

Delivering through Partnership: Community the Union

STRONGER

MODERN

PROUD

GROWING

Background

This research was carried out by Joe Dromey, Head of Policy and Research at the Involvement and Participation Association (IPA) for Community the Union. It aims to highlight Community's approach to organising, to representing its members and to working in partnership with employers.

Undertaken between March and June 2013, the research was based on four case studies of employers that Community works with;

- Sahaviriya Steel Industries UK (SSI), a large steel plant based in Redcar on Teesside
- TNT Post, a rapidly growing provider of postal and logistics services
- Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries (RSBI), a supported employment enterprise where the majority of workers are disabled.
- Serco who are responsible for delivering the London Cycle Hire Scheme

The case studies included in-depth semi-structured interviews with senior leaders at the organisations, HR staff, local union reps and ordinary members; as well as analysis of background documents. The case studies were supplemented with in-depth interviews with key figures at Community.

About the IPA

The IPA exists to promote the involvement and participation of employees in their places of work. We work with employers, trade unions and others to foster better ways of working that improve both productivity and the quality of working lives. The IPA is Britain's leading organisation delivering partnership, consultation and employee engagement in the workplace.

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Acknowledgements

The IPA would like to thank the following people for their help with this research:

Community – Michael Leahy, Joe Mann, John Park, Roy Rickhuss and Paul Talbot
RSBI – Robert Mooney, Peter Jupp and Graham Paterson
Serco – Carol Butler
SSI UK – Jo Davies, Cornelius Louwrens and Paul Warren
TNT Post – Gary Robinson

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Foreword

Working people today face significant difficulties both from the interminable economic crisis and this government's cruel and counterproductive austerity. Earnings are being squeezed, workplace closures remain too common and there remains little confidence in a sustainable recovery.

Now more than ever, strong trade union organisation is vital to protect working people. It's during these tough times that you see the difference we can make; pushing for decent pay; fighting to protect jobs; helping those who have been hardest hit by the ravages of austerity.

Community is a union rooted in the best traditions of the labour movement. It was the forerunner of this union that helped found the TUC over a century ago. We are proud of our industrial past but we recognise too that the world has changed. In order to support our members effectively, unions too must change.

We're a forward-looking union that is attuned to the changes in the economy and the labour market. Our membership is changing – and growing. Whilst retaining a strong base in steel, we now represent many other workers; including disabled employees, and staff in the service and voluntary sectors.

This report demonstrates how we make a difference for our members. It highlights three key elements of our approach; partnership working, a community focus, and a commitment to skills and training. Partnership is central to our approach. I've always believed the force of argument is more effective in delivering for members than the argument of force. Without a successful and profitable employer, we can't deliver job security and lasting improvements in terms and conditions. But needless to say, this doesn't make us a push-over. Where employers are not willing to work in partnership, and where they exploit our members, we take a stand.

The issues that affect our members do not stop at the factory gates. The union movement grew out of the community, and we need to retain a focus on the wider community. By bringing our organising capacity to bear and campaigning together, we can build stronger communities in the face of this government's ruinous policies of austerity.

With the days of a 'job for life' seemingly gone, we know how important skills are in the modern workforce. Workers will have to train and re-train to secure decent work. We invest in our members and reps, helping them access training and development opportunities to build lasting careers.



Michael J Leahy OBE

We embody the best traditions of the labour movement, but we are modern and fit for the future. We protect members in the workplace, but we also help build stronger communities. We prefer to deliver through partnership with employers, but if circumstances demand, we're not afraid to fight – and win – for our members.

So I hope this report gives you a taste of our work.

Yours,



Michael J Leahy OBE
General Secretary Community

Introduction

As we enter the second decade of the 21st century, the trade union movement faces significant challenges. From a peak of over 13 million in 1979, membership has fallen to just over 7 million. The sharp decline in the private sector – where just one worker in seven belongs to a union – raises the prospect of the movement becoming confined to the public sector. Membership is aging as unions struggle to recruit younger workers, who sometimes fail to see the relevance of the union model. Public opinion towards unions and their leaders remains luke-warm and some on the right are still intent on further legislative restrictions to union activity.

But against this bleak picture, there are some shining examples of where unions have bucked the trend. Community is one such case. As the economy and the labour market has changed, so too has Community. From its origins in the steel industry, Community now represents workers in various sectors across the economy. Through doing so, it remains a thriving and growing union.

This report focuses on Community's work with four diverse employers. From helping secure the future of steel making on Teesside with SSI UK, to building a sustainable model of supported employment at RSBL. We also look at how Community works with two new employers – TNT Post and Serco – to help give members a voice at work and secure benefits for them. It highlights three key elements to Community's approach; partnership working, a community focus and a commitment to skills and learning.

For me, it is the partnership approach that is crucial. From their General Secretary Michael Leahy right down to reps and members, there is recognition of the power of partnership working. Employers and employees will inevitably have differences of opinion and focus, but both share a fundamental interest in the success and sustainability of their organisation. And partnership works: by taking a cooperative approach, Community has delivered lasting benefits for their members.

The Shadow Business Secretary Chuka Umunna recently reminded us that trade unions at their best are '*wealth creators for this country*'. He was right and this could not be more true of Community. Day in and day out, their hard work helps employers achieve lasting success, and helps their members share in this success.

There has been much talk of late about how we build a 'One Nation Economy' – one that both depends for success on all working people contributing, and distributes the rewards of this success fairly. Looking forward, it's possible to see in



Nita Clarke OBE

Community the model of a One Nation trade union. A union that works in partnership with employers to secure sustainable improvements for workers. A union that focuses not just on industrial issues, but on the wider community too. A union that plays its part in helping to upskill workers and gives them a voice – for the benefit of themselves, the employer and the economy too.

Yours,

Nita Clarke OBE
Director, IPA

Executive Summary

Community the Union was formed in 2004 following the amalgamation of the steel workers union (ISTC) with other industrial unions and the National League for the Blind and Disabled. In response to the changes in the economy, it has broadened its focus and now represents steel workers, other industrial workers, disabled employees, and people working in the growing service economy.

This study is based on four case studies of how Community works with employers to deliver for its members:

● SSI UK

The steel plant at Redcar, formerly owned by Tata, was mothballed in 2010 following the economic crisis. Community worked closely with the management of the plant to minimise the impact of the closure, helping to prevent compulsory redundancies. Alongside this, they launched a massive campaign – ‘Save our Steel’ – which brought together their members and the wider community to fight for the future of the plant.

