

Trades Union Congress

South West Regional Council

Tel: 0117 947 0521 Email: southwest@tuc.org.uk Twitter: @tucsouthwest

Regional Council

MINUTES

Saturday 1 February 2025

Online, Zoom

Attendance

Sharon Battishill - Unite	Rosie MacGregor - White Horse TC
Derek Benner-McNulty - UNISON	Susan MacRow-Hill - NASUWT
Sheila Caffrey - Bristol TC	Lesley Mansell - Unite
Ben Caile - Prospect	Conor McGurran - TUC
Cathy Chilcott - CWU	Fflyff McLaren - Mendip TC
Simon Crew – Weston TC	Martin Menear - NEU
Clair Cross - UNISON	Sebastian Michnowicz - ASLEF
Chris Dando - PCS	Dave Osborne - Yeovil TC
Alan Daniels - BCP TC	Mike Osment - Salisbury TC
Hannah David - PCS (in the chair)	Liz Payne-Ahmadi - Taunton TC
Malcolm Davies - Unite	Zarria Phillips - Bath TC
Judith Desbonne - Bridgwater TC	Debi Potter - UNISON
Lesley Discombe - UNISON	Gerrard Sables - North Devon & Torrige TC
Keith Falle - Unite	Steven Sanders - PCS
John Fones - UCU	Simon Smith - Cheltenham TC
Sue Francis - PCS	Mark Sowden - Unite
Sadie Fulton - TUC	Kay Timbrell - Usdaw
Levoy Getton - PCS	Mike Walker - Usdaw
Val Hampshire - FBU	Karen Williams - UNISON
Torkwase Holmes - Unite	Nigel Williams - NASUWT
Ines Lage - TUC	Tim Woodason - Unite
Gareth Lowe - Unite	

1. Apologies

These were received from Michael Allen (NEU), Olivier Bagnara (NASUWT), Kevin Beazer (CWU), Cecily Blyther (UCU), Paul Breeden (NUJ), Pete Bright (Unite), Jacqui Brown (RCM), Amanda Brown (UNISON), Richard Capps (Weston TC), Dave Chapple (TUCJCC), James Davies (PCS), Alison Evans (UNISON), Darren James (CWU), Jenny

Lennon-Wood (Dorset TC), Maureen Loxley (Usdaw), Philip Maynard (ASLEF), Jake McLean (GMB), Hannah Packham (NEU), Dave Roberts (FBU) and Kevin Treweeks (UNISON).

2. Welcome

Hannah David welcomed delegates.

3. Minutes of the Regional Council 12 October 2024

These were agreed unanimously.

4. Minutes of Executive Committee on 30 October, 11 December 2024 & 22 January 2025

These were all agreed unanimously.

5. Trade union members – Post-election analysis and voting patterns

Hannah welcomed Conor McGurran, TUC Campaigns and Communications Officer, and invited him to address the meeting.

Conor presented the TUC's post-general election poll; TUC asked for a deeper picture of union members who either voted Reform or considered doing so. The overall picture is that Reform supporters (including union members) are more concerned about immigration (and less about climate change) than others. Former and older union members were among the most likely to vote Reform. Overall, there are three sub-groups of Reform voters: hard line right wingers, low-income workers who are angry at the status quo, and older comfortable people. There is opportunity with the second group.

Seb Michnowicz pointed out the interesting result that union members considering voting Reform trust their union reps more than other union members do. Sheila Caffrey pointed out that Reform's campaign talked a lot about workers' rights more so than other parties; they need to be exposed. Reform are pulling in candidates without experience; the differential of votes is now age rather than class.

Conor summarised that the far right have massive reach on social media and have to be challenged there as well as in workplaces and communities. Our message must be clear but delivery is also key; we need to lean into emotional delivery that taps into people's underlying concerns. Conor highlighted the huge discrepancy between Reform's voting record against workers and NHS funding and the rhetoric they are peddling.

6. Reps Guide to Anti Racism

Ines summarised the process leading to the current project; myth busting is no longer an effective strategy. This new project will be more targeted. There is trust in our reps so the guide is focused on how best to equip reps to respond to and

address rising racist tensions and concerns. Messaging still being tested. We are therefore focusing more on the issues people are deeply feeling. Unions and delegates were asked to share successful case studies from the region where unions and/or trades councils successfully addressed racism and community or workforce tensions.

