

PCS DWP Group Annual Report for the year ending December 2017

This annual report tells you about the work of your elected PCS Group Executive Committee (GEC) in the DWP in 2017. Your local PCS rep has a full and more detailed report.

Index

Introduction
Employee Deal
Pay
People and Locations
Staffing
Welfare Reform
Scottish Social Security
PMA
Organising
Union Learning in DWP
Working with the Commercial Sector and Privatisation
Equality
Conditions of Service
The Voice
Facility Time and Employee Relations
Work Services
Working Age
Disability Services and Dispute Resolution
Pensions Services
Operational Excellence
Counter Fraud and Compliance
Child Maintenance Group
Universal Credit
Corporate Centre
Young Members
Health and Safety
Finance

Introduction

This year, your DWP Group Executive Committee (GEC) has –

- Continued to build the campaign to oppose office closures announced under the People & Locations strategy and the Corporate Centre Hub Strategy. Holding a national meeting of reps, regional briefings and supporting industrial action.
- Successfully campaigned to stop the proposed closures of a number of offices, including Barrow-in-Furness and Bishop Auckland.
- Reduced the numbers facing compulsory redundancy as a result of the people and locations programme and will continue to fight to stop anyone from being made compulsorily redundant.
- Supported strike action totalling 43 days, in an attempt to prevent the closure of Eastern Avenue Jobcentre in Sheffield.
- Worked with MPs, other unions and campaign groups to defend the welfare system our members deliver, highlighting problems with UC and staffing shortages.
- Used the independent panels to achieve successful outcomes for our members in the vast majority of cases that were referred to them

The biggest issues we faced this year were the DWP People and Locations Programme and the Corporate Centre Hub Strategy. In January 2017 DWP announced its closure plans, we sent GEC members to those sites identified as “hot spots” and immediately began campaigning work. On 05 July 2017 DWP announced its final decision on closures. The campaigning work we had undertaken resulted in two of the “hot spot” sites being kept open, removing the threat of significant redundancies in those locations. DWP ploughed ahead with plans to close most of the other sites though, and it was clear that many members would be displaced and put at risk of redundancy by this and the decision to locate the Corporate Centre into fewer locations. Strikes were held to defend Whitley Bay and Hoylelake Jobcentres, and the campaign to defend Eastern Avenue, was stepped up. Later in the year members at Plymouth Old Tree Court took three days of strike action to oppose relocation and the threat of redundancy. We pay tribute to all the members who took action during 2017.

The Employee Deal continued to be a major issue for the Group, along with the implementation of Universal Credit, both of which are detailed in this report.

As part of the union’s national campaign to break the 1% pay cap all members were encouraged to take part in the consultative ballot, which saw 49% of PCS members participate. This is the highest turnout ever achieved in a national ballot, and shows that with a little more work the 50% ballot threshold can be broken. It is vital that DWP members fully engage in this on-going campaign in 2018, as the pay cap affects us as much as any other group within PCS.

It is obvious that DWP need more staff to deliver the work that it has to do, and that our members are under increasing stress and pressure. This DWP GEC will continue to organise, campaign and bargain with the employer in support of our members, to protect your interests, defend your rights and those of the public that we serve.

Fran Heathcote
Group President

Ian Bartholomew
Group Secretary

Employee Deal

The GEC continued to monitor closely how the Employee Deal is put into practice. Guidance, advice and support has been given to members and reps throughout the year to ensure safeguards are fully utilised and that the populating of the team planning tool ran as effectively as possible. This has not been helped by the repeated failure of the employer to organise proper team discussions to allow members to agree late finishes with their colleagues in their teams.

A very high number of complaints and concerns were referred to the GEC over the populating of the team planning tool during Rotation 1 and 2. There were less in Rotation 3, but it remains clear that the team planning tool is not a satisfactory means of arranging cover. The GEC continued to challenge the methodology used to set the tent poles, particularly at 18.30. There were numerous reports of members being made to stay until 18.30 despite there being no customer demand for them to do so.

There have been several instances of management trying to prevent members accessing assumed consent. The GEC, working closely with branches, has successfully fought off these attacks and assumed consent is becoming more firmly established. Many disputes over working patterns have been taken up through grievances and appeals and if needed to the Independent Panel. The vast majority of cases to the panel resulted in favourable outcomes for our members.

Now that the department has signalled its intention to extend operating hours to 20.00 the GEC is focused on ensuring that this is only put into place as customer demand increases, in line with what management agreed in the collective agreement. DWP could have extended the operating hours from October 2017, both in the evenings and on Saturdays, but did not do so.

Charles Law Negotiations Officer

Pay

The GEC has continued to campaign against the Treasury-imposed 1% pay cap in support of the national campaign on pay. With inflation running at 3% many members received a pay award worth less than the rate of inflation, despite the Employee Deal. A pay cut in real terms.

2017 saw the second year of pay increases under ED. As a consequence of continuing Treasury limits on DWP pay, it was not possible to improve on the gains that were made in the Employee Deal. The DWP had no flexibility to increase pay beyond what had been agreed in 2016. This meant that we were not able to address several key pay-related issues in 2017.

The Treasury's refusal to allow DWP to spend any more on pay than in 2016 mean that no progress could be made in improving the 0.25% consolidated increase for opted out staff. PCS made it clear from the start that we did not accept the 0.25% for opted out members and remains committed to improving this unacceptable situation.

