



# Bristol UNISON Annual Report 2024

## Branch Secretary Report – Paula Sharley

Once again, I'd like to start by thanking everyone for the support, they have given myself and the rest of the Branch Officers within the branch. We all take on our roles as volunteers and are often working in our own time to ensure our members are supported through the difficulties that they find themselves in usually through no fault of their own.

I'd also like to thank those Branch Officers and reps who have for various reasons decided not to stand for re-election this year; we will miss you and thank you for all your hard work. And welcome to the new Branch Officers and reps, I look forward to working with you all.

This year has seen our branch come out of regional supervision, which means that we are now able to make decisions for our branch without asking permission first. This decision was made by our regional secretary as it was felt that we are now in a more sustainable position, although that doesn't mean that we don't still have hard decisions to make.

We held a branch development day at the beginning of October which has helped us to develop a plan on how we grow our branch in a way that supports our members and helps them to find their voices to challenge managers in which ever organisation they work. More than 20 of our fabulous reps and Branch Officers along with our employed staff attended this day and everyone had the chance to ask questions and put forward ideas on how we can move forward. We were supported at this event by our Regional Organiser Siobhan Brown and one of the Area Organiser's from the Bristol office Tina Green, without their support on the day and the continuing support they and their colleagues have given us we would not be able to move forward and put our plan into action.

I have been attending various regional meetings including Regional Council and the Local Government Service Group and now sit on the Service Group Committee.

These meetings have been a valuable way for me to meet and work with other branch secretaries from our neighbouring branches.

With the continuing shortfall of funding from central government the coming year is going to continue to be difficult but with all of our Branch Officers and Reps with us, we will continue to grow our branch and support our membership to the best of our abilities. I must give special mention to our employed staff who have worked through difficult times this year, without Steve, Josh, Nicola and Sarah we really couldn't support our members in the way we do.

Lastly can I say to all our reps, members and branch employed staff we couldn't do it without you, and it has been an honour to have been your Branch Secretary over the last year.

Thank you to everyone in our UNISON family.

### **Branch Chair Report - Teresa Crichton**

This report provides an overview of my role as Branch Chair of Bristol UNISON over the past year. It highlights key achievements and challenges faced.

As Branch Chair, I have focused on ensuring a strong, supportive role within the branch. I have worked closely with the branch management team to foster collaboration and to ensure that our meetings were productive with clear outcomes. I have participated in regular meetings with branch officers to record, assess and address ongoing issues. I attend meetings with BCC senior management, escalating member issues through the correct channels and via the SW Regional Office.

I am pleased to report that as a Branch we are keeping our membership at a stable rate and have approximately 60 reps supporting some 4850 members, with the assistance of four employed Branch staff.

As a workplace representative I love working to support our members in their workplace issues, providing strong representation in negotiations and advocating for fair treatment and rights.

### **Challenges we face as a Branch:**

There are challenges that require our ongoing attention, here are just two examples of what we are striving for

- Managing the ongoing impacts of public sector cuts and austerity measures on our membership
- Improving communication and reducing barriers to engagement for underrepresented groups

In the coming year, I plan to build on the progress we've made and focus on the following priorities:

- Continuing efforts to improve workplace conditions, particularly in light of ongoing political and economic challenges.
- Strengthening our advocacy for social justice and workers' rights

I am proud of what we have accomplished and I look forward to continuing our work to support and represent our members.

### **Health & Safety Officer Report – Paula Sharley**

Another busy year for Health & Safety reps in our branch. We have been supporting members who are feeling under extreme pressure due to being expected to do more in their workplace without extra resources, and those members who are still experiencing long lasting effects of COVID and everything that came with the pandemic.

Within Bristol City Council the Joint Trade Unions Health & Safety Team have continued to work with the Disabled Colleagues Network to ensure that the Reasonable Adjustments Policy is followed and measures put in place to ensure colleagues are able to work in a way to maintain their health & safety in the workplace. This has resulted in a revised policy that now says that the best person to ask about what adjustments are required is the employee, it is also explicit that a referral to Occupational Health should be the last resort and certainly not because 'you haven't been for a while'. We are represented at the Disabled Colleagues Project Board and will be continued to ensure that the needs of all our members are represented.

At this time of employers wanting to move away from agile working, we need our Health & Safety Reps more than ever, a lot of members are feeling pressured to return to the workplace by managers and colleagues. These members need support to continue to work from home safely and productively. If any member would like any further information in how to become a Safety rep and what the role involves, please get in touch with myself or the branch office.

