



South East Central

2024 Annual Report



In Confidence for South East Central CWU members

Contents

<u>Title</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>Page</u>
Branch Chair Report	Steve Taylor	3
Political Officer Report	Di Hill	5
Safety Officer Report	Rick Cobern	8
Obituary		9
“Unions”		10
Branch Secretary Report	Dave Kauffman	12
Equality Officer Report	Steve Rhodes	14
Financial Report		15
Womens Officer Report	Lil Davies	16
Assistant Secretary Report	Tim Shoubridge	17
Retired Member Report	Dave Lomakin	18
Work Related Stress		20
Homage to Andy Kerr		21
Meeting Dates		22
Contact Details		23
AGM Invite		24



Front cover

You cant help but notice the congestion up at the top of poles, making it almost impossible to work safely off the top steps.

It’s getting very messy out there!

The views expressed in this annual report are personal to the author concerned and may not be the view of the branch. This report is "in confidence" and is meant for CWU South East Central members only.

Steve Taylor - Branch Chair



2024 was the year I officially took the helm as Chair of the branch. Has the world ended? Nope - we saw the whole year out and came through only slightly bruised. Although this will probably be the last introduction I write as Chair, we have been engaged in merger talks with our neighbouring branches.

The South East region has suffered due to the closure of all our local offices, leading to a reduction in membership. Officers have also been affected, with numbers decreasing—including myself. I had to prove that I could still be an engineer if the need arose, and I had to do it for a year. Fortunately, I had two things going for

me: bloody-mindedness and longevity.

Headquarters have also faced problems, requiring drastic cutbacks. Some of these cuts have impacted branches, with our rebate from your subs dropping from 29% to 23%, yet we are still expected to provide the same level of support to you, our members. They even have discussed the possibility of merging branches, and merging with postal branches!

However, we were ahead of the game and were already in merger talks with the Meridian and Portsmouth branches. We have mutually agreed the terms, and by the time you receive this publication, you should already have your ballot paper to decide whether you want us to merge or not. If successful, the new branch will come into being on 1st June. (Map page 18)

Dave Kauffman, the Branch Secretary, handles most Openreach matters, while I deal with everything else, including non-BT issues. We have over 100 portable members,

meaning they work for companies like Sky, Lightning Fibre, Vodafone, etc. —we even had one who worked for a taxi company once! Although this report will mainly cover BT Group companies, we must never forget the others we represent. I certainly don't.

For Openreach engineers: use the safety equipment provided. Use the gas tester. Use your Tetra kit. I know it can be time-consuming and sometimes frustrating (believe me, I know), but it's there for your safety. If you are being pressured by managers to "Do More," don't cut safety corners—getting caught ignoring safety rules often leads to not having a job to rush about



Bloody-minded and perhaps a tad mad

for.

We even helped one member secure a special roster, which, as far as we know, is the first of its kind in BT Group. Even senior employee relations had never heard of anything similar! A huge success for both the individual and the branch - achieved through persistence and reminding the company of its own values. We don't just tub-thump; we do subtlety too.

Frames have disappeared, but strangely, frame work hasn't! We told the company there was still plenty of work left for Frames, but did they listen? The poling teams' work has been contracted out - a travesty, in my opinion,

OPENREACH FOCUS ON POLING



BRING BACK OUR POLING WORK

Openreach management's unagreed decision to move poling crews onto other duties and give their work to third-party contractors has caused widespread discontent...

which will come back to haunt the company. I wish they would look up from their spreadsheets and actually go out and see what people do. We've seen managers, hard pinning massive amounts of jobs to engineers, why? Can't they trust the work allocation algorithms or the job controllers to do their jobs properly? If something isn't working, fix the cause, not just make a workaround and

put extra pressure and the responsibility onto the engineer. Seasonal Working options where the option you want, you can't have. And the company wonder why we keep battling with them.

And finally a message to our members who might be on long-term sick leave with some serious illnesses, we're here for you too whilst you fight a different type of battle.



Di Hill - Political Officer



Blimey, what a year 2024 was on the political front. We saw the rise of far-right parties in Europe and across the globe—Reform in the UK, and perhaps most worrying of all, in my opinion, the election of Donald Trump in America, along with the influence of unelected Elon Musk.

