

# SEPA UNISON Secretary Report 2019

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I want to start this report with my thanks to the SEPA UNISON members. It was a massive year for the branch and AGM 2019 saw a relatively new look committee take to the helm.

In the months between our last AGM and now, there have been a great number of times when I was blown away by how members got behind the new committee, supported us and stepped up. It's been vital in moving us along the road to becoming a more democratic, member-led and powerful branch. With you behind us we managed to exact and organise change.

The 2019 to 2020 Branch Committee met for the first time on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March. We took the decision to hold quarterly face to face committee meetings. It proved to be a worthwhile investment and our committee developed strong links as a result.

At the March 2019 meeting we asked ourselves "What kind of Branch do we want to have at AGM 2020?" From the exercise, branch officers and stewards produced the following main goals.

## **A branch that delivers for Members**

- Recruit more members and stewards to get a stronger voice
- Better and more regular communication which are independent of SEPA
- Actively engage with members before and after we consult with SEPA on their behalf
- Be more visible in our offices
- Know the key issues facing members and map them
- Map and understand weak spots in our membership
- Celebrate our wins with them
- Present members with clear and transparent rules so they can participate in Branch Democracy
- Run a member led branch which operates transparently

## **A Branch that supports, values and develops activists**

- Clear Pathways and support for new activists
- Better Branch Processes
- Clearer Branch internal communications
- Regular Meetings planned in advance
- Meetings with clear structure – Agenda in advance and clear minutes
- Better training and development
- Train new branch officers
- Share information

### **A Branch that is always**

- Approachable and welcoming
- Cohesive
- Resilient
- Operating with transparency
- Accountable and honest
- Visible

While there are a number of areas that we still need to develop, I sincerely hope when you review the list, you are able to relate it to what you have seen on the ground. If not then hold us to account or even better become a steward or branch activist and help drive the change.

There were a number of areas where we managed to exact change. We managed to secure direct improvements to T&C's such as; an extra day's annual leave, an extra days volunteering leave and an increase in bereavement leave to 5 days as standard. Our turnout at pay consultation meetings with members was very strong and we submitted a pay claim that reflected your aspirations.

There was also a much stronger turnout for our consultative ballot than in previous years. A lot of thanks goes to local stewards for organising these workplace meetings, those in admin that helped with putting a poster up and booking our VC meetings. Again thanks to members for juggling workload, making it along to these meetings and making your feelings known.

Since the ballot the branch have responded alongside partner NDPB UNISON branches to a Scottish Government pay consultation and raised the concern from members that the split pay award between grades was divisive and would lead to retention problems. Initial signs suggest that ScotGov have taken this feedback on board and will not be recommending a split pay award for 2020-2021.

The Branch made a real effort in the last 12 months to make stronger connections with the wider Union. The benefits of this have been immense. Through greater engagement with UNISON and its staff we managed to secure an increase in funding. We benefited from training put on by a fellow UNISON branch in the Scottish Children Reporters. I want to thank our UNISON staff and partner branches for their support throughout the year, particularly through the early days as we found our way into our roles.

Internally, branch rules and processes were developed. This allowed the branch to ensure the best use of our budget. Savings from this overhaul allowed us to put a sizable resource towards training our new and existing reps. The committee have also recently purchased a new website which should help members get information on the work of the branch and help lead to new joiners.

Externally SEPA UNISON were represented at UNISON National Conference, Scottish Council, International, Environment, Women Members and Black Members committees. This external engagement formed a huge commitment for the activists that represented us externally. Many of the meetings and conferences mentioned take place over the weekends. It would be unfair not to recognise and thank the families of our reps for the sacrifice they make so the branch can undertake this engagement.

The connections made from this work has been vital for bringing new skills and knowledge into the branch. It's also important that the branch play its part by assisting other branches and helping the union, particularly by providing our expertise around environmental issues.

A number of new faces became involved as stewards, workplace contacts and H&S reps and started to organise in their local areas and connect members to the union. Ideally the branch would like to have a H&S rep or workplace contact in each office so if you are interested in getting more involved then please get in touch. The effort put in by existing activists to put themselves out of their comfort zone and develop was immense. The growth in confidence in our committee was to be seen right through the year and branch now has much more resilience as a result.

Membership took a dramatic boost in the year. Voluntary severance schemes in previous years had led to a gradual dip in membership over a number of years. Hopefully the huge jump in joiners is evidence of the fact that members now feel more involved and connected to the direction of the branch.

Management were supportive as the branch settled in as a new committee. I would like to thank our management colleagues at JNCC for their partnership over the year. Working together we delivered the pay increase into members' pockets quicker than in many of the previous years. The moratorium on JE was lifted and some really positive steps have been made in the move to a new scheme. The majority of managers committed to engage early on issues and in consultation. This was been welcome and in many cases allowed us to contribute and work together to get it right.

While there was much delivered by the branch and some good wins, such as securing backfills for staff going off on Maternity Leave, there remains some huge issues the committee will need to organise around in 2020 – 2021. The UK and Scotland faces a challenging years in the face of a minimum 5 years of Tory rule and the impact of EU exit. UNISON will need to continue to grow in order to protect the public sector and also to promote the risks climate change poses to our communities in the face of potential inaction, ignorance and denial from government.

Internally our SEPA colleagues are under more strain than ever and absence rates due to stress are rising. Morale is low in the organisation and hopefully following the upcoming staff survey direct action can begin to be taken to turn this around. As an organisation there is much more work that SEPA needs to do and invest around equalities.

With some added impetus SEPA could back the staff undertaking this work and easily champion the aspirations set out by ScotGov in the Fair Work convention. The branch would like to see world class policy and advice urgently delivered for staff and managers around issues such as domestic abuse, menopause awareness, disability awareness, inclusive language and guidance for staff and managers around transitioning in the workplace.

Further steps need to be taken to see why overwork is still an issue affecting the health of our colleagues, 12 months on from a mental health and wellbeing survey highlighting the issues. Greater steps need to be taken to bring the organisation together as staff based outside of the central belt continue to feel isolated from the change and decisions being made. The branch has a responsibility in this regard also and will need to continue to support and invite the challenge of members and colleagues based in small offices.

In summary AGM 2020 sees the branch with more members, healthier finances and greater resilience within the committee. It has been a privilege to have served as SEPA UNISON branch secretary and I have every faith that throughout the year our branch, backed by members, will continue to grow, represent members and tackle the issues.

Finally I want to thank the committee, our workplace contacts, our full time UNISON officials and of course our members for their support and camaraderie. I wish the SEPA UNISON branch the best for the future and hope we all enjoy a successful AGM.

**Kind Regards**  
**Adrian Moore**

**Branch Secretary**  
**SEPA UNISON**  
<http://www.sepaunison.org/>