**UNISON Scottish Ambulance Service Branch – Supporting members during COVID-19 pandemic – April briefing, number one**

I understand that the current situation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic has far-reaching repercussions to our lives. I want to stress that members remain our top priority.

Our thoughts go to all members and their families who have been affected in any way

COVID-19 is having a massive impact. UNISON has put in place contingency arrangements that will allow us to continue protecting you at work. While there may be a decreased need for face to face representation at this time, we want to reassure you that we are working hard behind the scenes.

**Supporting you and protecting your Health & Safety (H&S)**

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The shortages around PPE are no secret and UNISON is engaging both locally with Scottish Ambulance Service and nationally with the Scottish and UK governments. We are meeting with senior managers of SAS on an almost daily basis and use these meetings to raise our concerns including the shortages and quality of PPE. As a result of this engagement we have seen an improvement in the amount and distribution of PPE.

Whilst we have seen some progress and movement we don’t believe it has been enough, we continue to have concerns and many unanswered questions. It got to the point where we wrote to the chief Executive to seek assurance that concerns raised by UNIOSN members about PPE will be addressed (A copy of the letter is attached to this briefing).

If nothing else, this emergency has shown how ill prepared the service is to deal with significant challenges. Contingency plans and an acceptable level of communication with staff have been poor since the start of the outbreak.  The lack of PPE is unacceptable. The absence of clear instruction, to staff in harm’s way due to the shortage of protective equipment is simply not good enough.

UNISON is committed to ensuring that everything that can be done to protect member’s, is done and done without delay.

Please continue to raise concerns around Health & Safety and PPE and let us know without delay, using the contact details below, if you are affected by PPE shortages. Do not put yourself at risk.

COVID-19 Testing

UNISON has been at the front of the queue demanding for testing for Ambulance staff for a variety of reasons. None more important than ensuring the service continues to run and we avoid people self isolating for a week or fortnight. We know members want to make sure they are fit and able to do their job without endangering the public, the people they are dedicated to helping.

At present we have over ten percent of A & E staff absent self isolating, putting a stain on those left. We know many of those off work do not want to be off and are eager to return to the frontline with colleagues. Because testing isn’t in place their self isolation continues, in many cases needlessly.

**Grievances, Disiplinaries**

Whilst the current situation has lead to a suspension for a large number of grievances and disiplinaries, it’s important that members remain aware that there has been no change to the SAS’s policy for raising grievances and more importantly legal time limits for raising employment tribunals. This means we encourage members with grievances to lodge them or bring them to the attention of the branch a soon as possible.

**4 ways to help your branch help you**

We realise the pressure our members are under but there are some really small things you can do to help the branch and hardworking colleagues.

1.      **Circulate this Bulletin –** Not all members get these [Branch Name] email updates. To help keep them in touch we would appreciate if you could print this update and place somewhere your colleagues can see it e.g. notice board, tea room etc.

2.      **Update your Details: –** It’s more important than ever that we have current and up to date details for staying in touch. The easiest way to check and update your details is by going to [**here**](https://www.unison.org.uk/my-unison#_blank)

**NB:** If you did not receive this bulletin by email then we need you to provide your email and give permission for us to get in touch.

3.      **Become a member: -** If you are reading this and you are not already a UNISON member then you can head to[**here**](https://joining.unison.org.uk/#_blank)and join. Over many of your colleagues are already members and over 300 people have joined UNISON in the last fortnight alone because they recognise the work we are putting in to represent workers affected by COVID-19. These new members increase our ability to protect the rights of Ambulancestaff and build on the important work we have already done.

4.      **Become a steward or workplace contact: –** Again we know how busy you are but no one knows your job the way you do. No one knows the local workplace issues like you do. We want to have our ear to the ground and we need your help to know where the pinch points or problems are.

The small simple things sometimes help the most. Volunteering to circulate this update, checking if colleagues have joined UNISON, updated their details or are receiving these communications will make a huge difference, keeping us in the loop and being able to help.

**Thank You**

Finally UNISON and its members and their families want to say thanks for the work you are doing. The public are lucky to have you during these extraordinary times and I hope you, your family and friends remain safe and well.

UNISON has your back and will remain there for when you need us. We will be back in touch with a further updates

**Stevie Gilroy**

**UNISON Branch Secretary**