This helped secure new investment in the plant from Sahaviriya Steel Industries, a Thai firm that offered the hope of bringing steel making back to Teesside. Community helped with the re-hiring process and managed to hammer out a pay equalisation deal which improved conditions for most members and put the plant on a sustainable footing.

● Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries

RSBI was formerly a council-run supported employment factory for disabled residents in Glasgow. However, due to poor senior leadership, the plant was making an unsustainable loss and facing an uncertain future.

Following a takeover of the plant, new management were brought in to turn things around. The union worked with them to make the case for change to members, and help them through the restructuring and retraining. Community used its political influence, helping build relationships with key figures at the

council, the DWP and the government to help secure the plant’s future.

RSBI now serves as a model for successful supported employment. It is commercially competitive and financially sustainable whilst also retaining its social purpose. It provides valuable opportunities for disabled people in the local community and is committed to helping them develop their skills and build lasting worthwhile careers.

● TNT Post

TNT Post is a large and fast-growing provider of postal and logistical services in the UK. Yet before Community, there was no recognised union representing their expanding workforce.

Community secured a partnership agreement with TNT Post and built a national committee to represent its workers across the country. Their partnership approach is already bearing fruit for members, delivering improvements in pay, in terms and conditions, and through giving them a voice at work.

Management at TNT Post really value the contribution Community have made and they clearly see the business case for good industrial relations. As well as delivering for their new members, the union is set to benefit from a huge potential growth in the workforce.

● Serco London Cycle Hire

Serco run the ‘Boris Bike’ scheme for Transport for London. Again, before Community there had been no recognised union for the workforce. Through approaching Serco and offering a relationship based on partnership, Community managed to secure an agreement.

In just over a year following the the agreement, Community have already delivered substantial benefits for the workforce – including overtime pay and a generous Olympics bonus – and expanded its membership there. The success of the relationship has benefitted both the organisation and its employees and it offers opportunities for Community to work with other parts of Serco.

The Community Approach

These case studies and the wider work of community demonstrate three distinctive elements of their approach:

• Partnership Working

There is a firm belief in the benefit of partnership working at Community. This is grounded in the belief that employers and employees share a common interest in the sustainability and success of their organisation. Community recognise that their members would prefer a partnership approach to conflict at work. In addition, they also highlight evidence for the success of partnership working.

However, partnership must be a two-way street. Community are willing and able to act when employers either refuse to co-operate or exploit their members.

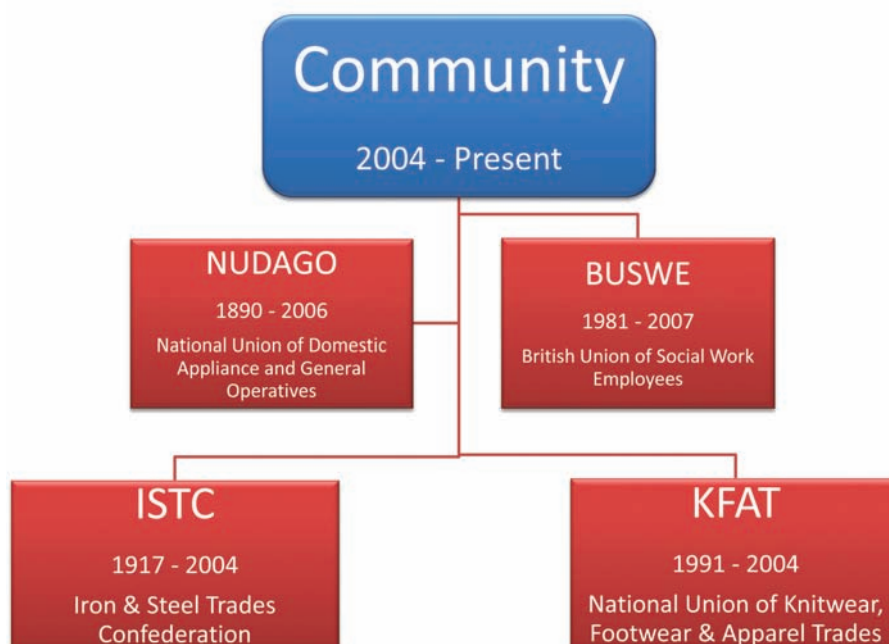
• Community Focus

As the name suggests, Community not only represents their members at work, but it also has a focus on the wider community. This approach fits with the traditions of the union movements and it recognises the fact that issues don't stop at the factory gates. Community seeks to organise and campaign locally to build stronger communities, for the benefit of their members.

• Skills and Training

The modern economy requires workers to train and re-train in order to stay in work. With their background in the steel industry which has faced significant changes in recent decades, Community recognise this well. They are committed to offering their members and reps opportunities to develop their skills so that they can build sustainable careers.





Community the Union

History

Community is a modern trade union but with roots dating back over a century. Its origins were in the old Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC) the forerunner of which had been one of the founding members of the Trade Union Congress in 1866.

Community itself was formed in July 2004 with the merger of the ISTC and the Knitwear, Footwear and Apparel Trades Union (KFAT). Prior to that, the ISTC had been joined by the Carpet Weavers' Union (PLCWTWU) and by the National League for the Blind and Disabled (NLBD).

Although a union of steelworkers and blind and disabled workers may seem incongruous, it grew out of a common approach to trade unionism and the needs of working people. The leaders of the two unions – Michael Leahy, General Secretary of ISTC and Joe Mann, General Secretary of NLBD *'clearly shared a view, a vision of what trade unionism should be. This was about taking it back to where it trade unionism belonged; in the community.'* As Roy Rickhuss, National Officer at Community explained, unlike other mergers which have been driven by financial difficulties, it was *'a merger that was driven by the right reasons, rather than by the wrong reasons.'*

Since its formation, Community has grown steadily. It has attracted other smaller unions including the National Union of Domestic Appliance and General Operatives (NUDAGO) and the British Union of Social Work Employees (BUSWE).

Today, Community is a growing and campaigning union with 32,000 members, significantly up on last year. It reflects the dynamic changes both in the modern labour market and in the economy as a whole. Though retaining a focus on steel making and on disabled workers, it has branched out into new areas including the service sector, logistics, the prison service, voluntary and service sectors and even football managers through the League Manager's Association.

Partnership

Partnership is key to Community's approach both to organising and to bargaining. This is characterised by a willingness to work constructively with employers for the benefit both of members, and of the organisation as a whole. It is an approach that favours negotiation and consensus over conflict and disputes.