All Safety reps continue to offer advice to our members in the non-BCC employers on how best to negotiate flexibility time agreements with their employers and on solutions to problems, with I think some success. We will obviously continue to offer advice and guidance to all who ask for it. Something that is often overlooked by employers is that our Health & Safety Reps have often received more training in Health and Safety than many of their managers who have Health and Safety as a responsibility allocated to them.

### **Equalities Coordinators Report - Rosie Legg and Rene Fonyuy**

It's been our first year in role in the jointly held Equalities Coordinator role, so we have spent time building connections and developing our skills, notably at the 2024 Branch Officer training weekend held in July.

Over the course of that weekend, we recognised the valuable contribution of self-organised groups (SOGs) and began to formulate plans to support the development of these groups within the Bristol Branch. SOGs provide a great forum for engaging with the membership and encourage members to get active around issues that they are already passionate about. It is important that the groups are member-led and sustainable, so it helps to build in areas where there is already member activity and meetings taking place. For this reason, and to ensure that our workload is

manageable, the first steps will be to support the establishment of SOGs of Young Members, Women and Black Members in the branch.

We were an active part of the Branch development day held in October and will lead on work to strengthen the Branch's relationship with the regional team, ensuring that issues that affect our members are escalated appropriately.

A key part of the coordinator role is communicating with members about key issues and changes in legislation. At the end of October, we produced a briefing on the Worker Protection Act that places new duties on employers to proactively protect their staff from sexual harassment.

This year sees new employer obligations regarding reporting of race pay gaps, so look out for further information from us on that.

We have and continue to explore arranging a trans awareness training session and other equality empowering seminars that we support our marginalised colleagues and members. We are happy to liaise with other branches to deliver this as this might reduce any associated cost and turn out might be better. We are aware of a particular branch that is happy to team up with this initiative.

We are focusing on ensuring that as a branch going forward, we will jointly engage, collaborate, and celebrate key dates and milestones with SOG as a show of support, allyship and solidarity.

As branch officers, we are focusing on ensuring that members have access to educational tools/resources insofar as it empowers and dismantled inequalities. Majority of these tools/resources are free/downloadable from Unison portal.

### **Black Members Officer Report – Georgia Ramsay**

The Bristol Unison Black Members group has had an active and impactful year in 2024. This report outlines our key activities, the steps taken to enhance member engagement, and our strategies for promoting diversity, particularly the recruitment of more Black stewards. We also reflect on our ongoing contributions to community and institutional discussions around equality and inclusion.

#### **Key Activities:**

##### **Participation in the Unison National Black Members Committee Conference**

Unison Bristol Black Members attended the National Black Members Committee Conference in Brighton. We were unable to attend the regional meeting, due to the timing of the trains.

##### **Community Engagement Events**

We were unable to host a Unison stall at the Festus event at Trinity Church this year, due to the bad weather. The celebrating Caribbean and Black British culture. The event featured family activities, workshops, and cultural performances. Through our presence, we raised awareness of Unison's mission, guided attendees to their

stewards, and connected with potential members so it was a shame that there was a red weather warning but we are looking forward to 2025 event.

### **Unison Black Members attended the Community Meeting on Predictive Policing Algorithms.**

#### **Drop-In Sessions**

Monthly drop-in sessions were introduced to provide a space for Black members to voice concerns, discuss workplace issues, and share ideas. These sessions have been instrumental in fostering open dialogue and identifying actionable solutions for workplace equity.

#### **Collaboration with the University of Bristol and Bristol Magistrates**

We actively participated in consultations addressing the University's historic links to slavery. This included contributing to discussions on reparative justice and institutional inclusivity, ensuring that community perspectives were represented in policy-making processes on going.

#### **Recruitment of Black Stewards**

Increasing the number of Black stewards remains a priority. Representation within the steward body ensures that diverse voices are included in workplace advocacy. Below are strategies to achieve this:

Recruiting Regional Black Reps, who will report back to the Bristol Black members Committee.

1. **Targeted Outreach:**

- Promote steward roles during drop-in sessions and community events.
- Collaborate with local organizations and cultural groups to identify potential candidates.

2. **Mentorship Programs:**

- Pair new stewards with experienced mentors to build confidence and skills.