In May, we had local elections in many areas across the South East. Many local Labour parties were changed and renamed, and constituency boundaries were altered, causing a lot of confusion. I was elected with 56% of the vote, even though the Lib Dems did their usual “Labour can’t win here.” Overall, Labour did well, winning control of eight councils (105 in total) with

5,789 councillors.

Then Sunak, the “Rain Man,” stood outside No. 10 and announced a General Election for 4th July. I think people had had enough of elections—they were sick of endless television debates that told us very little. I certainly was! The Lib Dems have now become the nasty party around here, desperate to win. Ed Davey—“Action Man”! Let’s not forget tuition fees, Horizon, privatising Royal Mail, and being part of the austerity programme that caused so much hardship to our country. Everything changes when you get a bit of power.

I’m not a Starmer fan, but I think he is what the country needs right now. It’s certainly not Nigel Farage and his Reform Party—scary stuff.

Labour’s New Deal for Workers will be a real change for many people’s lives. This came from our union; we

put it forward to the TUC. We should be proud of this and see it as a strong reason to vote Labour. It will end fire and rehire, ban zero-hours contracts (in most cases), strengthen trade union rights, and introduce fair pay agreements to drive up wages and conditions.

On 4th July, 411 Labour MPs were elected—36 in the South East alone. Under Blair, Labour only had 19 in this region. There are now 190 female Labour MPs, which is more than the entire number of Tory MPs (120). There were plenty of “Portillo moments”—Liz Truss, Grant Shapps, Penny Mordaunt, and, of course, Jacob Rees-



Rishi Sunak Getting Wet and wondering if he should have brought a brolly (Picture Sky)

Mogg all lost their seats.

What a win—but what a state the Tories left our country in. A £22 billion black hole. Surely, they noticed they were spending and promising money they didn't have? It's not an easy position for Labour, but why target pensioners? Cutting winter fuel payments was a naive move, especially when you consider that one of the first things Blair did in 1997 was make our national museums free to enter. We forget that we used to have to pay for them—just as people still do in other countries.

Labour has been in power for six months, and I've never known so many attacks from the right-wing press—almost from day one. The Tories still can't grasp that they lost the election. After 14 years in power, they seem to think it was everyone else's fault.

As for Reform, I'm not sure what their policies are beyond ensuring that Farage rakes in the cash and gets more power. He's certainly not spending much time in Clacton—he's been in America



Elon Musk, in hindsight, perhaps he should of stopped at the beating his heart phase (Picture BBC)

with Liz Truss more than anywhere else. In December, he was a guest at "Heartland," a climate denial organisation linked to Trump. The launch took place at Brooks's, a private members' club in Mayfair—an exclusive club that doesn't admit women. Just thought I'd mention that.

The election of Trump is terrifying, and the people he has appointed would be funny if they weren't so dangerous. Musk interfering in British politics is disgraceful—just because he has loads of money, he seems to think he can do whatever he likes across the globe. Bizarre.

Labour is making some controversial changes to the way the country is run. VAT on private education will affect just 6% of children. It's a business—why shouldn't they pay tax like everyone else? Inheritance tax for farmers is set at 20%, while our kids will pay 40%. Most of us have worked all



Liz Truss MAGA fan. (Picture The Times)

our lives to buy our homes rather than having them handed down with a business. Farage and Clarkson, among others, have been using it as a tax dodge. Oh dear!

Still, a lot to be done.

Devolution will drastically change the way councils function, taking more power out of Westminster's hands. The white paper is a government policy statement and is usually followed by a bill in Parliament. There will be elected mayors covering up to two million people.

The reorganisation policy will remove the two-tier system, merging county and district/borough councils into unitary authorities with up to 500,000 people each. This will likely merge three or four boroughs or districts together. Brighton and Hove, already a unitary authority, may be expanded—perhaps incorporating Lewes. This process was started under the previous government.

I attended an event in Rochester to mark 40 years since the end of the Kent miners' strike. Our CWU branch had been involved in making a film



John Prescott and Angela Rayner (Picture Facebook)

about it, and CWU was a sponsor of the event.