This approach has deep historical roots in the union. As Michael Leahy, Community's General Secretary and former General Secretary of the ISTC explained, the steel industry has always been characterised by a focus on partnership between employers and unions. *'It didn't mean you wouldn't have a dispute, but you'd try your hardest to resolve things before you even looked at industrial action.'*

The preference for partnership is underpinned by two core beliefs. First is the assertion that employers and employees have a substantial degree of shared interests. Of course there will always be differences of opinion on issues and competing viewpoints on the balance between profit, pay and investment. But fundamentally both parties have a shared interest in the sustainable success of their

organisation. Second is the belief that securing the interests of workers – in terms of both job security and improvements in wages and terms and conditions – is best achieved not through confrontation but through partnership.

Community believes that partnership working is the best way both to deliver job security and sustainable improvements in terms and conditions. The former is particularly important given the current state of the labour market. The economic crisis has led to a sharp increase in feelings of insecurity at work.¹ As Roy Rickhuss argues, *'when you ask ordinary workers what matters to them today... without a doubt job security is going to be top of everyone's list. We believe this can be better secured by working together than by confrontation.'*

In addition to job security, working in partnership can help deliver sustainable improvements in both wages and terms and conditions. The ability of an employer to improve wages depends on the success and profitability of the organisation. Community's approach is both to represent and protect their members, but also to work as partners with the employer for the success of the organisation as a whole. A member of Community's National Project Team put this well - *'without the company being successful, our members can't be... we're both in the same boat and in order to succeed, we both need to.'* This was echoed by Michael Leahy; *'we're committed to making a success of their business, because if the business isn't successful, ultimately it will hurt our members.'*

Michael Leahy argues that there is no evidence that a more aggressive and militant approach to industrial relations is effective in improving terms and conditions of employment. On the contrary, he claims that partnership has been more successful both in delivering job security and in securing sustainable improvements in wages, terms and conditions for their members.

Community argues that its partnership approach is far more effective at gaining access to an employer and securing recognition. *'Instead of standing outside handing out leaflets,'* asks Roy Rickhuss, *'why not secure access to the company and actually go and engage with them and talk to potential members in their workplace?'* He claims that the confrontational, adversarial approach has met with little success in the recent past and that it is unproductive; a waste of time and effort for both parties. Instead of helping employers see the union as a partner in the workplace, it leads to employers opposing recognition, fighting the union and excluding them from decision-making.

The belief in partnership shapes the way in which Community approaches working with employers. Roy Rickhuss pointed out that the approach taken by many unions to recruiting members and getting into companies is to take an immediately confrontational stance. *'A lot of unions still organise on this premise; let's find an employer, let's stand outside the gates and get the banners and posters out, and then let's tell the workers that their employer is bad and you need to join a union.'* This immediately sets the employees – and the union – against the employer, rather than looking for a more constructive, positive and cooperative approach.

As well as making it easier to gain access to an organisation, working in partnership with an employer offers greater opportunities to build a sustainable relationship and influence conditions for the better. Michael Leahy sums up their approach, stating that he's *'always believed that the force of argument is better than the argument of force.'* The union aims to make the case for fair treatment of workers, demonstrating that it is in the business interest. Accepting that the purpose of a business is to make a profit, they argue that this is best done through cooperation. Investment in the workforce – through decent pay, good terms and conditions, proper learning and development and fair treatment – pays off in terms of employee engagement, organisational performance and eventually profit. *'We are more about persuasion. We persuade employers there is a social, moral and economic case to treat people fairly.'*

In addition to the benefits for their members, Community highlights a clear business case for employers to engage in partnership working with a trade union. Having a trade union within the workplace can help management better understand their employees and communicate effectively with them. It allows issues to be identified early and addressed cooperatively, before they escalate. It aids employee engagement by strengthening employee voice.

Involving the trade union in business decision-making helps improve the quality of decision made. John Park, Strategy and Policy Director argues, *'management is far too important to be left to managers alone and nobody has a monopoly on wisdom.'* What's more, decisions once made are easier to implement if employees and the union have been engaged in the process of making these decisions. As Roy Rickhuss explains, *'good IR at the end of the day is good for business; it makes good business sense.'*

However, partnership by its very nature cannot be a one-way street. Paul Talbot, Head of Media and Government Affairs emphasised that the employer must also commit to working with the union; *'you can't have a one-way partnership in any walk of life. It's just not going to work.'*

Instead, it must be a true partnership based on commitment from both sides and a shared sense of respect.

Where partnership and persuasion fails, the union must be able to fall back on other measures. Roy Rickhuss emphasises that the partnership approach does not make Community a 'soft touch.' In recent years Community have, when necessary, resorted to ballots and industrial disputes on several occasions. *'The difference for us'* he claims *'is that it's very much a last resort.'* What's more, the partnership approach means that, when there is a conflict with an employer, the union is taken more seriously. John Park described how since their employers know they don't 'cry wolf' or threaten disputes for political or publicity reasons, they must be taken seriously when there is a dispute. This helps account for their impressive record of success in recent disputes.

The case studies in this report are excellent examples of where, by working in partnership with the employer, Community have ensured the sustainable success of the organisation and through doing so – secured benefits for their members.

At SSI steel plant in Teesside, the union worked tirelessly with management to limit the impact of the mothballing of the plant – preventing any compulsory redundancies. They then helped to secure a new buyer, bringing back hundreds of jobs to the plant and securing thousands in the wider economy. By working in partnership with the new owners, they also managed to harmonise pay across the site, delivering improvements for the vast majority and making the system fairer and more sustainable.

The close partnership between Community and the management at Royal Strathclyde Blidncraft Industries has been essential to the transformation of the plant. The union helped make the case for change and bring the staff along with them on changes at the plant which were vital to securing its future. By doing so, they have helped build a sustainable model of inclusive employment for disabled people.

Community's partnership working with TNT Post has allowed them to represent and support a large and rapidly growing workforce. As well as providing an unparalleled recruitment opportunity for the union, the relationship has also given employees at the company a stronger voice, and secured tangible improvements in their pay, terms and conditions. By working together with the employer to ensure the success and growth of the business, they will be able to deliver further improvements in the future, whilst simultaneously growing the union.

Community focus

In addition to their partnership working, Community as a union is also notable for its focus on the communities within which it organises. The clue's in the name.