The transfers into DWP, like ex-local authority Fraud staff and ex-HMRC Universal Credit staff, have resulted in increasing numbers of staff not on DWP terms and conditions, and so not subject to the Employee Deal. Many of these members received no consolidated pay increase in 2017. PCS pressed the department on this but again were told that the Treasury allowed no flexibility to pay these members an increase.

Pay for grades above HEO was again limited by the Treasury pay cap. In addition to this problem there was the growing concern of the HEO Max pay over-taking SEO Min. To prevent this from happening the department increased the SEO Min by more than 1% but paid for this by paying others in the SEO to Grade 6 grades a flat rate increase. For many this was worth less

than 1%. This was a deeply unsatisfactory situation that shows how urgent it is that the pay cap is scrapped.

Charles Law
Negotiations Officer

People and Locations

In January 2017 DWP announced proposals to close 25 processing/contact centres, 2 corporate centre offices and 74 job centres by 31 March 2018, that they intended to close a further 40 transition sites from 2021 to 2023 and co-locate 48 job centres in LA premises. In addition they announced that all corporate centre staff must be located in one of six hubs, known as the corporate centre hub strategy.

It was clear immediately that these proposals would lead to members being at risk of redundancy and lead to a serious deterioration to the public services offered by the job centre network. The GEC launched a major campaign against the proposed closures to build a strong group-wide political, industrial and public campaign to oppose the closures and protect members' jobs.

Detailed submissions were sent to the employer on the sites where redundancies were most likely, making a strong case for closures not to go ahead. The campaign secured a lot of support from opposition parties. There were several debates in parliament and PCS held a successful lobby of parliament in March with over 100 members attending to talk directly to their MPs.

Industrial action against the closures took place at several offices; Whitley Bay, Hoyle, Plymouth, while at Sheffield Eastern Avenue members took over 40 days of industrial action in defence of their job centre. Consultation with reps took place at several points in the year, including a consultation meeting in July to which all branches were invited to consider how the Group took the campaign further. The campaign was successful in persuading DWP to save some offices that were originally listed for closure. These included Barrow and Bishop Auckland, sites where, had the closure gone ahead, large numbers of members would have been made redundant. However in most cases DWP decided to go ahead with the closures.

In August, DWP formally declared 825 staff at risk or redundancy. 242 of these staff were in the Corporate Centre, the rest in Operations. Most of these were successfully redeployed, but around 400 staff had not been, and in November these staff were made an offer of Voluntary Redundancy. Most accepted and said they did not want to be redeployed. However over 100 said they wanted redeployment despite accepting voluntary redundancy. A further 23 staff refused the voluntary redundancy offer and so were placed at risk of compulsory redundancy.

As a result of PCS pressure DWP agreed to adopt a more flexible approach to where they located work to enable greater numbers to be redeployed. This led to DWP agreeing to set up satellite sites and use widespread over-bearing to maximise redeployment opportunities. This was very successful in redeploying nearly all the staff who had told DWP that they wanted to be redeployed, and in avoiding redundancies, especially at sites where there were large numbers of members at risk of redundancy. Despite this DWP were unable to redeploy everybody and a very small number of staff are still at risk of compulsory redundancy. PCS remains committed to fighting compulsory redundancy and continues to do everything it can to prevent any members being made compulsorily redundant.

Charles Law
Negotiations Officer

Staffing

The only exit schemes in 2017 were those connected to the office closures. DWP continued to recruit new staff into various parts of the business. Jobcentres, Universal Credit Service Centres, Debt Management, Working Age, Disability Benefits, Pensions and CMG all saw some recruitment. However, with the office closures and natural wastage of staff, DWP did little more than backfill for the staff who have left. The end of year staffing figures showed a slight reduction on the staff in post at the beginning of 2017. Whilst the number of people claiming benefits remains low, in comparison to a few years ago, we do not believe that DWP has enough staff, especially whilst it is dealing with transition to Universal Credit. Much of the new recruitment has also been for apprentices and Fixed Term Appointments. We have achieved some success in getting DWP to extend many FTAs, but we will continue to fight to get staff made permanent.

The GEC took the decision that the campaign against office closures, should also be one that defends the service to the public and fights for the right amount of staff to do the job. During 2018 we will continue to work for the staffing levels that are needed so that our members can deliver the work of DWP without facing the pressure that they currently feel.

Ian Bartholomew
Group Secretary

Welfare Reform

PCS continued to campaign hard against the welfare reforms which have a detrimental effect on the public who use our services. We want a decent social security system, which provides fair and equitable benefits in the event of unemployment, sickness or disability. We recognise that the attacks on our members come from the same source as the attacks on those in receipt of benefits. We continue to work with other organisations for a united campaign, arguing for a fairer, properly funded, welfare system, provided by well trained staff, working in properly resourced DWP offices.

We have worked closely with the PCS Parliamentary Group, providing them with briefings and questions to ask in Parliament on a whole number of issues, particularly around office closures and Universal Credit. We have submitted evidence to a number of select committees. We maintain close links with opposition parties, meeting Shadow Ministers and other MPs, providing them with our views on where welfare provision could be improved.

