



South East Telecom

2025 Annual Report



In Confidence for South East Telecom CWU members

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Front cover

A new dawn for the telecoms network?
For those eagle eyed of you, yes it's at
the rear of Neville House or more
commonly known as
Eastbourne exchange.

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 Telecom members only.

Dave Booker - Branch Chair



It's a real honour to be here as Chair of this new branch, bringing together members from Meridian, Portsmouth, West Sussex and the IOW, and South East Central. This is an important moment for all of us.

A quick bit about me: I joined BT in 1989 and signed up to the NCU the same day. I started in London with the Westminster Clerical Branch. I'll spare you the long version and stick to the essentials. I got involved early, moved from doing safety a couple of days

a week to becoming a Branch Officer, then Officers and Committee Chair, then Secretary. I spent three years on the Clerical Executive before life took me to the coast. I thought I was heading for redeployment when I was asked to get involved again, which led me to Meridian Branch, where I served as Secretary until our merger last year.

The merger took time, and rightly so. There was a lot to consider and plenty of steps with HQ. Every officer involved agreed that bringing the South East branches together would strengthen our voice, simplify organising, and help us support members more effectively. We are still adapting, but we're working well together and building something stronger than any of us had alone.

I want to thank all Officers and Committee members who served their individual branches and have now stepped down. Their commitment has been invaluable. We hope many will join us online at the upcoming Biennial General Meeting and stay connected as we move forward.

Our Biennial General Meeting will be via video conference, one of the few positives from lockdown. It pushed us to use the technology properly, and it means more of you can take part and be heard. This doesn't mean in person meetings are gone. With such a large area, this format simply gives us the best chance of involving everyone. We'll still be getting out to see you and strength-

ening communication across the branch.

As you know, we're all incredibly busy with disciplines, attendance meetings, grievances, and everything else that lands on our desks. Officers will report on their areas shortly, so I'll leave the detail to them.

This is also an election year, and we still have vacancies. If you're interested in getting involved at any level, please contact the Branch office. Fresh



voices and new energy are always welcome.

There have also been changes to our Region-

al structure. We previously had a committee covering both Telecoms and Postal industries, and the CWU nationally has now reorganised this. We now have a Regional Committee covering both the South East and London. It's too early to say if this will be an improvement, and we await our first meeting under the new structure.

Nationally, the Union is going through change as well. The Shorter Working Week campaign has begun, and more information is on our Branch website and the national CWU site. Pay talks have also started, and we'll update you as soon as we have news.

A quick but important reminder: please don't go into any formal meeting with management without speaking to the Branch first. We



are here to support you, and that support is far more effective when we're involved early. Remember, we can now attend fact finding meetings if you request it. They're not disciplinary, but they can still be stressful, and having support early makes a real difference.

I hope to see you at the BGM on the evening of 9th March. And if you're into punk music, come find me at a venue near you this year "Surgery Without Research". That's what the other photo was all about.

Ed Goodenough - Deputy Secretary



AI, Telecoms and the Future of Work

During 2025, the use of AI really stepped up across the telecoms industry. While a lot of our attention is on BT and Openreach, AI is being rolled out right across the sector involving suppliers, contractors, mobile networks and service providers.

What happens in one part of the industry doesn't stay there, and members are already feeling the effects in different roles and companies.

AI is now being used while the benefits of new technology seem to stop well short of customer contact, the workforce. This scheduling and performance management. In theory, this should be a good thing. It should reduce repetitive work, improve safety and let people focus on the jobs they're trained to do. Too often, though, it's being used to increase monitoring, push workloads up and squeeze more work into the same day.

The issue isn't whether AI exists, it's who it's working for. Over the last year, more decisions have been made by systems and algorithms, with little transparency and less human judgement. Members have raised concerns about unrealistic targets and increased pressure,

while the benefits of new technology seem to stop well short of customer contact, the workforce. This isn't about one employer, it's happening across the industry.

From AI to a Shorter Working Week

If technology means work can be done more efficiently, then people shouldn't be ending every week exhausted. Throughout 2025, workloads stayed high, and in some cases, AI actually made things worse by cramming more into the same hours. That's why the CWU's campaign for a shorter working week matters.

This isn't about doing less work. It's about fairness. If productivity goes up, workers should get something back; more time, less stress and a better bal-



ance between work and home. A shorter working week is a sensible response to the way work is changing and a practical way of making sure the benefits of AI are shared, not hoarded.

It also matters beyond the workplace. A strong economy depends on people being in secure, decently paid jobs with time to live their lives. Telecoms workers are customers too. When pay is squeezed or jobs are cut, spending drops

and communities suffer. You can't automate your way to long-term growth if the people doing the work can't afford to take part in the economy.

