BIRMINGHAM BRANCH NEWSLETTER
FEBRUARY 2024

THE HERE FOR YOU ISSUE

BRANCH AGM

Annual General Meeting
Open to all members of the Branch to attend.

Help Staying Warm and Well This Winter.

Groundworks Green Doctors help UK residents stay warm, stay well, and save money on household bills.

GREEN DOCTOR™ The Green Doctors offer free, impartial advice to help you take control of your bills, save energy where possible in the home, and access other services and initiatives available.

We can provide different kinds of support such as:
- Support with Gas/electric bills & debt
- Saving money on fuel bills and grants
- Tackling damp and mould in the home

Some of the reasons people ask us for help are:
- struggling to pay energy bills.
- finding it hard to manage fuel debt.
- worrying about keeping warm or choosing between eating and heating
- feeling that the home is cold, damp or draughty.
- respiratory problems e.g., asthma or a persistent cough

Find out more here:
Green Doctor, helping UK residents stay warm, stay well, and save energy. - Groundwork

Thank you, Janet Dugmore

We would like to give our thanks and say farewell to one of our schools' reps Janet Dugmore. She has been a valued Senior Steward in our Branch who has given commitment to UNISON and supported lots of our members. Among many other things she is responsible for developing a really useful skills audit pack for our members facing possible redundancy, started work on a violence in schools' presentation for members and has been a valuable representative of our Birmingham City Council school's forum.

We wish Janet well in her retirement and look forward to continuing to see her at the branch as a retired member.

NM

Help with the cost of living.

If you don't have enough money to live on, you might be able to get help to afford essentials like bills and food. This includes the Household Support Fund and cost of living payments.

You should check if you can claim benefits - you might be able to do this even if you work, have savings, or own a home.

Check what benefits you can get.

Lots of people miss out on benefits they're entitled to - so it's worth checking what you can get.

Claiming benefits might also let you get access to other financial help like cost-of-living payments and discounts on energy and transport.

You might be able to claim benefits or increase your current benefits if you're:

- Over 16 years old with a low income or no income
- Sick or disabled, including if you have a mental health condition.
- Of State Pension age with a low income or no income
- A carer
- Responsible for children

Check what benefits you might be entitled to with the UNISON benefits calculator:
Check your benefits | There for You (UNISON Welfare) | UNISON National

Check benefits and financial support on the Government website here: Check benefits and financial support you can get - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Get your first benefit payment early.

When you apply for benefits, you might be able to get your first payment early while you're waiting for either:

- A decision on your application
- Your first payment

This is called a 'short-term benefit advance'. You can get an advance for:

- Universal Credit
- Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Carer's Allowance
- Pension Credit
- State Pension

You'll need to pay back the advance. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will take an amount off your future payments until you've paid it back. For Universal Credit, you can spread the repayments over 24 months. For other benefits, you'll usually repay your advance over 12 weeks.

If you've applied for Universal Credit, you can check how to get a Universal Credit advance payment.

Check if you'll get a Cost-of-Living Payment

The government will send you a 'Cost of Living Payment' if you:

- Get a benefit based on your income - for example, Universal Credit, Pension Credit, or tax credits.
- Get a disability benefit - for example, Personal Independence Payment
- Are over State Pension age and get Winter Fuel Payments

You'll get 1 Cost of Living Payment for each type of benefit you get. For example, if you get Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payment, and Winter Fuel Payments, you'll get 3 Cost of Living Payments.

More information on cost-of-living payments here:
Cost of Living Payments 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
Cost of living support | Birmingham City Council

Get help with essential costs.

Your local council might help you pay for things like:

- Your energy and water bills
- Food
- Essential items - for example, clothes or an oven

This help is known as 'welfare assistance' or the 'Household Support Fund'. Each council runs their own scheme. You'll need to check if you can get support and what type of support you can get.

Ask your local council if they run a welfare assistance or Household Support Fund scheme. Find which council your own local authority is by checking here:
Find your local council - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
Extra help with your housing costs or council tax | Extra help with your housing costs or council tax | Birmingham City Council

You don't have to be getting benefits to get help from your local council. If you do get benefits, they won't be affected if you start getting money from a welfare assistance or Household Support Fund scheme.

There are also other things you can do if you're struggling to afford essentials like rent and you may be able to get a Discretionary Housing Payment to help with this.

To apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment, you would need to be in receipt of either:

- Housing Benefit
- The housing element of Universal Credit and need more financial support with housing costs.

You can get more information about the Discretionary Housing Payment and how to apply on the government website:
Applying for a Discretionary Housing Payment - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Warm Spaces

You can ask your local council if they have information about nearby 'warm spaces' – these are public spaces that anyone can use to stay warm such as a community space – like a library.

In Birmingham Warm Welcome spaces are open to all, inclusive and non-judgmental. Providing free, safe, comfortable and welcoming places where people can come together to take part in activities, access services, and get practical advice and support

Click below to find warm spaces in Birmingham:
Birmingham Warm Welcome Spaces | Birmingham Warm Welcome Spaces | Birmingham City Council

Get help if you have a child or are pregnant.

You might be able to get a Healthy Start card to help you buy certain types of milk, infant formula, fruit and vegetables.

To get the Healthy Start card you must be at least 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under 4 years old. You must also be getting either:

- Universal Credit - but only if your household earns £408 a month or less.
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance - but only if you're pregnant.
- Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit - but only if your household earns £16,190 a year or less.

If you get Child Tax Credit, you can't get the card if you also get Working Tax Credit - unless you get the 'run-on' payment. Working Tax Credit run-on is the payment you get for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit.