We argued for a suspension of Universal Credit rollout until the serious problems with UC were ironed out. Claimants were waiting weeks for payments, some facing eviction because the housing element was not being paid and many calls to UC service lines still go unanswered. As a result of this pressure the pace of rollout has been slowed. We welcome the fact that the seven waiting days for UC were scrapped and that UC will be payable from the first day of a claim. However, this change was only applied to UC and not JSA or ESA, creating an inequality. The slowdown in rollout, coupled with closing the gateway to UC Live Service, means that more people will have to claim JSA and ESA than previously planned. Therefore, more people will suffer a detriment. We raised this issue, through the Parliamentary Group, and will continue to campaign for the waiting days to be scrapped for all benefits. We also continue to campaign for the rule that means Universal Credit and Tax Credits will only be paid for two children to be scrapped. Not only will it mean that families will suffer hardship, but it also introduces a system where some claimants will have to provide distressing details about how a child was conceived in order to receive payment for that child.

Ian Bartholomew
Group Secretary

Scottish Social Security

PCS met with Scottish Government officials as part of our on-going negotiations on the setting up of a separate Social Security Agency in Scotland. We have also taken a seat on the SG's Operations Reference Group, which is made up of external stakeholders such as welfare rights, charities and local authorities. The executive agency is to be formed to deliver the first benefits in summer 2018. Opening hours of the service have not yet been determined. PCS will engage fully in these negotiations and regularly update members and branches.

Dundee is to be the agency HQ, with an equal sized site in Glasgow. Sites must be based within accessible reach of the community, as they will have a section open to the public. At least 1500 staff will be split between the two sites, with a further 400 to cover local service delivery across Scotland. Decisions are yet to be made on where local delivery staff will be sited. The Minister has publicly stated that she and her officials will work with PCS to identify any potential for Cabinet Office Statement of Principles (COSOP) transfers for existing DWP staff. There will be 250 staff working in the new agency by summer 2019. The first benefit to be delivered will be the carer's supplement, a top-up payment to the existing DWP Carer's Allowance. Funeral payments and best start (maternity) grants will follow.

PCS met with Jeane Freeman, and held a constructive and open discussion. She explained that Dundee and Glasgow had been selected to spread the socio-economic impact, and that both have the potential to recruit the staff needed. Work is under way in each local authority area to determine how the agency will fit in and avoid duplication of existing services. The Minister offered reassurance that the mandatory redetermination process would not be a carbon copy of DWP's derided mandatory reconsideration procedures and that some payment of benefit payment will be reinstated whilst the redetermination is underway. She was clear that the Social Security Agency will not operate in the same way as DWP.

PCS also gave evidence to the Social Security Committee, highlighting key areas for inclusion in the social security bill.

PCS met with the DWP Scottish Devolution Programme, but little information was available, as they are awaiting meetings with SG officials to determine how they will handle COSOP considerations. The programme agreed to improve communications to DWP staff, which until now have focussed on reacting to announcements in the Scottish Parliament. PCS pressed DWP to consider providing more assurances to staff about the impact on their jobs when the benefits devolve. DWP have previously stated that there will be no job losses as a result of benefit devolution.

Sam Hall Group Assistant Secretary

Professional Managers' Association (PMA)

Motion A56 of 2016 recognised the potential to develop the PMA as an effective means of building union support and taking up issues affecting members at HEO grade and above, and it set out a series of actions to achieve this. As part of ongoing work there was a well-attended fringe meeting at 2017 ADC.

The six Civil Service Live events in June and July provided an opportunity to speak directly to thousands of members and potential members. A total of 42 new members were signed up on the spot and good quality contacts were made for potential new reps, advocates and the equality

networks. The NEC has agreed that PCS will organise stalls at each of the events scheduled for 2018.

There were three issues of PMA News during 2017. By the time of the third issue, in November, the web link went to 6,344 members, a significant increase in distribution. A daft information pack for PMA members is now available for branches and a PMA training module has been produced. The GEC Organising sub-committee will consider how the materials can best be used through the organising network. The GEC believes that these give us an ideal opportunity to promote the PMA, and its values, across the DWP network.

Whilst Employee Deal landed fairly smoothly across the Corporate Centre, where the majority of PMA grades work, we continue to receive concerns from senior grade members, who were not offered ED, coming under pressure to extend working hours in line with the new ED operating hours. We are in possession of HR advice which makes it clear that "DWP will not require any employee to work outside of the terms of their employment contract". It goes on to say "this applies to all grades regardless of their ED status". Members should be alert to this, and their right to use the grievance process should they come under pressure from the employer.

Sam Hall
Group Assistant Secretary

Organising

In the DWP we remain a strong and effective part of PCS. Our reps continue to attend events, demonstrations and to be a key part of the wider PCS campaigning.

The DWP Group has set priorities in line with the National Organising Strategy and have set targets to work towards, including an increase in density of 4%, campaigning, a voice in every workplace, collation of personal data to increase communications, an expectation that all branches will have organising plans in place, encouraging diversity and equality within our membership and the administration of a DWP specific trade union education programme.

Equality remains a focus, and it is pleasing to report that we have maintained a position where high level of branch, regional and group positions are filled by women. This target is still moving towards the DWP demographic nationally.