Again, this community focus has deep roots in the origin of the union. Michael Leahy explained, how growing up in the Welsh valleys where coal mining and steel making were predominant, trade unionism was *'part of the culture.'* The union movement had grown out of the community in the early 19th Century not just to fight for the rights of people at work, but also to provide education and invest in libraries, to provide health and welfare provision. It was *'a movement that was relevant both within the workplace and outside the workplace.'*

Over the years that community focus has diminished somewhat within the trade union movement as a whole. As the state grew and provided more welfare provision, so unions have become more narrowly focused on industrial issues to the exclusion of issues in the wider community.

The process by which the ISTC union of steel workers broadened out to form Community demonstrates a willingness to retain a community focus. The merger with the National League for the Blind and Disabled was an early indication of this. Many members of the union could not see the rationale for steel makers and blind workers sharing a union, but it was part of a shared vision between Michael Leahy and Joe Mann, the former General Secretary of NLBD and now Deputy General Secretary of Community, about the future of the movement. As Roy Rickhuss explained, this was about *'taking trade unionism back to where it belongs,'* right at the centre of the community with a focus not just on the workplace, but on issues affecting people's lives outside the world of work.

With the relative decline of steel, the union expanded to include wider areas of the economy. Michael explains that this was due to a belief that *'the sons and daughters of the steel industry were being short-changed... we wanted to ensure that we were there for them.'* Community still represents members in the steel industry, but has become a much broader union representing other areas of manufacturing, disabled workers as well as those in growth industries in the service sector and elsewhere.

The issues that affect people at work often have their roots outside of the workplace, in the community. At one of the steel plants that Community represent, they recognised that there was a growing issue of drug and alcohol dependency that was affecting some of their members, both at work and in their personal lives. In response, Community funded three

councillors to work with employees – both at work and in the community – to help them overcome addiction. This is one example of where the union is willing to reach out beyond the workplace, to help tackle issues in the wider community.

A number of unions have recently awoken to the possibility of community organising alongside their industrial work. But for Community, this has been something they've been pursuing for some time. They established 'Community in the Community' to focus on supporting their wider goals in areas that members live. This includes helping local foodbanks, supporting local football teams, or campaigning on particular local issues such as youth unemployment in Wolverhampton. As Paul Talbot explained, *'it's about where we can bring our organising capacity to assist the local community and extend into all sorts of different arenas.'*

As part of this effort, Community have started to establish links with third sector groups to work together on joint priorities. This includes establishing a partnership with the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations. *'We're reaching out to a whole load of other organisations,'* said Michael Leahy, *'we're not imprisoned in the world of trade unions.'*

Community's wider focus also includes a strong political dimension. As Joe Mann explained, *'politics is about reaching out into the community; our community unionism is geared through our politics.'* They are affiliated to the Labour Party and have set up the Labour Campaigns Network (LCN) which provides representation and union services to any Labour member who wants to join. The LCN also supports Labour campaigning; both in the community and at election time. This has also helped Community grow its young membership, as the average age of those joining through Labour Campaigns Network is 28. Joe explained how their approach is focused on *'working with the party, not fighting it.'*

There are some good examples in the case studies of how Community has retained a focus on issues within the community alongside its industrial organising. Take RSBI where the employer and the union work together to provide vocational training to 50 local disabled school children within the factory, helping prepare them for the world of work. At SSI, Community also demonstrated a striking ability to engage with and mobilise the wider community in Redcar and beyond, as part of the highly successful Save Our Steel campaign.

Skills and training

A final distinctive element of Community's approach is their strong focus on skills and training. Michael Leahy argues that, in the context of a rapidly changing economy with strong global competition, *'it is essential that our members understand the need for re-training and updating their skills.'* Helping its members do this has become a major focus of Community's work.

In 1997 it established Communitas, a training provider that is a subsidiary of the union, designed to help members access learning and development opportunities. Communitas aims to help provide branch officials with the education, training and skills they need to do their job effectively and to meet the challenges of the workplace. It also helps members access training and development in the workplace to strengthen their job security and support their development. There is a particular focus on training and support for workers at risk of redundancy, ensuring they are able to secure appropriate employment if they do lose their jobs.

Robert Fairburn, CEO of Communitas explained how their approach to skills and training is based on working in partnership with employers. *'What I say is that your employees and our members – they're the same people. We want to work together for the benefit both of our members and the business as a whole.'*

Since it was founded, Communitas has helped more than 26,000 members and secured over £13.8million of Government and EU funding. Michael Leahy says he is proud that they have taken on this responsibility – both to members and to the wider community, and that they are committed to *'helping working people re-construct their lives through the personal development of their own skill, responsibility and effort.'*

There are examples of this focus on learning and skills throughout this report. At SSI for example, over a hundred workers at risk of redundancy were placed on the Retention of Skills scheme which matched up with training and employment opportunities until work returned to the plant. And at RSBI, there is a consistent focus on the importance of learning and skills with an on-site learning centre providing both basic skills support, vocational skills and qualifications, and even recreational learning.

Success

It is clear that Community's model – a focus on partnership, a concern with wider community issues, and support with learning and development – is highly effective. Despite the considerable fall in trade union membership in the last few

years, Community has been highly successful in retaining and indeed growing its membership. The union currently has 32,000 members, up significantly on the previous year. This is particularly impressive given the huge decline in employment in the steel industry over the last thirty years; the area which has provided the core of Community's membership.

The Future

The world of work has changed massively in the past few decades and so too has the labour market. It is clear that unions also need to change if they are to keep up, remain relevant and protect the interests of working people.

Community has adapted well to face the challenges and take of the opportunities in the modern labour market. Whilst still supporting workers in the traditional industries on which it is based, it has diversified in order to consolidate and grow its membership.

Community's approach is both novel and rooted in the traditions of the trade union movement. Key to this approach is partnership working.

Partnership is firmly rooted in the union's history – growing from the approach of the steel unions that were its predecessors. Partnership is also grounded in a belief that employers and employees, though they may disagree and have different priorities, have a fundamental shared interest in the sustainable success of their organisation.

And partnership is supported by their experience. They have found that improvements for members in pay, terms and conditions are best secured through working with employers rather than working against them. This does not mean that everything can be achieved through partnership but such an approach does mean that the union is taken seriously when a dispute does occur.

In addition to working in partnership, Community wants to put trade unionism back where it belongs, at the heart of communities themselves. The primary focus must obviously remain on industrial issues, but trade unions are more effective and more relevant when they consider issues in and work with the wider community too.

Finally, Community is committed to skills and training. The modern economy increasingly requires workers to re-skill and adapt to changing demands. This is particularly important in industries such as steel which have experienced significant challenges and change in the past few decades. Community does great work with members to help them develop their skills and thereby secure their futures.

