### **STATUS/PROGRESS**

- A webinar planned for spring 2024 will address the gendered aspects of flexible, hybrid and remote working policies. This webinar will be advertised to branches and members across the WET and the Energy Service Group.
- This same webinar will promote the practical use of UNISON’s published bargaining guides on flexible, hybrid and remote working, and these have already been specifically circulated to WET reps on regional Women’s Committees via email.
- The Right to Disconnect will form a part of the programme for the planned online webinar on flexible and hybrid working. As well as this, meetings have been sought with UNISON reps and the Health and Safety Unit on how to take forward campaigning work around this.
- Invitations for the panel for the online webinar workshop are being sent to women reps who have been involved in work on work/life balance, to share their experience.

## 6. Environment Agency Workers Deserve A Decent Pay Rise in Line with Inflation (WET Service Group Executive)

### Summary of motion

2022/2023 was a year of industrial dispute across the Public Sector, partly to address the indecent pay increases. UNISON Members in the Environment Agency are not immune to this – EA members took strike action over pay for the first time, which members voted overwhelmingly for in November 2022. Since 2010 salaries in the Environment Agency have fallen by more than 20%, which means staff are effectively working one day in every five for free. UNISON is the biggest trade union in the Agency and has had a key role in pay negotiations and securing employment policies, terms and conditions which benefit both the workforce and the Agency.

Low pay awards and funding cuts hinder the Agency's ability to retain and recruit skilled staff to carry out its environmental regulations. At the same time, poor remuneration is impacting staff morale and increased workload due to staff shortages. UNISON's pay survey and a recent survey by the employer show that pay is the main reason people are leaving the organisation for alternative employment.

Therefore, conference condemns the 2% plus £345 pay award made by the employer to Agency staff in June 2022.

### **ACTIONS**

#### The SGE is called upon to:

- 1) Intensify the current pay campaign for the government to take their responsibilities seriously to deliver a fair wage for staff and a well-funded EA.
- 2) Campaign for pay increases at least in line with inflation.
- 3) Put pressure on the Secretary of State to allow more autonomy for the Environment Agency Management/Executive Directors Team (EDT) to determine fair pay and reward for its workers.
- 4) Continue to work with other recognised unions in the Agency involving/lobbying all politicians in challenging further cuts to the pay of Agency staff.

### **STATUS/PROGRESS**

- EA Pay campaign ongoing – The 2022/2023 dispute is finished, but the case for improved remuneration in the EA continues.

## 7. Securing the legacy of the year of disabled workers in WET workplaces (National Disabled Members Committee)

### Summary of motion

Conference notes the success of UNISON's Year of Disabled Workers 2022. With the year now over, we have seen renewed focus on the experience of disabled members in our union, in the workplace and in society, including those in the WET service group.

We used the year to highlight the important contribution our disabled members make to the service group, to improve terms and conditions for disabled workers including in WET workplaces, and to campaign for improved rights for all disabled workers.

ACTIONS	STATUS/PROGRESS
<p><b><u>The SGE is called upon to:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Carry out an audit of WET branches to assess:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) where there is no agreed reasonable adjustment passport or policy</li> <li>b) where there is no agreed paid disability leave policy</li> <li>c) where there is no elected disabled members officer</li> </ol> </li> <li>2) Implement a disability equality bargaining strategy to address these policy gaps using UNISON's two bargaining guides (Disability Leave guide and Reasonable Adjustments Policy and Passport guide) to negotiate locally.</li> <li>3) Publicise UNISON's now regular online Disabled Members Officers and Contacts training to WET branches and consider setting a target for the number attending each year.</li> <li>4) Circulate UNISON's new stewards guide to representing disabled members and our guide to representing deaf (British Sign Language users) members to activists in WET workplaces.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An audit of WET branches to determine agreed policies and elected officers in workplaces and branches across the Service Group is currently underway.</li> <li>• The WET Branch Seminar 2023 included a workshop specifically devoted to exploring UNISON's Disability Leave guide and Reasonable Adjustments Policy and Passport guide and advising reps on how to use this guidance to negotiate with employers along these lines.</li> <li>• The relevant bargaining guides have been publicised and promoted across branches in the Service Group via email and were also contextualised in the seminar workshop.</li> </ul>