By the end of the direct debit campaign in 2015 the DWP had lost 12 per cent of our membership. Recruitment and retention of members is our first priority. The GEC and PCS Full Time Officers have worked with Organisers to ensure PCS attends inductions of all new entrants, asking every non-member to join the union. We have improved the materials available to branches and regularly review the PCS website content, to ensure branches have information and leaflets they can download to use as a speakers brief and recruitment pack.

We have recruited members through our active campaigns, and have increased membership in areas threatened by the people and location programme. We congratulate branches for recruiting over 4000 new members during 2017. However, this has done little more than see our overall membership remain static, due to the numbers who have left DWP during the year. DWP attrition is around 7% nationally. We have a huge opportunity to increase our density by attending inductions of the new staff that PCS have fought to have recruited, inducting apprentices into PCS and supporting learning in our branches. We still have over 30,000 non-members to reach. Our priority needs to remain recruitment, as any drop in density weakens our negotiating and bargaining strength. We have to continue to recruit all new staff entering the department on fixed term, apprentice or full time contracts to ensure we increase our membership and move back to the higher levels of density we had pre check off. The GEC

Organising and Education is now meeting monthly to share knowledge and target resource to work towards the new recruitment targets.

DWP continued to operate a very successful trade union education programme in 2017, tutored by GEC members, at no cost to PCS. 2017 saw DWP Group hold a record number of courses, and Regional Organisers should be commended for their activity in arranging these New Reps and Personal Case courses. Every single region/nation ran several courses, receiving excellent evaluation from those attending.

Advocate training is in place alongside a potential reps package and mentoring to ensure all future and current reps are supported. This continues into a very busy 2018 with numerous new courses booked already after the AGM season. We welcome all new reps from the branches and will ensure they are supported to take the organizing strategy forward.

Marie McDonough
Group Organiser

Union Learning in DWP

It is still clear that facility time for this area of work has been an issue in some parts of the country, and learning has not operated consistently, with some regions remaining active and others focussing on other union duties. Some learning officers have reported a drop in the amount of facility time available. After discussion with the employer it was agreed that every region/nation working collaboratively, in areas of learning, would attract official time. This has proved very useful, and is working well in the regions where this has been negotiated with managers.

Negotiations with DWP management resulted in a very positive inclusion into the new apprentice contract to operate from April 2018. This is a massive opportunity to reinvigorate the ULR network, working collaboratively on issues whilst supporting our apprentices, both new and current staff, undertaking a qualification. PCS reps have constantly had to police the Cabinet office agreement to ensure 20% learning activity, so this new inclusion into induction, information and closer working is welcome.

Learning remains imperative within PCS and DWP as we see the demise of formal learning accessibility in the department, but it is also imperative to ensure we strengthen and engage our members. The task for 2018 is to ensure regions use good practices and share opportunities available amongst the network. Sharing business cases, successful training event ideas and tips and regaining a learning community will be our aim.

Marie McDonough
Group Organiser

Working with Commercial Sector Members and Fighting Privatisation

The GEC continues to work with the commercial sector in order to provide the best support we can to members working for private sector employers who deliver work for DWP.

Significant amounts of IT work previously outsourced by the Department, have been brought back in-house over the last 18 months. This should have been a positive. However, a Gov-Co, named BPDTS, has been set up to deliver this work. The company is wholly owned by DWP, with Directors who are all Senior Civil Servants working for the department, yet it does not give its employees civil servant status. BPDTS, seemingly backed by Cabinet Office, have refused to recognise any union. We have challenged DWP, who have said that the decision was not theirs, and BPDTS have refused to even meet PCS to discuss non-recognition. We have embarked upon a campaign to achieve statutory recognition, beginning with a petition of those employed in BPDTS and will continue working towards forcing the employer to recognise PCS.

DWP's long-standing contract with Capita to deliver some telephony work, including JSA new claims, was extended, outsourcing all of its new claims telephony for legacy benefits. The rationale being that ESA and IS are being phased out, with the rollout of UC. We continue to argue for this work to be done in-house. We have also made it clear that we oppose any use of agency workers. DWP have no plans to use agency workers in the mainland UK, but have employed some in Northern Ireland to deliver UC work for the rest of the UK. Whilst members working for DWP in Northern Ireland are represented by our sister union NIPSA, we have made the argument that anyone delivering UC should be employed on a permanent contract with DWP.

The end of the Telereal Trillium contract gave DWP the opportunity to consider bringing the work delivered on the contract back in-house. Despite PCS making strong arguments for this, DWP awarded a contract to Sudexo, who will oversee the delivery of various parts of the office services contract. G4S have been given the contract to carry on delivering security guard services and Interserve have been awarded the contract for the other aspects.

The DWP GEC was represented at the PCS Private Sector Forum. This was the first in what is intended to be a regular event, with the intention of increasing understanding between, and strengthening our relationship with, the members and reps in the Public and Private/Commercial Sector parts of our Union.

The GEC agreed to support the following protocols.

- To build relationships between public sector members and private sector members in PCS branches.
- To encourage involvement of private sector members in PCS structures where those members are delivering public services for departments.
- To encourage joint working between public and private sector members on issues like campaigning, recruitment or disputes.
- Members employed on public sector contracts work together to make sure the interests of all workers are defended and improved.

