

UNISON IN WALTHAM FOREST

MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Meeting held on Wednesday 4 March 2015
Council Chambers, Waltham Forest Town Hall.

Chair: Sylvia Adjei

Minutes: Sheila Gobel

1. Welcome and Apologies

Apologies were received from Sandra Bennett, Chris Street, George Beattie and John Wiffen.

David Knight welcomed everyone to the meeting, which was inquorate (this later became quorate when the attendance at the evening AGM was included). He said there were various information leaflets available for members to take with them. He mentioned Workers' Memorial Day being held on 28/4 at 1pm outside the Assembly Hall. A leaving card was circulated for George Beattie H&S Officer/Joint Unions Convenor. Unfortunately John Cryer MP was unable to attend but John Noblemunn our Regional Organiser was at the meeting and Anne-Marie Christie (Thomsons Solicitors) was in attendance.

2. Minutes of AGM February 2014

Were accepted as a true record.

3. Guest speaker John Cryer MP was unable to attend – he had been going to speak on why members should vote for the labour party

Glynis Carpenter said a question had been put to John Cryer and asked if the branch would contact him and ask if he could respond in writing giving a deadline of a couple of weeks and put his response on the website. It was agreed to do this.

John Noblemunn introduced himself as Regional Organiser for Waltham Forest, Enfield, Harrow and Redbridge. He said that he had to be careful not to name a political party but would encourage people to vote for the party that would look after the working class people. He went on to speak about austerity and the cuts. There was a response from the floor that it was a waste of time voting for the Labour Party as they supported cuts and more time should be spent by UNISON fighting for pay. John replied that everyone was entitled to vote for whoever they wish, we all have a choice. A member of the Labour Party asked what alternative there was and said they felt that as a member you could influence what happens locally. Another member said they had been a member but left the movement as they were so disheartened and disputed that anyone at grass roots level had influence. The point was reiterated that it was down to individuals how they use their vote.

Guest speaker Anne-Marie Christie

Anne Marie spoke about asbestos. She has been a senior solicitor for 24 years, 7-8 of those working solely for the asbestos team though moved away

from that team a couple of years ago to look at other industrial diseases. She spoke about what to do if someone thinks they have been exposed to asbestos and the new payment scheme. People may not be aware they have been exposed to it but if they discover they have to report it straight away to employers. Ensure it is documented with their GP, also occupational health and on their personnel file. UNISON hold a database and members should contact UNISONDIRECT or Congress House who will send a questionnaire which when returned is kept in Manchester. It takes a minimum of at least 10 years and up to 40-50 years to develop. It is recommended that anyone who has had exposure have a chest x-ray at least every 2 years. There is no compensation for pleural plaques, this was abolished in 2007 unless you live in Scotland where you are still entitled to compensation.

Under the New payment scheme you need medical proof of diagnosis of asbestosis, mesothelioma or lung cancer. Only those diagnosed with mesothelioma after 25 July 2012 will be eligible to apply and then people are only entitled to 80% of the average value of the personal injury claim. The downside is that all DWP benefits are deductible from the total average payment and only dependents can make a claim if a person were to die.

Question - why is the database maintained?

It is to help people in the future as they may not be able to remember due to illness what happened a long time ago. It documents the employers they worked for and is purely there to help them at a later date, it could also be used as a form of assistance for witness tracing services.

Question - if someone is no longer a union member can they still make a claim?

The response was to encourage people to keep up membership. If they don't Thompsons will still help them as they do private cases but there may be a cost involved.

DK gave background information in respect of asbestos found in the Town Hall and the forthcoming court case.

4. Officer and Conference Reports

Branch Secretary's Report

Dave Knight thanked everyone for their support over the years as he is retiring in July and this was his last AGM and he wished Christine Street well as new Branch Secretary. He said he would remain at UNISON during a transitional period until he left in July. He mentioned the fact that there is to be a lobby of the council on Thursday at 6pm about the cuts and also the need to recruit more members.

Organiser's Report

Steve Woodhouse mentioned that after his report had been submitted he decided to follow up what he believed the council had signed up to become – a London Living Wage employer. However when he looked at the London Living Wage Foundation website LBWF was not listed. He contacted the Foundation only to be told they had never had an application from the LBWF.

When he chased this with the Council he was told it would cost £400 and it was too much to pay!

International Officer Report

Oona Kelly spoke briefly to her report. There were stalls from both the Palestine Solidarity Group and Cuba Solidarity Campaign (amongst others) present.

Branch Officer' attendance at committee meetings list was included with the papers and a few amendments need to be made.

5. Finance Report, Accounts and branch Finance Motion

Lynne Troughton went through the figures – expenditure last year went down. A budget report for the current year was approved. The Branch still has a healthy pot of money but it is understood that there is a move towards the redistribution of funds as some branches have significant reserve funds. Lynne Troughton has had to transfer her workplace so was unable to continue in the role – Oona Kelly has taken over the challenging job from her.