With the Healthy Start card you'll get:

- £4.25 each week from week 10 of your pregnancy
- £8.50 each week for children from birth to 1 year old
- £4.25 each week for children between 1 and 4 years old
- Free vitamins

You can apply for the Healthy Start scheme on the NHS website.

Further help if you have children or are pregnant.

You might be able to get help if:

- your child is at school.
- your child is in childcare.
- you're pregnant or you've recently had a baby.

If your child is at school

If you're on a low income or claim certain benefits, you might be able to get help with the costs of sending your children to school.

For example, you could get:

- Free school meals
- Free transport to school
- A grant to help to buy school clothes or uniforms
- Help with school trips

Find out more about getting help with school costs.

If your child is in childcare

If you're on a low income or claim certain benefits, you might be able to get help with childcare costs. For example:

- If you work and claim Universal Credit, you might be able to claim back up to 85% of your childcare costs - you could get up to £950.92 a month for 1 child under 17 or £1,630.15 for 2 or more children.
- If you have a 2-year-old, you might be able to claim up to 15 hours of free childcare a week.

If you work, you might be able to claim Tax-Free Childcare. This is a government scheme that helps parents with childcare costs like holiday clubs, childminders and nurseries. You can get up to:

- £2,000 a year for each child under 12
- £4,000 a year for each disabled child under 17

You won't be able to receive Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit, Universal Credit or childcare vouchers if you get Tax-Free Childcare. Work out which option is best for you before applying.

If you have a 3 or 4 year old, you can get up to 570 free hours of early education or childcare a year. If you work, you might be able to claim more.

Check what help you're eligible for on the UK government's Childcare Choices website.

If you're pregnant or have a baby

You could get a one-off payment of £500 to help towards the costs of having a baby. You usually qualify if you get certain benefits and are having your first baby - you have to claim before your baby is 6 months old. Find out how to apply for a Sure Start Maternity Grant on GOV.UK.

You might be able to get support from a local baby bank - these offer free essentials like nappies, toys, shoes and clothes.

Some food banks also provide nappies, baby wipes and baby food.

Search online to find your nearest baby bank or food bank - or speak to your midwife or health visitor.

Find out more about maternity pay and parental rights.

Young Women's Trust

Get free coaching and job application feedback with the Work It Out service.
Work It Out is a free service that offers support for women aged 18 to 30. It aims to unlock your potential by building skills, strong mental health and opening up opportunities for the future.

You can choose to sign up for coaching, or help with your CV and job applications, or both. The service is totally free.
You can have up to 6 free coaching sessions over the phone, WhatsApp or email at a time that works for you.

Conversations between you and your coach are flexible, they can be arranged during the day, in the evenings or at the weekends and are totally confidential.

They particularly want to support young women:

- With experience of living on low or no pay
- With a disability
- Who are currently out of work.
- Who have caring responsibilities.
  Who are care leavers.
- Who have few or no formal qualifications.

Work It Out welcomes all young women, including trans women. If you identify as non-binary and are comfortable being supported by a women's service, they are also happy to help you.

More information here: Get support | Young Women's Trust | Charity (youngwomenstrust.org)

Get help with health costs.

You might be able to get help paying for NHS charges, for example:

- Prescriptions
- Dental treatment
- Sight tests, glasses and contact lenses
- Travel to NHS treatment

Check if you can get help with health costs on the NHS website.

If you pay for regular prescriptions

If you can't get help to pay for your prescriptions, you might be able to save money by buying a prepayment certificate.

You'll pay a fixed price for either 3 or 12 months. This will cover the cost of all the prescriptions you need during that time.

You can buy a prepayment certificate for unlimited prescriptions for:

- £31.25 for 3 months
- £111.60 for 12 months - you can pay this in 10 instalments of £11.16.

You can buy a prepayment certificate on the NHS website.

If you've been prescribed hormone replacement therapy (HRT)

If you already have a prepayment certificate for other medicines, it covers the cost of your HRT.

If you only need a certificate for HRT, you might be able to save money. You can get an HRT prescription prepayment certificate - it costs £19.30 for 12 months.

The certificate only covers certain HRT medicines. Check if your HRT medicine is covered on the NHS website. If you have HRT medicines that aren't covered, you'll have to pay for them or buy a normal prepayment certificate.

You can buy an HRT prescription prepayment certificate on the NHS website.

UNISON HEALTH PLAN

We've got you covered for money back on everyday health expenses such as trips to the dentist and opticians plus a wide range of therapy treatments like physiotherapy, chiropody and many other cash-paying benefits.

Pre-existing conditions are covered on most benefits and there's no age limit to join or to stay on cover. Get peace of mind knowing health and dental bills for your family are taken care of with this low-cost plan, plus there's free cover for up to 5 children too.

Feel free to call us on Freephone 0800 037 0753 with any questions you may have about joining the UNISON Health Plan or switching from a similar scheme.

More information here:
https://unisonhealthapplynow.unionbenefits.co.uk/

Get help with your energy and water if you're disabled.

If you're disabled, you might be able to get extra support with your energy and water. You can check how to get free advice about energy and water bills on the Scope website.

Scope offers free energy and water advice to disabled people to help manage energy and water needs.

The service is open to:

- Any disabled person or households where 1 or more disabled people live, and
- those households are in England or Wales

Support with your energy and water needs

Our expert advisers can support you through a wide range of topics related to your energy and water needs. including:

- Managing energy and water debt
- Changing your meter
- Energy and water efficiency
- Accessing benefits, grants, and trusts
- Contacting or complaining to your supplier
- Understanding your gas and electricity bills
- Understanding how to use your heating systems
- Support registering with the Priority Services Register

Telephone appointments

You will get a telephone appointment with an energy adviser that will last up to 45 minutes. During this appointment you will get information and advice specific to your needs.

Your adviser will arrange any follow-up appointments if you need them.