Steve Swainston
Group Assistant Secretary

Equality

Many concerns have been raised with DWP, including part time members being told they have to work full time to do training and disabled employee consideration points not being awarded appropriately. There was a joint meeting to discuss the DWP Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. The report highlights PCS concerns, including the lack of discussion regards BME staff and the emphasis on comparison to other government departments, which could lead to a false perception that DWP is doing better on equality issues than it actually is. The strategy is moving away from 'identity' towards intersectionality, and this will feed into what will become a Civil Service strategy. There is concern this could possibly result in staff with specific protected characteristics being overlooked.

PCS DWP group women's committee, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) committee, equality committee and black members committee held a one day joint workshop. This was a successful event, where members of the committees were able to highlight the important work they wished to concentrate on during the year and to emphasise what PCS DWP Group does to tackle discrimination in the workplace.

We continued to push management for equality data within DWP. The introduction of the SOP system has made it far more difficult to obtain data. There is also feedback from reps that data regarding a myriad of equality-based information, such as homophobic or racial bullying, is not

acknowledged and is not classified correctly. This is extremely disappointing. However, DWP have continued to discuss with us ways to encourage the accurate recording of equality data and we have pressed the need for managers to input SOP data and for equality data to be far more accessible to reps.

There have been ongoing talks with about the problems faced by assistive technology users. Although management have assured us that there continual "fixes", this is an ongoing issue and one we are continuing to push on.

Annette Rochester
Group Vice President

Conditions of Service

During 2017 we had extensive consultation with DWP on the introduction a New Attendance Management Policy from April 2018. We argued for attendance management to be orientated towards the welfare of the individual, so that warnings are not the primary purpose and are only given where necessary. Improvements to current policy have also been achieved, such as the New DWP Attendance Management Steer for Attendance Management & Cancer related absences which introduced a New CSHR Legal Advice Process and the abolition of the mandatory requirement to refer cases to OHS on day one of any mental ill-health or musculoskeletal sickness absence.

PCS negotiated changes to disciplinary procedure and guidance, to support better consistency in decision making on gross and serious misconduct cases. The changes specify that in all cases where the level of misconduct is gross or serious, decision makers must consult CSHR Casework to discuss an appropriate penalty.

Flexible Working Hours Agreement Procedure 12 will be amended to include a note for part-time employees to include a mandatory lunch period during a training event in claims for additional hours.

A new People Performance Policy was introduced following consultation, but not agreement, with PCS. The implementation of this new policy achieved the abolition of 'Guided Distribution', 'Validation' and the 'Must Improve' rating. The new process was intended for 2017-18 and consultation will continue with PCS with the aim to achieve agreed arrangements for the period from April 2018.

PCS provided guidance for members that '*everyone does not have to work to 5pm or Later or Saturday*'. PCS guidance for working pattern disputes to go to the Independent Panel has ensured the implementation of equality related assurances given in the ED Collective Agreement. Consultation continues, to improve departmental guidance for working patterns.

In line with conference policy, the GEC pressed the employer to audit the numbers of Mental Health First Aiders already in DWP offices, and to assess the level of training undertaken. Following continued pressure from PCS, there is now a Departmental commitment that all MHFA will undertake the two day Mental Health First Aid England accredited training. Volunteers not trained to that standard, will not be part of the service. The GEC support the MHFA programme in principle and continue to work on lessons learned from the North East pilot. We aim to negotiate a framework to set policy based on the Mental Health First Aid England model.

Following a surge in Harassment, Discrimination and Bullying cases being brought to our attention, PCS approached the employer, raising numerous concerns with poor decision making.

DWP agreed there is a need for improvement. PCS will work with the employer to ensure a better standard of decision making, and push to tighten up existing policy.

Management failure to adhere to the TDA policy, in particular an expectation to carry out duties of the higher grade for days at a time without financial recompense, was challenged. This successfully achieved full remuneration for members in many cases. A bulletin was issued offering advice and guidance on the terms of TDA policy.

The inability, as part of the new DWP travel and expenses policy, to claim online for travel tickets costing less than £20 has created financial difficulty for some members. It is also a potential obstacle to development. The GEC formally raised this with DWP, with a view to revisiting the policy and reinstating the previous flexibility.

Poor mental health, and stress at work, are significant causes of absence in DWP. The issue is high on the Group Equality agenda; we therefore welcome the opportunity to work with the employer on both the Diversity and Inclusion strategy, and more recently the Wellbeing programme. DWP are to create a Wellbeing Survey which will go out to members on the intranet, we look forward to joint working on both the content of the survey, and more importantly evaluating the results before any plan of action is implemented.

Dave Burke
Group Assistant Secretary

Angela Grant
Group Assistant Secretary

The Voice

The Group journal aimed to cover the many issues affecting members throughout DWP. It has informed members how the GEC continued to challenge and negotiate with management during the year. We reviewed, with PCS at a national level, how members now interact with the union in the digital age and it was agreed to move the voice over to a new digital format from 2018, allowing easier access for members. We will keep this under review during 2018 and welcome input from members on the issues you want to see covered.

Rachael Watts
Group Journal Editor

Facility Time and Employee Relations

Members and reps continued to be subject to the imposed ERF and the severe restrictions on facility time, most notably by the 50% cap on an individual's facility time. The GEC was able to secure paid time off for members for attending local and branch AGMs and mandating meetings.

