



# **ANNUAL REPORT**

Reports to the  
2021 Annual General Meeting  
from Branch Officers for 2020

## Report of Branch Secretary – Mike Vaughan

Hello to all UNISON members in Staffordshire. Thank you for keeping local public services functioning in these very challenging times and thank you for participating in UNISON democracy by attending the Branch AGM. This is where you get the chance to see how the Officers, Staff and Stewards of the Branch have been campaigning and representing members on your behalf. Members sometimes say they do not know what happens in their UNISON Branch. Well this is where you can find out. We really want to show you what we do.

What a year we have had. When I became your Branch Secretary on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2020, at the last AGM, the threat from COVID was only a dim possibility, and yet now it continues to dominate our lives and has brought so much pain and inconvenience to our County and to the rest of World. At least we have vaccines now and that is a great source of hope. However, it will take many months yet before we can feel safer once again.

The pandemic has shown that we need more robust health and safety and welfare provision going forward. The NHS needs more resources and certainly does not need to be privatised. We need many more Nurses and Doctors and hospitals, and we do not need pay freezes for public service workers. Community based social care support for our vulnerable citizens needs enhancing and we need to acknowledge how vital our low paid public service workers have been. The pandemic has shown how unequal society is with wealth concentrated in the hands of a few whilst children go hungry with poorly filled lunch boxes, families live in temporary accommodation and the homeless sleep rough on our high streets. This must change.

We have all had to get used to doing most things differently with the lockdowns upon us. The Branch has had to conduct most of its business online. We have held our monthly Executive Committee meetings online and most representation meetings with employers have also taken place virtually. The Branch Office has had to close, and your activists have worked from home. COVID restrictions have made campaigning very difficult and getting out to meet, engage with and recruit members almost impossible. Members are still able to receive advice, support and representation through contacting the Office telephone number (01785-245000) or the Office email address ([unison@staffsunison.org.uk](mailto:unison@staffsunison.org.uk)).

The Branch has enhanced its virtual member communications though and there is much more interaction around campaigns online and with members. We have enhanced the Branch website and revamped the Facebook page. We see social media as an effective way of keeping in contact with our members, especially during the lockdowns. There is more work to be done though. Please visit our pages and tell us what you think.

The Branch had been in an industrial relations dispute with the County Council for several years when I took over. The origins of the dispute were of great concern, and

UNISON was initially correct in taking issue with the Council and some of its actions. However, it was soon very clear to me that it was time for the dispute to be ended and I ensured that this happened by the middle of 2020.

County Council employment concerns and issues can now be discussed calmly and collectively, and a consensus reached. That is not to say that we will agree all the time with the Officers and political leadership of the Council. Far from it. I have always disagreed with the commissioned dismantling of the Council and its services because I believe strongly in public run service provision and democratic accountability to local communities. Private organisations do not usually offer robust democratic scrutiny safeguards to the public. There are also concerns about how some private employers have treated their employees, especially during the pandemic.

There are still redundancies and hours reductions in scope at the County Council sadly, but we are doing all we can in the Branch to resist these cuts. We are especially keen to avoid the age-old problem of fewer workers remaining and working harder and longer for less pay. UNISON members need to stand strong together to thwart this process.

Council finances are unfairly restricted by the Government, and it is galling to see the Government being so wasteful with public expenditure. For example, the Serco test and trace system and the purchase of defective PPE.

Public service staff deserve more than a few claps on a Thursday evening and a pay freeze. We have had nearly 11 years of austerity to contend with, so further pay restraint will force many more public service workers and their families into poverty. This is just wrong after they have been praised by the public for keeping vital services going and ensuring that our children and vulnerable citizens are kept safe and alive.

The Branch has been extremely busy with disciplinary, grievance and service restructures, but I shall leave the 3 Assistant Branch Secretaries to expand on their demanding representation workload. The Branch has been very well supported by Stewards, but we need even more help. Many workplaces do not have a Steward. Please consider training to be one. We guarantee to offer support.

We often receive sterling support from affected members in building up the evidence for exploring alternatives to redundancies and cuts and have been successful in saving member work hours, rates of pay and jobs. Schools continue to introduce term time only pay for Teaching Assistants and reduce their hourly rates of pay on top. This double whammy comes in addition to being low paid already and ignores the invaluable role these Teaching Assistants play in educating our children properly and keeping them safe and happy.

Size really does matter here, and we need even more UNISON members so that through collective strength we can even more effectively resist such reductions in

services and jobs. UNISON membership is growing but we need this to continue even more vigorously. If you do not stand up for yourself and your neighbour, who else will?

The Staffordshire Branch of UNISON also covers the private sector across Staffordshire. Many of the members in this sector here were once employed directly by the County Council but have been commissioned out to private service providers over recent years. Some of these organisations work well with UNISON and some do not. Some have introduced worse terms and conditions for their staff whilst paying senior managers and shareholders a great deal of money.