Supporting Members and Looking Ahead

Alongside these wider issues, work across the west of the branch in 2025 stayed focused on supporting members when issues came up and stepping in early wherever possible.

By getting involved quickly, offering advice and representation, and dealing with problems before they escalated, many issues were resolved without the need for formal processes. That helped reduce stress

for members and kept situations under control.

AI isn't going away, and its use will only increase during 2026. The challenge is making sure change happens with workers, not to them. That means transparency about how AI is used, proper consultation, real safeguards, sharing productivity gains fairly and continuing the push for a shorter working week, alongside strong, early support for members at branch level.

Telecoms has always been about connecting people. The future of the industry needs to keep people, decent jobs and fair treatment at its centre.

Steve Rhodes - Equality Rep



This year there have been a lot of changes to not only the CWU Equality structure, but to our own branch.

With the re-structure ongoing there has been little in the way of focus for Regional or local meetings, although I attended the last South East regional meeting where we continued to support the Communication Workers Union Humanitarian Aid (CWUHA), who continue to provide funding for operations for children in the UK, as well as many other causes including much need-

ed aid to war-torn areas in Europe and Africa.

There is also ongoing support for the National Centre for Domestic Violence (NCDV), who's continued mission is to identify the early signs of Domestic Violence, as well as support the victims/survivors and their families. Our branch has been affiliated with them now for some years.

I look forward to seeing how the restructure of the Equality environment within our Union goes and I stay fully committed to embracing the year ahead.

There are many equality days throughout the year; please see our new branch website or the main CWU website for campaigns and dates to come.

I continue to work alongside our branch Safety co-ordinator in my Safety officer role. I deal with many CARM reports, accident investigations, as well as workplace inspections. Throughout this year we have seen a rise in Violence & Abuse toward our engineers/members. This has not always come from the customers we are attending and can as easily come from members of the public just passing by a worksite or engineer sitting in their van. The implementation of the new "Peoplesafe" app by the company is welcome and I hope this will aid in getting our people home safe to their homes and families after a day's work. Let's all remember, we are better when we are together. Stay safe out there.

Amber Gowin - Women's Officer



I have worked for Openreach in Service Delivery for nearly seven years and have been a full time Union Representative for almost three. I signed up as a CWU member as soon as my employment began.

I truly feel the importance of representing our members whenever they need support. It has given me a great sense of purpose, and I know the real value of CWU membership. The work we do behind the scenes should fill you with confidence; we

take pride in fighting your best interests at heart.

As a Women's Officer, I've attended multiple courses, meetings and workshops, and I've met some incredible people along the way. I've joined a network of women who share the same values and passion for making BT/Openreach a better workplace for women engineers. This isn't all we do, of course, we also represent female members in other companies, but the message remains the same.

Our recent mission has been tackling the bizarre removal of sanitary bins in exchanges. The explanation we were given was unacceptable, so with the strength of that network we spoke up, re-

ported back, and we were heard.

In our recent meeting with Clive Selley, CEO, I took the mic and explained exactly what it is like being a female engineer in a company that claims to value equality, diversity and respect. He was astonished by what I described, and I received a huge round of applause for holding the organisation accountable for its actions. It turned out there had been a lot of confusion over the communications that were sent out, and with our help the issue was resolved.

Since then, I've become part of a wider network and now liaise with the Openreach National Team (CWU) and HR Directors across BT/Openreach. Building these strong

working relationships puts me in a great position to represent all our members, not just women, despite my title.

I've also recently been elected to the BT Digital and Networks National Team, something I'm really proud of. Some of you may have seen me at the recent BT Safety Briefings. I genuinely enjoy getting out and meeting our members,

listening to their concerns and helping find solutions.

I have also recently qualified as a Mental Health First Aider after completing the training course. It was one of the most valuable courses I've attended, and I'm ready to put that knowledge to good use, supporting those who need it.

The next event I'll be attending is International Women's Day in

York on 10 March, where I'll be networking and learning new ways to support women in our industry, something I'm very excited about.

Together we have a voice. We truly are strength in numbers, so if you want change or need something to improve around you, reach out. We will do everything we can to support you in fighting for it.



Finances

With the three branches joining together, the accounts had to do the same, which led to some excitement.

The accounts are no

longer done using SAGE but now it is done on Excel, accessible by SharePoint, which allows HQ to have a look whenever

they feel the need.

The books have been audited by members Gavin Lainchbury and Garry Turner and now passed on to HQ.