Community aspire to be a relevant, modern trade union, meeting the needs of the modern worker. It is both a new vision of trade unionism that takes account of changes in the labour market, but one that is rooted in the best traditions of the movement. Such an approach, grounded in partnership, provides a blueprint for a modern trade unionism that can continue to make a difference for working people across the country.

Case Study 1

SSI – The Phoenix from the ashes

The mothballing of the former Corus steel plant at Redcar during the recession was a disaster not just for the employees involved but for the community as a whole. The resurrection of the plant two years later brought back thousands of jobs and restored hope locally.

Throughout the process – from mothballing, through the search for new buyers, to its restoration – Community have worked hard to protect their members and ensure the future of steel production on Teesside. The story of SSI demonstrates the potential for trade unions when working in partnership, to both deliver for members and contribute to the sustainable success of the organisation.

Background

Sahaviriya Steel Industries UK (SSI) own the steel making facility at Redcar on Teesside. It is a modern and fully integrated facility, and is home to the second largest blast furnace in Europe, capable of producing 3.5 million tonnes of steel slab a year.

It has had a troubled history over the last decade. Originally commissioned in 1979 and becoming part of Tata in 2007, it was mothballed in 2010 following the onset of the economic crisis.

Closure of the plant

Corus struck a deal in 2003 to supply steel at cost price to a consortium of four large buyers. However, following the financial crash and onset of recession, demand fell and the price of steel plummeted, making the deal uneconomic. As a result consortium cut their losses and pulled out of the off-take arrangement. Jo Davies, HR Director at SSI described this as *'the final nail in the coffin'* for Tata who could not afford to continue to operate the plant alone. Inevitably the announcement came just before Christmas 2009 that the steelmaking and ironmaking plants would be mothballed – closed indefinitely until a new buyer could be found.

This was a disaster for both for the workforce and the wider community. There were 2,000 staff working at the massive plant, with another 1,000 contractors. The Redcar plant was both the largest employer in the area and the foundation of the local economy; thousands more jobs depended on it. Paul Warren is Team Leader at the southbank coal ovens and Chairman of the multi-union which brings together Community and the other two unions who represented workers elsewhere on the site – Unite and GMB. He painted a bleak picture of the potential impact of the closure of the



plant leading to *'a spiralling decline for the area that just wasn't worth thinking about.'*

The management at the plant and the multi-union, were determined to limit the potential impact of the closure. In the first meeting following the

announcement, Jon Bolton the then Managing Director got a pen and wrote on the board *'zero redundancies.'* This was the aim to which they would work in partnership.

Not all of the plant would cease operating; the two coke batteries continued to run, producing coke to satisfy the Tata shortfall at other sites and stockpiling the balance on site for sale or later use. This protected 780 jobs. In an effort to reduce compulsory redundancies, workers across the site were offered voluntary redundancy and early retirement. Those working in the areas due to shut but wanting to continue were transferred over to the raw materials handling plant.

There were still some workers without a placement when these jobs had been filled so Community and the management at Tata secured a government grant for what came to be known as the Retention of Skills scheme. This allowed for the staff left over to be kept on until such a time as the plant became operational again when they could return. In the meantime, they were matched with training schemes or temporary work to maintain their morale.

The net result of this was to limit the damage of the mothballing and prevent any compulsory redundancies. This represented a considerable achievement. As Paul Warren emphasised; *'no man missed out. No man was pushed out or made redundant.'* This was only achieved through the close and productive working relationship between the union and the management. According to Paul *'everything we did was done hand-in-hand. We weren't acting alone. We were working in partnership.'*

Save our Steel Campaign

Nevertheless, there was widespread pessimism locally following the mothballing of the plant. As Paul Talbot, Head of Media and Government Affairs at Community explained, *'most people thought there was no chance it was ever going to open again, end of story; it was dead in the water.'*

Despite this, the union was determined to continue the fight to save the plant and bring back the lost jobs. The 'Save our Steel' campaign was led by Geoff Waterfield, a Community member and then Chair of the Multi-Union.

It organised a wide variety of events; from a march of 7,000 people through Redcar, to demonstrations at Middlesbrough FC's Riverside stadium, and events at the Labour and TUC conferences. The aim was both to focus attention on the fate of the plant, and to support the search for a buyer.



Members of the delegation to meet Mr Win, President of SSI UK in Thailand

As part of the campaign, Geoff and Michael Leahy, Community's General Secretary, travelled to Thailand in June 2010 to speak to Sahaviriya Steel Industries (SSI) who had expressed an interest in potentially buying it. According to Michael, his and Geoff's aim was to *'convince them that we would make a success of the business... [that] they'd have the cooperation of the unions.'* They strongly advocated for the plant, pointing out that there was a ready-made workforce that was skilled, experienced and motivated. As Paul Talbot describes; *'we were selling not just the company, but the workforce, the community and the ethos of partnership.'*

Following the visit, a memorandum of understanding was signed between SSI and Tata on 27th August 2010. In the words of Paul Warren, *'whatever that was said over there, it worked.'* The plant was officially signed over to SSI in March 2011.

Tragically, Geoff Waterfield wouldn't live to see the culmination of his campaign. He died suddenly of leukemia in August 2011, before the plant restarted in the following April. A memorial in his name stands at the plant, made from the last slab to be produced before mothballing, and the first slab that rolled off the production line in 2012.



the memorial to Geoff Waterfield

'The Phoenix from the ashes'

The return of steelmaking to Teesside was a massive achievement, and one which Community played a considerable role. Most thought that production would never come back. But as Paul Talbot describes, it was reborn *'literally the phoenix from the ashes.'*

However, the hard work didn't stop with the commitment from SSI to buy the plant. A great deal had to be done in order to get the plant up and running again, and to put it on a sure footing .

First, the plant had to recruit a workforce. Community were committed to ensuring that the people who had previously worked at the plant were first in line when it came to the new jobs. As Paul Warren said, *'these guys have worked with us before, we should look at these guys first.'* Community contacted former employees and provided help with CVs and applications forms to give them the best chance possible of securing the new jobs.

But in recruiting a workforce, SSI wanted to ensure there was a pay structure that was rational, fair and sustainable. As with many steel plants separate bargaining at different parts of the site had led to significant pay differentials. Those at the raw materials end of the plant would typically earn significantly less than those at the steel making end, despite similar roles and similar skill levels. This system was obviously unfair and, as Jo Davies HR Director at SSI identified, risked leading to *'animosity'* between sections of the workforce. Management wanted to use this opportunity to harmonise pay, making it both fair and sustainable.

