Tower Hamlets UNISON

Annual General Meeting (Hybrid)

Tuesday 5th March 2024

12.30–1.45pm

Council Chamber

Town Hall, 160 Whitechapel Road, E1 1BJ

& on Microsoft Teams
Join on your computer, mobile app or room device
Click here to join the meeting
Meeting ID: 335 190 080 091
Passcode: zCgPoW

Guest speakers

- Apsana Begum – MP Poplar & Limehouse
- Barnet UNISON Mental Health Striker



Lunch provided from 12.15

One hour paid facility time agreed by Council Management for staff to attend. Members are encouraged to make this one of their 'in the office days' and attend in person.

This is the main AGM meeting and is part of a 'rolling' AGM to fit around different groups of staff and their work patterns.

All members are entitled to attend any of the AGM meetings, but can only vote on Branch wide matters in one meeting.

Schools AGM Satellite Meeting (Hybrid)

Thursday 7th March

4.30 – 5.30pm
Room C1, ground floor, Town Hall

& on Zoom
Join Zoom Meeting
https://bit.ly/Schools-AGM-7mar
Meeting ID: 823 8870 9780
Passcode: AGM2024

Refreshments from 4pm

Guest speaker

- Tom Barker (Ash Field Academy striker)



This AGM meeting is aimed at members who work in Schools.

Agenda

1. **Minutes**
   To approve the minutes of the 2023 AGM
2. **Guest Speakers**
   Apsana Begum MP & Barnet UNISON mental health striker
3. **Annual Report**
   To approve the 2023 Report
4. **Rita Ash Solidarity Award**
5. **Annual Estimates**
   To approve the financial estimates
6. **Branch Elections**
   Full list of nominations on pages 3 & 4
7. **Motions**
   – Organising on Pay – Defending the Right to Strike
   – Year of the LGBT+ Worker
   – Ceasefire Now!
   (see motions on page 4)
8. **Other Urgent Business**
   Chair to be notified in advance

AGM (virtual only) Meeting for those with Different Work Patterns

Wednesday 6th March

5pm – 6pm

Join Zoom Meeting
https://bit.ly/DiffWorkPatt-6mar
Meeting ID: 823 8870 9780
Passcode: AGM2024

Budget for 2024

Funding	£102,790.06
Locally collected subs	£3,000
Retired Members	£90
Unemployed Members	£20
	£105,900.06

Salaries, Pension, Tax & NI	£91,000
Admin & Postage	£6,000
Conf & Meets	£10,000
Other Meets	£1,000
Publicity	£4,000
Local Activities	£500
Education	£500

Donations	£2,500
Affiliations	£500
Activist expenses	£500
Other	£1,000
Audit	£300
IT	£600
£118,400	**£118,400**
	– £12,500

General Fund Balance at 31 December 2023:
£115,541.70

Industrial Action Fund Balance at 31 December 2023:
£1,695,854.92

Tower Hamlets UNISON
Town Hall, 2nd floor, 160 Whitechapel Road, E1 1BJ

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■ **Facebook:** Tower Hamlets Unison ■ **Twitter:** @UNISON_TH ■ **Instagram:** thunison
■ **Branch website:** https://towerhamlets.unison.site/

Tower Hamlets UNISON Annual Report 2023

As the AGM approaches, we find ourselves within months of a general election. After 14 years of Tory rule the UK is now a place where even those in many types of full-time work need to rely on food banks and top-up benefits because of poverty pay. Public services and schools continue to be hit hard by years of austerity policies, with the Tories introducing even further draconian legislation to restrict the right to strike. Whatever the eventual election outcome, we know the Council has a £40 million savings target and multiple restructures are in the pipeline.

We continue to swim in stormy waters where the need to be organised is greater than ever.

