



Exeter City Branch

Meeting title	Unison Exeter City Branch AGM
Date and venue of meeting	Wednesday 19 th March United Reformed Church 12.30pm
Attendees	The meeting was attended by 17 members
Apologies	None

1	Previous Minutes: Minutes from previous AGM 2024 all agreed.
2	Matters arising: None
3	Presentation: None was given at this AGM.
4	Reports: Branch Secretary Hello everyone, Thank you all for coming to our 2025 AGM. It literally feels like it was only a short while ago, that I was here and delivering last year's Branch Secretary report whilst the senior management restructure was the backdrop of change we were dealing with. A year on and the entire world is providing the backdrop of change, as entire nations switch their politics and break traditional alliances and agreements. This backdrop inevitably means there will be testing times ahead for everyone, as this uncertain future unravels, and we see the impacts it will have on people, workers and employers. Whilst we are talking about the future. Your branch will be changing too, in the year ahead. We have recently finished a consultation with ECC regarding how it wishes to engage with industrial relations in the future and how best to support staff representation within the organisation. We highlighted the need to review this with ECC, as the post Covid era has resulted in a massive change to how we function and work as a branch, and the current setup didn't seem to fit what was needed for members moving forward. As some of the proposed changes have an impact on ECC's constitution, the final proposal is due to be ratified by the Council in early April. The big changes proposed for the branch is that this Branch Secretary role will no longer be funded by ECC as a full-time role and all union representation/activity will revert to a traditional

facility time approach, but please do not worry. This doesn't change your access to representation and doesn't change the amount of UNISON resources that are available to you, or indeed the branch engagement with ECC. All of this will continue, as it has done prior to the changes coming into effect.

Once this process is all finalised, we will of course update members with the details, but we feel confident that it still leaves the branch with the flexibility it needs to adapt to whatever changes evolve as we all move forward.

In anticipation of change, we have very recently introduced a new activisthub system, which is designed to help your reps and branch officers with any union work they undertake and should help us improve our communications with members, as you may have seen with the recent AGM messages. This system also replaces some of the function that the full-time role provided for branch administration, allowing a more modern approach to member enquiries, cases, etc.

Another agent of change is the local government review which has been introduced by our UK Government. Although it is at the earliest of stages and ECC has already made clear its intention to seek unitary status as part of the changes, this will bring many challenges for our branch and our membership as it evolves and takes shape. We need to be ready for any eventuality. UNISON work on that continues at pace and our regional officers can provide the bigger picture on that.

Although I have spoken about the future and the effect of change up to this point, it is also important to reflect on the successes we have had too. This last year has seen some major policies reviewed and improved and has also seen some new policies introduced. For example, the organisation now has a Menopause Policy and a Women's Health group, which reflect how important it is to recognise these issues in the workplace and help us and ECC in supporting our female members and employees.

We have also supported the consultations that have abounded around the senior management restructure and the changes that it may, or has brought to bear, working hard to lessen any impact on members and helping support them through the transitions, the restructuring, etc.

Finally, on a more personal note, whatever happens as we move through 2025, if I am re-elected, it will be my last year as your Branch Secretary. My aim is to see the branch through the change which lies ahead and my focus over the last 18 months has been to make the necessary changes and take the appropriate actions to ensure the succession planning is in place to maintain the work your branch and its officers and activists provide. This will continue until my time is done.

On the bright side, this is the last time you will have to sit through an AGM with me wittering on about your branch, disturbing you whilst you eat your sandwiches and preaching the gospel according to UNISON. However, I would like you to please give me a moment to listen to what I say next.

If any of you know me, you will know I am not a person who hands out platitudes lightly or speaks disingenuously, so please believe me when I say that it has been and will continue to be my absolute honour and privilege to represent all of you as members of the UNISON Exeter City branch.

Roughly a decade ago I volunteered to take on the role for one year, as a stop gap, whilst the branch assessed where we were. However, the continual support I received from branch officers (both old and new), activists (current and retired) and more importantly the members,

then encouraged me to commit to this role and grow it. That continual support has meant I have been elected to this post year after year and this has not only surprised me, but also helped me understand how you valued the work that I, and all the other branch activists, have done over this time on behalf of you all.

I know that when I step down, that I will leave the branch in good hands and in good shape, with more qualified activists than before, more resources available and a foundation to build on as the future unfolds.

To all the members of our branch, I have to say 'thank you' for that support over the last decade, from the bottom of my heart.

