

Welfare Seminar  
Friday 1 May to Sunday 3 May 2009  
Report to Branch Executive 29 May 2009

Janice Russell, Joint Welfare Officer and Karen Gainey, Services and Conditions Officer, both attended the above seminar and extend their appreciation and thanks to the Branch for allowing them to attend.

The Friday night started with a very pleasant dinner, followed by the Chairperson's (Eleanor Haggett) welcome and overview of the weekend. There then followed a quiz which was a great way to break the ice with new officers with much hilarity when trying to guess answers. Team Fife came in fourth!

Saturday started with a talk from June Poole, Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees, UNISON Welfare, where she outlined the picture both nationally and in Scotland. Not surprisingly, she advised that 2008 was a record year for welfare applications with there being a 22% increase for requests for assistance and that 50% of grants paid out were for debt and emergencies. From April this year, there has been an 11% increase already.

In Scotland, there was only a 1% increase in applications compared to other regions this is quite small.

June then handed over to Julie Grant, Head of UNISON Welfare who talked about the challenges ahead for UNISON Welfare and that the Board hadn't had cases to this degree in the past. New initiatives were being brought in to assist with multi-faceted cases e.g. debt management/relationship breakdowns and providing services that are appropriate to the needs of the members. She also advised that there was a lot of development in the advice side of the work looking at partnerships/collaborations.

Not only were did Julie talk about what UNISON Welfare is doing, she said that there was a collective responsibility to raise the profile of UNISON Welfare, developing links with local advisory and support services, ensuring Welfare features on branch committee agendas and using materials to promote Welfare.

Next year sees the centenary of Welfare and there are plans for major events throughout the country.

The rest of the seminar saw talks from Scottish Women's Aid, Child Poverty Action Group, a Payplan presentation; Social Tourism; Credit Unions and their role in the credit crunch and How to organise using UNISON Welfare.

This was a thoroughly enjoyable and interesting seminar with lots of ideas for welfare both at Scottish and National level and we all look forward to the centenary celebrations next year, which in Fife, should take place at the Glen Pavilion, Pittencrieff Park, Dunfermline. Watch this space!