Transition

The last 12 months has been a time of enormous change and transition. In the 31 years since UNISON was formed our Branch has only had four Branch Secretaries – so when one departs and another is elected this always represents a significant moment in our Branch story. As I come to the end of year one and deliver my first annual report I want to thank all the members, activists and those within the local community who have welcomed me into the role; sent well wishes, offered support and have contributed to continuing the tradition of our Branch as being a fighting campaigning union.

Whilst solid Branch leadership is important, ultimately what makes us strong is having a large, engaged and active membership which understands that solidarity is our core value. This transcends any one individual.

Branch Office

The theme of change continued into July with the departure of Branch Administrator, Jackie Durand, who after 27 years of service, flew off to start a new career as a therapeutic counsellor. Stalwart Bernie Hall remains and has been joined by able newcomer, Jamie Donohue Strawbridge, who has whipped our social media accounts and the Branch website into shape. We are now posting regular updates to members using these channels.



Bernie and Jamie.

Despite all the changes, the office has maintained the service our members expect of their union.

The Branch 'Office' continues to be a bank of desks on the second floor – an unsatisfactory arrangement which we continue to press the CEO about; and we will be looking to members to help with a campaign if the matter is not resolved in the near future.

A Year of Solidarity

The last 12 months saw the continuation of a vibrant reawakening in the Trade Union movement which saw the nation gripped by multiple strikes. The new Town Hall became a natural local focal point for lobbies and picket lines.Through the year Tower Hamlets UNISON visited picket lines and rallies, sent speakers, messages of support and strike hardship fund donations.

We remembered those who stood with us during the Tower Rewards strikes of 2020, such as Camden and Barnet UNISON, and reciprocated in kind when their members walked out in local disputes.



Taking solidarity to CAMDEN picket line.

New Town Hall

While many welcomed the move to Whitechapel, for others it was not straightforward. We advocated for members with disabilities who found that the new site did not adequately factor in their need for reasonable adjustments. We ran a high-profile campaign to challenge the Council's decision to spend scarce public money to repurpose the Refectory staff canteen into an exclusive VIP executive area only months after the move – shunting staff into an inferior dingy space on the 4th floor to eat their lunches. Whilst the fight was, in the end, not won, we exposed the plan; triggered a formal Planning Committee Hearing on the proposal in full glare of the media, and sent a message to Council senior management (who engaged in crude censorship and threats to try and control/muffle staff disapproval).

NJC Pay for Council and Schools Workers

Over the summer activists worked hard to turn out the YES for industrial action vote in the disaggregated NJC national pay ballot after we were again presented with another pay offer which represented a real terms pay cut. While nationally there was a strong YES vote, unfortunately not enough employers hit the tough 50+% turnout threshold imposed by the Tories. Our national NJC Committee made the pragmatic decision in July to settle the claim and plan for the next one. Unfortunately, this was not resolved until November due to the actions of the other NJC unions who opted to ballot much later in the year or hold small strikes in a handful of areas well into early winter.

Our local ballot result at 45.6% was far above the national average of 31%, it was the third largest turnout in greater London, and the largest ballot pool in the region. While ultimately not won, it was a respectable result thanks to the hard work of many who phone banked and campaigned, and prior to the imposition of anti-union laws in 2017 it would have been considered a thumping strike mandate. We now need to learn lessons from the ballot to build a strong campaign for pay going forward.



School stewards' meeting.



You are better off in UNISON

Annual Report by Kerie Anne (Branch Secretary)

Over the past year Tower Hamlets UNISON has:

- Organised our members in Tower Hamlets Homes to resist detrimental contractual changes
- Developed our organisation in schools
- Supported members in organisational reviews
- Continued to build our stewards and activists organisation
- Represented scores of members in individual sickness, disciplinary, grievance, discrimination and job evaluation procedures
- Defended jobs, pay, conditions and procedural protections locally
- Been part of building the wider opposition and resistance to austerity and anti-union programmes
- Taken solidarity to a wide range of disputes
- Supported the development of branch activists through training, seminars and conferences

Collective and Individual Representation

We have represented, advocated for, advised and supported scores of members facing reorganisations or involved in HR procedures – such as sickness, disciplinary, grievance or discrimination cases; helped many members win upgrades and won personal injury compensation for a number of members injured at work.

