

MORAY MATTERS



THE NEWSLETTER FOR UNISON MEMBERS IN MORAY

NOVEMBER 2009

Moray Council Budget Cuts – Scrooge's Christmas Carol

**Irene Sinclair, Branch Secretary
comments on the budget
proposals**

Moray Council's Administration is currently carrying out a consultation on proposals to slash Council budgets. £20 million over four years is the target, with this round of cuts accounting for around £12 million.

About two hundred members of staff have been put at risk of redundancy at the time of writing. By the time you read this there may be many more as proposed cuts in school budgets will have been identified.

The financial crisis we find ourselves in as a nation has been caused by a combination of factors, many of which have their origins in the Thatcher era. The worship of materialism, the individualist approach to society, the ready availability of credit, maximum mortgages and over-generous loans – all contributing to our downfall. And don't even get me started on bankers' bonuses, the lottery cum casino

that is the stock exchange, not to mention the cult of celebrity (think I've gone off the point there but allow me to rant!).

The public receives services from the Council - and that's all of us. We will have to put up with cuts in services while bankers still receive their bonuses. Is that fair? Is it fair that the elderly living in rural areas will have to do without their supply of books from the mobile libraries (maybe one of the few social interactions they have on a regular basis)? Is it fair that the toilet attendants will be out of a job while the toilets fall into disrepair through vandalism? Is it fair that school children, particularly those with special educational needs, should be deprived and young people lose their youth workers?

If the answer to the above is a resounding NO, then I suggest you take some action, no matter how small, to make your voice heard. Nationally, UNISON is campaigning to put over the message that swingeing cuts to the public sector will not aid financial recovery. You can do the same. Write to or email your MSP, Richard Lochhead and your MP, Angus Robertson. Get in touch with your Area Forum or Community Council – they are the bodies permitted to make a response to the proposals on

behalf of the public. Give them

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some inside information so they can make an informed response. A groundswell of public opinion, particularly as we're in the run-up to Westminster elections, might have some effect.

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Back in September the Retired Members Officer was given the November deadline for the pre-Christmas issue of *Moray Matters* – just as the first tentative Xmas decs appeared in the shops. So Big Cat has had a good long run-up to the Bah-Humbug season.

The Moray Council, however, has proved itself able to outdo all comers for seasonable humbuggery; and so, for many Moray Unison members in the run-up to Christmas, the musak of carols is interrupted by the dull thud of redundancy notices hitting the doormat.

For the RM Officer – and for a good many other RMs too – it is a case of same-old same-old and déjà vu all over again. And it is always the cats who suffer most when the early-retirement and post-redundancy belt-tightening takes hold. Enjoy your Whiskas while you can my furry friends: when the cuts kick in you'll be eating own-brand crunchies. Meanwhile, for the fat cats in the banks and for politicians on expenses, it'll be Kit-Kats, Kitekat, caviare and cream as usual (and at our expense).

And so today's favourite pastime for Moray Unison cats is speculating upon what DBS actually stands for. Designing Better Services? Don't be silly. It's jobs and services Down the Bloody Sewer. RMs (and their cats) watch from the sidelines with

sense of relief that, having paid our dues and done our time, we are well off out of it. Nonetheless it is galling to watch - impotent as a doctored tom - while the axe falls on services which we built up and of which we once were proud.

There have been a few bright moments in Big Cat's gloomy life. The RMs gathered for a little lunchtime meeting and a post-prandial perusal of the agenda for National Retired Members' Conference. And there were some (meagre) leftovers for Big Cat's doggy bag.

National Conference took the RM Officer away to Scarborough, leaving Big Cat sad, neglected and all alone. But human conscience (something cats do not understand but are happy to exploit) meant that the RM Officer returned with a soul full of guilt and a bag full of treats for Big Cat. There was also much consolatory petting, to which Big Cat responded with token purring and punitive biting.