## 8. Hybrid and remote working for LGBT+ workers in WET workplaces (National LGBT+ Committee)

### Summary of motion

Remote or hybrid working can create further barriers for LGBT+ workers to access support, resources and social connections that can be found in an office environment. Hybrid working can also be isolating for a number of LGBT+ workers. We saw in the pandemic, that some LGBT+ workers had to work from spaces where they were not out, or which were not accepting of their sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBT+ workers who once were able to use their workplace to be themselves, may not be able to express themselves the same as in the office, which can take a toll on their mental health.

As we navigate our way out of the pandemic and into new ways of working, conference recognises the need to work to ensure that employers have appropriate policies on remote and hybrid working which include ensuring that no worker feels unsupported. UNISON has a bargaining guide and model policy on working from home and hybrid working which includes guidance on issues such as mental health, switching off from work and career progression and development.

### **ACTIONS**

#### The SGE is called upon to:

- 1) Promote the UNISON bargaining guide on working from home and hybrid working widely within the service group.
- 2) Encourage branches in the service group to use the bargaining guide to review employer policies and seek to negotiate improvements where necessary in line with the model policy.
- 3) Publicise ways in which LGBT+ members in the service group, including those undertaking hybrid and remote working, can participate in UNISON's LGBT+ self-organised structures.

### **STATUS/PROGRESS**

- The relevant bargaining guides on home and hybrid working have been circulated to branches via email.
- A separate webinar event is being planned for spring 2024 that will adapt the Branch Seminar workshop to an online setting and be made available to members across the Service Group.
- New advice and guidance produced by the LGBT+ National Committee and the wider Equality Unit on how LGBT+ members can become more involved in activism and participate in UNISON's governance structures has been produced and has been circulated to all activists including those in the Service Group.



## 9. LGBT+ workers in field-based roles (National LGBT+ Committee)

### Summary of motion

Conference notes that there is a lack of diversity among field-based operational roles within the WET industries. This is a real cause for concern as it hinders the creation of an inclusive and welcoming work environment in WET industries.

Field-based operational roles within WET are mostly roles that involve lone working, for example monitoring and checking of equipment in the field and visiting customer's homes. The Health and Safety Executive advises that employers "must manage any health and safety risks before people can work alone" and that "there will always be greater risks for lone workers without direct supervision or anyone to help them if things go wrong". Worryingly, a recent study has found that around 66% of lone workers have reported that they had experienced violence and aggression from the public in the course of their duties.

This is exacerbated for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender plus (LGBT+) workers, who sometimes encounter homophobia, biphobia and transphobia from the public. Conference knows that this is a real problem for LGBT+ workers in customer facing roles.

Conference recognises the importance of working to ensure that employers in the service group have effective lone working policies that incorporate appropriate provision on violence and abuse.

### **ACTIONS**

#### The SGE is called upon to:

- 1) Urge branches to review the lone working policies of their employer and seek to negotiate improvements where necessary.
- 2) Promote UNISON's lone working guidance and guide on gender, safety, and health widely within the service group.
- 3) Explore and publicise best practice examples of lone working policies from within the service group.
- 4) Encourage branches to work with employers and engage with LGBT+ UNISON members to identify and address barriers to reporting homophobic, biphobic and transphobic abuse from customers or accessing support if they are subject to such abuse.

### **STATUS/PROGRESS**

- Meetings with the UNISON H&S Unit have taken place on the more direct and useful ways to promote this engagement.
- UNISON's lone-working guidance and guidance on gender and health & safety have been promoted across branches already and were again in a specific email campaign to coincide with the National H&S Seminar (April/May).
- The email campaign called for the sharing of best practice examples of lone-working policies.
- The April/May H&S email campaign promoted engagements on identifying and addressing barriers to reporting homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic abuse.