To get the most out of your appointment, please try to give your adviser as much detail as possible. You should have pen and paper for taking notes and the following information easily available:

- Your most recent gas or electricity bill
- An up-to-date meter reading, if possible
- Details of any missed payments or arrears
- Details of any payment plans agreed with your energy supplier

Applying for energy and water support

During your application you will be asked about the type of support you need. Here you can choose how you would like to receive your advice.

Apply here: Disability Energy Support eligibility check | Disability charity Scope UK

Find more information on the Scope website:
https://www.scope.org.uk/disability-energy-support/

Making adjustments

Scope can make adjustments such as:

- Video calls with British Sign Language interpreters
- Language interpreters if you wish to talk to us in another language.

If you have questions about accessing the service, please get in touch on 0808 801 0828 or email Disability.EnergySupport@scope.org.uk

Get help with pets.

If you're using a food bank, you might be able to ask for some things, like pet food. Check with your local food bank if they're able to help.

You can also check if there's a pet food bank in your area. Ask your local vet or pet shop or search online for 'pet food bank' and your local town.

You might be able to find free pet food collection points at your local supermarket, pet store or animal charity.

Get help with vet care.

You might be eligible for free or reduced vet care from Blue Cross if you:

- Get certain means-tested benefits.
- Live close to one of their hospitals or clinics

Check if you can get free or reduced vet care on the Blue Cross website.

You also might be able to get free or reduced vet care from charities such as RSPCA and PDSA.

Check if you can get free or reduced vet care on the RSPCA website.

Check if you can get free or reduced vet care on the PDSA website.

Get help with vet bills.

If you're struggling to pay your vet bills, talk to your vet about payment options - like reducing the bill or setting up a payment plan.

If you can't set up an affordable payment plan, you should get debt advice. Your vet might decide to stop treating your pet if you owe money.

UNISON PET INSURANCE

UNISON members can enjoy savings on LV=’s pet insurance. Choose from their limited or lifetime policies.

Why Choose LV= Pet insurance?

- Cover for puppies, dogs, kittens or cats, all with their own levels of cover to suit you and each of your pets.
- 10% discount for the first year of cover when you buy online.
- Free 24/7 access to online vets (with FirstVet)
- Protection if you're faced with unexpected vet fees for illness and injury, covering up to £10,000 pe year with lifetime cover.
- Lost pet? They reimburse you for up to £1,500 to advertise your missing cat or dog, including up to £500 that can be used for a reward.
- Third party liability – the pet policies offer up to £2million third party liability cover for costs and compensation if your dog has injured someone or caused damage to someone's property.
- Complimentary therapies – they cover treatments like acupuncture, hydrotherapy, osteopathy, physiotherapy or chiropractic therapy.

Get a quote on the LV= site: Pet Insurance Quotes UK - Cats & Dogs | Defaqto 5 Star Rated | LV=

Debt support and advice

The Citizens Advice website is a great resource for support around debt, and if you need help urgently, you can contact your nearest Citizens Advice. This could be for example:

- Bailiffs are coming round.
- You're being evicted for rent arrears.
- You're being evicted for mortgage arrears.
- You're being taken to court for a debt.
- Your gas or electricity company is threatening to cut you off.

REDUCING YOUR REGULAR OUTGOINGS

If you're struggling with money there are steps you can take to save on your regular outgoings.
You might be able to save money by:

- Getting a discount on your council tax.
- Getting a water meter fitted.
- Switching to a cheaper broadband, TV or phone deal.
- Getting cheaper travel.
- Paying for prescriptions in advance.

Council Tax

If you're on a low income or claim benefits you might be able to get a council tax reduction – each local council runs its own scheme, so it does depend on where you live, apply for a council tax reduction:
Apply for Council Tax Reduction - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Gas & Electric

At the moment you probably wont be able to save money by switching and on price comparison websites there wont be as many tariffs as usual but if you're looking – make sure you used an authorised price comparison website:
Switch supplier or energy tariff | Ofgem

If you're in debt with your energy supplier you would need to follow a different process: Switching if you owe your energy supplier money - Citizens Advice

Water Bills

If you have a water meter you only pay for the water you use. If it doesn't save you money you can change back within 12 months of installation. After 12 months you can't go back to unmetered billing.
If on a low income you might be able to get a cheaper rate from the water company, called a social tariff: Help with bills - CCW

Switch to cheaper broadband, phone, or TV

You might be able to save money by switching to a different broadband, phone, or TV provider. Check your terms and conditions before you switch, if you're part way through a fixed term contract you may have to pay to leave early – an 'exit fee'. It may be better to wait until the end of the contract, but its worth checking to cut costs.
Read more about finding a cheaper deal.

Find out more about help with debt on the Citizen's Advice website:
Help with debt - Citizens Advice

Help to pay energy bills.

You might be able to get help if you're struggling to afford your energy bills or top up your prepayment meter. The help you get depends on:

- How you pay for your energy
- The type of energy you use.
- If you claim benefits

Check if you can get a fuel voucher.

If you can't afford to top up your prepayment meter, you might be able to get a fuel voucher.

You'll get the voucher as a code in a letter, text message or email.You can use it to add credit to your gas card or electricity key. If you don't have one of these, contact your supplier to get one.

Birmingham City Council can award crisis grants to help with topping up you gas and electricity pre-payment meter. To get one, you must show you have already asked your energy supplier for help.

You can use a fuel voucher at:

- A shop signed up to PayPoint - find a shop near you on the PayPoint website.
- A Post Office or shop signed up to Payzone - find a Post Office or shop near you on the Payzone website.

To use your voucher, you'll need to take:

- The code and instructions
- Some form of ID - for example, your passport or a bill with your name and address

If you have a smart prepayment meter you can also add the fuel voucher credit to your account online. To do this, follow the instructions on your voucher.