We have pressed the Council to sign up to UNISON's Anti-Racism Charter and challenged detrimental proposals when these have been brought forward. We remain adamant that we will not tolerate the depreciation of our conditions or forgo any of our procedural protections without a fight.

For the first time in recent memory we were successful in getting the Council to fly its flag at half-mast on International Workers Memorial Day – with the memories of those who had died or developed lifelong conditions providing public services in Tower Hamlets during the Covid Pandemic utmost in our minds.

Schools

Our organisation in schools has continued to grow, led by Assistant Branch Secretary, Justine Kohl, with the Schools Committee meeting at intervals throughout the academic year and with plans to increase the frequency.

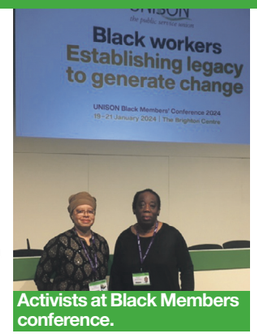
An attempt to foist the undertaking of medical procedures on a group of special needs TAs for no extra pay was thwarted by solid organising and we continue to work on the problem of TA grades not keeping up with the complexity of tasks expected of them. The challenging of private school meal providers who do not pay an adequate cost of living award also continues, with reported success at four schools. A shocking recent discovery of a handful of schools not paying its kitchen staff even the London Living Wage has given birth to the skeleton of a new campaign and proves that we cannot be complacent about even the most basic terms and conditions in schools.

Tower Hamlets Homes

October saw the THH Stewards Committee, led by Convenor Jason Crofts, and THH members successfully organise to fight off an arguably unlawful proposal by the Council to pervert their TUPE protection rights by transferring them into the Council on inferior contractual conditions.

International Solidarity

October also saw an upsurge in conflict in Palestine/Israel which distressed many members. UNISON condemned the hostage taking and targeting of civilians by Hamas, and also called for a ceasefire to halt the relentless bombing of Gaza which had turned the tiny strip into a wasteland, killing thousands. We supported events organised by PSC and partnered with the Staff Muslim Forum to hold an awareness raising webinar; a Branch bucket collection raised over £2,600 for Medical Aid for Palestinians.



Activists at Black Members conference.

Strong Team

Our team of Stewards and Officers have withstood the transitional challenges of the last year. Assistant Branch Secretaries Steve Evans and Justine Kohl, and Convenor Jason Crofts have been invaluable organisers and representatives. Interim Treasurer Mick Knight retired, and Co-Chair Mario Kyriacou will now step into the role.

We have sent many activists on training courses/events to aid their development as reps and promoted events to encourage Black members to become activists and take on leadership roles within the Branch. We have also sent delegates to all of the major UNISON policy making conferences to ensure our Branch's voice is heard – including Black members, Disabled members, LGBT+ members and Women's conferences.

I would like to thank all of our Stewards, Convenors, Workplace contacts, Branch Committee members, Officers and Branch Administrators for the hard work they have put in on behalf of members, and all our members for their ongoing support.

Affiliations: Stand up to Racism, Campaign Against Climate Change, CND, Homes for All, Tower Hamlets Trades Council; PSC.