Tim Shoubridge - Assistant Secretary



Back at the start of last year, Openreach embarked on “Project Green”, moving hundreds of engineers from fibre build teams into Service Delivery. To understand what support the branch could offer our members, I called all the affected colleagues to see how the move had gone.

The consensus was damning: the project was a shambles, and most members I spoke to were struggling to adapt due to the lack of support from the company. For some,

this meant inadequate training for their new workplace, but that is duties, not having the little comfort to mem- correct tools or equip- bers who feel excluded- ment, or being put by hasty decisions straight onto the tools made by management without the chance to without consultation be buddied with an with the CWU or the experienced col- workforce. league.

Others were pushed into roles incompati- ble with their health conditions, with no consideration given to alternative deployments that would make use of their skills and experience while accommodating their disabilities or health needs. This is a troubling trend within the company: too much focus on what engineers cannot do, and not enough thought given to what adjustments could be made to enable our members to succeed.

BT likes to talk about

With all this in mind, I have been working with other officers to increase participation in the BT Disability Passport scheme. You may have seen the “Neurodiversity” posters on our noticeboards, but it’s worth highlighting that the Passport scheme is open to any colleague with a health condition that may prevent them from carrying out the full range of duties, or who needs adjustments to do so.

I urge anyone who feels they could benefit from reasonable adjustments to put a



am all too aware of the issues facing our members at the coal-face: an ever increasing range of duties, often with insufficient training, while trying to maintain a myriad of quality and productivity stats.

In essence: do more, do it faster, and maintain quality and safety standards at the same time.

All well and good, but will our pay reflect the increasingly demanding nature of the job. Only if we stand up and make some noise.

passport in place with their manager. You do not need a formal diagnosis, and your union reps can support you through the process. Alongside my union duties, I continue to work on the tools in Service Delivery and

Obituary

Every year we mark the passing of some of our colleagues. Some this year, were active employees.

Whilst we mourn their passing we celebrate their contribution in life and that we walked beside them for a while.



- Leslie Welham**
- Geoff Harmer**
- Simon Crosswell**
- Charles Hale**
- Brenda James**
- Marting Tolhurst**
- Philip Foreman**
- Robert Hampton**

Rick Cobern - Safety Co-ordinator



Our New Safety Team

With the completion of our branch merger last year, we are moving into 2026 with a larger safety team but a vastly bigger branch area. To keep things manageable, we decided to divide the branch safety team into East, Central and West, managed by the branch safety team of Alan Tozer, Steve Rhodes, Roy Wells and myself.

The team have a wealth of experience, and they do a sterling job, fielding the majority of issues raised,

with only a small number needing escalation. Their feedback has proved invaluable, highlighting several common issues. This allows us to be far more focused in our talks and meetings with the company and helps us present a united front.

We are looking strong for the year ahead, although redundancies are likely to impact the team, as I'm sure they will for everyone.

Incidents

As I hope everyone is aware, our incident reporting system (CARM) allows us not only to report accidents and incidents, but also to highlight safety and procedural concerns through Near Miss and Hazard reporting. Having all these categories on the same platform

makes things easier, but unfortunately some confusion has crept in.

Phrases like, "Stick that in as a near miss", have led to hazards being incorrectly logged as Near Misses, when in reality they are Hazards or even Accidents. This benefits managers who have Near Misses on their scorecards, but it can have a detrimental effect on members when events are mis-reported.

When reporting anything on the CARM system, please take a moment to read the information provided so



CARM

you can accurately decide what type of event it is and record it correctly.

Our incidents involving injury are well down since my last report, which is encouraging.

Asbestos

After many conversations with engineers, I sensed that some believe asbestos is rarely encountered nowadays and is no longer a major concern. Let me be absolutely clear: asbestos is not a thing of the past.

Although less common than it once was, it can still be found in any building or structure,



especially pre 2000 buildings, but not exclusively. It can hide in plain sight beneath a coat of emulsion, within Artex, in soffit boards, or even within parts of our network, although the company has largely addressed this where its own plant is concerned.

Please remain vigilant. Carry out your risk assessment before starting work. If you suspect asbestos could be disturbed, stop immediately. Assess the

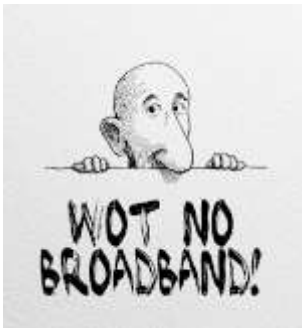
situation to determine whether your work poses a hazard to you or others. If necessary, request a survey and report it. And by all means, log it as a Hazard on the CARM system.