The Branch appointed an additional Private Sector Case Worker during 2020 and Holly is fitting in very effectively. The Branch is representing its members in the Private Sector very well but there is more work to be undertaken. I shall leave the Private Sector Area Organiser, Adrian Watts to inform you about the hard work which is being undertaken.

UNISON elected Christina McAnea, its new General Secretary on 11/01/21. Christina is the first female to lead UNISON, and with a majority female membership, this is long overdue for UNISON. I am sure that you will join me in sending Christina our congratulations, as well as our hopes that she can make UNISON a more effective and campaigning organisation at national and regional level.

UNISON is the largest public service Trade Union in the UK and we have been heavily involved in trying to persuade the Government to change some of its COVID-related policies. It is fair to say that UNISON has had some success here, but the Government does not appear to enjoy taking advice.

One major win for the Union in 2020 was an Employment Tribunal ordering private social care employers to count the travel time of care workers between social care visits as work time. Private employers were found to have been paying staff well below the national minimum wage as a result, and low paid and exploited UNISON members were paid thousands of pounds in back pay. This was a victory arising from the collective strength of a Trade Union.

Social Care workers do a vital job in an aging society and need a career grade structure with better training opportunities and retention incentives.

There are several industrial disputes ongoing at present and I send solidarity greetings to the activists involved. For example, the Care Workers at Sage Nursing Homes in London are striking for a pay increase, Porters at Heartlands Hospital in Birmingham are striking because of the imposition of non-family friendly work pattern changes and British Gas employees are striking to resist “fire and re-hire” tactics with the imposition of reduced wages. No one ever wants to be on strike, but these workers have been driven to this by the actions of uncaring employers. Declarations of support from individual union members are always welcomed by activists organising industrial action. Contact details are available via the Branch Office or the Internet.

The UNISON National Executive Committee (NEC) Elections will be upon us in the coming months. The NEC is the policy making forum of the union and is lay member led. Please get involved in this democratic process and use your votes.

There will also be County Council and Police and Fire Commissioner elections on 06/05/2021. The outcome of these elections will greatly affect the provision and shape of local public services. Please remember to vote. It is possible to apply for a postal vote.

The Staffordshire Branch took over responsibility for UNISON members at East Staffordshire District Council in October 2020 following agreement with the members there. Their representation has been greatly enhanced as a result.

I am also a Branch delegate to the Wolverhampton and Bilston TUC Trades Council. Our affiliation here is based upon the number of Staffordshire Branch members who live in the Wolverhampton area. Trades Councils do valuable and unsung work in bringing together Trade Union representatives across all Trade Unions within geographical areas so that issues of worker commonality, solidarity and struggle may be discussed in detail and solutions to problems explored and acted upon with a common purpose. I add details of some aspects of Trades Council work to the UNISON website, but the Trades Council website has much more to explore.

Finally, please keep safe and I hope that we all receive a double dose of the COVID vaccine sooner rather than later.

**Mike Vaughan**  
**Branch Secretary**

## **Report of Branch Chair – Nigel Brindley**

Dear Member's

This has been a very difficult year for all of us.

I would like to say thank you to all the officers, stewards, and staff in our fantastic union in Staffordshire. We have continued with Branch business, having meetings over various online platforms including Microsoft Teams and Zoom, I hope you found these useful and it enabled business to carry in these difficult times, I must say I have never been in so many bedrooms lol!

At the beginning of lock down I kept in touch with our officers and stewards by calling on a fortnightly basis, this became a lot harder to continue with once members started going back to their workplaces and the calls for advice and support started coming into the Branch. Although we have continued with the monthly Branch Executive Committee Meetings to ensure everyone had the arena to share concerns and gather support from each other.

As your Chairperson I would like to thank Mike, Kate, Mandy, Ann Marie, Adrian, Holly, Chris, and Sheena for keeping our union on track and making sure the membership has had a service they deserve.

We have not got everything right but we are now in a much better place than we were, we still have a lot more to do so can I ask you one big favour and that is to come and take part in our AGM on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2021. You don't have to leave you house just registered for the meeting on our website.

For those officers/stewards who have decided not to continue in their positions this year I would like to thank you for your hard work and dedication to UNISON and wish you well in the future and I hope sometime in the future you will return and continue the excellent work that you have done.

One phrase we've all got to know so well over the last year is 'You're on MUTE!'

Please stay safe and see you all at the AGM.

**Nigel Brindley**  
**Branch Chair**

## **Report of Assistant Branch Secretary – Nigel Brindley**

Dear Member's

What a strange and very difficult year it has been for us all.

When I was elected in February last year, I never thought that in 12 months we would all be in this situation. We all had to adapt very quickly to a new way of working to ensure our members got the best service.

In March I started looking at school's risk assessments to make sure that the schools were doing the right thing to keep members safe and talking to members who were very anxious about going into their workplaces.