3. **Accessible Training:**

- Offer flexible, hybrid training sessions that accommodate different schedules and learning styles.
- Provide funding for childcare and travel to remove participation barriers.

4. **Recognition and Support:**

- Publicly acknowledge the contributions of Black stewards to inspire others.
- Ensure ongoing professional development opportunities.

#### **Evaluation of 2024 Initiatives**

##### **Strengths:**

- The monthly drop-in sessions have improved engagement and highlighted specific member concerns.
- Collaboration with institutions like the University of Bristol has amplified our voice on critical issues of racial justice.

### **Challenges:**

- Recruiting new stewards requires continuous effort to overcome barriers such as time constraints and lack of awareness about the role.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

2024 has been a productive year for Bristol Unison Black Members. Moving forward, we aim to:

- Expand the reach of our drop-in sessions through enhanced advertising and partnerships.
- Next session will be held on the 24th of February 2025, at noon to 2pm.
- Actively support Black members interested in becoming stewards by addressing barriers to participation.
- Maintain our presence at key community events to ensure visibility and engagement.
- By continuing these efforts, we hope to foster a more inclusive and representative Unison community.

### **UNISON South West Black Members Rep Report – Rene Fonyuy**

Please see separate report

### **Women’s Officer Report – Rebecca Batt**

Another busy year in my role as woman officer and active Steward.

We have grown the Menopause staff led group to 600 members. Put on several really powerful menopause talks with guest speakers including, dietician, Menopause clinician, GP and specialists. These sessions are recorded and saved in the menopause Library on teams to refer to and catch up if members are unable to attend the session.

The many training courses put on via Unison have been a good way of keeping my knowledge and skills up to date, including equality and health and safety.

I have been involved in the remoulding of the Bristol branch inputting my thoughts and idea on what an effective branch looks like and attending the training day last year. Put on the recruitment day at City Hall to sign up new members and reps to directorates that are lacking in Union representation.

I attended International Women’s day event at City Hall and fed back on my involvement in the Cycle of change short film Understanding menopause. This little film forms part of our menopause toolkit and is a wonderful easy to view film to demystify symptom of the menopause.

My casework around women's health has decreased significantly because of the education and promotion of menopause but there is still work to be done. I have supported members around suitable adaptations to enable members to work healthy and well and provided education for managers around what they can do to support woman during this difficult time and menstruation and pregnancy support.

I have sat on many job evaluation panels to ensure fairness and process is adhered to.

My input in DJCC has ensured the workforce are given a voice during the many consultations and transformation processes that the council has going on over the past year, this session can be difficult but we are able to feedback to management and staff so the processes are transparent and meaningful.

I take my role of Women's officer seriously and being a workplace rep for the last 25 year has given me a great sense of achievement, pride and very rewarding.

### **Labour Link Officer Report – Laura Protheroe**

#### **Links with South West comrades**

I have maintained links with Labour Link comrades in the South West by attending and contributing towards South West Labour Link Committee meetings. These are still invaluable for building and maintaining relationships with UNISON comrades outside Bristol.

#### **Election Work**

I participated in campaigning in the Kingswood bye-election which led to a Labour win in February 2024.

I was an election agent for a councillor candidate for St George Troopers Hill helping him win his seat again in the local elections by planning and organising the campaign as well as knocking on doors and delivering leaflets.

I campaigned in the General Election where needed in the city which led to favourable results nationally.

I have remained a steward and Equality representative – attending the majority of branch committee meetings, helping individuals with cases and participating in job evaluation panels.

Outside work, I have recently been re-elected as Trade Unison Liaison Officer of Bristol Central Constituency Labour Party, a role I have held since the summer of 2022.

I would be happy to stand again for Labour Link Officer as I am still a very active union and Labour Party member.

### **Education Officer Report – Helen Thornton**

As part of my Education Officer role I meet with new and existing Reps working at Bristol City Council to find out what their support and training needs are and whether

they need a mentor or for more experienced Reps whether they are prepared to act as mentors for new Reps. Bristol UNISON now has a policy that every new Rep is given a mentor, that is a more experienced Rep to advise and support them.

This year we arranged a Reaccreditation course for all Stewards who did their Stewards training course more than 5 years ago. This took place in April and was combined with an Equalities action planning day.

We also held a Branch Development day in October, which was attended by many of our stewards and branch officers. We now have an action plan for making the branch stronger.

