

WE CAN GET THROUGH THIS TOGETHER

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

This newsletter is being edited at a time when specialist advice is being advanced on a daily basis. At a time when the World Health Organisation has declared Europe as the epicentre of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) at a time when many European countries are on shut down and when we have an indecisive British Government that has finally made the decision to have daily televised briefings, albeit belated, which may lead to unlimited restrictions. It is important to let you know that UNISON are working in partnership with colleagues from HR, the Incident Management Team and the Edinburgh Health & Social Care Partnership (EH&SCP) at this unprecedented time.

The council's departmental contingency plans are in place and are being updated when required. The Edinburgh Health & Social Care Partnership contingency plans are equally advanced and take into consideration different case scenarios including the possible re-opening of closed hospitals, transportation, protecting front line staff and the use of the private sector. Staff with specialised skills working elsewhere in the council may be requested to provide additional assistance and there is the

possibility that staff might have to be re-located.

Members concerns have been reflected in the number of calls received at the UNISON office over the last few weeks, these concerns have been raised at the highest level and as a result UNISON are meeting with colleagues from HR on a twice weekly basis.

Ian Mullen UNISON Health and Safety Convener said, "at a time when members, colleagues and their families are anxious of what will happen in the coming weeks and months it is important that we keep a level head and do not panic or cause undue stress. We are aware that information has not been cascaded down to front line staff especially to those that have no IT access or do not regularly attend their workplace, these members of staff are a priority and should not feel disengaged or excluded. I would encourage all colleagues to follow the available guidance and make use of all public building facilities, especially those working outside who have no or limited hand washing facilities. Some colleagues will find this time more anxious than others to deal with and I would ask that this is taken into consideration, we all have a responsibility at this time to support and respect each other

and I would encourage all line managers to take time out to listen to all our colleagues concerns and to cascade council information which can be found on the Orb". Additional information can be found on the UNISON branch website at: <http://unison-edinburgh.org.uk/coronavirus-covid-19-advice/>

For colleagues that do not have access to council IT facilities there is an external site, which can be accessed from your own personal devices at: <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/work-us/coronavirus---colleague-advice/1> This link and the Orb page will also contain information in relation to pay for employees, supply, agency, casual and tertiary workers. UNISON have been advised by HR that "this is very much a moving position and therefore we will need to revise our position as an organisation, as required. AskHR will be available for colleagues to contact.

However, if home working is required by the HR team, then alternatives measures may have to be put in place. Colleagues should speak to their line managers or check the Orb in advance as the team will be focused on supporting critical processes such as payroll".

Andrew Barnett

The branch was deeply saddened to hear of the sudden death of our former colleague and comrade Andrew Barnett.



Andrew was employed as an Environmental Warden and held a number of positions within the Edinburgh branch including branch secretary and health and safety convener. Andrew left the council three years ago to pursue a career as a health and safety advisor in the private sector and had recently re-joined the branch as a member after moving to a new employer. All our thoughts and condolences are with Andrew's wife, daughter, family and friends.

Fire Safety Compliance

UNISON continue to raise concerns about fire safety within the council estate after it was identified that some buildings had no fire co-ordinators or wardens on site. Ian Mullen said "we have been working with colleagues from FM and through the Fire Safety Working Group to find a solution to the current situation. With services being re-located and

trained co-ordinators and wardens either moving or leaving the council there are vacancies that have not been filled and we now have a shortage of voluntary fire and incident wardens. However, the number of requests for fire safety inspections especially in schools and nurseries have increased and it is concerning that we have had four fires in schools in the last twelve months". Any colleagues interested in becoming a fire warden should speak to their line manager, full internal training is available.

Asbestos Team Update

Thirteen months after taking the decision to place the Asbestos Team in abeyance no conclusive decision has been taken as to the future of the team. With an external investigation completed last year and a further fact finding exercise completed by Pincent Mason solicitors this year, we would have hoped that the teams future would have been decided. It is known that the team will no longer be under the management of Edinburgh Scientific Services but FM, how the final structure will look is yet to be determined. This has been a very stressful time for the team and any further delay's would not benefit team moral or their wellbeing.

Mental Health Awareness and Wellbeing

The HR team should be congratulated for introducing Mental Health Awareness and Wellbeing workshops into depots. This is something we have been working with HR on and feedback from members has been positive, it is hoped that this initiative could be further developed. Advice on health and wellbeing, finance and bike to work are a few of the services provided. Ian Mullen says "this is a positive start taking workshops in to depots and we

would like to see it progress further into Parks & Greenspace, Roads and for Care Workers, front line staff who are on their feet most of the day. Access and advice from physiotherapists and podiatrists would be beneficial as a similar survey in Kirklee Council, Yorkshire in 2019 showed a reduction of 8% in absence in the first year". Unfortunately, the council's latest dashboard figures show a continued increase in absence from work due to anxiety, depression, work related stress and fatigue syndrome from 30% in December 2019 to 44% in March 2020 of the overall absence.

Members are reminded that the council's Occupational Health Advisors Confidential Support line can be contacted 24 hours a day on 0800 882 4102 for those who are finding the current situation more stressful.

International Workers Memorial Day

International workers memorial day will be held on Tuesday 28th April 2020 in Princes Street Garden.

Additional Coronavirus Information

As a reminder you can obtain additional information from www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus.

If you have any concerns about your health or the health of someone else, please contact NHS 24 on 111 and notify your line manager.

UNISON will continue to keep you updated when more details are available.

If you are interested in becoming a UNISON shop steward or Health & Safety Representative please contact the branch office on 0131 558 7488 for further information.