

WHAT'S HAPPENING.

1 Jul 2019

REBUILD OUR COMMUNITIES AND END VIOLENCE



A UNISON member working for United Utilities had his van stolen while he was loading his tools into it, and the perpetrator then tried to run him over with his own van.

That was just one example of the violence

and aggression UNISON members can experience on a daily basis, Brian Morgan-Strutton told the union's national delegate conference in Liverpool.

The United Utilities delegate was speaking

in a series of linked debates on violence and aggression – at work, on the streets and in the wider sense – on Thursday.

Marl Turner of Four Seasons Huntercombe branch shared the experience of a young female member whose jaw was broken when she was assaulted by a patient. The attacker was taken to court “and she was awarded the princely sum of £200 compensation”, he noted.

Members had similar tales from across all the union’s service groups and sectors, whether they work in social care, call centres, libraries, the health service or elsewhere.

Bolton delegate Julie Tudor is a social worker who has worked directly for the council and for an outsourced arms-length company. She experienced assaults when in the public sector as an outsourced worker.

“We support everyone’s right to go to work without fear of assault,” she said.

“We are constantly told violence comes with the job – well, no it doesn’t. Nobody should be expected to tolerate violence and aggression in their workplace.”

And NEC speaker Luisete Batista declared: “An assault to any worker is an assault to all of us.”

Conference agreed to promote the union’s guidance on the issue, to get employers to sign up to the UNISON Violence at Work Charter and to campaign for stronger legal protections with proper enforcement.

Violence doesn’t just happen in the workplace though, and in a debate on gun and knife crime, Peter Daley of the housing associations branch highlighted the fact that such crime “has an impact on victims and their families, of course, but also on UNISON members, whatever their service group,” as they deal with the aftermath of attacks.

That was illustrated by Carol Garfield from Birmingham who told of a teaching assistant colleague at a pupil referral unit where a boy had been murdered in a machete attack in the school car park.

During a routine pat-down – “yes, pat-downs are becoming routine” – the TA found a gun hidden in a pocket. She later asked her management to supply a stab vest for protection.

“What is the world coming to when a TA needs to ask for a stab vest to feel safe?” asked Carol.

They say knife crime is a disease,” Sarah Walsh from the national young members’ forum. “We refute that. It’s not a disease, it’s a symptom of vile Tory austerity.”

But Mandy Burgess of Greater London called on cities across England to follow the example of Glasgow, noting that the Scottish city had seen an 81% reduction in knife crime “by treating it as a public health issue” rather than a law and order one.

And Sarah Walsh stated: “This is not a lawless Britain, it is a let-down Britain.

“Cuts to social care, to the youth work profession and the abolition of Education Maintenance Allowance , plus fewer bobbies on beat, are the root causes.

“These young people deserve a brighter future, let’s work to give it to them.”

Conference expanded on the effect of cuts to vital public services in a debate on austerity and public safety.

Introducing the debate, NEC speaker Sarah Crowe said: “We’ve heard a lot about violent crime and what public service workers should do about it, but we’ve not heard about what government has done to public services.

“A stitch in time saves nine,” she added, but government cuts are turning into gaping

wounds.

“A decade of austerity has cut services back to the bone, it has left communities less safe and vulnerable people without the help they need.

“A cut to one service affects all services. UNISON knows that public safety and justice is fundamental to a society.

“We know that public services are at the heart of a society that cares for everyone and leaves no one behind.”

Looking ahead, Joanne Moorcroft of Cheshire police staff branch demanded:
“Ending austerity has be about reinvesting in community policing and probation, but also has to be about the causes of crime.

“We need to end austerity and rebuild our communities.”

Conference committed the union to campaigning for an end to austerity and proper funding for the full range of public services, including youth services, and working with others on specific strategies to tackle gun and knife crime.