

One call does it all

Officially launched at the National Biennial Delegate Conference in May, Community's Member Service Centre has a lot to offer members...

What the MSC offers

Freephone 0800 389 6332

or email servicecentre@community-tu.org

Opening hours: currently Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, but looking to open 8am to 8pm to meet members' needs outside normal working hours.

Services offered include support, advice and information on:

- grievance and disciplinary procedures
- health and safety problems
- contractual issues and employment law
- union benefits
- education and training opportunities
- legal advice on issues outside the workplace.

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'A member's best friend,' is how Sean Bowen describes Community's new Member Service Centre in Kidderminster. As Branch Secretary at Pedmore Automotive in Stourbridge he has had many reasons to call lately. 'We had safety concerns at work and the firm wanted to film us carrying out work processes,' he explains. 'The Centre staff gave me legal advice on what they could film and use it for. They've also emailed me information so I could attend disciplinary meetings, confident of being fully informed, and helped with my branch audit. The centre is a great tool for recruiting new members - no other UK union offers all this as part of their membership subscription.'

And the centre isn't just for branch officials but for all members and their families, as Marion Peggie found. Marion from Region 1 was concerned when her daughter's employer became unreasonable about offering flexible hours throughout her pregnancy. She needed support and advice on what her daughter's actual rights were so she called the centre. 'I had a chat with Mark, one of the centre's advisers who was fantastic and helped a great deal.' Mark advised that Marion's daughter visit her doctor who provided her with a letter to hand to the employer, which they have now accepted. 'I can't speak highly enough of the centre - the staff were great,' Marion said.

Along with Sean and Marion, hundreds of other members have called or emailed about issues both at and outside work since the MSC came into operation this February – and with that one call they had access to all the union's services.

The Centre has three specialist advisers: Oliver Stockley-von Statzer, Chris Hale and Mark Jones. Between them they have a wide knowledge of employment law and the trade union movement, having recently worked for Communitas, The Labour Party and Citizens' Advice Bureau respectively. They are adding to that knowledge by liaising with branch officials and new members at union health and safety courses and the Regional School.

'The queries we get vary from employment law to holidays, terms and conditions to wages,' Oliver explains. 'Community is such a diverse union that our advice on contractual issues needs to be specific to all sectors where the union has members from betting and steel to social care.' To do this, the advisers are looking to build up a reference library of members' workplace handbooks, contracts and terms and conditions. 'Another part of our work is to identify common issues in individual workplaces,



At your service: legal services and benefits Manager David Fiddler (left) and MSC adviser Oliver Stockley-von Statzer

and bring them to the attention of union officers and membership liaison managers. This means these issues can be dealt with collectively,' he says. 'Basically we're here to make life easier for all Community members.'

In addition to the advisers, from mid May the centre has also offered members its Free Legal Advice Service (FLAS). Legal adviser David Hewitt has years of experience in personal injury claims. He can offer members advice and support on legal issues such as employment, personal injury claims, debt, welfare benefits and housing matters. And like the other advisers, if he can't give an immediate answer he will research the issue and call you back, or if it is complex, forward it to a specialist Community solicitor.

The Centre is the hub of the union's modernisation programme and, with its core services set up, it's now looking to develop future services such as a members-only section on the website, online chat forums, and sending mass texts or voicemails to members when an urgent union issue arises.

While the Centre staff are there to help you there are a few things that you the members can do to help them. 'The more information we have about you and your needs the better services we can provide,' adds Oliver. 'If you haven't completed and returned the census on the Community website, please do. And if you are going to call us, have your membership number to hand, or your contract or staff handbook if it's a contractual query, and note down anything you want to ask. That way you'll be helping us help you.'

Support with urgent criminal issues

If you find yourself in trouble with the law, as a Community member you can call a free 24-hour emergency helpline.

Solicitors will be available on **0800 916 9002** to offer initial advice and support.