I did do some face to face meetings during this time but then I realised that it was not safe for any of us, so meetings were then carried out using online platforms, to enable us to continue supporting members going through grievance and sickness meetings and also to support staff who were going through Consultation with in the County Council.

There is one major difference this year we got back round the table with officers of the County Council. We also welcomed a new Officer from our Regional Office, and a new Branch Secretary Mike Vaughan, we have come a long way this year after a very difficult two years and we continue to move forward as a Branch working closely with my other colleagues even though it's only over Zoom!

I know a lot of you have struggled this year with your Mental Health, anxiety, and stress. I have also struggled with this being home for the last year has not been easy for any of us. There is one thing that has come out of all this in that we have not polluted the country as much by not driving around all over the place!

We have continued to have weekly meetings with officers and other trade unions on what is going on within school settings and also with our Health and Safety Officers who have done a fantastic job so thank you to them for keeping all of us safe.

It is now January 2021 and we are in another lockdown, this Government has let us all down but there is now a vaccine, so we hope sometime soon we can get back to some sort of normality.

Finally, a big thank you to our office staff for keeping us in contact with our members they have also been working from home. Thank you to you all, please stay safe and I hope we can meet face to face some time this year fingers crossed.

**Nigel Brindley**  
**Assistant Branch Secretary**

## Report of Assistant Branch Secretary – Kate Salter

What a year.

2020 will never be forgotten by those of us who have lived and worked through it. We have been fortunate enough to have been able to work safely from our own homes throughout the pandemic and we wholeheartedly appreciate that. Others, as we know, are not so lucky and have had to return to work in schools, hospitals, shops, and offices following the lockdown periods, and whilst risk assessments are in place the risk cannot be eliminated, only minimised. Whilst we accept that we are fortunate and far safer at home than in our usual workplace, home working has presented many challenges which have required a great deal of adaptation, and homeworking has undoubtedly taken a toll on our mental health at times. It is isolating, often lonely and work and personal lives have blended into one. I have missed my colleagues this year, although we have done our best to maintain regular contact via online meetings and phone calls, but that is no substitute for working within the Branch Office with other team members, sharing ideas, venting frustrations and discussing complex work related issues.

In February our new Branch Secretary, Mike Vaughan, was elected, and he has done a fantastic job under incredibly difficult circumstances. He has prioritised our safety and has supported, guided, and advised me consistently throughout the year and the wealth of knowledge, good humour and experience he brings to the Branch has helped me enormously. Sincere thanks Mike for all you have done.

2020 has been incredibly challenging for all of us. We have responded to unparalleled requests for support, advice, and guidance from our members, where Coronavirus linked concerns have been an understandably common theme. Many of our members have called us to seek advice regarding their individual safety and that of their colleagues and their close family members. We have all worked tirelessly, under significant pressure at times, to keep on top of the ever-changing and evolving guidance and advice from Government at both National and Local levels to ensure our members receive the most up to date and relevant guidance and support.

Nigel and I have attended weekly meetings with the Deputy Director for Education and the Health and Safety Lead at Staffordshire County Council, who are responsible for coordinating the Coronavirus risk management within all of Staffordshire's educational settings and the wider community. We have fed back member concerns and raised awareness of potential Health and Safety and/or risk assessment breeches and have worked with employers to resolve concerns and minimise risk for our members.

I have completed the UNISON Health and Safety course this year, to deepen my knowledge of the legislation that employers are bound by to protect their employees and to understand how Trade Unions can assist with ensuring best practice is followed and can inspect and monitor workplaces to ensure your safety is prioritised.

Following some pauses due to the pandemic, many employers have now resumed consultations, albeit virtually in most cases. I have virtually attended many consultations within schools and Staffordshire County Council settings and am currently supporting

school Support Staff members with unfavourable proposals to reduce pay. These consultations are challenging during normal times and coupled with the restrictions of the pandemic we have had to find alternative ways of supporting, informing and guiding our members. I have held numerous on line group meetings with members using platforms such as Skype, Microsoft Teams and ZOOM and whilst this is no substitute for being able to meet in person, which is always my preference, I feel they serve a purpose and I have been able to offer the same standard of advice and guidance.

There has been little reduction in the volume of non-Coronavirus related referrals to the Branch, and I have also assisted members with allegations of misconduct, safeguarding breeches, financial misdemeanour, workplace bullying and sickness this year. These are, unfortunately, all too common and myself and my colleagues are very experienced in assisting members through these processes although each case is unique and requires a tailored approach dependant on circumstances.

As an Assistant Branch Secretary, I am supported by an Administrative Team at the Branch who have done a wonderful job of ensuring that any technological problems are resolved quickly, thus enabling the continuity of service to our members without interruption. I feel fortunate to work with a team of highly experienced and professional colleagues - thank you to the Admin Team for your consistent and highly valued assistance and support.