Nominations for Branch Officer posts 2024

The following are elected unopposed:

- **SECRETARY: Kerie Anne**
- **CHAIR: Amina Patel**
- **ASST SECRETARIES: Steve Evans, Justine Kohl**
- **TREASURER: Mario Kyriacou**
- **HEALTH & SAFETY OFFICER: Tom Leach**
- **WOMENS EQUALITY OFFICER: Sue Nolan**
- **LGBT+ EQUALITY OFFICER: Thomas French**
- **INTERNATIONAL OFFICER: Oliver Kianchehr**
- **EDUCATION OFFICER: Bridget Galloway**
- **WELFARE OFFICER: Shamine Kanabar/ James Wakefield (job share)**
- **COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER: Jonathan Mort**
- **YOUNG MEMBERS OFFICER: Isaac Hoeschen**
- **DIRECTORATE CONVENORS: Carly Holmes – Childrens Services Amina Patel – HASC Jason Crofts – (ex THH)**
- **RETIRED MEMBERS SECRETARY: John McLoughlin**

Nominations will be taken at the meeting for the following posts as no nominations were received. To discuss any of them phone the Branch office on 020 7364 5032 or go to: *https://www.unison.org.uk/about/our-organisation/activists/branch-roles/*

- **BLACK MEMBERS EQUALITY OFFICER**
- **DISABLED MEMBERS EQUALITY OFFICER**
- **SOCIAL OFFICER**
- **ENVIRONMENTAL OFFICER**
- **LABOUR LINK OFFICER**
- **TWO AUDITORS**
- **DIRECTORATE CONVENORS X 4**

Conference delegates

LOCAL GOVERNMENT DELEGATES (4 places)
- **Wendy Harris** (low paid woman reserved seat)
- **Dionne Mottley**
- **Steve Evans / Thomas French** (sharers)
- **Kerie Anne**

NATIONAL DELEGATES CONFERENCE (3 places)
- **Wendy Harris** (low paid woman reserved seat)
- **Dionne Mottley / Kerie Anne** (sharers)
- **Isaac Hoeschen** (Young member reserved seat)

The delegation composition must comply with UNISON's proportionality and fair representation rules (Women/Black members/ Young members).

Motions

Motion 1

Organising on Pay – Defending the Right to Strike

This Branch notes:

1. Council and schools workers have suffered many years of pay awards that have eaten away at the real value of our pay by 27% since 2008.

2. Tory anti-union laws imposed in 2017, which mandate that a 50+% turnout in a postal ballot must be achieved to take lawful industrial action, have been a serious barrier to our ability to fight poor national pay offers with strike action.

3. Over 2023 and 2024 there was widespread and inspiring industrial action on pay and conditions across the public and transport sectors. This demonstrates that with hard work and smart organising, despite the legal hurdles, it is still possible to obtain the required turnout when balloting large pools.

4. In response the Tory Government has cynically imposed even more draconian and anti-democratic anti-strike legislation – The Minimum Services Standard Act 2023 is now in force and places additional severe restrictions on the fundamental rights of workers to take strike action to defend pay and conditions.

5. There was a significant increase in overall national turnout for UNISON's 2023 NJC pay ballot (31%) as compared to 2021 (14%); with Tower Hamlets UNISON being far above the average in 2023 and coming very close to the threshold (45.6%). This serves to demonstrate the good organising makes a real difference in beating the anti-union threshold.

6. UNISON Branches such as Barnet, Brighton, and South Gloucestershire are finding an alternative route to addressing pay beyond the national NJC pay claim by taking strike action to force the payment of market supplements by employers for some occupational groups.

7. Work on the national NJC pay claim/offer for 2024/25 is currently underway.

This Branch resolves to:

1. Undertake a local review of the 2023 pay ballot campaign to learn lessons and implement any changes necessary in preparation for the next Pay campaign.

2. Continue to develop our shop floor network of Pay Champions, Stewards and Workplace contacts in preparation for the next pay campaign/ consultation/ ballot. Undertake work to try and identify a pay champion/ workplace contact in every school in Tower Hamlets.

3. Should Labour win the next general election, make use of UNISON's Labour Link function to press it to repeal the anti-union legislation including the Minimum Services Act by identifying a Labour Link officer to represent the Branch in the union's Labour Link structures; in the meantime, continue to support campaigns against Tory anti-union initiatives/legislation.

