

# UNISON withdraws support for Take 5 Risk Assessments

**I**n December UNISON notified the employers that it would not support the introduction of the Take 5 Risk Assessment.

In UNISON's view the process risked reducing management responsibility for the health, safety and wellbeing of our members and colleagues.

UNISON sought legal advice about the implications for trade union members lodging a claim for industrial injury against the local authority.

We were informed that:



Happy festive season - especially to those delivering Edinburgh's services over the holiday. Be safe and take care.

"until such a claim is lodged, there is no reason to believe that a local authority would not use such a document in mitigation of a claim for industrial injury. The health safety and welfare of staff is the responsibility of managers and ultimately the Chief Executive".

Nationally, UNISON has been monitoring the

introduction of "Behavioural Safety Programmes" (bhav). The Take 5 Risk Assessment is such a programme.

It should be noted that where this has been introduced, staff have been instructed to sign and date this document without being trained in risk assessments.

## Working together in partnership

UNISON attempts to resolve our members' concerns by engaging with managers, Facilities Management and corporate Health and Safety.

Unfortunately, we have had to remind the employers that we reserve the right to contact regulatory bodies such as the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, SEPA and the HSE where there has been a failure to make improvements.

## Unions call for action as surveys show level of violence towards staff

**I**n September, UNISON in conjunction with the EIS teachers' union carried out successful Violence at Work Surveys in schools.

The outcome was no surprise to the unions as we've had a dramatic increase in member complaints.

A joint presentation was given to the Council Joint Consultative Group with widespread support

### Violence is not part of the job'

Graham Neal

from all political parties.

The results received large scale media coverage and constructive talks have taken place with guidance letters sent to all schools.

Branch Communities and Families vice-convenor Graham Neal

said: "We need the council to recognise the problem and be clear that violence is not 'part of the job'.

"Our members are committed to the children they work with but we need greater clarity about what happens when schools cannot meet the needs of a child."

The survey can be found on our branch website.

## Working for our members

As we come to the end of 2018, UNISON's health and safety team has been pro-active in the workplace with over 30 inspections since May 2017.

The branch held a successful health and safety training course, resulting in 13 reps gaining accreditation.

Further workplace inspections and training programmes are scheduled for 2019.

# Call for re-introduction of health and safety committees

**A** joint union campaign has won a Council review of governance, monitoring and reporting of health and safety - along with consideration of reintroducing constituted health and safety committees.

This followed UNISON serving notice of our intention to withdraw from the current unconstituted health and safety working groups.

While the motion only refers to 'consideration' of health and safety committees, UNISON is clear that the council now has to act within three months under the Health & Safety Executive code.

Our presentation to the council health and safety forum led to councillor Lezley Marion Cameron (chair), submitting a motion of support to the Labour and SNP coalition.

UNISON then took a deputation to the December meeting of the full Council.

Ian Mullen, UNISON health and safety convener, highlighted a number of long-term health and safety issues, some of which are in this newsletter.

The Lord Provost

**Year on year budget cuts and austerity measures are no excuse for shortcuts in the health, safety and wellbeing of our members and colleagues."**

Ian Mullen

extended the question and answer session, as elected members had so many concerns at what had been presented.

Ian said: "Had I thought about the impact this presentation would have on elected members I would have gone into more detailed examples of where we are failing in our duty of care to our staff.

"Wellbeing issues, which UNISON have campaigned on for many years must be a priority for 2019.

"The council's monthly absence figures show consistently high percentages of work-related stress, anxiety and depression.

"Reduced staffing levels, high workloads and unachievable targets have all contributed to this.

"The effect on staff from the misuse of the



draconian absence management policy is not acceptable.

"Our members' health and wellbeing is suffering as a result of punitive action being taken after hospitalisation or industrial injury absence.

"Since this policy came into effect the joint trade unions have raised concerns at the lack of consistent decision-making and the length of time taken to resolve cases.

"Year on year budget cuts and austerity measures are no excuse for shortcuts in the health, safety and wellbeing of our members and colleagues."

UNISON will be actively engaging with management over the legal timescale of three months for the introduction of these committees across all departments.

## Waste and cleansing issues

**A** number of serious risks have been identified this year including an increase in dumped asbestos in waste and cleansing.

UNISON campaigned for a training programme, which is fit for purpose, to be introduced for all waste and cleansing operatives.

Unfortunately, efforts to have this rolled out have failed due to management's lack of engagement.

We have now been informed that the training will be carried out by an external organisation rather than by Edinburgh Scientific Services who had a programme in place since December 2017.

In street cleansing we continue to highlight concerns about the use of cage vehicles that are not fit for purpose.

Fleet continue to procure vehicles that have high body geometries that increase the possibility of manual handling injuries. Tools are stored in the back of the vehicles with the waste, hardly hygienic. Discussions have started with Fleet to identify alternatives.

In civic sites we continue to highlight a number of long term concerns affecting our members, including training on plant, machinery, Personal Protective Equipment, signage and traffic management amongst others.

## Staff safety in community centres and libraries

**W**e reported in a previous newsletter that in one of our community centres we identified an issue with Silica dust and have had a new cleaning programme put in place to reduce or eradicate exposure levels to our cleaning members.

Joint inspections with

corporate Health and Safety identified the need for an air quality survey, which we are currently arranging with Edinburgh Scientific Services.

Members in libraries have reported an increase in verbal and threatening abuse towards our staff.

Discussions with senior

management have been constructive in attempting to reduce threats of violence.

Inspections in community centres and libraries highlighted a lack of trained fire wardens and first aiders.

Ian Mullen, health and safety convener said:

"This remains a concern as UNISON requested the assistance of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service on two occasions this year.

"Unfortunately this is a council wide issue and we are potentially placing our staff and service users in danger."