Val Hampshire shared that Reform are planning on bringing Nigel Farage to Trowbridge; we need to keep an eye on local forums.

7. Draft Annual Conference Agenda

Ines shared the latest draft agenda. Croyde have adjusted their cancellation policy and we now have only three weeks prior before the full amount is charged. The Women's Committee requested a network event in the evening, looking at health and safety for women and to be held in the pavilion. Sue Francis requested that the paperwork for the breakout rooms be available to everyone, not just those attending those breakout rooms. Torkwase Holmes has a potential speaker from Jersey.

8. Employment Rights Bill – update

Ines presented on the bill, its contents and current status in parliament. The expectations are that the Bill will clear the parliamentary process by summer recess although laws may not be enforceable until 2026. Unions need to begin preparing for the leveling up of workers' rights. The bill is thorough and offers a great deal of new protections for workers. Some negotiations are ongoing with pushback from employers' lobbies. Some rights from the new deal aren't included in this bill – more is to come, especially around union rights. Ines will circulate the presentation.

There was a discussion on the new legislation and how it is already impacting negotiations. Lesley Mansell shared the NHS are changing their approach on probationary periods given the ERB changes. John Fones stressed the importance of further education in rolling out these processes and that it is being overlooked. Kay Timbrell shared that there is an increase in warnings being issued for sickness absence in food retailers. Ines appealed for information on trends emerging so this can be fed back to national officers.

9. Parliamentary Reception for SW MPs and Unions

Despite eight confirmations from MPs only Neil Duncan-Jordan attended. We will be pushing for further meetings with MPs and recognise that Thursday was a tricky day. Positively, regional secretaries and political officers were able to meet as a group. Karen Williams asked about the plan going forward – Ines responded that we will continue to approach MPs seeking opportunities to meet and share our work.

10. Growing and diversifying our movement

- a. Young Organisers Network – update
Sadie updated on the goal of the network – a few young workers have taken the reins and are keen to be more involved in Tolpuddle and bringing Norwegian Summer Patrols to the UK. We need more unions involved and we need to stay engaged as they do “age out”. The network has the capacity to follow young members across different unions as they get jostled through the precarious workforce. Karen Williams asked about a scheduled event coming up in Plymouth and asked that information be shared. Sadie responded that that specific event was cancelled but further events would take place and would be advertised.
- b. SWTUC Pensioners Committee – update
The committee met in-person this week. Roles have been appointed and there is considerable enthusiasm to build a work plan. There are still a few more seats available on the Committee.

11. Heart Unions Week – 10-15 February

Events are taking place across the South West; materials are available and can be ordered from Congress House or sent from our regional office. The TUC South West will circulate information about the stalls and events being run by trades councils.

12. Tolpuddle Martyrs’ Festival 2025 - 18-20 July

Ines updated on the festival; thank you to unions who are already engaged. Music line up is fantastic. There is lots of work being undertaken already to ready us for this year. The main stage is no longer safe and needs to be replaced. Tolpuddle Museum also now has a new museum curatorial assistant. We hope to bring the Conviction Politics exhibition to the festival this year. Ines shared the sad news from Tolpuddle comrades who passed away over the Christmas period - Les Kennedy, Dick Musckett and Jane Longshaw. Delegates expressed their condolences to these grave losses to the movement and gratitude for their massive contributions to the festival.

Hannah asked that the new pricing structure be circulated. Fflyff McLaren suggested involving John Callow in the Radical History School.

13. Union and trades council reports

Hannah opened this item agenda reminding delegates that there are written reports circulated ahead of the meeting.

- a. Unite – Local government, 49 replacement carers were impacted by a shortfall in shifts, a ballot of members received 94% turnout, 100% success. Deal sees 160k split between 61 staff members. Live dispute – Stagecoach West. No backpay was offered on a pay deal despite negotiations having been passed. High turnout across the board on ballots.