We all hope for a better year to come, although we face many significant challenges. The development and distribution of coronavirus vaccines brings hope and the glimmer of light at the end of a very bleak tunnel; however, the financial cost of the pandemic response measures and Brexit will undoubtedly impact severely on Local Authority funding and budgets. As I write this, I am mindful of the proposals to freeze public sector pay, further compounding the impact of a decade of austerity for all of us.

I think it's only right to spare a thought for all those thousands of families who have tragically lost a loved one to the Coronavirus this year, and to the brave and unwavering NHS and Care staff who have worked tirelessly to care for patients and clients in the face of this terrifying disease. My Son's extended paternal family sadly experienced the sudden and shocking loss of Tim, a much-loved son, brother, uncle, and cousin, and we suffered the awful grim and surreal reality of watching his funeral online. He was a fit and healthy 54-year-old and he is one of thousands whose loss is keenly felt by his family, friends, colleagues, and community.

What we have all endured this year is beyond compare, however as a Branch we have adapted to our new circumstances, worked flexibly and dynamically and we have worked together (albeit remotely) as a team to ensure we are here for our members. We will continue to strive for the best for each of our members whatever their situation and under whatever circumstances we are faced with.

**Kate Salter**  
**Assistant Branch Secretary**

## **Report of Assistant Branch Secretary – Mandy Dancocks**

My year, like most people's, hasn't been what I envisaged it would be. The COVID 19 pandemic has quite understandably changed both what I do and how I do it. Like everyone else I have had to adjust to using technology to replace face to face meetings, not my first choice but it serves a function.

A large part of my year has been spent reacting to issues caused by the pandemic. My work has included:

- reading ever changing government guidance for both core council services and schools,
- triaging large volumes of calls from members worried about their health and safety at work and giving appropriate advice,
- supporting and representing individual members in serious health and safety concerns in virtual meetings with their employer to secure suitable outcomes,
- attending fortnightly [at times] COVID 19 Update Meetings between SCC Health, Safety & Wellbeing, and the Trades Unions – commenting upon guidance issued,
- attending SCC Health & Safety Committee

In terms of casework I have supported and represented members through the disciplinary process and disciplinary hearings, absent management meetings and grievance process – both within core council services and schools.

I have supported members through various restructures within the county council and business cases in schools that either seek to TUPE the school to an Academy or change the terms and conditions of Support staff. I have worked with members to ensure that their voice is heard through written feedback; this sometimes results in the proposal being modified e.g. number of hours or posts increased or amended implementation times.

An important aspect of my role is to support the Branch Secretary to work with the Council and Headteachers / Governors to influence employee relations at a strategic level. This is achieved do this by attending various strategic meetings and working through agreed areas of work. I have worked closely with Council colleagues to develop an agreed performance report card for Human Resources casework, discussed the principles in Human Resources policy reviews and sought to advance the equality, diversity, and inclusion agenda at every opportunity.

Despite a difficult year I have ensured that I have kept my knowledge up to date by attending relevant online training.

The demand for advice, support and representation has been incredibly high throughout the year – without any let up. This, coupled with remote working, has caused many challenges for my colleagues and me. We've kept going and provided a service as best we could under the circumstances. I would like to pay tribute to my colleagues for their support, honesty, and resilience; I really appreciate them and could not do my role without them.

We are still here, still smiling and still responding to your concerns. Here's to a better 2021!

**Mandy Dancocks**  
**Assistant Branch Secretary**

## Report of Assistant Branch Secretary (FRS) – Tim Wareham

Hello Members,

Entering in to my fourth Year as Assistant Branch Secretary and Learning Rep for Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service.

This last Year the Staff and Service has witnessed unprecedented levels of change. The Fire and Rescue Service Strategic Governance Board (SGB) continued with its implementation plan to embed shared back office services and included in the plan was the decision to transfer Fire & Rescue personnel working in JETs (Joint Emergency Transport department) to the Police.

This was contested and UNISON raised a cause for concern – requesting that a rationale be provided which identified the benefits of the proposed transfer – each organisation explaining why they chose to have the function within their remit and staff transferred to their workforce. After much deliberation, the Commissioner decided that the function would best sit under the Police. The decision was again challenged by UNISON. Following dialogue with the senior management team, there was no appetite for further challenge from the fire employer side. This did not mean they agreed the decision but saw no option to change the decision.

TUPE transfer was carried out for some 14 members. The process was observed and full support given to our Members - both Police and Fire UNISON Officials were present at Staff briefings and 1-2-1s and I'd like to record my thanks to my Police Colleagues for ensuring consistency and solidarity throughout the process.

There were some very positive outcomes from the process – several members were made substantive – increasing their pay and providing security (At least for a short while).