The company is currently running an asbestos awareness campaign, driven by Networks group, at many locations across the UK, so I'm sure I won't be the only one highlighting this important safety issue.

Dave Kauffman - Branch Secretary



It took us a while, but we are slowly getting there as a new Branch and working through the day to day ups and downs of Branch life. This has not been made any easier by BT cutting off all our analogue lines in all branch offices and, as a result, we also lost all our broadband. But,



as someone once told me, “we endeavour to persevere.”

We have now completed a full review, identified our best mobile provider, and purchased our own mobile internet hubs. We are signing up to a VoIP phone system, and we hope that will be in place soon, complete with a geographical landline number. If it works well, we may expand the system.

Alongside all this, we also have to contend with the employers. I am going to concentrate on Openreach and leave other officers the option of talking about other lines of business.

You may have been affected by Project MANTA, a downsizing of the build programme that Openreach undertook. At

least 12 months ago, those on build were told they could, under Project MANTA, make decisions about staying or going, signing up with a leave date 12 to 18 months later. I am being polite here — many were being pushed out of the door by Openreach. If you have found another role, well done, and if you are leaving, I wish you well going forward.

We then had forced moves from Complex Engineering, where engineers, in order to keep their jobs, were pushed into Civils. It was at this time we discovered that Openreach had been misleading everyone about the 2020 home parking contracts since the day people were employed on them. Apparently, Openreach can give 12 weeks' notice to make

you a yard parker, and it is not a compulsory term of your contract to be a home parker.

As for the rest of Complex Engineering, it has been a busy year. Some products, like Ethernet, have not sold as well as forecast, but the build side of Complex is running at full speed to reach its total homes passed figure. London and the South East are performing much better than other parts of the country.

The present CEO of Openreach attended a forum of CWU reps and proudly stated that it was his decision to outsource all poling. It's a shame he didn't come to the CWU and discuss it before he went ahead and gave an ultimatum to team members about their future roles. When it was announced, there was no contractor lined up for London

and the South East, and when the winter storms hit, the contractors they did have couldn't cope. Well, there's a surprise.

Voluntary Leaver Payments (VPL) has been offered in many parts of Openreach, as the CEO has stated that team member numbers will reduce over the next few years. What we all know is that contractor numbers will increase, this is the fate of allowing an investor to buy huge chunks of BT while looking for a quick re-

turn on their investment. I think they used to call it asset stripping. But again, London and the South East team members in SD Copper and FTTP were told they could not apply for the recent VPL because there was "too much work" in the South East.

Mind you, with the way some Patch Managers treat their staff, I would think Openreach is more worried that whole teams in the South East would simply disappear.



That brings us back to performance management and the bullying culture we saw in 2024. It carried on into 2025, and I don't think Openreach covered itself in glory in the way it treated certain team members, breaching the law in numerous ways. Several members had to take tribunal cases because the internal processes within BT and Openreach did not seem fit for purpose. Breaches of the Equalities Act seem common, and the CWU has had to challenge managers and HR who appear to have a very liberal interpretation of what is fair and what constitutes reasonable adjustments.

Civils continues to have its issues, and within the CWU we would like to see a proper career pathway for Civils team mem-

bers, something the leadership in Openreach say they are happy to discuss one day, and then avoid engaging with us the next. To be honest, as Openreach continues to change, and my guess is it will change again in the next 12 months with another reorganisation, perhaps all career pathways need to be re-examined and adjusted for the new ways of working.

I think the key points are these:



1 - your management may try to isolate you and make you feel self-doubt about your work. This is bullying.

2 - Management will throw stats at you and tell you that you must reach certain targets. This is not a SMART plan. Your manager must be specific about what you are doing and what needs to change to improve. Chasing stats is like herding cats, it means nothing to the value of a team.

3 - Bond together as a team. If you receive a note or message you disagree with, email something back, this becomes your evidence.

4 - You can raise a group grievance if several of you feel you are being bullied by a manager.

Stick together. Let us know what's going on. Stay strong.

Lil Davies - Assistant Secretary



I am a Service Delivery copper engineer and still work on the tools, so I understand the challenges we face as a team and as individuals on a day-to-day basis.

I have been learning about Openreach and

union processes and procedures to understand how I can assist our members in investigation and disciplinary cases.

I have also sat in on some non-BT cases to understand how we support them and to ensure the correct processes are being followed so that everyone is treated fairly.

I have attended union safety meetings to discuss safety matters and to make sure I understand new safety measures implement-

ed by Openreach. I continue to take ownership of my exchanges and report any defects to ensure we all have a safe environment to work in.

