



HOMECARERS' BRIEFING - 26 JULY 2006

A meeting was recently held between UNISON, GMB and Aberdeenshire Council on the issues facing homecarers since the introduction of the guaranteed hours contracts on 16 January 2006.

The issues you have raised with us and we raised with management are:

- Shift patterns – working up to 12 days in a row
- Shift patterns – pattern of guaranteed hours
- Travel time – excessive travelling with no pay other than mileage rate
- Banked hours – when and how they can be worked
- Favouritism – a difficulty in some areas with the allocation of work
- Cover for annual leave
- Cover for sickness absence
- Annual leave calculation
- Allocated working – “courtesy time”
- Allocated working - rounding up of working time
- Printouts – monthly printouts of hours completed
- Working patterns – proposed changes to some shift patterns with possible introduction of weekend only contracts

The Council has offered solutions to some of these issues.

In order to help homecarers organise annual leave and sickness absence cover the Council propose to introduce team working i.e. homecarers will work in small teams of 4-6. These teams will work closely together and provide cover for each other when needed. This will also minimise the number of people providing care in each household.

The Council listened to our comments on the current practice of working up to 12 days out of 14. At present they have no response but have made a commitment to look at this pattern again. The Council do hope that the new guaranteed hours contracts may go some way to resolving these issues i.e. weekend only guaranteed hours contracts with fewer hours but only to be worked at weekends

and guaranteed hours contracts with longer hours during the day so resulting in a reduced number of days required to work.

Travel time is an issue for many of you, particularly those required to work outside their home area. At present homecarers receive, in their hourly rate, a 5% add-on that includes the travel time allowance. UNISON feels this is inadequate for a significant number of homecarers who often have to travel between clients. This Council has agreed to look at this issue again with a view to finding a compromise that will assist homecarers with significant travelling responsibilities.

The rounding up of working time was also discussed. Homecarers feel that current time measuring does not take into account courtesy time i.e. time saying hello to clients and checking all is well before clocking on/off. The unions asked that each session should be rounded up to the nearest 15 minutes – this could also go some way to repaying travelling time. The Council is considering this proposal.

UNISON requested the issue of monthly printouts of shifts be continued for homecarers so they can check their hours and amend inaccuracies. The Council agreed to continue this.

It has come to UNISON's attention over a number of years that the allocation of work/hours is and continues to be on an uneven basis. Some staff work long hours and others in the same team are unable to get enough hours to fulfil their guaranteed hours contracts. The Council say they are concerned about this issue and will address this as a matter of urgency.

Some homecarers are very concerned over the guaranteed hours contracts and not being given enough work to complete these hours – these extra paid hours are being banked and some staff have built up a significant number of banked hours. As a result many homecarers feel obliged to work outside their core hours or outside their home area. The Council hope that the new contracts (i.e. weekend only and longer daily hours) will resolve some of these issues and ensure that hours are allocated fairly and evenly.

We hope we have been able to take forward all the points made to us by UNISON members. The Council hopes to meet with homecarers throughout the month of October to see how things are progressing.

When any new shift or pay pattern is introduced there are always difficulties – UNISON is trying to resolve these difficulties. Please get in touch if you have any comments or queries.

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