Big Cat has recently been informed of a meeting (a meeting with eats) for Unison young members. But YM Officer Kieron insists that RMs are too old to get in. I wonder whether they need a guest speaker, or a burlesque cabaret turn – or a performing cat. How else can we get our feet under the YM's table? There is always Botox and surgery. But it would take more than a nip and tuck to make the RM officer look like a YM. And even if he could pass for twenty-four, he would only give himself away by his inability to programme the DVD, operate an iPod, or appreciate the finer points of Beyonce (and her music). So, sadly, we will not get a sniff of the YM buffet: unless Big Cat gate crashes on his own account – if only he can scrub up and mellow out enough to pass as a kitten cat.

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Just remember, if services go, they won't come back. There will be more cuts over the next four years. And in addition there will be more cuts through Designing Better Services.

While UNISON is opposed to job cuts in any area and at any level, we wonder why some staff groups are targeted and others not even touched. Many of these others are involved in Corporate Services. We do not ask for them to be targeted but we do ask that all services should be looked at with equal scrutiny - Education, Environmental Services, Corporate Services, Community Services, Finance & ICT.

The proposed management restructuring is an exercise that will result in no savings – what's the point? Do we really need so many high paid officers? Again, we don't ask for particular groups of staff to be picked on, but we do believe the pain should be shared out a bit more fairly and with minimum disruption to front-line services.

Can we persuade the Administration to deviate from its course? Yes we can. But are you willing to take the necessary action?

Details of the proposals can be found at:

www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_61289.html

To give the administration your views on the cuts use the email address for the area you live in:

buckie.consult@moray.gov.uk
elgin.consult@moray.gov.uk
forres.consult@moray.gov.uk
keith.consult@moray.gov.uk
laich.consult@moray.gov.uk
milnes.consult@moray.gov.uk
speyside.consult@moray.gov.uk

Moray College Update

At a well attended members meeting on 11th November concern were raised about the short time to complete job evaluation questionnaires – particularly for members in generic posts. In response the college agreed to a two week extension – with the deadline now being 4th December.

Members felt the job evaluation project was being rushed and this would be detrimental to the job

evaluation of their posts.

Members also requested for a period of four years pay protection for members whose salary would go down after the implementation of the new pay structure in January 2011. Following legal advice on this matter the branch secretary will be sending a letter to the College principal requesting three years pay protection – the maximum legally permitted in these circumstances.

We will be requesting negotiations with management with regards the information that will be made available to staff after their post had been evaluated – for example the job overview, the five factor scores and the overall score. We will also be negotiating the job appeal process, and the information available to staff going through the appeal process.

Becoming a Steward

Janie Bell explains why she became a steward

Like most of you reading this I am a member of UNISON. Being a member of UNISON, and all that you can access from that was all I considered until I suffered an injustice due to management within Moray Council. It wasn't long before I began to notice that colleagues turned away. I also began to feel a burden to friends as the problem was taking over my social life as well. This is when I turned to UNISON for help and support.

Finding someone to listen and understand where you are coming from was the most important thing for me. I found all the support and more from local UNISON representatives. After this episode finished I felt totally drained and rather than let this experience eat away at me I thought I would turn this around to something positive.

All I had gone through could be looked upon as a valuable lesson and the knowledge and experiences could perhaps help others who find themselves in the same situation.

