

Tower Power
Summer 2024

UNISON

Tower Hamlets – fighting for jobs, safety and services

Special *Leisure Services* edition



Welcome 'home'

Message from the Branch Secretary

I would like to warmly welcome all former GLL Leisure staff into the Council's workforce. UNISON has long campaigned for the insourcing of our public services, and we are thrilled that Leisure staff/ services have finally 'come home'. The Council is a unionised work environment that recognises and operates a system of collective bargaining through the Trade Unions, where staff are encouraged to join a union and are provided with paid release from their usual jobs to undertake Trade Union duties.

Unity is Strength

While it might not be obvious straight away, it means that this is a very different environment to work in – and one where workers (through their union) have much more power than what you would have been used to whilst working for GLL. UNISON is the biggest NJC Trade Union in the Council with a proud history of fighting and campaigning for its members on a wide range of local and national issues. We stand against discrimination and inequality and have a zero tolerance for bullying, harassment and violence at work. Having a large and engaged membership is what makes us strong and means that the Council must listen to us when we raise concerns. The bigger we are, the more influence and leverage we bring to any conflict with an employer.

BRINGING SERVICES HOME



UNISON members outside the Town Hall.

Update

This newsletter is to update you on some of the actions UNISON has been taking, with the goal of improving your terms and conditions and resolving problems that our Leisure members have flagged up. It will also provide information on the NJC pay award that you will receive and highlight some of the many benefits of UNISON membership. If you are not a member already, we hope you will join our UNISON Trade Union family; and if you already are, we invite you will get active in your Branch.

Kerie Anne
UNISON Branch Secretary

Get in touch with UNISON

The UNISON Branch Office is located on the 2nd floor of the Town Hall, 160 Whitechapel High Street. We are the only union in the Council that runs a fully staffed office open during usual business hours, five days a week. Our members have to go into work – so we do too! If you need to get hold of UNISON, we are easy to reach. You can contact our dedicated Administrators (Bernie and Jamie) who will be happy to discuss any work-related problem, help you with membership/ joining queries or refer you to the relevant steward. They can be reached on **0207 364 6515** or **0207 364 5302**, or email ***jamie.donohue-strawbridge@towerhamlets.gov.uk*** or ***bernadette.hall@towerhamlets.gov.uk***


Bernie and Jamie

Stay in touch with Tower Hamlets UNISON

FOLLOW OUR
Branch website:
https://towerhamlets.unison.site/

Facebook
Tower Hamlets UNISON

Twitter/X
@UNISON_TH

Instagram
thunison

Tower Hamlets UNISON TowerPower Special Leisure Services Edition Summer 2024

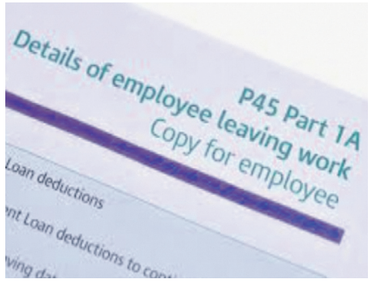
What has UNISON been doing?

Here are just some of the Leisure problems that have had our attention:

Fancy cleaning a dirty toilet? – No!

When Leisure members complained to UNISON that they were being instructed to undertake cleaning tasks on top of their usual jobs, the union got straight onto the Council. It appears that there were hardly any cleaners engaged by GLL and Leisure staff were being forced to mop out and clean the toilets and other spaces. We have pressed the Council on this and have been informed that cleaners are now in place at all Leisure sites, and that staff will no longer be compelled to undertake cleaning duties. We need our members to monitor the situation and to let us know if any problems persist. **You should not be instructed to grab a mop or plunger and sort out a disgusting loo anymore– get in touch with the Branch Office if you are.**





P45s – this is just a fiasco

What exactly is going on in the GLL Payroll Department? Many members have contacted the UNISON office to complain about the failure of GLL to provide their P45s in a timely manner. An employer must provide a P45 without unreasonable delay, although there is no legal time frame specified, it is usually agreed that this is on the last day of work – but nearly two months on GLL had *still* not provided the P45s.

Reduced pay

The P45 document is important when you start a new job, as it ensures your new employer knows which tax code should be applied to your first pay. If it hasn't been sent prior to your pay date, then you may end up on an emergency tax code resulting in a reduced wage packet. This is what happened to many former GLL staff, causing anxiety and stress.

