



Richmond upon Thames

AGM Thursday 19 March 2015

York House Salon 12.30-2pm

Guest Speakers: Sampson Low, Unison Head of Policy; Greta Farian, Unison Regional Officer

15 members and prospective members present

Minutes Maggie Fordham

John Holroyd, Branch Secretary welcomed those present and reported on current and previous year's Unison business (see appendix 1)

Greta Farian thanked the Branch for their hard work maintaining membership numbers in such difficult times (currently 1,074).

Shared Services: spoke of her experiences in other London boroughs that have gone through similar reorganisations. There has been dissent among Wandsworth and Richmond staff as to how the sharing of services will work in practice. Labour and Lib Dem councillors have expressed opposition in Wandsworth; Lib Dem in Richmond. **Called for members to report back to branch from any meetings/discussions occurring in their teams.**

Q: fears that the Wandsworth draconian sickness policy (available on their website) may be applied in Richmond.

GF: there are assurances that each borough will maintain their own terms and conditions of service, unless there is a change employer, eg Richmond to Wandsworth, then change of contract and terms & conditions will apply.

Q: Could the drive to save money result in pushing down wages? Staff doing same job in both boroughs will be on different pay. What is the time frame?

GF: savings are more likely to be made by staff losses. Plans are for a 2017 completion but realistically, likely to take longer. Negotiations with W have started by looking at jobs at the top of hierarchy. There are so many ponderables, what will happen with change of government? Lib Dem Councillor Stephen Knight has called for a resident referendum and has made a legal challenge. Small departments may be swallowed up eg Pensions in Richmond which have already moved to W.

Q: Our experiences of shared services in Mental Health and Environment for example have been negative, can we push these examples at meetings? How far have decisions gone?

JH: W & R have gone to cabinet and the proposals have been approved in principle.

GF: We do have the benefit of time to challenge decisions. Please discuss with colleagues, encourage non-members to join; we need to be strong. Your interests need to be represented. A working party has been set up by council leaders; unions not invited, we need to insist!

Sampson Low: introduced himself as a local resident, formerly worked for Kingston Council. Reported on 20 billion pounds of cuts to public services over past 4 years. As union stakeholders in public services, he asked what a new government holds for us. Labour has promised to rebuild local government. They have put the minimum wage and zero contracts at the top of their agenda. There are 8 or 9 permutations of coalition possible – Unison’s ‘Care for it; Vote for it’ campaign puts public services at the centre of what we demand from a new government. Reported that discussions with members has identified 3 major concerns: NHS, living standards and job security.

NHS: privatisation is coming to West London. Has been enormous outsourcing elsewhere eg to Virgin Healthcare. NHS Staff strike for pay the 1st in 32 years.

Living Standards: are under greatest pressure for decades – pay freeze followed by minimal pay rise last year.

Job Security: reorganisations, outsourcing etc He understands local pressures eg schools SEN funding.

SL brought his speech to a close by asserting that Trade Unions are made for tough times. He called upon us to realise our collective strength; that we are experiencing these tough times nationally; that trade unions are still as relevant as 100 years ago. We have 1.3 million members across all public services and we demand:

1. **Respect**
2. **A fair days pay for a fair days work**
3. **Meaningful work**
4. **To make a difference**

He urged us to vote on May 7, to make sure we are registered to vote and to speak with one voice about the future of public services.

JH: As the meeting was not quorate, the election of branch officers would have to be deferred until the next branch committee meeting. Those standing are:

1. Chair: Joanna McCullough
2. Secretary: John Holroyd
3. Treasurer: Mike Potts
4. Black Members: Herb Simms
5. LGBT: Don Rainbow
6. Equalities: Barbara Gray
7. Retired members: Ernie Hunt

GF: called for someone to step up as Welfare Officer to support members through hard times; training and support will be given. Bill Reed agreed to stand.

JH: thanked people for attending: meeting closed 1.30pm

Appendix 1



Richmond upon Thames

Annual General Meeting 19 March 2015

Branch Secretary Report

Welcome and thanks

Introductions

Greta Farian – who'll say a few words

Guest speaker – Sampson Low Head of Unison Policy

Apologies from Branch Committee Members Joanne Mc, Mike Potts, Don Rainbow

MP not here so not able to provide a financial report

But this and other reports will be on our website as soon as possible

Once again it has been a busy hectic stress full year for staff. There doesn't seem to be an end in sight to the cuts that we are facing and even if a labour Government is elected there is unlikely to be any respite. After many months the much heralded proposed shared staffing structures with Kingston was scrapped although rumours abound we do not really why the proposal was abandoned.

Within a very short time of the announcement we were told that a similar plan to share services with Wandsworth Council had been proposed and accepted by both councils. I presume most of you will have read the bulletins that Gillian Norton has sent out and will have gone to her presentations. She will also be addressing staff at two meetings in the Clarendon Hall next week. Both councils have been working to produce a senior management structure.

There was also a staff news earlier this week informing us that the shared HR service with Kingston will be terminated with a proposal to develop a shared HR service with Wandsworth. In the same document we were also told that some of the ICT staff we will be brought back in house prior to a shared arrangement with Wandsworth.

We do not have any more information than you do at the moment but all of this presents us all with many challenges. Initially it is proposed there will be losses amongst the senior management but it is inevitable, in my view, there will be significant numbers of redundancies across the organisation.

In addition, although this has not been agreed, Gillian has indicated that both sets of council staff will be employed under the same terms and conditions. We will of course be doing all we can to support individual members and in negotiations continue to work for the best terms and conditions for all of you.

Greta Farian, our Regional Officer will say a few words about how she and Region will support us through the changes.

Most of our work involves supporting staff through issues that are affecting them at work. This involves helping people going through the formal procedures, including disciplinarys, grievances and the sickness and capability procedures.

Obviously we support people who are 'up against it' in one way or another but it is certainly our strong impression that more and staff are suffering from stress leading in some cases to periods of sickness. We have had people crying and breaking down in the office and have had to offer a certain amount of counselling.

This is obviously understandable and relates often to increased workloads and an uncertainty as to the future. This is of course not helped by the financial pressures many staff are under, with the recent tiny pay increase being dwarfed by the increase in the cost of living

It was against this background that we decided to put on last year's Unison Wellbeing Day. We felt it was appropriate for us to give the opportunity for staff to try out activities including Meditation, Tai Chi and Yoga to combat stress in their lives. It was a great success with over 200 hundred people attending throughout the day.

This also led to an increase in our membership. We have managed to maintain our membership numbers despite the loss of jobs, outsourcing and shared services

The day was the idea of my colleague Maggie Fordham and she organised, publicised and ran the event for us. Many thanks to Maggie and we are hoping to run a similar event in the autumn

I'll end on that positive note but would also like to thank officers and members of our committee for their support and hard work.

We are always looking to recruit new members and intending to run a recruitment drive in spring looking for volunteers.

Thank you

John Holroyd

Richmond Unison Branch Secretary

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