Check your fuel voucher to see when it expires. You might have to use it within 15 days.

If you have problems using your voucher, contact the organisation that gave it to you - you should be able to find their contact information on the instructions.

Grants and help to pay off energy debt.

If you're behind with your energy bills, you might be able to get a grant to help you pay off your debt. This might be from your energy company or a charitable trust.

Get help if you're behind with your energy bills - Citizens Advice

Check if you can sign up to the Priority Services Register

You can get extra help from your gas and electricity supplier by signing up to the Priority Services Register. You can sign up if you're either:

- Of State Pension age
- Disabled or have a long-term health condition.
- Considered 'vulnerable' by your energy network.

You could be classed as vulnerable if you're disabled or have a long-term health condition. Your energy network might also consider you vulnerable if you:

- Don't speak or read English well.
- Have children under 5 years old or are pregnant.
- Have no sense of smell or would struggle to smell gas.

If you're on the Priority Services Register your energy supplier can:

- Make your call a priority when you contact them.
- Give their engineers a password if they visit or contact you - so you know they're genuine.
- Move your prepayment meter if you struggle to get to it.

Signing up to the Priority Services Register
You'll need to fill out the form on your electricity operator's website - this is who owns and operates the electricity cables in your area. Your electricity operator is different from your electricity supplier, who sends your bills.

You can check who your electricity network operator is on the Power Cut 105 website. You'll need to know the postcode of your property.

UK Power Cut? Call 105 For Free | Find Your Electricity Provider (powercut105.com)

If you use an oxygen concentrator

If you use an oxygen concentrator for a disability or health condition, you can get money back for the electricity it uses. This is called a 'rebate'.

You should get the rebate every 3 months. The person who installs your concentrator should tell you how to get the rebate.

If your rebate hasn't been set up, contact the supplier of your concentrator. The supplier in the West Midlands is Baywater Healthcare.

Electricity Refunds - Baywater Healthcare

Check if you can get a Warm Home Discount

If you get benefits, you might be able to get £150 off your electricity bill or £150 added to your prepayment meter. You'll get the payment by the end of March 2024. You don't need to apply for the scheme - payments are automatic.

Check if your benefits might make you eligible:
You should get the Warm Home Discount if you or your partner got the Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit on 13 August 2023.

You might also be able to get the Warm Home Discount if you get a different benefit and the government decides you have 'high energy costs'. This is based on the type of property you live in; not how much you spend. They'll work this out automatically - you don't need to contact them.

If you have high energy costs, you'll get the Warm Home Discount if you or your partner got any of the following benefits on 13 August 2023:

- Universal Credit
- Pension Credit Savings Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Child Tax Credits and Working Tax Credits - and your income is below the limit that applies to your household.

Income limits for Child Tax Credits and Working Tax Credits

	Single Adult
No children	**£17,688**
1 child	**£22,942**
2 children	**£28,215**
3 children	**£33,489**
4 or more children	**£38,763**

	2 or more adults
No children	**£26,369**
1 child	**£31,643**
2 children	**£36,917**
3 children	**£42,191**
4 or more children	**£47,465**

The limits are for your gross income per year. This means the total amount before any tax and deductions are taken off. The limits don't include income from:

- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Disability Living Allowance
- Personal Independence Payment
- Attendance Allowance

The government works out your income from your tax credit records.

Check if your supplier is part of the scheme.
You'll only get the Warm Home Discount if your supplier is part of the scheme. Check if your supplier is part of the Warm Home Discount Scheme: Warm Home Discount Scheme: Energy suppliers - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

If you're eligible for the winter 2023 to 2024 payment the government will send you a letter between mid-October 2023 and mid-January 2024.

They might ask you for more information to check whether you're eligible. You must tell them by 29 February 2024 - this is when the scheme closes. If you send it by post make sure it gets there in plenty of time.

Check if you're eligible for the Warm Home Discount
Check if you're eligible for the Warm Home Discount - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

If you're of State Pension age

You can usually get a Winter Fuel Payment; this is an annual one-off payment to help you pay for heating during the winter.

You'll get between £250 to £600; this automatically includes an extra Pensioner Cost of Living Payment.

You should start getting the Winter Fuel Payment automatically once you reach State Pension age, but sometimes you might need to apply.

Check how much Pensioner Cost of Living Payment you'll get:
You'll get £300 if you live either:

- On your own
- With people who don't qualify for a Winter Fuel Payment

If you live with someone else who qualifies for the Winter Fuel Payment, the amount you'll get depends on whether either of you gets any of the following:

- Pension Credit
- Income-related ESA
- Income-based JSA

If either you or the person you live with gets one of these benefits, you'll both get £300 - as long as you're not partners. If you're partners, you'll only get one £300 payment.
If neither of you gets one of these benefits, you'll both get £150.

Cold Weather Payment

If you get certain benefits, you might get a Cold Weather Payment when it's very cold. This is a one-off payment to help pay for extra heating costs.

You're only eligible for a cold weather payment if you receive: Pension credit, income support, income-based Jobseekers Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Universal Credit, support of mortgage interest. If eligible you will be paid automatically.

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Help from other providers.

LEAP
LEAP (Local Energy Advice Partnership) can provide help and advice with:

- Energy switching
- Free energy saving measures
- Money advice

They can also check if you are eligible for insulation, a new appliance, or a new boiler.

Phone LEAP on 0800 060 7567 or apply for LEAP online.

HEART
HEART is an initiative to support fuel poor and vulnerable households. They help replace old and inefficient appliances with modern and efficient ones.