As well as being Bristol UNISON's Education Officer I also teach on the UNISON Stewards course – I am pleased to say that over the year there have been many excellent new Reps from Bristol branch on my courses. I also encourage all UNISON members who are interested in becoming a Rep to contact me so that I can talk to them about what is involved.

Please have a look at the following links:

UNISON South West provides training for Reps:  
<https://southwest.unison.org.uk/activist-education/>

UNISON nationally also provides lots of training for members:  
<https://learning.unison.org.uk/member-learning>

The TUC in the South West also run courses for Reps:  
<https://www.tuc.org.uk/TUCcourses#southwest>

The TUC provides webinars on a large variety of subjects:  
<https://www.tuc.org.uk/webinars>

### **International Officer Report – Helen Thornton**

Bristol UNISON is affiliated to a number of different international organisations including Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Cuba Solidarity Campaign and Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign Action Group.

In the last few months of 2024 Bristol UNISON branch committee passed a motion to demand Avon pension fund divest from companies arming Israel. As a result I wrote a letter to the Chair of the Pension Fund. Various campaign groups have also asked about Avon Pension Fund's investments in companies which provide the Israeli military with defence products. The Pension Committee will look at the various statements and petitions, as well as its legal and financial position, before considering the issue at a public Pension Committee meeting in early 2025.

I am stepping down as the branch's International Officer, but I hope someone will step forward to take on this role and UNISON South West is looking at ways it can support Branch International Officers.

### **Area Organiser Report – Steve Mills**



I supported UNISON members at Off the Record, with two collective grievances. Relating to bullying and insufficient safeguarding support. There were also 7 individual cases over the space of two months. Two related to sham disciplinaries, where HR changed statements to fit their position. We had a major increase in membership and a new steward. There were numerous member meetings and three collective grievance hearings with the Chair of the Trustees. We were successful in our collective grievances, which were upheld. Safeguarding support has improved, and bullying has ceased. We are in the process of negotiating a trade union recognition agreement (TURA) and have regular meeting with the new senior managers. After several left. We also have some new members who want to support our existing steward, either as stewards or health and safety reps. Most casework has been successfully concluded.

Women's Aid has always been well organised, with active reps. This is still the case now, but the last two years has raised a lot of work for UNISON. We have had a lot of case work, some being concluded with settlement agreements, to the member benefits. However, we are now facing redundancies. Following member's interaction and meetings, we have forwarded a collective grievance on how this financial deficit occurred. With the stewards, we formulated a statement collating evidence from members and attended a hearing with the chair of the trustees and their predecessor. Our grievance was largely upheld and whilst compulsory redundancies have not been averted. The process will be smoother for members, and they will be able to engage properly whilst the process is conducted. There were significant concerns that the redundancies were being rushed through, without looking at other ways to save money. Furthermore, the JNC was being circumvented as a consultative body. This has now stopped and the JNC has been reinvigorated, There is still casework ongoing and we have had a major increase in membership.

City of Bristol College. We have three stewards at COBC, covering different sites. They are covering case work and organising members. We regularly attend JNCs and sub JNCs to discuss working arrangements. We had a pay ballot, but members chose not to strike and accepted a 3.5% pay award.

Citizens Advice Bureau has elected a new steward, who has undergone his training. We have worked together to secure a TURA and dates for a JNC. We are holding member's meetings and looking to take some issues to the new JNC.

Bristol Waste has regular JNCs which I attend. We no longer have a steward there, which is work in progress. We have had two pay ballots and another ongoing now. Also, discussions are ongoing about productivity and costs. Whilst being clear that negative contractual variations and redundancies are not on the table.

Avon Fire and Rescue. We have a new steward, who is attending JNCs with me and engaging with members. We are having more regular member's meetings and emailing newsletters.

PROPS, which is a charity providing support to adults with learning difficulties. We have recently elected a steward and held member's meetings. A TURA has recently

been agreed. Sick pay and lone working are the main issues. Area Organiser Josh Connor has recently taken this over. As the steward is relevant to the work that Josh is doing with young members.

Avon Centre. We have a steward there, who I supported with a workplace issue. We were successful and now engaged in increasing membership and securing recognition.

I also support stewards at WECA, BDP and Second Step. But these workplaces are largely self supporting, with very competent stewards and reps. I do still attend the JNCs at WECA.