To all of those who have stepped up, volunteered and played their part in our success over the last 10 years or so, as activists, stewards, reps or any other role supporting the branch, a big thank you, you will never know how much I truly appreciated you walking this path alongside me.

All that is left for me to say, is to thank you all again, for attending this AGM, and please rest assured that my remaining time in this role will be as committed as it always has been.

-End-

A member thanked the Branch Secretary for his service and raised a question of what the new role (of Branch Secretary under the proposals) would look like.

The Branch Secretary stated that the new role would be replaced with facility time, approximately 2 days per week, rather than the 5 day a week funded post that is currently in place. The rationale behind the Branch agreeing to these proposals is that the current role does not allow the Branch to be as effective as it could be moving forward, noting that currently members only speak to the Branch Secretary rather than other Branch Officers/Reps. Under the new proposals the Branch Officers/Reps will play a greater role in ensuring greater representation for members and the Branch would be less centralised. With advances in technology and the new Activist Hub the role of the Branch Secretary, and administrative burden, has been greatly reduced. The role has morphed to being more of a full-time rep rather than a Branch Secretary. Under the new proposals Branch Officers/Reps will take a more active role which should work better for members. It was noted that in the last 10 years no member has shown an interest in taking over as Branch Secretary in a full-time capacity so at some stage the Branch would have to adapt to account for this. The Branch Secretary reiterated that the role of Branch Secretary would not be deleted, only the full-time funded role.

The member was concerned that the Branch would be losing its full-time role and that this was being pushed on the Branch by senior management.

The Branch Secretary stated that there were multiple reasons for the changes under the new proposals, namely political reasons with the Labour group wishing to see greater representation of Unite and GMB unions within Exeter City Council. Senior Management would like to reduce facility time to the minimum prescribed by ACAS and thus are no longer willing to fund the role. The Branch has pushed back on the facility time and will instead monitor this on a 12-month basis after which the new proposals effectiveness will be reviewed.

The member was concerned with how the proposals would affect the Branch's ability to negotiate the new local government reorganisation.

The Branch Secretary stated that this where UNISON regional would step in and play a greater part with negotiations. The Branch Secretary reiterated that the new proposals would

enable the Branch Officers/Reps to play a more active role in the Branch rather than the Branch solely relying on the Branch Secretary. The proposals allow a reset for the Branch and the members.

The member then asked why the Branch Secretary had agreed these proposals and the Branch Secretary reiterated that it was the Branch Executive (Branch Officers) who had agreed these proposals. The Branch Secretary stated that there is the potential between a conflict of interest as it is his full-time post that may be deleted, the decision has therefore been one discussed amongst and made by the Branch rather than the Branch Secretary.

The member then asked why the Branch Officers were happy with this and why it was agreed.

The Branch Secretary stated the Branch Officers were not necessarily happy with the proposals but did agree then save for the proposals over facility time. The Branch Secretary noted that he was disappointed that the Labour group were content with this proposal indicating a broad level of agreement by Exeter City Council to agree the proposals. UNISON regional did not input on these proposals despite a request for input from the Branch.

The Service Conditions Officer echoed the sentiment of the Branch Secretary and stated that the proposals gave the Branch an opportunity to reset member relations and gave an opportunity for members to get involved and active. The Service Conditions Officer noted that an effective union requires member involvement and organising to ensure greater representation amongst the members. The current way of working means the Branch is too reliant on one individual, the Branch Secretary.

The member then asked what would happen to the Branch Secretary with regards to redundancy, redeployment, or returning to his prior substantive role and queried whether the decision had been made by the Branch Secretary on a personal level and that there was a conflict of interest.

The Branch Secretary reiterated that the decision was not made personally and that the Branch had made the decision. The Branch Secretary stated the most likely option of the three would be redundancy.

Another member stated that they would be reluctant to see the full-time role go, especially as the reorganisation takes place and how this would affect members.

The Branch Secretary reiterated that UNISON regional would play an active role in these negotiations as would the Branch under the new proposals. The new proposals would give an opportunity for new members to step up and become active in the Branch. The lack of diversity amongst the Branch Officers was noted and this is perhaps a reason why members do not wish to get involved, noting the current vacancies of Branch Officers.

The member was concerned the Branch Officers had agreed this without speaking to members.

The Branch Secretary stated that typically the Branch Executive would deal with these types of matters and then report back to the Branch at meetings such as these. The members were not involved in voting for the role to be made into a full-time post when the post was created.