Conflicts across the globe are on the rise—47,000 killed and 110,000 injured in Gaza, 15,000 killed in Ukraine with many more injured. Did we learn nothing from two world wars?

We said goodbye to Andy Kerr, our telecoms assistant secretary, with tributes coming from trade unions across the world and from the Labour Party.

John Prescott—what can you say? He was a real character and a trade unionist through and through. His dedication to

the climate change agenda was recognised even by Al Gore. We've lost these kinds of characters in politics—it all feels a bit "cloney" now.

Let's hope Angela Rayner fills his shoes—big as they are—as Deputy PM.

A good start with workers' rights.



Rick Cobern - Safety Officer



2024 Progress

The past year has seen significant progress in improving safety and maintenance within the branch, thanks to increased funding and the tireless efforts of our Union Safety Representatives (USRs). Leaky roofs and longstanding maintenance issues have been addressed in many buildings, though some areas still require urgent

attention. The active reporting of problems by members has played a crucial role in driving these improvements, demonstrating the power of collective action.

Accidents & Incidents

Concerns remain about the reluctance of some members to report near misses due to fears of disciplinary action. The branch continues to advocate for the use of the CARM system as a learning tool rather than a punitive measure.

Vehicle Safety

Vehicle safety has emerged as a critical area of focus following changes to servicing arrangements. The shift to Holman and smaller garages has led to issues such as the unavail-



CARM

**CARM a Learning tool not
a Punitive Measure**

ability of courtesy vehicles. Members are reminded to plan ahead by booking these vehicles in advance and to perform thorough checks before accepting hire vehicles, ensuring their suitability for work. This proactive approach will help avoid unnecessary blame for damages, prevent unsafe working practices, and ensure safer conditions on the road.

Safety Inspections

Workplace inspections conducted by USRs remain vital in identifying hazards and holding the company accountable for maintaining safe environments. Members are urged to report potential risks, including persistent roof leaks in both wet and dry



Some leaky roofs can be fixed - Ninfield Exchange

weather, as well as hazards associated with adverse driving conditions. Flash floods, hidden potholes, and careless driving near puddles pose notable risks that require vigilance.

USR Update

The branch faces challenges following the loss of nine USRs due to redundancies and voluntary leaver schemes. While this represents a significant loss of expertise and dedication, efforts to recruit new USRs have yielded some success, with two new representatives joining and two more beginning training this month. Members interested in contributing to workplace safety are encouraged to step forward, as training is provided at no cost, and the role offers a meaningful opportunity to make a difference.

Final Thoughts

Safety is a shared responsibility, and timely reporting of hazards, near misses, and incidents is crucial. If you are unsure about reporting, the safety team is always available to assist. Every report contributes to creating a safer environment for all. The

emphasis remains on fostering a culture of education and prevention rather than punishment, ensuring that every member can work, drive, and return home safely.

Again, and always, please:
**Work Safe. Drive Safe.
Get Home Safe.**



Obituary

This year, we sadly bid farewell to four retired members who dedicated many years of service to our union. Their hard work, commitment, and camaraderie left a lasting impact on colleagues and friends alike. Though they

may be gone, their contributions will not be forgotten. We extend our deepest condolences to their families and loved ones. We honour their lives and legacies and contributions in this annual report.

Jamie McGuire

Ron Muggridge

Ron Newton

Michael Whittle

What have unions ever done for me?

Improved Wages

Unions have been instrumental in securing fair wages, ensuring workers are paid appropriately for their labour, and helping to reduce income inequality.



The 8-Hour Workday

Through union action, the standard workday was reduced to eight hours, giving workers more time for rest and family, and helping to improve their overall quality of life. In the 1800's 12 to 14 hours a day was common.

Paid Holidays and Sick Leave

Unions fought for paid time off, including sick leave and holidays, allowing workers to maintain financial security during periods of illness or per-



sonal time. In 1938 the government introduced the Holidays with Pay Act in 1938, which gave the right to one weeks paid leave a year. We've worked busily away and now it's a minimum of 20 days (plus national holidays).