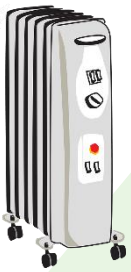
This includes:

- Fridges
- Fridge freezers
- Washing machines
- Electric cookers

Help to Heat Grants

You may also be eligible for help to heat grants if you are a home owner-occupier.

Find out if your property is eligible for Help to Heat funding; Help to Heat schemes make sure homes are warmer and cheaper to heat, this includes:



- Boiler Upgrade Scheme
- Home Upgrade Grant phase 2
- Sustainable Warmth Competition
- Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund
- Energy Company Obligation (ECO)

This funding is not delivered directly by the government, but through installers, local authorities, energy companies and other bodies.

More information here:
https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/find-energy-grants-for-you-home-help-to-heat

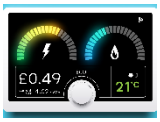
Energy saving boilers

Money Saving Boiler Challenge will save you money and energy by changing a single setting on your boiler.

Many UK combi boilers burn more gas, generate more carbon emissions, and cost more in energy bills than they need to.

Research shows that by adjusting the boiler flow temperature to 60 degrees or below, households will save money on their energy bill. They will also save an average of 172kg in carbon emissions.

Smart meters



A smart meter can help you take control of your energy use.

Smart meters have an in-house display that shows, at a glance, how much gas and electricity you are using, and how much you are spending.

This means you can plan ahead, knowing how much your energy bill will be. It could also help you make small changes around your home to use less energy, which could save you money too.

Find out more about smart meters

Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 (HUG2)

The Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 (HUG2) is designed to help improve the comfort and energy efficiency of lower income homes that are not heated by mains gas central heating. The scheme offers several other benefits, including reducing a home's carbon footprint and energy bills, with no cost to residents.

Find our more about the HUG2 scheme and eligibility (link to this Apply for help to improve a home with no gas boiler (Home Upgrade Grant) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

We are working with West Midlands Combined Authority and Act on Energy to offer free home energy efficiency improvements to qualifying residents.

Check your eligibility here: Act on Energy Expression of Interest

Benefits Calculator

If you're over 18, you can use the Turn2us benefits calculator to check which benefits you can get.

Millions of people are missing out on thousands of pounds. Check what you are entitled to now.

Grants for energy-saving home improvements

You might be able to get help with the cost of things like insulation, a new boiler or improvements to your heating.
https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/energy/energy-supply/save-energy-at-home/get-help-with-the-cost-of-energy-efficiency/

Mental Health Support

Mind has a wealth of resources and information on mental health support online, but you can find a limited amount of information below.

Finding Out what support is out there.

Crisis Services

Here is a list of crisis services you might be able to use, broken down into the type of situation they are useful for.

Crisis Service	Situation when this service can help
Accident and Emergency (A&E)	You need immediate medical help – especially if you think you might act on suicidal thoughts, or you've harmed yourself and need urgent medical attention.
Emergency GP Appointments	You need urgent support for your mental health, but there is no immediate danger to your safety or the safety of others.
Listening Services (telephone support)	You need to talk to someone right away about how you're feeling.
Crisis Teams	When you need urgent support, and you are already in contact with your local mental health services.
Crisis Houses	When you need more intensive support than can be offered to you at home, but it's not appropriate for you to be admitted to hospital
Hospital Admission	• If not going to hospital would mean you or others would be at risk of harm. • If you need intensive support which cannot be give n to you at home. • You need to have an assessment which cannot be done outside of hospital.

Finding services for ongoing support or treatment
Sometimes just knowing that there is support out there, can help you to feel better.

You might feel you've exhausted all the resources in your area, but services are changing all the time, and it might be worth looking again or in a different place than usual.

If you can't find anything for you on Mind, try googling the following terms:

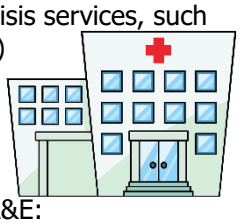
- Local CBT therapist
- Local anxiety support groups
- Therapists near me
- Local crisis team
- Local advocacy service contact inf
- Mental health support groups nea
- Mindfulness courses near me

Help at A&E

Some A&E departments have a liaison psychiatry team (specialist help for mental health) that you can ask to see. If there isn't a liaison psychiatry team, A&E staff might contact other local services such as a crisis team (CRHT) to help assess you.

The liaison psychiatry team or mental health team might:

- Make an initial assessment of your mental health needs (sometimes called a psychiatric evaluation)
- Help keep you safe for the short-term
- Prescribe medication to help you cope with symptoms you may be experiencing right now
- Put you in contact with other crisis services, such as your local crisis team (CRHT)
- Decide whether you can go home, or if you need to be admitted to hospital.



For more information about attending A&E: https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/crisis-services/accident-emergency-a-e/

Emergency GP Appointments

When should I make an emergency GP appointment?

If you need urgent support for your mental health, but you feel able to keep yourself safe for a short while until your appointment.

How could it help me?

An emergency appointment involves seeing a doctor quickly – usually the first appointment with an available doctor. If it's not with your regular GP and you'd like to see them too, you can ask your surgery about booking a follow-up appointment.

For more info about emergency GP Appointments: https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/crisis-services/emergency-gp-appointments/

How can a crisis team help me?

Crisis teams can help if you need urgent mental health support. This includes times when you might otherwise need to go to hospital for your mental health. The team usually includes a number of mental health professionals, such as a psychiatrist, mental health nurses, social workers and support workers.

Support from a crisis team could help you manage a crisis at home, which some people prefer. But this isn't right for everyone. You might feel you would rather be treated in hospital. For example, this may be if your home environment has contributed to you feeling in crisis.

ore info on crisis teams: Mental health crisis teams - Mind

Mental Health Crisis Helplines

Listening Services

If you're in crisis and need to talk right now, there are many helplines staffed by trained people ready to listen. They won't judge you and could help you make sense of what you're feeling.