A member questioned whether the Branch Secretary could carry out the vacant roles.

The Branch Secretary stated that effectively he has been carrying out numerous roles for the past few years but that there were difficulties with doing this for all of the roles given UNISON national rules.

A member stated that they could see both sides of the proposals but again raised concerns

over representation.

The Branch Secretary agreed on a personal level the proposals were not ideal but noted that he would be stepping down in 1 years' time in any event so the Branch would need to change at some point. It was again noted that there has been limited member interest in taking on the role on a full-time basis.

A member stated that they had only joined the branch in recent years due to the work of the Branch Secretary.

The Branch Secretary stated that this work was not his alone and that it was down to the work of the Branch Officers/Reps past and present who had also been a key part of this.

Two members again raised concerns over how the role would look under the new proposals and were concerned who would take the role if it was not paid. The members were concerned there would be no Branch Secretary.

The Branch Secretary reiterated that the Branch Officers are currently volunteers and that the Branch Secretary role would not be deleted, it would revert to being a Branch Secretary rather than a Branch Secretary/Rep role that it currently is. The Branch Secretary noted that the Branch had to change as the current senior management of Exeter City Council do not see the current working arrangements continuing to be effective.

A member then asked if members could vote on these proposals. The Branch Secretary stated that an extraordinary meeting could take place to discuss these.

A member then stated that they were concerned that Exeter City Council was to try to disempower the Branch and was forcing this change on the Branch. They voiced concern that the full-time role would be lost and stated that there would be someone who could fill this role. Another member echoed this stating there was a strong feeling in the room about this matter.

The member then again asked who had proposed the proposals, whether it was the Branch Secretary.

The Branch Secretary stated that the proposals stemmed from discussions with senior management around the Branch Secretary role and the role of the Branch. From those discussions a proposal was made at JCNC which was then brought to the Branch for consideration. The Branch Secretary reiterated that the Branch had considered this and agreed the proposals rather than the Branch Secretary acting alone.

The Regional Officer noted the depth of feeling in the room and stated he will take this issue back to regional for further input.

Treasurer

The Treasurer reported that the branch's accounts are healthy with over £46,000 in the account. The Treasurer encouraged members to come forward with ideas on how to spend the money.

If any member would like to view the branch accounts, please contact the Branch.

Regional Officer

Our Regional Officer, Micheal Auguste, stated he was meeting with other local branches to discuss the local government reorganisation. He stated the other branches were also

	considering recruiting a local organiser who would help with recruitment and support the Branch.
5.	<p>Election of Branch Officers</p> <p>As no nominations had been received before the deadline the current officers are to remain in post. A motion was proposed, seconded, then voted in unanimously by show of hands.</p>
6.	<p>AOB</p> <p>A member raised a query over whether the Branch could update the noticeboards. The Branch Secretary stated these could be updated and that the new Activist Hub enabled greater communication with members. It was noted that members also play a key role in recruitment by speaking to new staff about joining UNISON rather than leaving this solely to the Branch.</p> <p>A member raised a question over whether the Branch could have a rolling segment in the staff newsletter on recruitment. The Branch Secretary stated that the Communications Officer has tried this and had been rebuffed by Exeter City Council. The member then stated that if enough members contacted Exeter City Council on this matter, then they may have greater success with the request.</p> <p>A member asked how many members the Branch has. The Branch Secretary stated there are 324 members including retired members, 264 not including retired members.</p> <p>A member proposed that following on from the Branch Secretary's report an extraordinary meeting be held within 6-8 weeks to discuss the new proposals. The Branch Secretary noted that the Branch Executive has not voted for it or against it yet but has signalled agreement to it. A briefing would be issued to members on the proposals.</p>

The meeting closed at 14.10pm

Next meeting: tbc

List of Branch Officers Duly elected for 2025

Branch Chair	Vacant
Branch Secretary	Stewart Ward
Treasurer	Nick Stone
Service Conditions Officer	Chris Garlick
Assistant Branch Secretary	Amanda Leach
Education Secretary & Lifelong Learning Coordinator	Daryl Taylor-Hopgood
Health & Safety Officer	Quinton Cunliffe

Welfare Officer and Sports & Social Secretary

Vacant

Communications Officer

Amanda Leach

Membership Secretary

Vacant

Equalities Officer (Women)

Vacant

Equalities Officer (BAME)

Vacant

Young Persons Officer

Vacant