Health and Safety Regulations



Unions have been at the forefront of pushing for workplace safety laws, ensuring that workers are protected from dangerous

and life-threatening conditions on the job.

The National Minimum Wage

Unions played a major role in the establishment of the National Minimum Wage, lifting millions of workers out of poverty and ensuring fair pay for all.

Collective Bargaining Rights



Unions introduced the concept of collective bargaining, which empowered workers to negotiate better pay, benefits, and better working conditions through solidarity.

The Right to Organise

Unions fought for the legal right for workers to organise, giving them a voice in the workplace and enabling them to come together to demand fair

treatment.

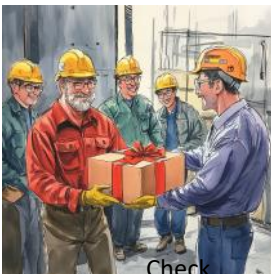


Equal Pay for Equal Work



Unions have fought for pay equality, addressing the gender pay gap and advocating for fair pay practices for all workers, regardless of gender or background.

Pensions and Retirement Security



Through union negotiations, workers gained access to pensions and retirement plans, helping ensure they have financial security after years of service.

Improved Workplace Benefits

Unions have been key in securing essential benefits like healthcare, parental

leave, and job protection, contributing to the overall well-being and stability of working people.

These achievements, driven by the efforts of unions, have made a profound difference in the lives of workers, advancing their rights and improving their working conditions over many decades.



Check to see what other benefits you can get on the national website - if you need help logging on contact your local rep for assistance

Dave Kauffman - Branch Secretary



It's that time of year again when I write my report for the Branch Annual Review. As Branch Secretary, this year has brought both challenging and significant moments for the CWU.

As a branch, we attended Conference as well as a special forum where we were informed of the financial challenges facing the CWU nationally. This has been covered by HQ in various communications under the Redesign banner. It never ceases to amaze me that socialists spend time debating capitalism when it comes to the distribution of CWU funds and decisions about CWU assets—most of which will be sold or downsized.

As Branch Secretary, I have also observed the limited recruitment into the major departments of BT, Openreach, and EE & Consumer. In Openreach, recruitment has been minimal, while in Consumer, it has been restricted to attrition replacement. This, in itself, presents challenges, as some BT Group companies are reluctant to allow the CWU to attend induction events. The reason for this remains unclear—perhaps certain senior managers believe they are running their own fiefdoms. However, this does explain the numerous discrepancies in BT Group's grading and pay point system.

Will this ever be fully resolved? My guess is that an agreement will eventu-

ally be reached on how the grading structure should work. But will this actually fix the mess BT has created with pay points? I suspect not. However, if we don't keep pushing on this issue, we all know BT will take the cheapest option, simply assuming that "cheap works."

Does It Really?

The effects of this approach can be seen daily in Openreach, where different departments are outsourcing work to third parties. What does this mean in practice?

1. Direct Labour Openreach engineers, already subjected to workplace bullying through performance management measures like CDR and

Success Rate, are left with increasingly complex tasks.

2. Contractors complete simpler jobs but feed unfinished work back into the system, adding to the workload for Direct Labour engineers at the end of the day.





Work-Related Stress and Employer Accountability

There has been a noticeable increase in team members taking time off due to work-related stress. Some of these cases have been reported as Near Miss or Accident at Work, with CARM numbers issued against them. However, it is deeply concerning that BT and Openreach seem to hide/lose some of these reports and fail to investigate them. But the branch will not allow the company to hide these incidents. If you report a near miss or accident, please inform the branch. We are compiling a report to highlight which departments are covering up these incidents. Legally, the employer has a duty to record, track, and work to minimise such cases.

Voluntary Paid Leaver (VPL) Schemes

This year has also seen a number of Voluntary Paid Leaver (VPL) schemes offered, and some members have chosen to take a different path. For those considering other employment, CWU membership can continue under portability membership, while retiring members may wish to explore retired membership options. However, the CWU must challenge the employer on reports that managers are unethically approaching employees covered by the Equality Act 2010, offering financial settlements in informal "car park conversations". This kind of spiv management is complete-



ly unacceptable. Furthermore, these managers refuse to put anything in writing—unless they manipulate the employee into making it appear as if they requested the settlement themselves. While settlement agreements have a legitimate place in workplace negotiations, they should never be used as a tool to bully staff out of the company.