This would be a considerable challenge. Many steel workers expected to return on the same pay on which they had left. Yet the plant could not afford to level up all members of staff to the pay of the steel workers. As Jo Davies explains, *'there had to be an adjustment of expectations and that was difficult and tough.'* Community though recognised the need to alter the payment structure. They worked tirelessly with management to agree a settlement that was fair and equitable. This was not an exercise in levelling-down; the result was a single, simple payment structure that left around 80% of employees better off. As Paul Warren explained, *'I don't know anywhere else that has done this... going forward it is going to be a fairer equitable pay structure.'*

The union played a vital role in securing this deal. Pay harmonisation suited the vast majority of workers, but it didn't suit all of them. Inevitably there would be some discontent among those losing out. But Community worked hard to explain the rationale and bring these workers with them. Both the management and the union recognise that the change would have been near-impossible without the support of Community. According to Paul Talbot harmonisation *'would never have got it through without the support of the trade union.'*

Partnership working at SSI

The close and effective relationship between Community and the management at SSI demonstrates both their commitment to partnership working, and its potential impact. The union worked tirelessly during the mothballing process, the Save Our Steel campaign, and the reestablishment of the plant to ensure both the welfare of its members, and the long-term sustainability of the plant.

The success of this partnership working owes much to the attitudes and approach of both Community and the management. The senior leadership at SSI stress how important it is to involve the union in decision-making.

According to Jo Davies, *'there is nothing done without negotiation and consultation... it's about being consultative and cooperative.'* Cornelius Louwrens, the Operations Director also recognises the benefit of partnership working.



John Bolton and Mr Win Viriyaprapaikit at official handover ceremony Friday, March 24 2011

He argues that unions should be *'part of decision-making, part of the leadership body of the business.'* He highlights two reasons for including unions in decision-making. First, the unions bring alternative viewpoints adding to the diversity of expertise and improving the quality of decision-making. Second, the company recognises that employees are far more enthusiastic and accepting of decisions if they have been part of the process by which they are made.

This partnership working is facilitated by regular and varied contact between management and unions. Jo Davies and Cornelius Louwrens have informal weekly chats with the leaders of the three unions at SSI as well as a *'completely open-door policy.'* They also share a commitment to deal with problems locally, trying to resolve them rather than escalate them to plant or regional level.

Conclusion

The SSI plant at Redcar has gone through a difficult few years. But throughout this time – from the mothballing, to the search for a buyer, to the restarting of the plant – Community has played a central and crucial role. By working in partnership with management at the plant, the union has managed to limit the potentially devastating impact of the closure on the workers and the local community. And by helping secure new investment in the plant, they brought back over a thousand jobs to the plant, and secured many more in the local area. They have shown that by both standing up for their members and working in partnership with employers, they can really make a difference.



Members of Community and other unions march through Redcar on 18th July 2009

Case Study 2

TNT Post – Delivering for members through partnership



post *sure we can*

Introduction

Community has had to adapt its recruitment focus and organising model to meet the changes in the economy and labour market in the last few decades. The union's relationship with TNT Post is an important example of how it has broken into a new area, recruiting members and growing the union. It is also an example of where, by working in partnership, the union has benefitted both the employer and their members.

Background

TNT Post is the second largest postal provider in the UK. From 2004, it has been providing 'downstream access' services; the collection, sorting and delivery of post to Royal Mail for the final delivery to households. There are currently around 700 employees working in this service.

In addition to this established business, they have recently completed a pilot project of an 'end to end' service; the collection, sorting and delivery of mail to customers' doors. Following the recent completion of this pilot, the service has grown from 250 employees to around 1,000 and it is set to rise to a potential 20,000 employees in the next five years.

TNT Post has two partnership agreements with Community, covering both its downstream access and end to end services.

Establishing the Relationship

Before the agreement with Community TNT Post did not have a recognised union representing its employees. As Michael Leahy General Secretary of Community explained, TNT Post *'wanted a trade union, but they were concerned about which trade union.'* It wanted a union willing to invest in their members and their careers.

It also wanted a union it could work in partnership with for the benefit of both employees and the business. Gary Robinson Director of End to End at TNT Post said it had realised that Community *'want to become the modern union, similar to how we want to create the modern workforce for the future; that was the alignment.'*

Key to establishing the relationship was the way in which Community approached TNT Post. *'If we'd been outside with loudhailers and banners saying to staff "don't you know TNT treat you like crap"'* said Roy Rickhuss, National Officer at Community, *'Do you think we would have achieved that? No*

chance, no way.' Such an approach would have led to TNT Post putting the barriers up and resisting the union, he suggests. Plus with existing good relations between TNT Post management and its staff, the staff wouldn't have recognised value in joining the union. Instead, the union approached the employer on a basis of working together, for the benefit of both parties.

For Community this represented an ideal opportunity. Since no union had approached TNT Post or its staff with a view to representing them, it was *'a clean sheet of paper.'* Following the completion of the partnership agreement, Community recruited a substantial number of members. They rapidly achieved around 80% coverage in the downstream access business and 90% in the end to end business. As Paul Talbot, Head of Media and Government Affairs at Community said, *'I've been doing this for a long, long time but I cannot recall such rapid sign-up of so many members in such a short space of time as we did at the depots and delivery units.'*

Partnership working at TNT Post

The partnership approach developed with TNT Post has been highly successful, delivering for employees, the union and the employer.

In the words of Gary Robinson, the relationship is *'extremely positive and progressive; it's a win-win-win.'* TNT Post provide the union with on-site facilities and allow employees to take time off to speak to the union about the benefits of membership. Gary says that this collaborative approach is pursued because it is *'in the interest of employees to be members.'*

The relationship is characterised by honesty and transparency and supported by regular communication. Instead of merely using scheduled monthly or quarterly meetings, there is constant contact between management and the union reps. Information is shared readily between the two sides, building trust and ensuring there are no surprises. Given the start-up nature of the end-to-end business, the company needs to be nimble and *'fleet of foot'* in acting. This is enabled by what Gary describes as a *'very speedy and decisive relationship'* with the union.

Benefits to the organisation

There is a recognition on both sides that the partnership approach delivers benefits to TNT Post. A member of Community's National Project Team cited this relationship as a *'prime example of where good industrial relations within an organisation makes good business sense.'* And TNT Post agree, highlighting a number of benefits arising from partnership.