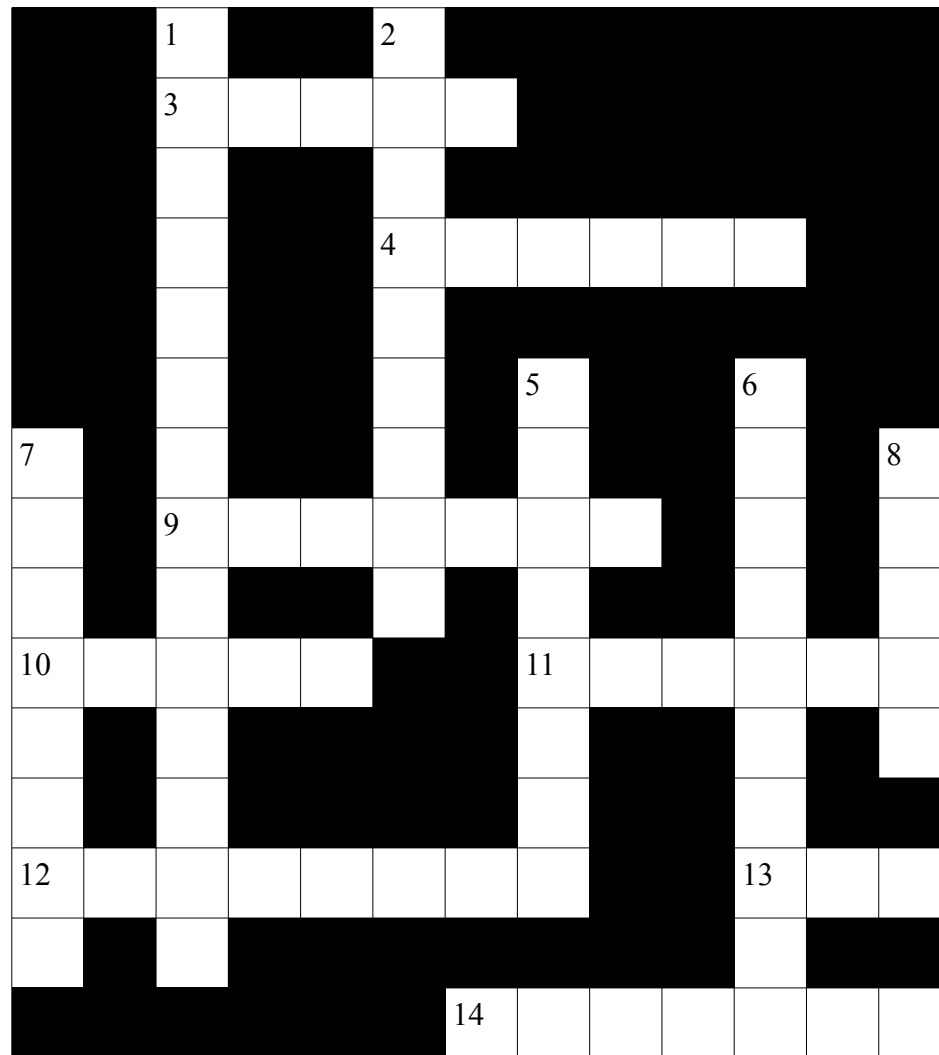
I decided to put my name forward for a position as a Steward and attended the AGM. I was successful and from there I went along to my first monthly meeting where I was made very welcome. Training followed quickly and I attended an introduction to stewarding, which was held in Edinburgh over a weekend. I was very apprehensive but I am so glad I went. Meeting people from Edinburgh, Dundee, Glasgow and Aberdeen who were there to gain more insight into the role of Steward was very informative and enjoyable.

If you have ever been in a situation or thought that you could do better why not come forward. Remember we are just people willing to help. We have no special powers but knowledge is a powerful thing and with the training and more experienced members who are willing to share their knowledge, you have everything to gain. There is a lot to learn. Everyday is a learning day and hopefully I will be able to contribute to UNISON members and not go around thinking UNISON should contribute to me. The strength of UNISON is only as strong as its members make it, lets make it the best we can.

What about You?

Many workplaces do not have a steward. Now more than ever it is vital that we are able to represent members effectively – and the more stewards we have the easier that becomes. If you have been inspired by Janie's experience and wish to become a steward then get in touch with the branch office – 01343 563170 or unison@moray.gov.uk.

Seasonal Competition Crossword



For your chance to win £25 complete this seasonal crossword. Send your entry to Moray UNISON Prize Puzzle, Moray UNISON, 149 High Street, Elgin, IV30 1DS before 11th December. Winner to be drawn at random from correct entries. Be sure to include your name on your entry and good luck!

Across

3. Red Breasted
4. This country's largest city has a Byzantine past.
9. Bob's miserly master.
10. A tuneful girl.
11. To arrive.
12. A famous story.
13. A league of it's own.
14. Not past or future.

Down

1. A European Capital that Grows on you (7,7)
2. Catch a romantic moment under this weed.
5. Out with the old - in with the new.
6. Ponder before you complain (6,4)
7. Hang this up.
8. Saint Nicholas.

Congratulations to Lynne Davidson for winning the August Crossword.