An interesting outcome was that the Fire Staff chose individually to transfer on their current pay and conditions – A true reflection of their loyalty to the Service. This, no doubt, will cause some issues to the new employer, and we of course will be there to jointly support our Members through any future negotiations.

New ways of working have brought an amount of change within the Service at all levels and this has had a marked effect on the number of workplace issues within the Membership. There has been an increase in individual grievances raised and there has been an increased requirement to represent Members at discipline hearings as emotions surface. Change remains inevitable, and there is a greater requirement imposed on UNISON to ensure that proper processes are followed when deciding on different ways of working and they are recorded, robust and well thought through.

My concern is that the Unions are overlooked in this part of the planning cycle which may be at the detriment of the Members and the functions they can provide to the Service.

The savings and efficiencies being made through the building stock has alleviated the intense pressure that was being exerted on the workforce posts but I feel that this will soon become the prime focus of attention once the estate assets have been fully sweated.

My UNISON colleagues in the Police Branch have actively sought to engage with all the transferring and restructured staff to ensure their best interests are attended to as I fear there is limited understanding of Green Book T&Cs currently within the FBU.

I still spend a great deal of my time educating and enlightening management colleagues to help them understand that Members need to be treated fairly and consistently – still one of my core values and motivations to be involved with this Union – A consistency of approach is levelled towards all staff members at all times, not just when it suits!

January tends to be a month of reflection and review - this month is no exception with reviews of working practices being carried out across the Service. This will throw up additional work - Job evaluations, amendments to contracts and the potential for dispute.

There are still conversations to be had and battles to be fought. These will take place with another year's worth of knowledge and experience.

Recognition and thanks:

Thank you to the Branch business support team who keep me on the straight and narrow administratively. (I couldn't have done this role without you)!

I've received great support from the Branch Exec Team and some useful objectivity from the regional organiser when dealing with some complex and difficult cases. Thank you so much for your patience!

Thank you also to those members who received support – I received verbal and written thanks from many of you – it really is appreciated.

My Good friend Johnny Kaye has stood again for the Steward in JETS – He has transferred to the Police but remains active and close. I said last year that he was a rare treasure – possessing a quick-wit and understanding that allows him to untie the knots that sometimes strangle common sense. This sometimes gets him in to mither but cutting through this is his authenticity and credibility. John now works a parallel path within the Police, and I feel he may be in for a busy year!

The Branch, like the Service has seen some upheaval. Change is inevitable, and I have provided some objective scrutiny to some of our internal processes.

I feel like the dynamic is strong and settling and I have confidence moving forward that we have the team in place that will support me and my members and one in which I'm willing to provide support to.

As I did last Year, I'll conclude my report with a request – **I want UNISON to be more active in the workplace** – We need more Reps! Please come forward – consider being more active - A union is a movement – support Your Colleagues and strengthen Your voice – we can't do it without you!

**Tim Wareham**  
**Assistant Branch Secretary (FRS)**

## **Report of Assistant Branch Secretary (Ofsted) - Carolyn Thompson**

As always been a busy year in Ofsted this organisation thrives on change. This last year however has been like no other due to the COVID Pandemic. All staff have been working from home and all meetings have been conducted virtually. Yes, it's definitely been a strange year.

Due to the pandemic I have met, virtually, with management 2 or 3 times a week to discuss any ongoing or new issues. Several policies have been reviewed and new ones produced because of the pandemic. During the first lock down many staff inspectors were redeployed to other government departments in the main Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) which provided its own set of difficulties with which members needed support. I am pleased to report that we have successfully worked in partnership with management even when we have failed to agree.

Regulatory work in Social Care and Early Years remits continues and we were able to agree a blended approach of virtual and where necessary onsite visits. The health and safety on our members has been key and risk assessments are constantly been reviewed and discussed. All safeguarding concerns that are part of Ofsted's remit, regarding children and learners were addressed by our members.

Pay negotiations this year were held once again within the difficult financial climate. It is hopefully the first and last time that I will have to conduct these virtually – just to say it wasn't easy. I lead the negotiations on behalf of Ofsted's Trade Union Side and a pay offer was agreed.

I continue to work nationally with the Ofsted Sector Committee and support other regional reps. As chair of the Ofsted committee I also sit on the Service Group Executive (SGE) I also sit on the Pay and Conditions and Service Delivery which are sub-groups of the SGE. All meetings again this last year being conducted virtually.

I remain the Trade Union Side (TUS) secretary in Ofsted coordinating the work of the 3 unions (UNISON, FDA, and PCS) recognised by Ofsted and leading on all consultation and negotiations with the employer.

Advising and supporting members remains a significant part of the roles. Casework over the last year as kept me busy, in-between everything else, with a number of cases taking a lot of time to deal with.