Charles Law
Negotiations Officer

Work Services

The People and Locations proposals included the closure over 70 Jobcentres. PCS supported branches and members that wanted to fight the closures, with a number of sites, notably Sheffield Eastern Avenue, taking industrial action in support of the communities that the Jobcentres serve. Following PCS representations, plans to co-locate Jobcentres with Local Authorities and Medical Examinations were scaled back.

PCS continued to press Work Services Directorate (WSD) on staffing issues. The early part of the year saw significant recruitment in advance UC Full Service rollout. As a result some of the staffing pressures experienced in Jobcentres in previous years were alleviated. However, changes in UC Full Service rollout mean that those pressures may be experienced later in the year. PCS will continue to press for clarity on the demands that UC will put on staffing to make sure Jobcentres are adequately staffed.

PCS have long argued that the reception area of the Jobcentre has been inadequately staffed and that improvements were required in the management of health and safety in this area. As a result of PCS pressure, highlighting the potential for UC to generate more incidents, WSD have created a bespoke HEO role for all Jobcentres with more staff to manage the front of house/reception and take responsibility for health and safety. We expressed serious concerns about practices, introduced into Jobcentres without consultation, in particular the delivery of Advance Payment decisions in an open plan area. This has the potential to create flashpoints between claimants and members, and as a result a full review of the Jobcentre risk assessment is to be undertaken in conjunction with PCS.

The Work and Health Programme replaces the Work Programme and is on a considerably smaller scale. It is designed to focus the limited resources available on claimants with health conditions or disabilities. PCS responded to the Government's Green Paper, and through negotiations and political pressure, using the PCS Parliamentary Group, have secured a limited Public Sector comparator for this area of work. This gives our members the opportunity to demonstrate how much better this work is delivered by the public sector. We are confident that the results will prove this.

We have continued to argue that there is no business need for staff to be working in Jobcentres until 6.30pm and will do as DWP look at the potential of 8.00pm finishes.

Mark Page
Group Assistant Secretary

Working Age

Working Age Directorate (WAD) was significantly impacted by the People and Locations announcement with 1600 staff directly affected by the threat of office closures. PCS will continue to campaign against the detrimental impact on working age benefits in the sites threatened with closure and sites taking on extra work. We raised the issue of low staff morale at the transitional sites, but WAD management stated their priority was on the sites imminently due to close. PCS argued that this was unsatisfactory and that both should be done. Management agreed to emphasise the message in the transitional sites that the forecast is for more than enough work for all existing staff for the next 5 years.

Despite recruitment over the past year, it is clear that there is a staffing crisis within WAD. This is despite senior management indicating that they felt they were properly resourced and that ESA is in a good position. This has been contradicted by the number of reps who have escalated ESA staffing issues to the GEC. However, WAD management did acknowledge the pressures on IS, as they did not get the expected new recruits from exercises. A Branch Bulletin towards the end of 2017, seeking feedback from branches on how the staffing crisis in WAD is affecting members, will be used to take forward the staffing campaign.

In the budget it was announced that New Claims to UC Live Service would end on 31 December 2017, and there would be a drastic slowdown in the rollout of Full Service between January and June 2018. This means that significantly more claims than planned for will be made for JSA,

ESA and IS during this period. As a result 150 staff in Glasgow Buchanan and Nottingham UC Service Centres will be supporting JSA until the summer.

The GEC welcomed the news that Fixed Term Appointment staff in WAD would have their contracts extended until December 2018 or until they had been working for DWP for 2 years. However, we argued that this was not enough and that this would lead to the continued loss of experienced staff as they seek permanent jobs elsewhere. The GEC also urged senior management to withdraw the ban on extending contracts for staff with warnings. The GEC also welcomed the news 430 Fixed Term Appointment staff are being recruited in January 2018 to work on the potential underpayments of Incapacity Benefit Reassessment (IBR) work at Birkenhead, Oldham, Caerphilly, Bridgend, Hanley, Blackburn, Stirling and Wellingborough. Added to this, all Fixed Term Appointment staff at those sites not on formal warnings for attendance, behaviour or performance have been offered contract extensions.

PCS raised concerns throughout the year about the pressure on telephony. The emphasis on measuring telephony performance by the percentage of calls answered (PCA) rather than the actual number of calls being missed is flawed. It means DWP fixates on the end of the day when the volume of calls is much lower. PCS members working on telephony have raised their concerns that when the service to the public goes wrong from the start of the day this creates pressure that just builds throughout the day. PCS has highlighted that the obsession with covering the end of the day is damaging the services to the public at the start of the day, and have stressed that the emphasis also needs to be on staffing up processing. This will deal with backlogs and reduce the pressure on the phones. This was demonstrated in December when around 120,000 Budgeting Loans were outstanding and the processing was taking 4 weeks instead of 3.

Ian Pope
Group Assistant Secretary

Disability Services and Dispute Resolution

The main issue facing DSDRD is the conversion of DLA to PIP which is due to ramp up in January 2018. Senior DSDRD management advised that they have planned for recruitment to deal with the volumes of work. Due to DWP losing judgements in the courts, additional staff are required as they are not resourced for this work. Senior DSDRD management plan to employ existing staff to carry out this work, with the new recruits being brought in to backfill.

Fixed Term Appointment staff, not on warnings for attendance, performance or behaviour have had their contracts extended to a maximum of 24 months or March 2019, whichever is the earliest. The GEC continue to argue for all FTA staff to be made permanent.