I am part of a women's union group to stay up to date with issues affecting women in the workplace and how we, as a union, can help.

I hope to continue gaining more experience over the coming year and to be here to support our members.

Membership Details

We do hold a database of our membership, but we need your help in keeping it up to date.

If you move house and tell the company, they do not pass that information on to us.

We will, on occasion, contact you by email to check that your details are correct, but often life gets in the way and the email gets ignored.

One person was very surprised when he

found out that the death beneficiary payment was due to go to his ex-wife — someone he had divorced 13 years earlier.

So, any changes, please drop us a line at office@cwuset.uk.

Political Report - Ian Weller & Di Hill



distinction must remain central to how we organise.

Ruth Harris, our South East Regional Secretary, has retired and we wish her well. Under the leadership of Ruth and Ed Baldwin, our political lead, we have held regular political officers' meetings with guest speakers covering workers' struggles past and present. It is not yet clear how the merger will affect political organisation, but it is essential that we continue to meet effectively so we can hold both the union leadership to account.

At the start of the year, Di attended the Local Government Conference, followed by the South East Labour Regional Conference in Portsmouth. This was her final conference



representing the trade union movement on the Labour South East Executive, a role she has held for twenty three years. Senior Labour figures, including Angela Rayner and Wes Streeting, spoke about the NHS, which has seen the second largest drop in waiting lists for fifteen years. Di chaired the Saturday afternoon session, introducing Tan Dhesi, the first turbaned Sikh elected to any European Parliament, and Alex Baker, the first Labour and first fe-

This is our first joint political report since the merger of the South East Telecom branches. We now represent a large and diverse area, and although we retained our three political officers, the merger of the CWU South East Region with London has raised serious concerns. We have consistently argued that political life in the South East, with its rural communities, coastal towns and cities, is fundamentally different from the London environment. That

male MP for Aldershot. On the eleventh of March, we held our CWU political meeting in Rochester, marking forty years since the end of the Kent miners' year long strike. In September, our political meeting in Brighton featured a TUC speaker who addressed the rise of the far right and Reform. The issue of mass produced George Cross flags appearing across towns, often erected at night by masked individuals, was raised. In Hastings, council workers were attacked while removing them from public highways, and similar incidents occurred elsewhere. Across Tunbridge Wells and surrounding areas, communities have faced severe water shortages, with low or no supply for days. This is a direct consequence of privatisa-

tion, which left South East Water with a monopoly and no accountability. It is a stark reminder of what happens when essential services are handed over without proper safeguards.

The Horizon Post Office scandal is finally seeing compensation reach sub postmasters. It remains the most widespread miscarriage of justice in UK legal history. More than nine hundred people were wrongly accused, many with devastating consequences, and the Post Office continues to use the Horizon system. No criminal charges have yet been brought.

In early November, a National Political Forum in London, chaired by Dave Ward, discussed electoral reform and whether the CWU should support

proportional representation. This will be debated at the coming CWU Annual Conference in Bournemouth.

Kent's recent County elections saw Reform take overall control of the Council. Despite promises, council tax is set to rise. The administration has already been marked by disputes, suspensions and weekly crises. Kent is now being watched closely as an example of what a Reform led government might look like, and the early signs are far from reassuring.

In Sussex and Hampshire, Labour now holds nine parliamentary seats, the highest number ever. These include Hove and Portslade, Brighton Kemptown and Peacehaven, Hastings and Rye, Crawley, East Worthing and Shoreham, Worthing West,

Portsmouth North, Portsmouth South and Isle of Wight West. Our branch is affiliated to all Labour Party constituencies within our area.

Local government is undergoing major reorganisation. Hampshire, East Sussex and West Sussex County Councils, along with all Borough Councils, will be abolished and replaced by single tier Unitary Authorities. Their boundaries have not yet been confirmed. Labour currently runs Crawley, Worthing and Adur Councils. Last year's County Council elections were cancelled, and it is likely this year's will be cancelled as well. Elections to the new Unitary Authorities are expected in 2027, with Mayoral elections in Sussex and Hampshire in 2028.

Eighteen months into this Labour Government, the right wing press continues its relentless criticism. Labour has made mistakes, but has listened and corrected them. The Government inherited a country weakened by fourteen years of Conservative rule. The economy had been damaged, interest rates and inflation were high, and public services were in crisis. Labour has begun the long task of rebuilding.