**Looking forward to yet another busy year ahead!**

**Carolyn Thompson  
Assistant Branch Secretary (OFSTED)**

## Report of Branch Area Organiser – Adrian Watts

The Private sector has always been and probably always will be the most challenging work of our Branch, as employers are hard wired to achieve profits. With zero-hour contracts to contend with along with more than a smattering of rogue employers, it is a battle ground that we as both a Branch and a Union should certainly look to grow and organise in. It could be argued that these workers need the help of a union the most.

### Then came along Covid-19

Naturally this has been a worrying time for everyone as this silent killer can make you very ill and even worse – kill you, as well as threaten your livelihood and mental wellbeing. You along with me had probably never heard of the term furlough however, it seems that we have heard of virtually nothing else since March 2020. It has been a god send to a large population of working people that will hopefully get them and employers through the extremely turbulent and uncharted waters that we find ourselves in, although there is at least hope ahead with a number of vaccines coming through. However, it has been a very difficult time for our members, often on the front line even during the lockdown, as they had to provide meals to key workers children; our cleaners who apart from health workers could arguably say that they were most at risk as it became apparent that children were most adept at spreading this deadly virus.

### Success

In September Chartwells put together a business case to reduce the headcount in their cleaning, grounds services and school catering. We went into consultation although I cried foul as they had not adhered correctly to the process and the clock on consultation had to be restarted. I was amazed that during a global pandemic that they actually wanted to reduce cleaning – they said that was what the clients wanted and took real issue with that notion.

There were initially **142 staff** at risk of redundancy. I made robust representations over an anticipated rise in school meals due to the high-profile campaign by Marcus Rashford and Union pressure and said that we would be lobbying the local Council, schools, and MPs. We made representations over reducing the ratio of expected meals per labour hour to reduce the impact of redundancies and the subsequent need to re-advertise, interview, rehire new staff and the mandatory DBS checks as and when demand returns.

They informed us the figure had dropped to **90 staff** at risk at a later consultation meeting. Three staff were redeployed as cleaners and a further three took voluntary redundancy and the pension strain was agreed to be taken by Chartwells, effectively giving them their statutory redundancy figure, their pay in lieu of notice (PILON) and because of admitted body status into the LGPS, early retirement.

At our last but one consultation the figure of **staff at risk of redundancy was 55**. Pressure over the above points was applied again as done previously, via emails and previous consultations and the timely announcement of the extension of furlough was announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, although I had heard on the grapevine they did not want to place staff on furlough and were very resistant to this idea.

Finally, we were informed at our last consultation that **there will be no redundancies** as they look to redeploy some staff where there is low demand in their schools contracts and place them in schools that they operate in with higher demand and the remainder on furlough until March.

### **There is still much work still to do though....**

As I write this report there is a national battle with a catering firm called Dolce over slashing our members' hours, which is being fought locally up and down the country via grievances that may well end up as a breach of contract.

### **Last but certainly not least - Thank you to our Stewards**

Stewards are the lifeblood of unions and union Branches up and down the country and we are no different, so I would like to extend a huge thank you for all the hard work (often unseen and unrecognised) of Mick Barker at Chartwells, Margarita Brown at Burton and South Derbyshire College and our latest addition of Andy Hollinshead at South Staffordshire College. After a long courtship, I managed to finally persuade Andy to come on board as we had not had a steward there in four years. So, a huge thank you for all the hard work and the triaging that you do for free to improve the working lives of many of your colleagues and our UNISON members.

**Adrian Watts**  
**Branch Area Organiser**

## Report of Branch Caseworker – Holly Moore

I think it's safe to say in the 13 years I've worked at UNISON, this year has been one of the toughest to date.

The start of 2020 brought changes to the branch welcoming our new Branch Secretary Mike Vaughan. Mike has done a fantastic job in difficult times, offering support and guidance to us all. Mike's vision for the branch is admirable and it feels things have moved on very positively.

March then saw the start of the COVID pandemic and lockdown, this proved difficult for us all, but we all worked together as a team and managed to continue working throughout lockdown with a new way of working, and continued to support our members the same way we always have.

Big changes for me personally came in September when I took the decision to apply for the caseworker role within the branch. I was delighted, following interview, to be offered the position.

It wasn't the way I hoped I would be starting in a new role, working from home and not doing any face to face meetings made it a little challenging but feel we all adapted well and we were still able to support and represent members to the best of our ability using online platforms.

Doing this new role has certainly opened my eyes to the challenges our members are faced with in the private sector, where employers are very different to that of local authorities. Poor policies and procedures appear to be the norm and the expectation the employers have of our members is concerning.

I have sadly experienced employers taking advantage of these unprecedented times and not showing compassion to employees in the private care sector where our members have been on the front line in very challenging workplaces where COVID has been rife.

I have seen many members suffer detriment to their salary due to self-isolating where positive cases have arisen, There for You, the UNISON Charity has been discussed on a regular basis with these members and feel this is such an important tool for our members to access when they are suffering from financial hardship.