Ian Pope
Group Assistant Secretary

Pensions Service

PCS highlighted the levels of work in Pensions, which led to increased telephone activity and members being 'stood up' onto the phones then 'stood down' back to processing too often throughout the working day. PCS has worked with management to better understand the call requirements and to ensure that members are able to spend a minimum time on each activity before being stood up or down. PCS continue to work with Pensions management to improve this aspect of members working experience.

Additional staff have been brought into Pensions in 2017 following pressure from PCS and we continue to raise the need for further recruitment to address workloads and backlogs throughout the Directorate.

Members concerns regarding incorrect messages on the Employee deal, including the adherence to GWFM being required despite members having the right to use 'assumed consent' under Employee Deal, were resolved in 2017, and it was made clear that members are only fixed at one end of the day with no detriment for using assumed consent at the non-fixed end of their day.

PCS will continue to work with Pensions management to ensure that the levels of staffing at the start and end of the day are reflective of call levels and work volumes to ensure that members have the most flexibility possible in their working arrangements and that there are no 'minimum number of late finishes' incorrectly imposed when members complete their preferences.

Steve Swainston
Group Assistant Secretary

Operational Excellence Division (OED)

PCS have engaged with management over issues regarding festive leave, resources - ensuring that there is sufficient trained LDO's to carry out the extensive training required for UCFS. PCS strongly disagreed with OED management when they decided to not adhere to the previously agreed festive leave percentages. Although staff were not refused leave, PCS believe that members received undue pressure to change their requests. PCS will be reviewing the issue with management to ensure this is not repeated next year.

Bev Laidlaw
Group Assistant Secretary

Counter Fraud and Compliance

CFCD are changing to a more geographical based management structure. This should make it easier to give support to staff who are working across a large number of sites. Senior management confirmed to PCS that there is no hubs strategy in CFCD. They also confirmed that they have developed a more proactive approach within the networks to ensure that the needs of CFCD are recognised with the impact of the office closures. Management agreed our request for a specific CFCD H&S committee.

This year NINO moved to the CFCD directorate. PCS continued to engage with management on the new Digital NINO Gateway (DNG) and visited the sites where this system is being piloted. We highlighted a number of concerns. Management are looking to up skill members so that other CFCD can be undertaken if necessary.

The JEGS exercise in CCIS was settled out of court without involvement from PCS. We contested the LSI JEGS exercise result and submitted further evidence to management. However, CFCD refused to review the decision. PCS then started legal proceedings against the department as we believe the process was not carried out correctly and members in LSI were not treated the same during the JEGS exercise as those within other areas. The legal case is still continuing.

A JEGS exercises was conducted in FIU, with the Accredited Financial Investigator/Confiscator roles regraded at HEO. An initial offer on promotion, backdating and TDA was rejected by members. We are currently in negotiation to gain a better offer for all members affected.

Management started the grading exercise for the HILs (Higher Investigation Leaders) and PCS will be involved throughout. CFCD previously agreed that members carrying out the Authorised Officer Role would be entitled to back-dated TDA, due to role being an EO grade. They then retracted this, and made an offer to only pay 30% of TDA for to anyone who had worked 100 % on the role and lesser amounts for those doing 50% or less. We opposed this offer.

Management have recognised that a focus on targets has driven some perverse behaviour. There will be further consultation on this as the issue progresses.

PCS challenged a proposed reduction of 90 compliance staff from the Compliance Work Study. Management confirmed there would be no change to resources for this work during 2017/18. Any future changes will be properly evaluated and there will be consultation with PCS.

Bev Laidlaw
Group Assistant Secretary

Child Maintenance Group

PCS has continued to address the concerns of our members working in the in Child Maintenance Group (CMG). PCS raised concerns with CMG about levels of stress amongst members, caused by workloads, and levels of staffing, particularly on the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) or 2012 scheme as it is otherwise known.

PCS has been successful in gaining additional staff, with 100 full time equivalent staff joining CMG in February. These will be on 18 month fixed term contracts and PCS will continue to argue that these staff should be made permanent. An argument which PCS made successfully for members in CMG recruited in 2017. PCS continue to work with CMG to ensure that the levels of staffing at the start and end of the day are reflective of call levels and work volumes, so members have the most flexibility possible, with no 'minimum number of late finishes' incorrectly imposed.

We continue to work with CMG management to address levels of stress and to look for solutions to this issue in conjunction with consideration of the People Survey results.

We agreed a timeline for the Job Evaluation and Grading (JEG) of the EO caseworker role, which will be undertaken early in 2018.

A campaign to stop the proposed closure of the CMG office in Bishop Auckland was successful. PCS also opposed the closure of Cumnock and Coatbridge CMG sites.

PCS submitted evidence to the Parliamentary review and continue to work with campaign groups such as Gingerbread to oppose the charges for the use of the Child Maintenance Service.

The GEC secured amendments to the call listening process, to ensure that calls which include the financial information of customers such as card details are not selected for group call listening. This protects customers' data and finances, and ensures our members cannot be unfairly held responsible for any potential leak of such data.