Samaritans
To talk about anything that is upsetting you, you can contact Samaritans 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. You can call 116 123 (free from any phone), email jo@samaritans.org or visit some branches in person.

SANEline.
If you're experiencing a mental health problem or supporting someone else, you can call SANEline on 0300 304 7000 (4.30pm–10.30pm every day).

National Suicide Prevention Helpline UK
Offers a supportive listening service to anyone with thoughts of suicide. You can call the National Suicide Prevention Helpline UK on 0800 689 5652 (6pm to midnight every day).

Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)
You can call the CALM on 0800 58 58 58 (5pm–midnight every day) if you are struggling and need to talk. Or if you prefer not to speak on the phone, you could try the CALM webchat service.

Shout.
If you would prefer not to talk but want some mental health support, you could text SHOUT to 85258. Shout offers a confidential 24/7 text service providing support if you are in crisis and need immediate help.

The Mix
If you're under 25, you can call The Mix on 0808 808 4994 (3pm–midnight every day), request support by email using this form on The Mix website or use their crisis text messenger service.

Papyrus HOPELINEUK.
If you're under 35 and struggling with suicidal feelings, or concerned about a young person who might be struggling, you can call Papyrus HOPELINEUK on 0800 068 4141 (24 hours, 7 days a week), email pat@papyrus-uk.org or text 07786 209 697.

Nightline
If you're a student, you can look on the Nightline website to see if your university or college offers a night-time listening service. Nightline phone operators are all students too.

Switchboard
If you identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender, you can call Switchboard LGBT+ Helpline on 0300 330 0630 (10am–10pm every day), email chris@switchboard.lgbt or use their webchat service. Phone operators all identify as LGBT+.

Helplines Partnership
For more options, visit the Helplines Partnership website for a directory of UK helplines. Mind's Infoline can also help you find services that can support you. If you're outside the UK, the Befrienders Worldwide website has a tool to search by country for emotional support helplines around the world.

How could they help me?
Listening line staff will let you talk through your feelings and experiences without judging you or telling you what to do. Many listening services let you talk for as long as you need.

If you can't talk on the phone
As well as phone numbers to call, some organisations routinely offer support in other ways – which could include emails, messages or web chat. Or you might need to make a specific request:

- Some organisations are required to make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities, which could include providing other forms of communication.
- If you have difficulty hearing or speaking, it might help to use the Next Generation Text Service (NGTS) Typetalk/Text Relay app on a mobile device or computer.
- If you need a translator or British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter, you could ask the organisation if they provide a translation service and if it costs anything to use.

Access to Work Mental Health Support

Able futures

Able Futures supports people who are working and living with mental health difficulties, as well as advising employers and providers of apprenticeships on how they can support mental health at work.
Able Futures is set up to provide the ATW Mental Health Support Service on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions.

Able Futures delivery partners
Led by Ingeus UK, the Able Futures partnership includes Case-UK, Health 2 Employment, Salus and The Better Health Generation.

More information: https://able-futures.co.uk/access-to-work-mental-health-support-service

Maximus

If you're having more down days or feeling anxious in your role, you are not alone. The Access to Work Mental Health Support Service, funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, is here for you.

It's easy to access and there's no cost.

Maximus can help you to: Have better days at work with a personalised wellbeing support plan, get the most out of your role with ideas for workplace adjustments and stay in or return to work with nine months of practical advice and guidance.

More information: https://atw.maximusuk.co.uk/

UNISON Member benefits

THERE FOR YOU

Members experiencing financial and emotional difficulties can contact UNISON Welfare, which provides confidential advice and support services for members and their dependants.

Learn more here: There for You (UNISON Welfare) | Member support and services | UNISON National

HEALTH PLANS

We've got you covered for money back on everyday health expenses such as trips to the dentist and opticians plus a wide range of therapy treatments like physiotherapy, chiropody and many other cash-paying benefits.

Pre-existing conditions are covered on most benefits and there's no age limit to join or to stay on cover. Get peace of mind knowing health and dental bills for your family are taken care of with this low-cost plan, plus there's free cover for up to 5 children too.

Learn more here: Health plans | UNISON Member Benefits

DENTAL PLANS

If you have a NHS dentist, get £500 of NHS dental cover with this NHS patient plan exclusively available to UNISON members and their families.

It gives you money back each time you visit your NHS dentist, meaning no more costly treatment bills! You're covered immediately as soon as you join the plan.

Learn more here: Dental plans | UNISON Member Benefits

QUILTER FINANCIAL ADVISERS

Quilter Financial Advisers offer a free, no obligation initial consultation with an expert financial adviser to discuss your circumstances and find out how you could benefit from financial advice. Your adviser can help you with:

- Savings and investments
- Planning for your retirement
- Making sure your mortgage deal is right for you
- Protecting you and your loved ones.

Learn more here: Quilter Financial Advisers | UNISON Member Benefits

HOME INSURANCE

UNISON members can now obtain exclusive discounts on LV Home Insurance vs the general public prices on lv.com and through the call centre.

Get a quote today: UNISON member discounts | LV=

UNISON REWARDS

UNISON Rewards is an online shopping discount website, where you can receive cashback and discounts on purchases, there are many categories you can scroll through, or you can type in a retailer to see if they are available. There are categories such as:

- Mother and baby
- Home phone
- Health and beauty
- Sports and fitness
- Free trials
- Broadband
- Utilities
- Books
- Fashion
- And more

there are a number of companies you can earn cashback or discounts with, including:

- Boots
- TalkTalk
- Moneysupermarket Energy
- U-Switch
- Burton
- Vodafone
- Very
- O2 Mobile
- Halfords
- M&S
- Thorntons

You will need to log in with your UNISON online login, and once logged in you can see a full list of retailers here (or use the categories, or search for a retailer in the search bar)

Retailers - UNISON Rewards

MEMBER LEARNING

UNISON has a proud history of providing high quality learning opportunities for our members. We work with trusted national institutions like The Open University and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and a host of local providers, and we also deliver informal learning in-house.

