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PCS members celebrate brand new branch

Membership swells at the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) as workers are attracted to PCS's wide outlook and influence.

The RSH has undergone huge change in the last few years, doubling in size and adapting to an expanded remit. There's more pressure on workers as the government politicises social housing and there have been difficult meetings between union reps and management.

RSH is a non-departmental public body (NDPB), under the Department for Levelling Up, so staff tend to be treated like civil servants when it suits managers and like private sector employees when it doesn't. There's the constant possibility of being shut down and workloads reorganised into the civil service.

Worst of both worlds?

Kerry was established in another union, working in a reps' team and also alongside a PCS rep. During regular negotiations with management, Kerry worked closely with PCS industrial officer Jayne Craven who was also supporting PCS members. Jayne had insight into wider departmental negotiations and PCS was ready for a significant dispute.

At RSH, the purse strings and legislation are held by government. So, management don't want to rock the boat and will make their choice between existing arrangements and civil service standards. Existing benefits, like annual leave, are used to resist bringing in other benefits from comparable civil service areas.

Powerful perspective

Kerry and the reps' team saw that PCS's national executive committee was debating at Cabinet level. Along with Jayne being able to compare RSH conditions with other PCS branches, this gave real weight to bargaining with RSH.

RSH workers who were already active could see that PCS was the right union for NDPBs and arm's-length bodies. Intense support, branch coordination, democratic structure, clear strategy, and the successful national campaign – they all drew other members over to PCS.

Organising: next steps

Now RSH has its own PCS branch and Kerry is acting branch secretary. The next challenge is to look for common goals in other workplaces. This means getting new members involved in PCS more widely so they can be more engaged and empowered, and feel they're a member of a union, not just a unionised workforce.

Jayne says: "PCS members can feel proud to be in a union, to recruit, take action, and spread the message. This is the exciting value of organising and influencing, not just being serviced. And the more we do, the more that message will hit home."

Kerry adds: "We've got a speaker from PCS's national executive committee coming to our branch AGM. We feel valued, involved and influential. PCS's bottom-up approach, based on relationships, adds value and makes a difference. I can feel the enthusiasm. We've got a lot of work to do but we can rise to it."

Find out how you can build strength and solidarity by [talking to colleagues about membership and activism](#).