Steve Swainston
Group Assistant Secretary

Universal Credit

UC Full service rollout was ramped up with 50 Jobcentres per month going live in October, November and December 2017. Following pressure from various organisations, including PCS, it was announced in the budget that rollout is to be slowed from February to only 10 Jobcentres per month ramping up again from May, with full rollout not now completed until the end of 2018. It was also announced that new claims to UC Live Service were to cease from 31 December 2017. These two things mean significantly more people claiming JSA, ESA and IS. The announcement followed on from us being told by DWP management, only a week earlier, that the rollout programme was on course.

The GEC continues to raise issues about telephony work. In full service many staff are pulled on to the phones at short notice, finding themselves timetabled for at least 20% of the time on telephony, resulting in insufficient time to carry out case management duties. The GEC negotiators also raised related problems members experience having insufficient time to deal with complex cases and deal with journal entries as a result. UC management claim that with new call routing systems these problems should be alleviated. We continue to argue for a better balance between telephony and case management work. We also raised the continued failings of IT systems in both Full and Live Services and the problems with appointments created by Capita. Management acknowledge these and believe that improved IT will help in the longer term. Following PCS pressure there has been recruitment throughout the year with more planned.

We continued to take up issues generated by the transfer of HMRC staff to UC. Key problems around contracts, pressure on staff to cover more than one 6.30 tent-pole, and access to assumed consent were taken up with UC management. Discussions are on-going to ensure that any further staff transferring from HMRC to Universal Credit do so on the best possible terms their contracts allow.

The current advice on staff as claimants is clearly inadequate and we have taken the issue forward with DWP, with a detailed discussion planned for early 2018.

We continued our campaigning work in 2017, including providing evidence to select committees, working with opposition parties, giving detailed information to the PCS Parliamentary Group, getting issues raised/questions asked in parliament. We have also made regular contact with the press and media.

Mark Page
Group Assistant Secretary

Sam Hall
Group Assistant Secretary

Corporate Centre

The key issue has been the Decision by the Corporate Centre Director Generals to move to a Corporate Centre hub strategy. The general rule of thumb has been to insist that Corporate Centre staff will be based in a Corporate Centre hub by April 2018. This caused many issues for members, not least the fact that the department has no hub in either Scotland or Wales. The view of PCS is that this strategy was ill thought out, needless and has done nothing more than put many Corporate Centre members under extreme pressure, some members having to make life changing decisions. Many hubs are now approaching full capacity with little scope for future recruitment. Elsewhere, PCS negotiators have, over the past year, sought to engage with each of the directorates with the process running reasonably well, except in Digital Directorate.

We dealt with the Change Resource Pool where the staff turnover within CRP measures around 7% per year. There are currently around 300 vacancies in CRP, many covered by TDA. CRP

are working with redeployment teams , sharing vacancies where staff are currently sitting unassigned due, in the main to the Corporate Centre hub strategy.

HR Directorate have a view that staff are too dispersed across the Corporate Centre. They are seeking to deliver services almost exclusively from the 6 CC hubs. The vast majority of staff are already situated in a hub, but with a small number in Scotland/Wales whose main function is to service the Parliament/Assembly. They will continue to operate from their current base.

Within Strategy, Policy and Analytical Group we have learned that SPAG 2020 is no longer a living piece of work, with the new SPAG Director General considering which parts of SPAG 2020 he would like to take forward.

Commercial Directorate have confirmed that all staff have been matched into positions within the new organisation. They are currently working closely with Government Property Unit around job families and future roles. A response is awaited from GPU around funding and an LD package.

In Finance Transformation they have shared an engagement plan and Future Operating Model. First step is to create a 'centralised services team' (lift and drop of existing staff - no different work, but possibly different management chains).

Within Digital Directorate it has been extremely difficult to have meaningful consultation, especially around their Future Location Strategy, which has resulted in some staff being left with the threat of becoming unassigned. Over the past year, the employer has been reluctant to engage with PCS. However, a recent change in leadership may result in more positive engagement.

Sam Hall
Group Assistant Secretary

Young Members

The Young Members Committee continued to concentrate on apprentices, and in particular ensuring all apprenticeships meet the criteria in the cabinet office agreement. We set up the DWP Young Members Network and re-launched the DWP Young Members Newsletter.

Sarah Spencer
Young Members Officer

Health and Safety

PCS has had positive discussions on the design of a new H&S Committee structure. Due to the estates contracts coming to an end, all of the H&S training for staff is being revisited. PCS welcome the new Keeping Safe training and are pressing for the course to be mandatory for all. We have not yet reached agreement regarding DWP specific training for PCS H&S reps, but we have negotiated a full review of the JCFRA's.

Management launched a new Stress Policy, although the policy was welcomed, PCS strongly opposed the decision to tell staff not to complete an AR1 for stress. We recommend that all staff continue to use the AR1 to report Stress. PCS also agreed with the other DWP unions to encourage members to complete the Wellness survey.

Bev Laidlaw
Group Assistant Secretary

Finance

The outgoing year was dominated by the Campaign for Offices, Jobs and Services. These campaign related activities cannot usually be foreseen when preparing the Group's funding bid. We are pleased this critical additional work was funded, on top of our group budget by the national union. Budgets throughout the union are very tight and will continue to be so. As always the Group continues to look critically at all of our structures, to ensure we provide members with the very best value without compromising on the support PCS offers.

Bashir Chilwan
Group Treasurer