Some of Labour's achievements so far include improvements to workers' rights, record increases in the minimum wage, the return of rail franchises to public ownership, stronger rights for tenants and major investment in the NHS. Waiting lists have fallen, five million extra appointments have been created and two thousand five hundred

new GPs have been recruited.

Labour is also tackling the cost of living crisis by freezing fuel duties, rail fares and prescription charges. Free breakfast clubs are being introduced in every primary school, and thirty hours of free childcare is being provided. Economic stability has led to interest rates being cut five times since Labour took office, and inflation is falling.

There is still much more to do. It is vital that the Labour movement continues to apply pressure to improve living standards, strengthen workers' rights and rebuild our public services. We cannot allow the Tories or Reform to regain power at national or local level and repeat the damage of the past.

Retired Members Report

First, we acknowledge and thank David Lomakin for his hard work and dedication as Retired Members Lead. He has represented our retired members with commitment and integrity at meetings, conferences and marches across the South East and nationally. His contribution has been invaluable, and it has been a privilege to work alongside him. His knowledge, calm approach and determination ensured that retired members' voices were heard throughout the union. We offer our sincere thanks and wish him the very best for the future.

The current government has already fallen short of promises made while in opposition. One of its earliest actions was to remove

the Winter Fuel Allowance from millions of pensioners who relied on it to manage rising energy costs. Although this decision was later reversed, it caused real anxiety and exposed a worrying disregard for some of the most vulnerable people in society.

Government rhetoric often suggests pensioners are "asset rich", yet many are cash poor, relying on the state pension to maintain a basic standard of living. The

UK state pension is well below the Government's own living wage and remains one of the lowest in Europe. Many older pensioners, particularly those on the pre-2016 state pension, live just above the level where "heat or eat" becomes a daily dilemma. These are not abstract figures; they are our neighbours, friends and former colleagues.

Research from Age UK shows around 2 million pensioners are living in poverty, with rates ris-



ing over the last decade. High living costs, low incomes and unclaimed benefits all contribute to what has been described as a “crisis hiding in plain sight”. Older renters and those over 85 are especially at risk. The familiar media image of pensioners as universally comfortable or wealthy bears little resemblance to the reality many face.

The ongoing WASPI (Women Against State Pension Inequality) scandal remains a major injustice. The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman found the Department for Work and Pensions guilty of maladministration for failing to provide proper notice of state pension age changes for women born in the 1950s. Despite recommendations for compensation and clear promises made during the

2024 election campaign, the government has refused to act. This broken promise has caused deep anger and the campaign for justice continues.

Digital exclusion is another growing problem. Millions of older people have limited or no internet access, and a large proportion of those over 75 do not use the internet at all.

Many lack the skills, confidence or equipment needed to navigate online systems. As banking, healthcare and government services move online, those without digital access face isolation and reduced independence. The closure of local bank branches and removal of ATMs make it even harder to access cash or resolve



problems in person. This shift, often described as “digital ageism”, risks leaving many older people behind.

Several wider policy issues also affect pensioners. Frozen tax thresholds mean more pensioners will be drawn into paying tax as the state pension rises.

The state pension age is increasing from 66 to 67, with further rises not ruled out, hitting those in physically demanding jobs hardest.

Concerns remain about the long-term future of the Triple Lock.

Restrictions on the Winter Fuel Payment continue to leave many low-income pensioners struggling with energy bills.

Although the government has encouraged greater take up of pen-



sion credit, many eligible pensioners still do not claim it, often due to lack of awareness or difficulty with the process. As a result, vital support goes unclaimed each year. Single person households, especially women, face the highest risk of poverty, and older people are increasingly being asked to shoulder the burden of economic pressures they did not create.

Many of today’s retired members worked their entire lives, paid into the system and helped build the services and industries this country relies on. They should not have to fight simply

to maintain dignity and security in retirement.

Looking ahead, we hope every member will one day enjoy a long, healthy and financially secure retirement. To achieve that, we must stand in solidarity with our retired members now. They are working to protect the pensions, rights and dignity that future generations will depend on. Their experience and determination strengthen our union.

Supporting them is not only an act of respect, but an investment in the future of everyone who will one day follow in their footsteps.

Mandy Baker - Assistant Secretary



I am based in the east of the new branch. I normally try to work two days a week, but as this is a voluntary role, it can vary.

My main duties include general office tasks, answering members' queries by both email and telephone, attending meetings, and more.

The calls usually involve requests for clarification on issues, death benefit applications, and requests for representation. Shortly after the merger, I assisted a female mem-

ber whose maternity leave and pay had been mishandled, leaving her owing money to Openreach. It took numerous calls and emails, but we managed to resolve the matter to a conclusion agreed by both the member and the company.

