

December 2025

Use the CWU for All IFWs and FFWs

We have received reports that some managers are encouraging staff to attend Initial Formal Warnings (IFWs) and Final Formal Warnings (FFWs) without union representation, some even describing IFWs as "informal warnings". Members are reminded that both IFWs and FFWs are formal stages of the disciplinary and attendance-management process, and attending without proper support can have long-term consequences.

Union officers stress that any meeting capable of leading to disciplinary action, warnings, or changes to your employment record is *not* informal. These meetings can impact future reviews, pay progression, and even job security. Having a trained union representative present ensures that procedures are followed correctly, your rights are protected, and any mitigating circumstances are clearly presented.



Recent cases have shown that when members attend alone, important details are missed, and outcomes can be more severe than necessary. Union reps are experienced in challenging unfair evidence, requesting reasonable adjustments, and ensuring that attendance issues, particularly those linked to health, are handled fairly and with respect.

Pole Testers Multiskilling?

Openreach is once again facing concern from frontline workers after attempting to introduce major role changes for Pole Testers and Heavy Cable Recovery (HCR) teams without meaningful consultation. CWU has been frustrated, particularly after previous assurances from CEO Clive Selley that the union would be treated with respect in all discussions affecting members.



Workers say they are being pushed towards multiskilling despite serious practical and safety concerns. Pole Testers warn that vehicles lack space for the extra equipment required, and that already heavy workloads leave no room to divert time away from critical safety inspections. Members fear that, as "lead to cash" priorities expand, safety could be sidelined.

Long-standing issues around the outsourcing of pole erection have also resurfaced, with local teams pointing to historical cases where third party involvement compromised safety and even led to fraudulent claims for unfinished work.

Although senior Openreach leaders have since met with the CWU National Team and promised that multiskilling will remain limited, and that core roles will continue to be prioritised, many members see the discussions as an afterthought rather than genuine consultation.

Branch Biennial General Meeting

The date has been set for the first Biennial General Meeting of the new South East Telecoms Branch, which will take place on Monday 9 March 2026. This is your opportunity, as members, to have your say on how the branch is run and what your expectations are beyond the day-to-day work.

There will be elections for the branch officer posts, with all positions carrying a two-year term. This meeting is an important part of ensuring the branch reflects your priorities and has the leadership you want moving forward.

Sanitary Bins in Exchange Toilets

Over the last few months we have noticed the removal of sanitary waste bins in exchanges. Members have reported that single-use bags have been issued to some engineers, to be disposed of in general waste. This is unsanitary, particularly as general waste bins are also being removed from some exchanges.

This issue has been escalated by the Branch Safety Committee, and CBRE have now been instructed to reinstate sanitary bins where they have been removed. The CWU was not consulted about the removal, but thanks to the work of our safety team, this decision now appears to have been reversed.

Members are reminded that UK law requires employers to provide suitable sanitary disposal facilities in all female and gender-neutral washrooms.

Our Safety reps will continue to monitor the situation and members are always encouraged to report any missing facilities so these issues can be reported and resolved quickly. Ensuring compliance and maintaining dignity at work remains a key priority for the union.



"Put it back!"

What's the Gossip?

Word around the patch is that the suspected merge between Service Delivery Copper and Fibre is still on the cards, but don't hold your breath just yet. Clive Selley has apparently made it clear that he wants the merger done "properly and only once," which sounds reassuring... except no one seems to know when "once" actually is. Timescales? None. Clarity? Minimal. Rumours? Plenty.

Meanwhile, there's been a fair bit of eyebrow-raising over the latest round of leaver packages. They have been offered across Copper & Fibre SD in some regions, but team members in London and the South East were left completely out of the offer. Managers, however, were included, is there a particular reason for this?



For now, no one seems to have the full picture, but the rumour mill is certainly turning. As always, the union will be keeping a close eye on developments... even if the corporate crystal ball is still a little unsure and foggy.

Political Opinion

The Communication Workers Union has achieved a significant milestone with the passing of the Employment Rights Bill, marking one of the most substantial improvements to workers' rights in over a decade.

The CWU launched its New Deal for Workers initiative in 2017, calling for an end to exploitative employment practices and stronger legal protections for working people. Working closely with the TUC and through direct engagement with government, the union has pushed for wide-ranging reforms, many of which are now set to become law.

The new Bill, which passed through the House of Lords on 17 December 2025, includes several major provisions that the CWU has long advocated for. Among them is a near-total ban on "fire and rehire", making the practice automatically unfair in most circumstances. The legislation also strengthens unfair dismissal rights, reduces qualifying periods for protection, and delivers improved rights for pregnant workers, whistleblowers and new starters. Outdated restrictions on trade union organising are also being removed.



Royal Assent is expected early in 2026, with most measures coming into force by early 2027. The Bill is a genuine improvement to millions of working people's lives, but the campaign still continues, further reforms, such as action on the gig economy, sectoral bargaining and a single worker status are still under review, and the CWU has pledged to maintain pressure for their full delivery.

CWU delivering real workplace change.

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