Demand

UNISON got onto to the GLL payroll department to demand the release of our members' P45s and also sent all members information on how they could make an emergency application to UNISON's welfare charity for a nonrefundable grant to help financially tie them over until the fiasco was sorted. We understand that the P45s have at last been received (a whopping eight weeks after the date of transfer) by the Council's payroll department, with GLL opting to 'go retro' and send them in hardcopy form (just to add to the delay). Hopefully this brings to an end this unnecessary and protracted fiasco.

Pay and Conditions – No to a two-tier workforce!

UNISON has been pushing senior Council management to ensure the fair treatment of ex-GLL staff. We want our members to be harmonised onto the Council's pay scales, to benefit from access to additional pay increments, and to have the same annual leave entitlement as Council staff. The Council's measures letter had some positive content about providing the NJC annual pay award, access to the LG pension scheme, and other policy benefits – BUT we want our transferred members to get the same entitlement as Council staff to ALL benefits over and above what GLL contractually provided.

TUPE permits changes to contracts after transfer with mutual consent if the new employer's Ts and Cs are better. While the new employer is not legally obligated to offer this, arguably as a progressive public sector employer the Council should not be creating a two-tier workforce, so UNISON is pressing this as an equalities and fairness issue.

We have also been pushing senior managers to commit to a schedule of job description reviews and new job evaluations in order to obtain fairer pay than what GLL provided for roles and to address certain pay anomalies.

Unfairness

We are aware that there are some people doing the same job but who are on vastly different pay. How can this be right? Also, how can it be fair that when people are recruited into vacancies, they go onto Council contracts that are better than what former GLL workers (who are doing the same job) are on? At the end of May UNISON formally wrote to the Simon Baxter, Corporate Director for Leisure, to make our position clear.

Branch members campaign for fair treatment in 2020.



Picture: Guy Smallman

News flash!

As we go to press Council managers have told UNISON that they intend to start a process of harmonising some full time staff onto 35 hours pw contracts at no financial detriment and will start to equalise pay across certain roles, and will then look to roll this out more widely over a series of months. We do not have full details at this time – but if this does not happen fast enough, we will be looking to Leisure members to take part in a campaign for fair treatment. While change of this scale always takes time and requires consultation, steady progress needs to be made. We will not tolerate a two-tier workforce.

Watch this space!

there for you

supporting UNISON members when life gets tough

You're not alone – UNISON Welfare Charity

UNISON is unique in that it is the only union with its own registered charity called **'There for You'**. It provides a wide array of practical and financial support services and supports members in a variety of ways mainly through confidential advice and financial assistance in the form of grants. Each year the charity gives out around £500,000 in grants to members and its main goal is to provide financial assistance as a short-term safety net. This includes schemes that provide grants to members for their children's school uniforms, help with winter fuel bills, financial assistance, and full or partially funded respite/ wellbeing breaks. The union owns its own holiday resort on the beautiful Devon coastline so union members can book seaside holidays for their families at a greatly reduced cost. Our Branch has two Welfare Officers who can assist members to make applications to 'There for you'.



Meet James Wakefield, Branch Welfare Officer:

'UNISON Leisure members and their families who are eligible can access grants from *'There for You'* for help with a host of matters such as replacing household appliances, urgent repairs, disability equipment/adaptations, utility bills, school uniforms and funeral costs etc. If you have any questions or want to make an application to 'There for You' please get in touch with me via the Branch Office.

● **For information about 'There for You' go to: *https://www.unison.org.uk/get-help/services-support/there-for-you/***

UNISON College

UNISON College – get learning!

Did you know that as a UNISON member you have access to a massive and varied adult education programme, most of it free, through UNISON College? There are a variety of learning opportunities for members ranging from short workshops and one day courses to longer programmes. All our free courses aim to build your confidence and give you a range of skills and knowledge not only at work, but outside too. So, whether its stress management, assertiveness, improving you writing or computer skills, or continuing professional development, UNISON College has something for you.

Financial help with learning

Or maybe you are interested in studying for that qualification you never got when you were younger through a non-UNISON course? As a UNISON member you can often get discounts on courses from many organisations and our member learning grants can also help towards the cost of these courses as well as the cost of textbooks and exam fees.



Branch Education Officer, Bridget Galloway:

'I believe that you never stop learning and I encourage you to check out the huge range of training courses UNISON offers and our learning grants. I am happy to be contacted via our Branch office to discuss these.'

● **For more info on UNISON College as well as the types of grants/financial support the union can provide for course fees: *https://learning.unison.org.uk/college/***

The UNISON Legal Service

UNISON provides high-quality legal services to members and their families across a wide range of issues. Check out this table.