Disciplinary cases have continued throughout this pandemic, I have supported a large number of members in hearings via online platforms, and found the support is just as effective as it would be in person.

Signposting members to the Gov.uk website for up-to-date guidelines on COVID is a regular occurrence, it is increasingly difficult for us to keep up to date with the ever-changing guidance from Public Health England and the Government. I have seen an

increase of grievances being submitted to employers around COVID with many being resolved in the early stages.

I would like to thank all my colleagues who have supported me massively in my new role and the admin team who provide an invaluable amount of support.

My thoughts go to those who have sadly lost loved ones to COVID, stay safe and I hope we can get back to some normality soon.

**Holly Moore**  
**Branch Caseworker**

## **Report of Health & Safety Officer – Mike Vaughan**

This report relates primarily to County Council health and safety issues, but there has been overlap this past 12 months with allied workplaces such as Schools and Care facilities. COVID related health and safety concerns have dominated the agenda and led to other health and safety projects having to be put on hold temporarily. UNISON was involved in the drafting of the new County Council Menopause Policy though and in the review of the Mental Health First Aid support programme.

The Trade Union and County Council Health and Safety Committee has met through the last 12 months and there have been fortnightly health and safety briefings for Trade Unions and weekly School health and safety meetings.

UNISON has been involved in discussing numerous individual and collective risk assessments with managers and affected staff, especially within School, Care facilities and Early Years settings and have negotiated on behalf of many members who possess protected characteristics under equality legislation and have severe and enduring health conditions. Branch Officers and Safety Representatives have also been providing advice around health and safety concerns to dozens of members. UNISON has also been involved recently in formally commenting upon proposed new Testing and Vaccination Council policies.

UNISON needs its members to continue to provide us with the information and support we require to make County Council working lives safer and fairer.

I wish to hear from members about how they are coping at work. There is a great need for more Safety Representatives so that there can be enhanced health and safety scrutiny in all workplaces. Full UNISON training for these roles is available with paid time release. A unionised workplace generally makes for a safer and more harmonious environment.

All Schools within Staffordshire have been contacted about their adherence to health and safety procedures; many more than once.

The mental wellbeing of union members, workers and citizens has been an issue of concern for the Branch since well before the onset of the pandemic. Staff working longer hours with more demanding workloads and access to fewer resources will undoubtedly experience higher levels of stress.

The social and professional isolation caused through the lockdowns is also worrying. Although there is some state, employer and charitable support available, many people are continuing to struggle. If you feel the Branch can be of help to you as a member, then please contact us to talk the situation through. You are not alone here.

The financial wellbeing of our members is also of concern to the Branch. Many of us are struggling to manage our household finances currently following more than a

decade of austerity and there is more financial uncertainty ahead. UNISON has its own Welfare fund available called "There for You". Information is available through UNISON websites, but if you want to discuss seeking financial support as a UNISON member then please contact the Branch Office. The contact will remain confidential. I cannot guarantee that "There for You" will be able to assist but you have nothing to lose by asking.

Staffordshire UNISON paid for a Kissing Gate in Stone to commemorate Worker Memorial Day on 28/04/20. We were unable to organise a physical ceremony in support of this worthy event due to COVID restrictions unfortunately, and it may be that the 2021 date will also be affected in this way. Details will be publicised on the Branch website.

**Mike Vaughan**  
**Branch Health & Safety Officer**

## **Report of Equalities Co-ordinator – Mandy Dancocks**

Equality, diversity, and inclusion is in the spotlight due to the inequalities highlighted by COVID 19, the Black Lives Matter movement and the Government dropping plans to reform the Gender Recognition Act.

COVID 19 enquiries have dominated work for the Branch in terms of its unequal impact upon BAME workers, older workers and workers with impairments and health conditions. I and my colleagues have worked with health and safety teams, human resource providers, managers, and individuals to give advice or ensure that appropriate risk assessments have been completed to keep people safe.

At a strategic level I have worked closely with the Council to develop a performance report card for the case work held by human resources. It provides statistical data on the number of people who are subject to disciplinary action, grievances, and attendance management processes – this is also broken down by the protected characteristics that are currently collected. This information is showing trends – we are looking at this information to ensure that people are not disproportionately affected by working processes. It helps to provide evidence for consideration for reviewing policies.

I have also influenced the emerging Council equality, diversity, and inclusion agenda. At every meeting I challenge around the public sector equality duty, the need for informed community impact assessments that are embedded routinely into the business. I also attended an Equality & Diversity workshop for Trade Unions to ensure that UNISON's views were heard; comments have been fed back to the Council about what I perceive to be weaknesses in its approach.

On a day to day basis I provide support to colleagues around issues of discrimination. I have worked very closely to support and represent members raise concerns or grievances where they feel that they have been treated differently; this has led to changes with the employer.