I was also involved in a case concerning lost company property. This was concluded not necessarily to the member's satisfaction, but in accordance with Openreach rules.

I am currently supporting an Employment Tribunal case for a member employed by an external company, which is being reviewed by legal representatives. This case has been challenging due to the company concerned and has required us to find new

ways of supporting the member.

We also have an ongoing case involving a member who was moved to civils, and I've attended meetings with them as the issue continues to be escalated.

I have taken part in meetings regarding a shorter working week, which has been very interesting and forms part of a campaign the CWU is progressing. I'm also involved in a Women's Officer group and act as Women's Officer in the eastern area of the branch when required.

I attended the new Women in the CWU course, which I found both informative and encouraging, particularly seeing prospective Women's Officers within the CWU.

Kieran Golding - Assistant Secretary



My role is to provide full administrative support to the branch including liaising with third parties, suppliers etc. For example, in the last year I was involved in renegotiating the office multifunction copier/printer/scanner contract and liaising with the suppliers about collection of the old machine and the supply, installa-

tion, and commissioning of the new machine.

My day-to-day office role includes answering the phone, checking voicemails, taking messages, and directing callers as proper, managing incoming, outgoing mail, and providing advice to members with regards to attendance, conduct, and grievances.

Of course, like every office there is the daily/weekly housekeeping which means maintenance of the office filing system, checking, and managing the branch diary and branch officer's whereabouts, and li-

aising with and supporting the branch officers as proper.

Where and when the need arises, I would also access the Membership database for updating.

Case wise, on behalf of our members in the past year I have worked on two ET Cases which has meant home visits and liaising with CWU Legal Services. I am also mentoring Mandy on an ET Case, which is still ongoing. I have also been involved in several Gross Misconduct, Grievance, Preferred Work Area, and Parking at Home cases

Our Social Media QR codes

Website



X (Twitter)



Facebook



Colin Tyler - Assistant Secretary



I joined British Telecom (as it was then) just after the hurricane in 1987.

I've worked in many roles during my career: Subs, Apps and Lines; Business Systems; Big Switch; OMC; Frames Management; and Featurenet Number Management. Management later tried to move me into a call centre and, due to the stress that caused, I first approached the union, who helped me through the problem.

I then did a stint on nights jumper running,

before being moved two days on the tools, back to days on the Exchange Build Team. After a few years there, I was asked to join the Power Team, where I remain today.

Around two years ago, I was asked if I would like to become a local USA (Union Safety Rep), which I enjoy a great deal, helping to keep the workplace as safe as possible for you all. In mid 2025, I was contacted by the union and asked to put my name forward for the Networks Coordinator post.

I'm still learning, so please bear with me. Some of the issues that have been brought to me include parking at home, leave problems, TOIL after a call-out, and travel distances for call-outs.

I now spend two days on union duties and

but you can call me any time if you need me. Since joining the union team, I have recruited four new members and hope to bring many more into the fold.

I have also been helping with the asbestos briefings that all Power Engineers have recently attended, and I am currently taking part in the telematics trial for the vans to ensure it is fit for purpose and not simply another tool to monitor our movements.

Show a non member this code to join the CWU



The Unions and Labour Party Link

The Labour Party was founded in 1900 as the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), created by trade unions and socialist groups seeking parliamentary representation for working people. By 1906 it became the Labour Party and the principal political working class voice.

From the beginning, the relationship was formal and influential. Affiliated unions funded the Party, sent delegates to conference and shaped policy. In return, Labour offered political access and legislative reform. After the Second World War, this partnership delivered major welfare reforms, stronger

workers' rights and the nationalisation of key industries.

Tensions emerged at times, notably during the late 1970s "Winter of Discontent," when industrial unrest damaged both the government and union standing. Nevertheless, co-operation continued, which reaffirmed shared priorities on fairness at work and public services.

In recent years, the relationship has grown more complex. Union membership has declined and the labour market has shifted towards service industries and insecure work, reducing traditional leverage. Under Keir Starmer, Labour

has pursued broader electoral appeal, prompting concern among some unions about a shift away from its original roots. Reforms have also reduced union block voting power within the Party.

However, unions remain influential. The CWU helped drive Labour's "New Deal for Working People," securing stronger employment rights, protection from unfair dismissal and action against insecure contracts.

Today, the formal link endures but continues to evolve, balancing historic partnership with modern political strategy.

Labour



CWU *calling for*
**A NEW DEAL
FOR WORKERS**

Steve Taylor – Assistant Secretary



As I recently have entered the sexagenarian age, I have a few years experience of work to fall back on and although I might have one eye on the exit, the fight against injustice still remains.