On a positive note, our new officers are stepping up and taking on more responsibilities and our new safety reps are learning the ropes. This will be crucial for the branch moving forward.

So my final message to you is simple: keep in touch with each other and with the branch. Bad managers thrive if employees feel isolated. But when people start talking, they often find that others are experiencing the same bullying and unfair treatment. If you are fortunate enough to have a good manager, that's great just reach out and support those who don't. **Together, we are stronger.**

Steve Rhodes - Equality Officer



On 16th–17th October, I attended Part 2 of *Neurodiversity in the Workplace and the Union* at HQ. This was again run specifically for the South East region. I cannot say enough good things about these courses. This second part expanded on some aspects of the first but also covered our own experiences, myths and realities, case studies demonstrating how the Union and reps can navigate neurodiversity issues, the reality of undisclosed conditions, and reflections on action planning for our membership.

If you get the opportunity to attend these courses, I would wholeheartedly recommend them. Even if the only thing you gain is a better understanding of yourself, it will be time well spent.

Rick and I attended the Equality Conference on 21st–22nd October in Newcastle. It was another great event with highly informative speakers covering a range of important topics:

- **Karma Nirvana** – An organisation campaigning against all aspects of *honour-based abuse*, including forced marriage, child marriage, and honour killings. Since February 2023, laws in England and Wales have changed to better protect victims. More information can be found on their website, including how to contact their helpline (**0800 5999 247**) and the story *When is a Spoon Not Just a Spoon? When It*

Saves a Life, which is well worth a read. Karma Nirvana <https://karmanirvana.org.uk/>

- **STAMMA** – A UK charity representing people who stammer. STAMMA <https://stamma.org/>

- **Thompsons Solicitors** – Discussed the disability employment gap, reasonable adjustments, and what defines a disability within employment law.

- **TUC Equalities** – Spoke about how the new Employment Rights Bill could be a game-changer. Employment Rights Bill Factsheets <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employment-rights-bill-factsheets>

- **Banner Theatre** – Performed a mix of music and political commentary marking the 40th anniversary of the Miners' Strike and the protests at Orgreave.



KARMA NIRVANA

Supporting all victims of honour based abuse and forced marriage

• **Ray Goodspeed / LGSM (Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners)** – Discussed their role in supporting miners during the Miners’ Strike.

• **John Page (Ella Baker School of Organising)** – Spoke about the failures of democracy, the increasing narratives of division in our communities, and how the right conversations can help counteract them.

• **Gary Bennett** – Former professional footballer, anti-racist activist, and *Show Racism the Red Card* ambassador. Show Racism the Red Card <https://www.theredcard.org/news/our-patron-gary-bennett-heads-to-windsor-to-collect-his-mbe/>

• **TIC-Yorkshire CEO Kim Mitchell** – Supports people with Tourette’s Syndrome and tic disorders.

TIC-Yorkshire <https://tic-yorkshire.co.uk/>

Deeba Syed (Senior Legal Officer, Rights of Women) – Provides legal advice for women. Rights of Women Advice Lines <https://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk/get-advice/call-our-advice-lines/>

Branch Finances

It has been one of the most chaotic and interesting years for managing finances. With the loss of many members due to office closures - some taking leaver payments, others relocating - our branch finances have been affected.

Headquarters, with agreement, no longer passes on 29% of your fees to us, reducing it to 23%. These changes, combined with the rule allowing us to keep only one year's equivalent funds, have led to our monthly rebate being sequestered multiple times.

We no longer enter figures under various codes - such as buying a notepad, catching a train, or booking a meeting room. Instead, all expenses are lumped together. Those who manage finances prefer detailed records to report back to members, (yes, we do, though you probably didn't notice as you nodded off!) This year, everything has been combined and even entered by head office.

As HQ strengthened defences against cyberattacks, the old SAGE Online system was deemed vulnerable and discarded without replacement. Promises of a new system never materialised, leaving us with a haphazard spreadsheet.