I have tried to keep in touch with this changing agenda throughout the year by attending webinars arranged by the Equality & Human Rights Commission, UNISON's virtual disability conference, the Midlands Anti-Racist Summit and I am a member of the Regional LGBT self-organised group.

The equality, diversity and inclusion agenda are gathering pace within the Council. It is my intention to keep influencing this throughout 2021.

Here's looking to a good year!

**Mandy Dancocks**  
**Equalities Co-ordinator**

## **Report of Welfare Officer – Helen Smith**

This has been my second year in post as Branch Welfare Officer and it has continued to be a rewarding role.

There for You, Unison's charity, has had a great increase in applications throughout the pandemic, however they have continued to operate and offer support and financial assistance to the members who need it most.

Over the past year I have had contact with a number of members regarding COVID-related financial difficulties, as well as those who have not been directly affected by it. Very often it appears that members appreciate being able to discuss their troubles with someone and to know that there is the possibility of financial assistance if they decide to apply.

Fortunately for some of the members who found themselves unemployed as a result of Covid-19 they have gained employment following redundancy and so no longer needed the assistance.

Something I would like to highlight is that, although There for You is keen to offer financial support to members, it is means-tested to ensure that the help gets to the members who need it the most.

Unfortunately, we have been unable to assist members if they have decided against sharing the information required for the application for financial assistance. There for You are only able to assist if an application is submitted and, following their assessment, it is found that the member meets the necessary financial criteria. To avoid disappointment, I would urge members to contact the Branch Welfare Officer as soon as they start to experience any financial hardship to discuss their options and prevent the situation from becoming worse.

Thank you once again to those stewards and officers who have spent time helping members by making them aware of There for You and helping them to complete application forms and thank you to anyone who has donated to There for You.

I am standing down as Branch Welfare Officer, however There for You will continue to be there for our members, and I wish our incoming Welfare Officer all the best for their time in the role.

**Helen Smith**  
**Welfare Officer**

## **Report of Communications Officer – Dan Watson**

It has been an unprecedented year and although it seems the whole world has stopped, the pace of the changes in how we work has increased.

As a branch we are used to meeting with members regularly face-to-face but have had to completely change to working online.

As a relatively new Communication Officer the challenge has been to continue to learn about the effective ways of communicating with members while creating new ways for us to do it!

When I look back to last Spring, when we were struggling along with Microsoft Teams or Zoom and stress testing our broadband connections, it's easy to forget how far we have all come.

Now all meetings are held online - the other day I attended a meeting chaired by someone from the front seat of their car while they waited for their daughter to come out of school! - all notes are digitised (something we were keen to do as a Branch anyway) and we are using a huge array of tools to help us continue to provide an effective service to our members and employers.

So firstly, I'd like to congratulate everyone reading this report, wherever you are based or work, on being able to adjust to a new era of communicating! And of course, welcome to our historic first online AGM!

Sifting through the huge amounts of speculation, conjecture, confusion, and famous U-turns to provide our members with the correct (at the time) information has been a challenge.

Last year we accelerated our use of Facebook and feedback from members has been positive. This has helped us push on this year and it is widely used to send information out. Going forward we intend to make more use of other social media platforms.

We have also tightened up on cyber security in the branch to keep our social media accounts safe.

I have been involved in testing and commissioning the technology that we are using to work remotely, introducing it first to the branch and then the Branch Executive and now to the members through the webinar AGM. Each step has had its own challenges.

I am also a member of Staffordshire County Council's Health and Safety Committee. As you can imagine there have been a lot of meetings and the work that the H&S team over at SCC has been inspiring. Again, regular changes and U-turns have made

their jobs really difficult, but I firmly believe they have done their County and its residents proud and kept them as safe as possible.

As the only member on the committee from a school, I have used my experiences to feed back to them.

As a Steward and H&S Rep, I have also been very busy in the workplace. I too have had meetings from my car with members and colleagues! When schools originally closed in the spring, our workplace suffered hugely from lack of staffing due to isolations and suspected cases. Understandably staff were very worried about the return of children to the classroom and it has been my job to work closely with the leadership to make sure we can do this as safely as possible.

Constant changes from the department of education has meant it has been crucial that the information I give my members, and the branch to the wider membership base, is clear. I have a lot of sympathy for school leaders who are stuck between carrying out the demands of the DfE and protecting their work force from harm, I do not envy them in this task and I believe UNISON has a very important role in helping.

Regardless of what has been reported in some areas of mainstream media I believe school staff have done a fantastic job under incredibly difficult circumstances. The 'can do' attitude of UNISON members has been clear from the start and without them, and indeed all those working in the public sector, this country would be in an even more unthinkable position.

Finally, I'd like to take a moment to recognise all those who have been lost to us this year and also to their families, friends, and colleagues. I hope very much that we are approaching the end of this awful moment of history but until we are, continue to stay safe and look after yourselves.

**Dan Watson**  
**Communication Officer**