I have many varied roles in the branch, but the one I want to focus on is representing our non BT group members of which this branch has about 250. They all come from a variety of companies from cleaners to office workers and contractors to people seeking work, but whoever

they are they are linked to us through the telecoms or financial way.

The other officers here have outlined issues with Openreach and BT, and these similar issues exist in other companies, but sometimes worse. Most, we do not have a “recognition agreement” with the companies, so we cant enter into negotiations on the terms and conditions of the members employment and that is reflected in the amount their membership costs.

However, we can represent members on a personal basis. That includes supporting grievances, fighting against the unfair or punitive work placement, assisting in pay disputes, personal contract changes and

sadly racism. Sometimes by getting the best deal we can in exiting the company, with a settlement agreement, although we would prefer to keep you in employment.

One of the more difficult types of cases involve redundancy. Most people may accept dismissal if they were terrible at their job, had too much sick or done something wrong, but it is far harder to accept when they have done nothing wrong. Someone, somewhere, reviews a spreadsheet and determines that a certain number of roles must be cut, and that is that! Dedication and high performance may count for little, but the result is anxiety and financial uncertainty and anger is the outcome.

In the rush to get fibre into the ground, companies have over-promised and over-reached. Sometimes there's hope of an acquisition and a TUPE transfer for the workforce, but that outcome is far from guaranteed. Whatever the situation, we will work to ensure your terms and conditions of employment are protected.

Some members prefer to keep their membership private from their employer, and that is entirely acceptable. We can always give advice to you and help in the background, if that is what you wish. But it is also nice when



we sit by your side in a meeting, opposite management, and see them fluster, as they make sure all the T's are crossed and I's dotted, as the UNION is here! You pay for your membership so please use us.

We often get people who join with existing cases underway. We

will always try to help, but we may not attend meetings in those circumstances. After all you won't get a full service from the RAC when you've already broken down. It is far better to join before problems arise, so encourage colleagues to sign up early (see QR code on page 26).



You are the many!

Current Branch Safety Contacts

Name	Role	Contact
Rick Cobern	Safety Co-ordinator	07498 923159 rick.cobern@cwuset.uk
Roy Wells	Safety Officer (W)	07525 833965 roy.wells@cwuset.uk
Steve Rhodes	Safety Officer (C)	07764 338836 steve.rhodes@cwuset.uk
Alan Tozer	Safety Officer (E)	07379 493553 alan.tozer@cwuset.uk

General Meeting Dates 2026-27

Mon 9th March 2026 BGM & Elections

Mon 13th July 2026 General Meeting

Mon 12th October 2026 General Meeting

Mon 8th March 2027 General Meeting

Committee Meeting Dates 2026-27

Tues 5th May 2026 Committee Mandate Meeting

Mon 10th August 2026 Committee Meeting

Mon 9th November 2026 Committee Meeting

Mon 8th February 2027 Committee Meeting

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.

Current IR Contacts for South East Telecom Branch

Full Time Officers

Name	Role	Contact
Dave Kauffman	Branch Secretary	07850 815644 dave.kauffman@cwuset.uk
Dave Booker	Branch Chair	07841 039561 dave.booker@cwuset.uk
Steve Taylor	Financial Secretary	07377 880526 steve.taylor@cwuset.uk
Ed Goodenough	Deputy Secretary	07590 453251 ed.goodenough@cwuset.uk
Amber Gowin	Women's Officer	07710 290378 amber.gowin@cwuset.uk

Part Time Officers

Mandy Baker	Assist Secretary	07939 564051 mandy.baker@cwuset.org
Lil Davies	Assist Secretary	07483 387978 lil.davies@cwuset.uk
Paul Holland	Assist Secretary	07710 070862 paul.holland@cwuset.uk
Tim Shoubridge	Assist Secretary	07496 808442 tim.shoubridge@cwuset.uk
Colin Tyler	Assist Secretary	07570 672954 colin.tyler@cwuset.uk
Kieran Golding	Assist Secretary	07841 039562 kieran.golding@cwuset.uk



**SOUTH EAST
TELECOM
CWU**

*For up to date contacts
check*

www.cwuset.uk



South East Telecom Branch

Biennial General Meeting



**Online
Via Zoom**



Invitations will be sent out via email - please make sure we have your up to date information in order to receive the invite

Monday 9th March

7.00pm

The agenda will include the submission of the Annual report, the election of officers and committee, the co-opting of branch 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.

YOUR CHANCE TO HAVE YOUR SAY

PLEASE ATTEND