## 10. The Importance of Women Health and Safety Representatives (National Women's Committee)

### Summary of motion

UNISON has approximately 5,000 Health and Safety representatives across the union working hard to defend members' health and safety at work. Over the past few years health and safety has emerged again as critical for protecting members' rights at work, especially in the Water, Environment and Transport (WET) service group. However, the gender balance of Health and Safety representatives in UNISON does not reflect the gender balance of our union.

Women's health and safety is never more important – whether it is advising on maternity rights, menopause, women's safety equipment, or areas where there is a traditional bias towards female working – we need women representing women.

### **ACTIONS**

#### The SGE is called upon to:

- 1) Work with the National Health and Safety Forum and the National Women's Committee to emphasise the key issues for women in the WET service group workplaces.
- 2) Work with the National Health and Safety Forum, and any other relevant body, to encourage women working in the WET service group to become health and safety representatives.

### **STATUS/PROGRESS**

- Health & Safety Unit's developing a video which branches to use to encourage more women to take on safety role. We will continue to monitor and provide regular updates to branches.
- A plan to organise a health & safety recruitment and organising webinar towards the end of the year, date yet to be agreed. Once the date is confirmed it will be publicised to branches.

## 11. Sewage and Wastewater Discharges into Rivers by Water Companies (WET Service Group Executive)

### Summary of motion

More than ever, water quality is at the forefront of public consciousness. Due to Ofwat's regulatory approach, which prioritises value for money for the consumer, and the companies adopting risk-based strategies to deliver maximum profits for their owners, little money is spent on maintaining infrastructure.

This issue has been brought to light with the increased sewage discharges by water companies polluting our rivers and pose a risk for the public in enjoying water-based activities and a negative impact on local wildlife. As a result, in November 2021, the Environment Agency and Ofwat announced major investigations into potential widespread non-compliance by water and sewage companies for sewage treatment works. The investigations revealed that many water companies could be breaching their permit conditions.

This situation could lead to considerable insecurity for members and negatively impact members' pay, terms and conditions.

### **ACTIONS**

#### The SGE is called upon to:

- 1) Work with the TUC, Labour Link, and other appropriate channels on the renationalisation agenda in bringing water back into public ownership.
- 2) Raise this issue with the Ofwat to ensure that the regulator is aware of our concerns on employment matters.
- 3) Work with other stakeholders including NGOs in campaigning for stronger powers for the Environment Agency in prosecuting polluters.
- 4) Coordinate our concerns with other trade unions in the water sector to ensure that any response is as effective as possible.

### **STATUS/PROGRESS**

In progress (check update on M3).

## 12. Funding of Local Bus Services (WET Service Group Executive)

### Summary of motion

Conference notes the Government scheme to cap bus fares at £2 in England as part of its support scheme during the cost-of-living crisis. UNISON recognises this is a temporary measure and feels the incentive does not go far enough to address the challenges working people face.

Conference calls on the government for more funding for bus services to enable local communities to meet zero emissions targets for a sustainable environment, and reduce pollution in the transport system, whatever savings they were able to accrue from a temporary fare cap will not be enough to deliver and achieve the ambition set for bus companies in the national bus strategy. Also, the lack of funding within this sector is affecting the job security of our members in bus companies and local authorities. Conference calls on the Government to provide more revenue funding for bus services – currently, the Government prioritises capital infrastructure projects over a suitable revenue funding model. This would help to secure jobs in bus companies and transport authorities.

### **ACTIONS**

#### The SGE is called upon to:

- 1) Actively campaign/lobby for government funding for buses in local communities and monitor employment practices ensuring no detrimental impact on our members working for private bus companies. Furthermore, to actively campaign and lobby for improved workplace pensions for all our members working for private bus companies.
- 2) Work with Labour Link to lobby appropriate bodies for more sustainable bus services to protect members' jobs.
- 3) Assist branches with members in Combined Authorities to work with elected Mayors to promote an efficient transport network.