Member learning | UNISON College

UNISON members have access to the full member learning offer including a wide range of educational opportunities online and offline.

UNISON also has the UNISON College Bursary Scheme., which helps members further their education – offering grants towards course or exam fees for members studying at their own expense.

Members can get fee discounts for distance learning also. For more information on UNISON's financial assistance for learning, see here: Financial support | UNISON College

Get Support - Domestic Violence and Abuse

You do not have to wait for an emergency situation to find help. If domestic abuse is happening to you, it's important to tell someone and remember you are not alone.

Recognising domestic abuse

Does your partner, ex-partner, or someone you live with:

- Cut you off from family and friends and intentionally isolate you?
- Bully, threaten, or control you?
- Take control of your finances?
- Monitor or limit your use of technology?
- Physically and/or sexually abuse you?

Domestic abuse is not always physical violence. It can also include:

- Coercive control and 'gaslighting'
- Economic abuse
- Online abuse
- Threats and intimidation
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse

Anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, sexuality or background.

If you believe that you are a victim of domestic abuse, there are signs that you can look out for including:

- Being withdrawn or being isolated from your family and friends.
- Having bruises, burns or bite marks on you.
- Having your finances controlled, or not being given enough to buy food, medication or pay bills.
- Not being allowed to leave your house or stopped from going to college or work.
- Having your internet or social media use monitored, or someone else reading your texts, emails, or letters.
- Being repeatedly belittled, put down or told you are worthless.
- Being pressured into sex or sexual contact
- Being told that abuse is your fault, or that you're overreacting.

GET HELP AND SUPPORT

Refuge National Domestic Abuse Helpline
Call: 0808 2000 247
Online Web Chat: Live Chat Homepage | Refuge National Domestic Abuse Helpline (nationaldahelpline.org.uk)
Web form: Contact us | Refuge National Domestic Abuse Helpline (nationaldahelpline.org.uk)

Respect - Men's Advice Line
A confidential helpline specifically for male victims.
Call: 0808 801 0327
Email: info@mensadviceline.org.uk
Website: Domestic Abuse Helpline for Men | Men's Advice Line UK (mensadviceline.org.uk)

Bright Sky App
Bright Sky is a mobile app and website for anyone experiencing domestic abuse, or who is worried about someone else. Bright Sky is a safe, easy to use app and website that provides practical support and information on how to respond to domestic abuse. Bright Sky helps you spot the signs of abuse, know how to response and help someone find a safe route to support.

The app can be downloaded for free from app stores, only download the app if it is safe for you to do so and if you are sure that your phone isn't being monitored.

Website: Bright Sky app | Hestia

Women's Aid
Women's Aid have a directory of domestic abuse support services accreoss the UK.
The Women's Aid live chat service is available 7 days a week, 10am to 6pm.
Women's Aid Directory: Women's Aid Directory - Women's Aid (womensaid.org.uk)
Women's Aid Live chat: Live Chat | Women's Aid Live Chat (womensaid.org.uk)
Email: helpline@womensaid.org.uk

Victim Support
Victim support from these services for victims and survivors of any abuse or crime, regardless of when it occurred or if the crime was reported to the police.
They have a free, independent and confidential 24/7 suppotline.
Call: 08 08 16 89 111
Live chat: Live chat - Victim Support
My Support Space – free online resource: My Support Space My Support Space

Ask for ANI codeword
If you are experiencing domestic abuse and need immediate help, ask for ANI (Action Needed Immediately) in participating pharmacies and Jobcentres.

When you ask for ANI, you will be offered a private space, provided with a phone and asked if you need support from the police or other domestic abuse support services.

To find your nearest provider search using the poscode checker: Ask for ANI postcode checker | ENOUGH

Safe Spaces
Ask for ANI is delivered in partnership with Safe Spaces, a safe and confidential room where victims can take some time to reflect, access information on specialist support services or call friends or family.

Safe Spaces are also available in Boots, Morrisons, Superdrug and Well pharmacies, TSB banks and independent pharmacies across the UK.

Find your nearest Safe Space: Safe Spaces Locations - UK SAYS NO MORE

How to call the police when you can't speak
If you are in danger and unable to talk on the phone, call 999 and listen to the questions from the operator and, if you can, respond by coughing or tapping on the handset.

If you are deaf or can't use a phone
You can register with the EmergencySMS. Text REGISTER to 999. You will get a text which tells you what to do next. Do this when it is safe so you can text when you are in danger.
Register here: SMS to the emergency services | EmergencySMS

Check Whether someone has an abusive past.
If you are concerned that a new, former or existing partner has an abusive past you can ask the police to check under the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (also known as 'Clare's Law'). This is your 'right to ask'. If records show that you may be at risk of domestic abuse, the police will consider disclosing the information. A disclosure can be made if it is legal, proportionate and necessary to do so.

If you are concerned about a friend or family member, you can apply for a disclosure on behalf of someone you know.

You can make a request to the police for information about a person's previous violent offending in person at the police station or elsewhere, by telephone, by email, online or as part of a police investigation. Support agencies and services can also help you ask the police about this.

Get a court order to protect you or your child.
If you're a victim of domestic abuse, you can apply for a court order or injunction to protect yourself or your child from:

- Your current or previous partner
- A family member
- Someone you currently or previously lived with

This is called a non-molestation or occupation order.