Rest assured, this branch ensures your contributions are well managed and spent wisely. A full report will be given at the AGM.



Lil Davies - Womens Officer



Having worked at Openreach in Service Delivery for almost four years, I have been a union member since joining the company. I understand the importance of the union and how its hard work impacts me in my day-to-day job. Because of this, I reached out to my local branch to see what more I could do for my branch and my colleagues.

I attended my first committee meeting to gain a better understanding of what my local branch is doing for its members and how I could help. I met some fantastic people who inspired me to do more for my colleagues, ensuring we always have a good place to work where we feel valued as individuals.

Being a woman in engineering and having a passion for ensuring everyone feels valued and safe within their workplace, I have become the Women's Officer and Assistant Secretary for the branch.

Since taking on this role, I have gone out into the field to meet female members, introduce myself, and provide my contact details. I've attended numerous meetings, which have been great for connecting with people from various branches, learning about the current challenges we're dealing with, and exploring how we can better represent our members.

I participated in the Essential Skills Level 1 and 2 courses, where I learned about negotiation techniques, member mapping, the fundamentals of employment tribunals, and effective speech delivery.

I am continuing to learn and understand the structure of the CWU and where I fit within it. I will also be attending the USR Safety Rep course in February, which will further

increase my knowledge and enhance the role I take on in our branch.

From speaking to engineers and reviewing feedback from **Your Say**, I have noticed some key trends. There is an increased focus on statistics and the impact this is having on individual well-being. Additionally, our facilities in exchanges are still not acceptable. Our branch believes that, as a bare minimum, there should be a table, chairs, a kettle, and a heater so our engineers can take their unpaid lunch break in a suitable environment. We may start a campaign to address this issue and look forward to your support.



I hope to meet more of our members, and work together to find solutions.

Tim Shoubridge - Assistant Secretary



In 2024, I took steps to increase my involvement with the CWU, having been a branch committee member since 2020. In May and September, I attended two CWU education courses, which covered some of the essential skills for reps. I became a branch Assistant Secretary in August last year and currently carry out reps' duties one day a week. I'm enjoying getting to grips with the role and take great pride in representing our members.

I also work on the tools in SD Copper around the Brighton area. I attended safety training in November and now carry out USR responsibilities in addition to my assistant secretary duties.

I've been contacting branch members to introduce myself and gain a better understanding of the concerns across all areas of the business. This has allowed me to identify some common trends, including poor building maintenance and inadequate access to desk space in BT buildings, discriminatory practices from management, and concerns about job security.

To get a clearer picture of these issues, I would greatly appreciate further input from our members. If you're being targeted by management, struggling to find a place to work, facing inadequate welfare facilities, or dealing with teams "squatting" in your local building, please get in touch. The more I know about these problems, the better we can work together to tackle them.

In 2025, I will be working alongside other branch officers to increase our recruitment efforts, particularly targeting contractors working in our patch, as we currently have few contractor members.

While Openreach tries to play direct labour off against contractors, there is an opportunity here to broaden our membership. By uniting for a common purpose and shared interests, we can level the playing field and improve standards of safety and quality.

Over the coming year, I will continue to build on my trade union education by taking further courses in advanced skills for reps, as well as safety and equality training. This will enable me to develop my skills as a rep and provide better support for our members. I look forward to meeting many more of you in 2025 and working to ensure our voice is heard both locally and nationally.



Dave Lomakin - Retired Members Officer



This annual report will be the last from our present South East Central branch before we face the merger with the Meridian and Portsmouth branches.

For me, this journey has come a long way since 1965, when I joined the Sevenoaks Branch of the POEU and attended their venues in smoke-filled rooms of drinking estab-

lishments. Those days of GPO camaraderie, combined with the notoriety of civil servants, fostered a closer working relationship and a gentlemanly understanding between engineering grades and managers.

Since then, we have experienced merger after merger, and we now face the prospect of the CWU representing a South Eastern area stretching from Portsmouth to Canterbury. Declining membership, along with the challenges brought by technological advancements in the telecommunications industry, has continued to reduce the workforce, with many relinquishing their memberships due to undignified leaving terms.

