12.07.2021

**Meal Breaks**

Dear Member

Yet again the situation around altered/cancelled meal breaks has become a serious issue over the weekend.

UNISON fully understands the pressures that the service is currently under, and with very little prospect of the issue resolving soon, it is even more vital that members are looked after and supported whilst at work. A vital part of this support is ensuring members get a meal break which allows them to recharge, eat and get a least a little respite from the ever increasing pressure being put upon them. A pressure that shows no sign of abating any time soon, so protecting our members for the long haul into winter pressures becomes ever more important.

With this in mind it is only right that UNISON leads and gives advice and direction to our members.  This advice is simple, our members are always expected to stick to Trust policy, and this time is no exception. The time you are given for your meal break is your unpaid time.

The agreement is back at your base station so all members are advised with the support of UNISON to stick with this principle and return for their meal breaks.

If for whatever reason you get back to base station at the end of your shift after not having your meal break and having the meal break takes you passed your finish time, then you will have already worked your contracted hours and can go home after informing EOC, a major incident being the only exception.

The only exceptions to members having their meal breaks on station as stated above are as follows and taken directly from the agreed SOP

4.1 In the following circumstances the meal break can be postponed or cancelled

* A declared major incident in any part of the region – arrangements will be put in place to ensure staff get adequate breaks and food
* Long distance journeys – arrangements will be agreed with the crew

4.2 This SOP can also be suspended in consultation and agreement with the Trade Union if the Trusts Demand Management Plan is triggered at level 4 and there is significant concern regarding patient safety.

UNISON will work with its sister Unions to ensure a consistent approach from Staff Side. We also understand that this may put individuals in difficult position whilst working however we want to assure members they have the full support of UNISON and no one can be penalised for sticking to the agreed policies.

We also understand that some members may wish to volunteer to take their meal break away from their base which is entirely their choice, but it would need to be a crew decision.

 UNISON Branch Committee