4. Continue to provide solidarity to other disputes by encouraging members to visit picket lines/rallies of other unions and UNISON branches; and donate £2,500 to live disputes over the next year.

Motion 2

Year of the LGBT+ Worker

This Branch notes:

1. Fighting for equality and challenging all forms of discrimination in the workplace and in society is a value that lies at the heart of the Trade Union movement.

2. Inspired by UNISON's Year of the Disabled Worker (2022) and Year of the Black Worker(2023), the union has now decreed 2024 to be the year of the LGBT+ Worker (YOLGBT+W).

3. UNISON's LGBT+ National Committee has for many years worked hard to raise the profile of the achievements of LGBT+ workers through the union and in workplaces.

4. There are many achievements of note, including the repeal of Section 28, equalisation of the age of consent, and the introduction of civil partnerships and marriage for LGBT+ people.

5. There is still a long way to go to achieve true equality and some have an agenda to systematically remove hard won LGBT+ rights, while hate crimes against the trans community are at an all-time high.

6. The origin of 'Pride' was (and remains) one of public protest as well as celebration. In 2023 the Tory Government introduced controversial new legislation (the Public Order Act) placing further restrictions on protest rights.

7. This year will provide the opportunity to raise awareness of LGBT+ rights throughout the union, challenge discrimination in the workplace and society, and recruit and grow the LGBT+ Branch activists of the future.

8. For the first time, our Branch Committee will have designated LGBT+ Equality Officer to lead on local LGBT+ issues.

This Branch resolves

To call on Branch Officers to

1. Develop a plan of action to integrate all aspects of UNISON's LGBT+ agenda at work into our organising.

2. Organise/promote events to encourage and support the development of LGBT+ activists and leaders in the Branch.

3. Support and sponsor local events on the LGBT+ calendar, such as History month and Pride.

4. Encourage members to understand and support the diversity of the LGBT+ community by promoting and encouraging attendance at events such as UK Black Pride, London Trans+ Pride and Imaan LGBTQI Muslim Support.

5. Circulate national resources and tool kits developed by UNISON to promote the YOLGBT+ worker.

6. Continue the outreach work already underway with the Tower Pride Network with a view to co-working on identified issues and sponsoring events.

Motion 3

Ceasefire Now!

This Branch notes:

1. The war in Gaza/Israel has become prolonged, with significant loss of civilian life and casualties in Gaza, mass displacement, destruction of the majority of the civilian/ health infrastructure and with the spectre of famine looming. The UN has described the situation in Gaza as 'catastrophic'.

2. UNISON's General Secretary, Christina McAnea condemned the 7 October Hamas attack; called for the immediate release of all hostages; called for a ceasefire and an end to the collective punishment of Palestinian civilians by the relentless bombing which has occurred since.

3. Tower Hamlets UNISON members responded magnificently to the call for humanitarian solidarity by raising over £2600 for Medical Aid for Palestinians Gaza Appeal via a staff/resident bucket collection.

4. There has been a rise in reported Antisemitic and Islamophobic hate crimes in the UK since October 2023 believed to be linked to the conflict.

5. The Branch is affiliated to Stand up to Racism and the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

This Branch resolves to:

1. Continue to support, publicise and encourage attendance at local and national anti-war events which call on the UK Government and Opposition to demand a ceasefire and ensure that adequate humanitarian aid is able to flow.

2. Agree to the Staff Muslim Forum's outreach to work together to explore co-hosting fundraising/ awareness raising events on the conflict and occupation.

3. Support, promote and encourage attendance at events organised by Stand up to Racism to raise awareness of, and challenge Antisemitism and Islamophobia.

4. Make a donation to the Red Cross emergency Gaza appeal of £200.

5. Explore undertaking another Bucket Collection for humanitarian aid.

Design and layout by Andy Smith & Denise Bell (NUJ) – *info@smithplusbell.com* / Printed by Solopress Ltd.