- b. Usdaw – many announcements of restructuring and possible redundancies from the big four supermarkets.
- c. Stroud Trades Council – 15th of Feb will be holding a HeartUnions stall.
- d. FBU – Gloucestershire management are imposing a detrimental shift change affecting those with caring responsibilities. 12h shifts will convert to 11/13. No equality impact assessment or public transport requirements have been considered or undertaken. There is a rally on 12th Feb, 9:30 @ Glos North Fire Station. New FBU General Secretary Steve Wright will attend and speak as well as Ian Murray, FBU President. All support would be greatly appreciated. Ongoing cuts in Dorset and Wiltshire; Dorset has already removed 5 appliances and now seeking to remove another three. Neil Duncan Jordan has been brilliant supporting the FBU against the removal of a pump in Poole. Trying downgrading, shift changing, etc. Upgrading a station in Swindon to whole time cover, but cut 30% of fire fighters wages.
- e. UNISON is leading a campaign to improve migrant workers' visas; led by their Black workers network and supported by Neil Duncan-Jordan MP it calls for the introduction of a certificate of common sponsorship. Recently, there was a successful Cuba Solidarity fundraiser in Exeter. SERCO workers' strike action in Swindon for the owed lump-sum payment have paused strike action to enable negotiations to progress. The union is also balloting phlebotomists in Gloucester and Cheltenham hospitals on strike action over band grading and unfair pay. Healthcare workers, who currently work for Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, including Occupational therapists, nurses, care co-ordinators and physiotherapists are demanding Wiltshire County Council delays the controversial transfer of community health services to a venture capital-owned private company.
- f. Bristol Trades Council had a public meeting this week regarding the £51million cuts from Bristol City Council. It was very successful with the Council already making some u-turns, but there are still lots more cuts planned. The Council are suggesting selling off of all council housing. Trades Councils are working with ACORN to block this.
- g. Hannah Packham talked about the relaunch of the union's pay campaign with indicative ballots starting in March; the new offer came unfunded and research shows 76% of primary and 94% of secondary schools cannot afford this unfunded pay offer without substantial cutbacks.
Hannah also updated on the ongoing dispute over last year's award to non-academised sixth forms. Notably, St. Brendan's Sixth Form will be taking further action on 29 Jan, 6 and 7 February.

- h. There are also a series of disputes across the region on workload, the pension scheme, and conditions.
- i. PCS – It has been announced there are hundreds of job cuts and people put at risk in English Heritage Trust.
- j. North Devon & Torridge Trades Council – Trinidad and Tobago has seen a massive strike wave. TC decided to send a message of solidarity with a photograph. They'd like to put on William Morris' only play so are seeking a venue.
- k. White Horse Trades Council – Thomas Helliker commemoration will take place on 22 March and they hope to be joined by Bath and Salisbury trades councils. This year they are doing a musical interpretation of his life – "The Innocent", at the Cause in Chippenham.
- l. ASLEF – World Toilet Day 19 Nov. Drivers have to go four hours without having access to a toilet. The government regulator has now picked up the report and is inspecting. GWR have a mandate from the Department of Transport to bring Sunday into the working week. Two sectors now, one requires Sunday work, the other doesn't – can't take the day as annual leave, and its not pensionable. Some people aren't coming to work and are now facing disciplinary action.
- m. Taunton Trades Council – Somerset council are in crisis. An appeal for union branches in Somerset was made to attend the trades council so that they can continue to support and rally against the cuts.
- n. NASUWT – sixth form pay continues to be an issue.
- o. Bath Trades Council – have completed their pamphlet, archives now confirmed at Bath University and will also be running a stall for Heart Unions.

14. Any Other Business

- a. Regional Women's Committee – Karen Williams reported there is Women's safety event taking place on 26 April in Exeter. A good range of topics have been discussed for inclusion. They would like to shift their networking event at the AGM into another room given the lack of privacy in the bar; could this be included in the agenda too. They would like to revisit the Tolpuddle dedicated event and asked for the women's committee to be a standing item on the agenda.

- b. Freeports – Ines updated that given the general election and a new government, things have shifted slightly in that civil servants are still determining their policy on this. The Skills meeting no longer takes place pending the officer moving on. Employers trying to bring people into work from the communities. There was talk of an employment charter.