I attend the BCC HR committee. Normally trying to progress the real living wage and sick pay in outsourced social care. We were hoping to get the added to the baseline standards for funding from BCC. there is a distinct staffing crisis at present, due to low pay, lack of sick pay and agency workers. The agency workers get paid more and have far less responsibilities than the contracted workers. Therefore, contracted workers are leaving and joining an agency. The employers then cannot afford to have adequate staffing levels. We have hit several brick walls on addressing this, but need to carry on trying. As social care is close to collapse. Josh set up a survey monkey, in an attempt to gather members and recruit stewards. As due to the shift patterns and numerous employers, this group of staff are increasingly difficult to organise and represent collectively. With many resigning and joining agencies, this is becoming increasingly difficult. Some employers have engaged with us, but for different reasons to ours. But we both want employees with decent terms and conditions. The issue lies with funding, with the Local Authority hampered by Central Government funding.

I attend regular JNCs at the Cabot Learning Federation (CLF) and other Multi Academy Trusts. These are split between Josh and I. Some like the CLF have schools over a wide geographical area, including the counties that used to be Avon (CUBA). We are working with other branches in CUBA, to ensure coverage and are now getting some significant regional support. We are looking to ensuring that this work is successful this year, hopefully recruiting more members, but also importantly reps also. As we are short of these, and the NEU are now involved in recruiting support staff.

CVS stewards. I am mentoring and supporting 16 stewards. Some only contact me for advice, whilst others I support with member's meetings, case work and one to one meetings. Josh and I have set up a Teams drop in session on Thursday afternoons. These are not always well attended, but it affords Josh and I time to catch up and plan.

Case work, I have worked on 238 personal cases this year, with 18 still open. Some of these were no further action after a telephone call or email advice. Some of these cases involved collective grievances, with members. Other cases, I did with the workplace stewards. Who would take a more proactive role as their confidence grew. I got this number via the enquiries tracking spreadsheet. Of these personal cases 8 received settlement agreements amounting to nearly £200k in total. I have

only presided over 3 dismissals, with one more going to appeal at the time of writing. These dismissals do not include redundancies. Following our Branch Development day, it was agreed that I would reduce my time on case work and concentrate more on mentoring and organising. This is work in progress.

### **Area Organiser Report – Josh Connor**

This past year has seen a continued increase in both poor practices from employers, particularly in the social care sector, as well as a steady interest from members towards organising collectively to rebalance power. It has highlighted more than ever the insufficiency of current employee rights and I hope that the upcoming bill will have its various loopholes closed such that it finally begins to address the extreme power imbalances between employer and worker; I'd encourage all members to support the Trade Union Congress lobbying of the Government to strengthen the bill.

It is in this context that I have been supporting members in both the Community and Voluntary Sector, with the ongoing regional project in various Multi Academy trusts, as well as in Bristol City Council.

I supported several TUPE consultations in schools including Ashton Gate Primary School, Henleaze Infants & Henleaze Juniors which disappointingly academized and joined Cathedral Schools Trust. I was engaged with members at CST earlier in the year when it was proposed to shorten their holidays and supported them to successfully resist these changes. We're continuing to seek recognition from the Trust but have found the process frustrated by management. I worked with Jane Palmer who was elected as a rep at Ashton Gate to challenge the loss of pay caused by the Trust's policy of awarding in September without backdating and this issue is now the focus of organising being done by our colleagues in regional office. I'd like to congratulate Jane on her initiative and skill in identifying the real impact of this on members.

Other TUPEs happened because of the collapse of the Diocese of Bristol Academy Trust. At the beginning of 2024 they announced that the board had made the decision to cease trading, and this left members uncertain about their futures. I negotiated in support of members in the central team who were being made redundant and ensured a fair process which allowed them to move on with stability and dignity. I also supported the transfer of the affected schools to the Lighthouse Schools Partnership and hope to attend Joint consultation meetings with the new trust soon now the transfer has taken place.

Sponsorship based visas in the care sector continue to allow unscrupulous employers to hold workers to ransom and in fear of reprisals. Through engagement with the Caring Economy campaign and directly with BCC we continue to demand better pay and conditions to be enforced through social care commissioning decisions. I am hopeful that the national UNISON focus on care in the upcoming year goes some way in addressing these issues through more access to employers and effective worker organising.

I have mentored and supported reps in both BCC and CVS to organise their members and leverage their collective power when negotiating with management. This has resulted in wins for members in reshaping restructures and negotiations on pay and conditions in which members' voice is taken seriously.

**Reports not received**

Disabled Members - Barry Scrase

Young Members - Emily Collins