Finance Motion

This Branch AGM recognises that our branch is running in deficit at the moment and has been for some while. At previous AGM's we have agreed to transfer money from the Industrial Action Fund and last year agreed to convert the Industrial Action Fund into a Contingency Fund in order to ensure the branch is able to continue running its campaigns and services at the same level.

This AGM thanks the outgoing treasurer Lynne Troughton in successfully reducing branch expenditure but the branch is still running at a loss year on year.

This AGM therefore reluctantly agrees that the branch should:

- a. Cease to fund visitors to conferences.
- b. Review the various agreements that it has with private contractors for IT Support, photocopying and any other regular outgoings in order to investigate whether further savings can be made.
- c. Ring-fence an amount of money equivalent to the redundancy entitlements for the branch employed staff in our Contingency Fund for the purpose of ensuring the branch can meet the entitlements of our staff should the need arise.
- d. Focus all its efforts on recruitment. The best solution to this funding problem is to increase our income.

Proposed: Dave Knight
Seconded: Bill Palmer

The motion was agreed by those present.

6. Ratification of Branch Officers and Delegate Positions

The election of branch officers for this year was agreed by those present. Delegates to Regional Local Government Committee and Regional Council were agreed by those present as were delegates to the Local Government and National Delegate Conference, though there are still some spaces. If any members are interested in taking up the vacancies then they should contact the branch office.

7. Elections for unfilled Branch Officer and Delegate Positions

Glynis Carpenter agreed to take on the role of Women's Equality Officer and was nominated by Dave Knight, seconded by Oona Kelly and agreed by those present. The branch still needs a Low Paid delegate for both the Local Government and National Delegate Conferences.

8. Confirmation of Stewards, Learner Reps and Safety Reps

The list of elected reps was agreed by those present.

9. Member's Recruitment Competition

Won by Lawrence Ekele, steward at George Mason Lodge.

10. Motions:

a.) Pensions Board

This Branch welcomes the new governance arrangements for Scheme member involvement on the new style Pensions Boards that are being established throughout the country.

In Waltham Forest UNISON currently has observer status on the Pension Fund Committee and we would want UNISON to provide the Scheme representatives on the new Pensions Board once it is established. Our branch believes that these representatives should be elected by UNISON members in Waltham Forest and that they should be accountable to those members.

We therefore agree to:

1. Create a new Branch Officer position of Branch Pensions Officer whose role would be to attend Pensions Board meetings to represent UNISON and all scheme members. The post would have full voting rights at Branch Committee and would need to be filled by a UNISON member who is also a member of the LGPS. The post would also be responsible for monitoring the scheme and reporting back on their activities and any developments to Branch members.
2. This officer would also deal with pension enquiries on behalf of individual members though this would exclude giving any financial advice.
3. In order to facilitate this new role the branch also agrees to merge the posts of Membership Services secretary with the post of Membership Secretary and
4. Merge the posts of Publicity Officer and Campaign Officer.

Proposed by Branch Committee

The motion was agreed by those present.

b.) No Confidence in Waltham Forest Council Chief Executive

This Branch has no confidence in the Waltham Forest Council Chief Executive for the following reasons:

1. During his time as Chief Executive he has failed to protect the Council workforce from exposure to asbestos *and failed to act when Director of Environment.*
2. In 2012, under his leadership, the Council cut the pay of lower paid Council workers (those Graded at Scale 6 and below), deliberately ensuring that the cuts to terms and conditions were primarily inflicted on the lowest paid workers.
3. Under his leadership this Council has employed large numbers of consultants without proper equal opportunities recruitment procedures and has paid them inflated salaries that far exceed the Council's own evaluation of what the posts concerned are worth.
4. Under his leadership since 2010 the Council workforce has reduced by 800 people, causing misery and financial hardship to many workers of Waltham Forest.
5. Furthermore, the Council has lost over 1,000 jobs. These represent employment opportunities that have been lost to the people of Waltham Forest.
6. The Chief Executive has accepted a pay rise that is in breach of the government's public sector pay restraint policy (of 1%). He has received a pay rise of £15,000 per annum (8%+ increase) *as a reward for making the cuts.*
7. Under his leadership, the Council has devolved decision making regarding staffing issues to the management team of the Council thereby ensuring that the trade unions can no longer formally relate to Council members.

This Branch AGM therefore calls on the Chief Executive to tender his resignation and that the branch secretary will write to the Leader of the Council, Chris Robbins to that effect.

Motion proposed by the Branch Committee. Amendments from the floor (in italics above) were accepted.

The motion was agreed by those present.

11. Any other business

Bill Palmer spoke about Workers' Memorial Day. It will take place on 28 April at the Town Hall unless not allowed to do so this year. Normally Council officers are invited to give speeches but they have not this year due to the Council's prosecution for failing to manage asbestos in the Town Hall.

The meeting closed at 2pm.