	Members	Members' families
Employment advice	✔ Free	✘
Personal Injury advice following an accident/injury:		
(i) Accidents at work including industrial and work-related diseases	✔ Free	✘
(ii) Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) work-related injury due to a crime of violence	✔ Free	✘
(iii) Accidents outside work including road traffic accidents and holiday accidents†	✔ Free	✔ Free
Criminal law advice defending work related criminal charges	✔ Free*	✘
Wills standard wills service	✔ Free** Incl' joint will	✔ Special rates
Conveyancing	✔ Special rates	✔ Special rates
Free initial legal advice e on any non work issue up to 30 minutes advice°	✔ Free	✘
Clinical negligence	✔ Free***	✔ Free***

To see all the benefits UNISON members enjoy go to: *https://benefits.unison.org.uk/*

Joining UNISON

Joining UNISON is simple and easy:

● **Scan the QR code – see right**

● **Phone or call by the UNISON office to collect/ fill in a new joiners' form – 0207 364 5302**

● **Online – join securely online at *https://www.unison.org.uk/***

UNISON is coming to your Leisure Centre


Jonathan Mort

Keep your eyes peeled for UNISON Branch Committee members, JON MORT and ISSAC HOESCHEN. They will be touring all Leisure Centres, speaking to members and answering your questions. Isaac is the Branch's Young Members Officer while Jon is the Communications Officer. They will also be inspecting all the staff-only areas, as the union has received reports that some are on the grotty side and are cold in winter. We want to view their suitability and hear from members about how they can be improved. Be sure to say 'Hi' when Isaac and Jon visit your site.


Isaac Hoeschen

A message from JONATHAN MORT – Branch Coms & Social Officer

THE UNION MAKES US STRONG

Welcome to Tower Hamlets, welcome to public service!

I'm sure this is an exciting time to be working in Tower Hamlets Leisure centres. That said there's a number of differences working as a public servant rather than for a private company like GLL, one of the biggest is unions. In the private sector unions have been beaten to within an inch of their lives, allowing bosses to take advantage of workers as they want, a situation I'm sure you can all remember.

This is less true in the public sector; at Tower Hamlets we have a mainly unionised workforce. UNISON is the largest union at the council. We negotiate pay (which is why unionised workers get paid more), we protect our workers from unfair disciplinary actions, we have our own welfare programme for when times get hard, and we will fight tirelessly for our members. If you're fed up with feeling powerless at work, take the power you're owed back, join UNISON! I look forward to meeting you when I visit your centre.

What is the NJC?

Now that you work for the Council you are eligible for the NJC pay award. But what exactly is the NJC? For 1.5 million workers in local government and schools, their pay and conditions are determined by the National Joint Council (NJC), making it the largest negotiating body in the UK. The NJC is made up of representatives from UNISON and other Trade Unions and the national Employers.

UNISON has over half the Trade Union seats on the NJC, making it the majority union. Most years the NJC enters into talks about an annual pay award (rise) and UNISON asks members to vote on whatever the Employers eventually offer us. This year UNISON submitted a pay claim for £3000 or 10% whatever was greater – but the Employers only offered £1,575 FTE. UNISON ran a consultation over June and members voted to reject the Employer offer as it was too low.

This is another important reason to always be part of the union. Unless you are a member of an NJC union you will have no right to vote on and participate in the decision making about your pay, conditions and pensions. **As we go to press, we are waiting to hear more about what the next steps will be on this year's pay offer. Members will receive regular email updates.**



The UNISON Branch Committee – ordinary members just like you!



Get active in your union – become a Steward or Workplace contact

The union is made up of ordinary members just like you. TH UNISON is run by and for its members – who train as Stewards, Health and Safety Officers and a range of other roles; They advise, support and represent members when they run into difficulties at work and campaign for a fairer workplace. A Branch Committee meets once a month, and an AGM is held every year. We have a built up a local £1.6 million local strike fund – so if strike action is ever called, TH members don't suffer any hardship. We want to elect a Steward at every Leisure Centre or have a workplace contact identified who can distribute union publicity. Full training and support are provided. If you are interested in getting active contact the Branch Office.

TowerPower is published by Tower Hamlets UNISON, Town Hall, 2nd floor, 160 Whitechapel Road, London E1 1BJ
Design and layout by Andy Smith & Denise Bell (NUJ) – *info@smithplusbell.com* / Printed by Solopress Ltd.