### **STATUS/PROGRESS**

- Labour Link have carried forward the action in this motion to ensure the element of this motion is incorporated within the Labour Party plan on Transport.

### 13. Mental Health Awareness Training (National Disabled Members Committee)

#### Summary of motion

Conference notes with concern the evidence that the last few years have shown there to be an increasing deterioration in good mental health of workers across public services and including in Water, Environment and Transport (WET) workplaces.

Conference recognises that poor mental health disproportionately affects staff who are already disabled.

Conference notes the work done by UNISON in highlighting the impact of poor mental health and in providing educational materials to help WET activists and members recognise and combat poor mental health as well as addressing root causes.

#### **ACTIONS**

##### The SGE is called up on to:

- 1) Liaise with UNISON's Communications Department to encourage the publication of articles on how our union is supporting WET members who have been impacted on by poor mental health.
- 2) Work with our high-quality Learning and Organising Services to promote our excellent mental health training programmes to WET activists and members, and continue to develop them, and work on encouraging branches and activists to take up such training.
- 3) Circulate our updated Mental Health Bargaining Guide, which includes a new mental health model policy, to WET activists and encourage them to negotiate on mental health policies with employers.
- 4) Engage with regions and branches in the WET service group to encourage them to promote our bargaining advice and training packages with WET employers and encourage them to potentially work with employers in delivering joint training where appropriate.
- 5) Work with the national health and safety forum to consider whether there is a need for a mental health support line to be made available to our stewards, to offer support and someone to talk to when dealing with stressful and/or emotive cases.

#### **STATUS/PROGRESS**

- A feature in the next edition of the Service Group magazine Network is devoted to showcasing the work of WET reps in branches supporting members impacted on by poor mental health, and the related initiatives they have taken forward in their workplaces.
- The same Network magazine feature includes details of the UNISON Learning training programmes around mental health, to encourage members to engage with them.
- An update bulletin to coincide with Mental Health Awareness Month (May 2024) is being planned, which will dovetail with similar work being undertaken elsewhere.
- The issue of a mental health support line available to stewards is being raised as part of a broader engagement with the Health and Safety Unit.

#### 14. Transpennine Express: The operator of last resort should be the only operator (West Yorkshire Combined Authority and Transport Branch)

##### Summary of motion

Conference notes that on 28th May Transpennine Express had its franchise cancelled by the government and was taken over by the 'operator of last resort'. This occurred because the company was unable to run a decent service for its customers and had alienated its employees leading to dreadful industrial relations. All this, despite massive subsidies from the pockets of taxpayers.

In the lead up to this take over, our members have had to deal with the chaos caused by this operator on an operational level or bearing the brunt of this shambles with transport staff across the sector facing abuse from frustrated, angry members of the public.

For other WET members just getting to work on time had become nearly impossible. In the past year even going for an earlier train has not guaranteed getting to work on time or even getting on to a train, as overcrowded carriages had become the norm. This has led to members taking unpaid leave or working longer days, with low performance due to tiredness, stress and suffering other issues with mental health.

The operator of last resort is the government. Transpennie Express performance was so lamentable even the Tories renationalised it. The aim on the nationalisation is to 're-stabilise' the franchise and then offer it out to the private sector once more. Other rail operators have gone through this same process demonstrating repeatedly, an effective transport service cannot be run for profit.

##### **ACTIONS**

##### **STATUS/PROGRESS**

##### The SGE is called upon to:

- 1) Continue to promote superior quality public transport in conjunction with our friends in the Campaign for Better Transport.
- 2) Work with Labour Link to encourage the Labour Party to have the renationalisation of all public transport on its agenda at the next election.

Same as motion M12. Completed, no further action is required.



Printed and published by UNISON, UNISON Centre, 130 Euston Road, London NW1 2AY