Firstly, the company sees the relationship with Community as a key part of its employee engagement and communication strategy and activity. Although it sees its existing individual engagement with employees as strong, it recognises the benefit of having good collective channels of communication. Gary Robinson argues that one of the benefits of having a heavily unionised workforce is that *'then I'm speaking to one voice regularly instead of 20,000.'* He also explained that positive union relations aid the company's understanding of staff opinion, helping them gauge levels of satisfaction and identify any potential issues.

Second, as well as helping the company to understand employee's opinions, the relationship with Community provides a valuable source of business intelligence. The union, through its regular conversations with members, provides feedback on issues from to pay and rewards, to targets and processes. As Gary Robinson put it: *'it's literally continuous improvement.'*

Finally, given the rapid growth of the end-to-end business and its workforce, the union relationship is seen as a positive challenge to the management. According to Gary, Community *'help us understand employee views'* as the business grows, helping them to *'keep in touch.'*

Benefits for members

The perceived benefits for the business are clear, but what about Community's rationale for pursuing partnership? As one Community representative said, *'it's not just about having a relationship, it's about delivering on behalf of our members. That's our prime objective.'*

This approach of Community is supported by the firm belief that the employer and their members have shared interests. A senior officer at Community put this well; *'without the company being successful, our members can't be... we're both in the same boat and in order to succeed, we both need to.'* There is a recognition that the sustainable success of the organisation is in the interest of employees, both in terms of their job security, personal growth and career progression, and the scope for wage increases.

Community also argues that partnership matches what their members want out of a union. *'Working people don't want to be in dispute with their employer,'* argued a member of Community's National Project Team, *'They want to be in a place where things can be worked out through discussion and negotiation.'* Gary Robinson echoed this, saying that if the union took a more aggressive tack, it wouldn't have the same degree of success in recruiting and retaining members.

In addition to matching what employees want out of a union, Community have delivered real and significant benefits to employees in the short period since the partnership agreement was signed.

One such example was on last year's pay agreement. Given the pressures on finances and the difficult economic climate, TNT Post initially offered only a pay freeze. But Community was able to push the employer to *'beg, steal and borrow'* enough to up their offer to a competitive figure of 6%, linked to productivity, which was accepted by over three quarters of the staff in a ballot on the offer. The union also cites improvements to terms and conditions such as holiday pay that have been delivered in their first year.

Soon after signing the agreement, Community set up a 16 person strong National Committee, comprising of two reps from each depot to represent employees at TNT Post. This has given employees a voice in the key decisions that affect them at work.

Looking ahead

The relationship between Community and TNT Post has delivered significant benefits for all sides – for the employer, for the union and, most importantly, for the employees. In just a year, staff have seen real improvements in their pay, terms and conditions, and they have been given more of a voice at work.

Michael Leahy effectively sums up what the relationship with TNT Post says about Community: *'it tells the employer that we're a modern organisation that looks at their business and our members holistically, committed to making a success of their business, because if they're not successful, ultimately it will hurt our members. So our approach is, let's work together jointly to make it a success both for the business and our members.'*

This is exactly the approach the union has adopted at TNT Post. As the company grows, the partnership relationship that has been forged with Community will continue to deliver benefits for the workforce, the employer, and the union.



Garry Robinson – Director of End to End

Case Study 3

RSBI – Building a model of supported employment

Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries (RSBI) is unique and successful manufacturing organisation, employing some 250 people, most of whom are disabled. A division of City Building, the business has transformed in recent years, from a struggling and loss-making site, to a thriving and growing employer. Vital to this change has been the close relationship between RSBI and their union, Community.

Background

City Building took over the running of RSBI from the social work department of Glasgow City Council in 1997. At that point, the factory was in grave trouble. The markets for its products were diminishing, its machinery was antiquated and it was poorly-led. Instead of making to order, the factory was just piling up stock. They were making a substantial and unsustainable loss and faced the prospect of closure.

Graham Paterson, the man brought in by City Building to turn the plant around (and now City Building's Executive Director) lays the blame squarely at the door of the previous senior management who *'lacked the foresight to pursue the opportunities of new markets.'* However, *'the one thing they did have is that their staff did really want to work and to make sure the business was successful.'*

Securing the future at RSBI

Graham and his team were determined to make the plant competitive and financially viable in order to preserve its future.

But the arrival of the new management caused considerable apprehension. Robert Mooney the Branch Secretary for Community at RSBI recalled how staff feared that they were interested only in the factory and that they would soon get rid of the disabled workforce. However, the union was reassured about the management's motives when within two months they employed two people with disabilities; the first time this had happened in several years.

Graham Paterson believed radical change was needed to secure the future of the plant. They wanted to focus on markets with stronger demand which meant introducing

new product lines such as kitchens and furnishings for the Council's temporary accommodation units. These changes required much greater flexibility from the workforce.

Community played a vital role in supporting these changes. As Peter Jupp, Managing Director of RSBI explained, *'Community know that change is required in order to stay competitive. They understand their role and that's not just sticking up for the workforce no matter what; it's often explaining to the workforce what they need to hear.'* Graham Paterson echoed this, saying that Community are always open to change; *'And when you're implementing things, they're right behind you. If the union are on side, Robert will bring members with us.'*



The RSBI factory

Robert also recognises the role of City Building and the new management team in saving the plant. *'I'm quite sure if they hadn't stepped in, the factory wouldn't have been here today.'* Together, Community and City Building have made RSBI a huge success. Within 18 months, the plant went from a substantial deficit to breaking even. It remains profitable today, with a diverse product range, and an increased workforce; providing sustainable and high quality employment to dozens of local disabled people.

Community's political leverage also played an important part in securing the future of the plant. Both the local officials and senior national figures in Community such as Joe Mann the Deputy General Secretary regularly met with key decision-makers from the council, the DWP and even government ministers to advocate for the plant. This helped secure a positive relationship with the local authority which has been key to the sustainable success of

the plant. Community recognise that this political support can often be as important as their industrial work on behalf of members. As a key player in this, Joe Mann sees his work in helping secure the future of RSBI as one of the most important things he has ever done in his career.