Those who retain membership will continue to be supported within the newly formed region, with representation from the CWU both regionally and nationally.

On behalf of the branch, I have continued my association with the CWU National Retired Members' Committee, attending the Retired Members' Conference last October. This conference took on a highly political tone, expressing dissatisfaction with the Government's recent announcements, including the abolition of Winter Fuel Allowances, rising gas, electricity, and water prices, and increases in standing meter charges. Criticism was not only directed at the previous govern-





Nearly 100 branch delegates, regional officers and other activists took part in the CWU Retired Members Conference, and discussed agenda motions covering the whole range of issues facing the older people in the UK

ment’s handling of the Triple Lock, which guarantees State Pension and benefits increases, but also at the current government’s stance on downgrading State Pension protection against inflation.

One positive development was a directive for the

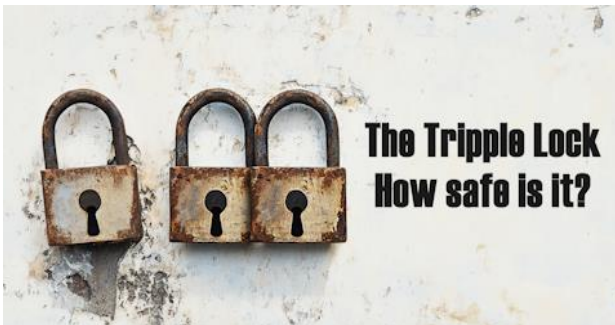
CWU NEC to formally recognise retired members who reach the age of 100 years!

The Christmas cards, branch diaries, and pens sent to retired members during the festive season will continue but in a new format and with revised

area recognition.

For continuing members and prospective new members from BT and other supported industries, who are always welcome, CWU benefits will remain available, including legal services and the Union Death Benefit, which provides financial support to your nominated next of kin or legal representative.

Please inform the branch of any changes to your circumstances, including email address, home address, or death beneficiary details.



Work-Related Stress and Employer Responsibility

Many employees frequently ask important questions regarding their working conditions, particularly in relation to work-life balance and employer expectations.

Why? There is growing concern that the employer does not prioritise employees' work-life balance. Across all areas of BT and Openreach, changes are being implemented, often driven by managers whose primary focus is spreadsheet data rather than the well-being of their teams.

Patch managers, motivated by league tables, exert undue pressure on team members, leading to workplace bullying in pursuit of performance targets. However, employees should be aware of their rights under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. These laws clearly state that the employer has a legal duty to ensure that



Work-related ill health

employees do not experience excessive work-related stress.

Furthermore, the employer is required to track and report incidents of work-related stress. Employees have the right to take the STREAM test and formally log an incident. Additionally, if work-related stress results in absence, it can be reported as an accident or near miss. Unfortunately, there is widespread pressure discouraging employees from reporting such issues. This stigma must be challenged, as only by raising concerns can employees push back against performance management practices that negatively impact their well-being.

How? Employees experiencing work-related stress are encouraged to report it, seek support from their GP, and inform the Communication Workers Union (CWU). By doing so, they can ensure their experi-

ences are acknowledged and addressed.

776,000

Workers suffering from work-related stress, depression or anxiety (new or long-standing) in 2023-24

If? If employees take these steps and collectively build a body of evidence using the employer's own reporting systems, it may be possible to pursue legal action. An independent solicitor could assess whether there is a viable claim for compensation based on the employer's failure to protect employee welfare.

What Next? The next step is to gather evidence and continue challenging the employer on how their management practices are harming employees' health and well-being. By standing together and holding the employer accountable, real change can be achieved.

1.7 million

Workers suffering from Work-related ill health (new or long-standing) in 2023/24

Andy Kerr 1956 - 2024 (former DGS)



Andy Kerr, a stalwart of our union, dedicated his life to championing workers' rights and advancing the labour movement. Beginning his journey as a workplace representative in 1976, he ascended through various roles, including Branch Committee member, Branch Vice-Chair, Assistant Secretary, and Branch Secretary. His commitment led to his election to the National Executive Council in 1997, and by 1999, he became Chair of the Telecoms & Financial Services Executive. In June 2008, Kerr was elected as the Deputy General Secretary for Telecoms & Financial Services replacing the leaving Jeanie Drake, a position he would hold with distinction for 16 years.