You can apply online, by email or by post.

You can apply for an 'injunction' if you've been the victim of domestic abuse. An injunction is a court order that either:

- Protects you or your child from being harmed or threatened by the person who's abused you - this is called a 'non-molestation order'.
- decides who can live in the family home or enter the surrounding area - this is called an 'occupation order'

Before applying, check if you're eligible for non-molestation order or occupation order.

More information available here: Get an injunction if you've been the victim of domestic abuse: How to apply - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Emergency orders
If you need protection immediately, ask for an emergency order when you apply. You do not have to tell the person you want protection from that you're applying so it's known as a 'without notice' or 'ex-parte' application.

The court will hold a hearing which you must attend. It may issue an order at the hearing.

You'll still have to tell that person about your application after the order has been issued.

An emergency order will usually last until your hearing.

Information about your court hearing: Get an injunction if you've been the victim of domestic abuse: Your court hearing - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Supporting someone you know
If you are worried that a friend, neighbour or loved one is a victim of domestic abuse, you can call the National Domestic Abuse Helpline for free and confidential advice, 24 hours a day on 0808 2000 247.

Seeking help for someone you know can be challenging but #YouAreNotalone. Domestic abuse advisers will offer confidential, non-judgemental information and advice on the options available to you helping you to keep safe and make informed choices.

If you believe there is an immediate risk of harm to someone, or it is an emergency, you should always call 999.

If someone confides in you, there is more information on how to support a friend who is being abused here:
Domestic abuse: recognise the signs - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

OTHER WAYS TO GET SUPPORT:

- Women can call The Freephone National Domestic Abuse Helpline, run by Refuge on 0808 2000 247 for free at any time, day or night. The staff will offer confidential, non-judgemental information and support.
- Talk to a doctor, health visitor or midwife.
- Men can call Men's Advice Line on 0808 8010 327 (Monday to Friday 10am to 8pm) or visit the webchat at Men's Advice Line (Wednesday 10am to 11.30am and 2.30pm to 4pm) for non-judgemental information and support.
- Men can also call ManKind on 0182 3334 244 (Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm)
- If you identify as LGBT+ you can call Galop on 0800 999 5428 for emotional and practical support
- Anyone can call Karma Nirvana on 0800 5999 247 (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm) for forced marriage and honour crimes. You can also call 020 7008 0151 to speak to the GOV.UK Forced Marriage Unit
- In an emergency, call 999.

You can also email for support. It is important that you specify when and if it is safe to respond and to which email address:

women can email helpline@womensaid.org.uk. Staff will respond to your email within 5 working days.
men can email info@mensadviceline.org.uk
LGBT+ people can email help@galop.org.uk
The Survivor's Handbook from the charity Women's Aid is free and provides information for women on a wide range of issues, such as housing, money, helping your children, and your legal rights.

If you are worried that you are abusive, you can contact the free Respect helpline on 0808 802 4040.

IF YOU DECIDE TO LEAVE

The first step in escaping an abusive situation is realising that you're not alone and it's not your fault.

Before you go, try to get advice from an organisation such as:

- Women's Aid or Refuge for women
- Men's Advice Line for men
- Galop for LGBT+

If you're considering leaving, be careful who you tell. It's important the person abusing you does not know where you're going.

Women's Aid has useful information about making a safety plan that applies to both women and men, including advice if you decide to leave.

Equalities

2024 is the Year of LGBT+ Workers in UNISON, as voted for at National Delegate Conference 2023, and following on from the Year of Black Workers in 2023.

Elections

Birmingham Branch elections for Rulebook officers are taking place to the timetable as agreed by the Branch Committee.

The Self Organised Group Officers and the APF (Labour Link) Officer are elected by their SOG's at their AGM's. (Held in Jan/Feb to start in April 2024)

If you are part of any of the Self Organised Groups, please ensure you can attend the SOG's Annual General Meeting to make sure you get to have your say on who is elected to represent you as that SOG's Officer.

The ABS's and the senior stewards are elected by their respective Directorate Stewards committee meeting.

For the other Branch Officer posts, any contested roles are up for election – where members will have a vote on who they wish to take on that role from April 2024.

AGM Dates

The Self Organised Group Annual General Meetings have been announced on the Branch website and social media.

The Year of LGBT+ Workers

Inspired very much by the Year of Disabled Workers in 2022 and the Year of Black Workers in 2023, UNISON was proud to launch the Year of LGBT+ Workers for 2024 at the UNISON LGBT+ Conference in Liverpool,

UNISON was very proud to launch the year of LGBT+ Workers for 2024 at UNISON's National LGBT+ Conference in Liverpool.

2024 will provide the opportunity to promote UNISON as the union for LGBT+ workers, raise awareness of LGBT+ rights throughout the union, challenge discrimination in the workplace and society, and recruit and grow the LGBT+ activists of the future. So watch this space!

Members Education & Training

UNISON West Midlands offers a range of education opportunities throughout the year for members and activists. The 2024 list of courses has been released now and if you are interested in something, please register fast as the offer is always popular in the region.

Courses such as 'Introduction to Mindfulness', Excel and Spreadsheets (beginner and intermediate), Developing Your Self-Confidence and Self-Assertion, Caring for Someone at End of Life, Attachment in Early Years, Mental Health in Children & Young People, Stress Awareness, Bereavement & Loss are all available to all members in the region. These are free of charge to the member.

There are also courses specifically for activists throughout the year.

See the list of training here: Events | UNISON West Midlands

Any News

If you have anything you'd like to add to a future newsletter or our communications across social media and the website, please contact the Communications Officers:

Nicola.Moran@birminghamunison.co.uk
James.Burnett@birminghamunison.co.uk

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