Beyond his national contributions, Andy's influence was felt globally. He served as the Global President of UNI's Information, Communications, Technology, and Related Services (ICTS) sector for nine years, guiding the sector through significant expansions and addressing challenges such as outsourcing and the gig economy.

In April 2024, during his last CWU Conference, Andy delivered an inspiring address, reflecting on his lifelong commitment to socialism and the working class. He emphasised, "I've been a socialist all my life and I'll die a socialist." he then handed over his role to the new lead, Karen Rose. Karen said, "Andy has been a superb DGS.

He's been a mentor to me and I've learned a great deal from him"

Tragically, a few months later on August 27, 2024, Andy passed away after a serious illness. The union described him as "one of the most influential leaders in the history of the CWU and our predecessor unions."

Andy's legacy as a dedicated trade unionist and advocate for workers' rights remains a guiding light for the labour movement.

At a branch level, Andy was willing to come to our branch meetings, even when he knew he was in for a rough ride. He never backed down from a fight in which he thought he was right.



Meeting Dates 2025-26

Members of the South East Central, CWU Branch, are advised that the following meetings are open to all members: **Subject to change due to merger ballot.**

General Meeting	Wednesday 4th June	2025	Venue TBC
General Meeting	Wednesday 3rd September	2025	Venue TBC
AGM	Wednesday, 18th Feb	2026	Venue TBC

Meeting venues will be advised closer to the time. Special Meetings may be called to address urgent issues and notified to you via the email address we have for you.

Committee members are advised that the following meetings are open to committee members

Committee Meeting	Tuesday, 1st Apr	2025	Uckfield
Committee Meeting	Tuesday, 1st July	2025	Uckfield
Committee Meeting	Tuesday, 7th Oct	2025	Uckfield
Committee Meeting	Tuesday, 6th Jan	2026	Uckfield

Dates of all meetings are advertised on the website www.cwusec.org.uk

Think you could help? Think you could do better? Make yourself known to the branch and join our committee. Ring any of the officers on the contact list for more details.

South East Central CWU

Current Points of Contact

		<u>Telephone No</u>	<u>Mobile No</u>
Branch Secretary:	Dave Kauffman chair.sec.tw@btinternet.com	01892 522948	07850 815644
Branch Chair:	Steve Taylor cwu.sec.finsec@btinternet.com	01892 522948	07377 880526
Fin Secretary:	Steve Rhodes finsec@cwusec.org.uk	01892 522948	07764 338836
Assist Secretary	Tim Shoubridge timshoubridgecwu@gmail.com	01892 522948	07496 808442
Safety Co-ord. (& Vice Chair)	Rick Cobern safety@cwusec.org.uk	01892 522948	07498 923159
Political Officer:	Di Hill dianne.hill1@btinternet.com		07747 193133
Women's Officer: (& Asst Sec)	Lil Davies cwulil@btinternet.com	01892 522948	07483 387978
Equality Officer (& Assist Safety)	Steve Rhodes srcwuusr@cwusec.org.uk	01892 522948	07764 338836
Retired Members	Dave Lomakin via cwu.sec.tw@btinternet.com	01892 522948	
Youth Officer	Vacant		
BAME Officer	Vacant		



South East Central Branch
Annual General Meeting

Horntye Park Sports Complex

Hastings

Bohemia Rd, St Leonard's on Sea, Hastings TN34 1EX (map on website)

Wednesday 19th February

7.30pm

The agenda will include the submission of the Annual report, co-opting of branch officers and committee vacant posts and any proposals pertinent to an AGM, i.e. changes to branch bye laws and any proposals for the forthcoming year, including financial proposals, delegation and proposals to the CWU Annual Conference

The meeting will conclude with any questions and current issues time permitting.

Refreshments will be available for members.

YOUR CHANCE TO HAVE YOUR SAY PLEASE

ATTEND