Partnership working

Both the management and the union reps at RSBI attest to the strength of their relationship, and the benefits for employees and the organisation as a whole. According to Robert Mooney, the relationship *'couldn't be any better to be honest – both sides have got a real respect for each other.'* Graham Paterson echoes this, saying that *'it's one of the best relationship of all unions I've ever worked with, without any doubt.'*

Key to this relationship is partnership. For Robert, the starting point is the long-term future of the plant; *'the most important thing is this place is here in 10, 15, 20 years.'* In his view, the sustainability of the plant – and with it his members' jobs – is best protected by working in partnership with RSBI. He contrasts this with the more militant approach common in the 60s and 70s which he sees as potentially on the rise again, which is about *'the argument of force, instead of the force of argument.'*

In addition to securing the jobs, working in partnership ensures that employees can then benefit from the plant's success. As Joe Mann explained, by ensuring that the plant is profitable, *'we can then legitimately argue for better terms and conditions for workers.'*



Robert Mooney, Community Branch Secretary at RSBI

Central to the success of this relationship has been Robert Mooney himself. Having worked at RSBI for 35 years and serving as Branch Secretary for 6 years, he is both respected and valued by his members and management. Audrey McJinspey, Learning Centre Manager said that Robert acts as a key link between staff and management and that he *'can't be replaced'*. Graham Paterson was similarly positive, saying that Robert *'is fantastic for us – a great ambassador for the trade union, for disabled people and for RSBI.'*

Community's approach is appreciated and reciprocated by the management at RSBI. They ensure that both the reps and the staff as a whole are kept informed about what is happening at the plant, involving and consulting them as much as is possible on the key decisions. According to Graham Paterson, *'the relationship is all about cooperation. That's so important in making sure businesses like RSBI are successful.'*

Working in partnership does not mean that the union is a 'push-over' or that both sides always agree. Graham explained that Robert would always *'fight his corner – if things aren't right for his members, he'll be open about it'*. This can lead to *'strong debates, but good debates'*, in which both sides retain respect for each other and try to develop a solution that works for everyone.

Both sides clearly recognise the benefit of this partnership approach. Peter Jupp identified three key benefits; *'first, you've got a happy workforce; second, you're meeting the customer's demands; and third, you're not at loggerheads with each other – there is continuous production and improvement.'*

In addition to this, and as mentioned above, the partnership approach has been essential to deliver change. As Graham Paterson explains, *'if you don't have that relationship with people at the top, with the trade unions, and with the workforce as a whole, it's very difficult to change things.'* The cooperation and flexibility of the union was crucial in both delivering the changes necessary to secure the future of the plant and in bringing employees along with them.

Community demonstrate a high level of engagement with employees themselves. Robert Carswell, a former dockyard worker, highlights the difference with the unions there; *'At the dockyards the unions were a bit aloof. You would only see them when there was a strike on. Community are close to the workers.'* This helps explain the very high penetration at RSBI, where the vast majority of employees are Community members.

Inclusion at work

Inclusion of disabled workers is close to the hearts of both the management and Robert Mooney who is himself partially sighted. Both sides highlighted the challenges disabled people face in the labour market, particularly given its current state. As Peter Jupp explains, *'these are just people who want to contribute to society. They don't want to be reliant on the state. They want to work, and work hard.... If there's not a place like this and a union like Community fighting for it, what chance have they got?'*

Given the relatively low levels of skills among some of their staff, there is a strong focus on training and development at RSBI. The management work with the union through Audrey McJinspey, who is both the manager of the on-site Learning Centre and Community's Union Learning Rep, to ensure all employees are supported to develop their skills and progress. This also has a wider community focus, with 40 disabled children from local schools brought in for half a day a week to develop their skills and experience and to study towards an SVQ.

The sustainability of the model at RSBI is based on providing a supportive environment that includes both disabled and able-bodied staff, and which retains a social purpose alongside a commercial focus. This seems to be a valuable success story in terms of inclusion of disabled workers, standing in stark contrast to the recent closure of the Remploy factories and the failure of the Work Programme to meet its targets for helping sick and disabled people into work.

Conclusion

The transformation at RSBI has been a real success story. In little over a decade, it has gone from being a massively loss-making and seemingly moribund plant to a stable, thriving and growing organisation. Though it is commercially viable, it maintains a strong and pervasive social purpose with a focus on inclusion of disabled workers and a commitment to learning and development.

The transformation of the plant, its continuing success and its huge social impact owes much to its management. But Community – both locally through Robert Mooney and nationally through Joe Mann – has also played a central role. In addition to representing their members' interests and championing the rights of disabled people, the union has also worked in partnership with RSBI to secure the long-term future of the plant, securing the long term security of their members' jobs.

Case Study 4

Serco London Cycle Hire – Giving workers a collective voice

Introduction

Community's relationship with Serco on the London Cycle Hire contract is relatively new, but it is already starting to bear fruit. It serves as an excellent example of where the union has broken in to a new area of the economy and helped improve terms and conditions for staff by working in partnership with the employer.

Background

Serco have been delivering the London Cycle Hire scheme – commonly known as 'Boris Bikes' – since it was launched in August 2009. It involves 6,000 bikes, available for hire from 400 docking stations across central London. The popular scheme is run for Transport for London by Serco who have 241 staff providing logistical support.

Forming the relationship

Community were in discussions with the Prison Services Union (PSU) towards the end of 2011 around a potential transfer of undertakings. Terry Pye National Operations Officer at Community recognised that most of the PSU's members – largely working in the privately delivered parts of the criminal justice system – were employed by Serco. He therefore approached Serco to discuss a potential future relationship once Community had taken on the prison workers.

In doing so, Terry recognised that Community already had a handful of members in the London Cycle Hire section of Serco. Though this was just a small group, there was no existing relationship with any other recognised union in the workforce. Terry therefore approached Serco to '*discuss the possibility of forming a relationship based on a partnership approach.*'

Serco were encouraged by Community's positive approach and were impressed by their track record of working in partnership with employers. This led them to conclude a partnership relationship to represent their London Cycle Hire staff in February 2012.

Working in partnership

The relationship is valued by both sides. Carol Butler was brought in by Serco to work on the contract as an HR Business Partner. She described what she called a '*really, really positive relationship*' with Community. It is supported by a mutual desire from the employer and union to work



Bringing service to life

together for the good of the business and its workforce; *'I'm a firm believer in working with the unions, not against them.'*

Terry Pye reflected this desire to work together '*As my General Secretary says, we prefer the force of argument rather than the argument of force.*' Though the union is prepared to take a more forceful approach when faced with obstructive and uncooperative employers, he stressed that '*good employers have nothing to fear from Community.*' This approach is based on a belief in the existence of shared aims between the employer, employees and the union. All sides want a company which is profitable and which is therefore able to share the benefits with the workforce.

Benefits for members

Despite having only been agreed in February 2012, the partnership agreement between Community and Serco has delivered real and tangible benefits for members and for the workforce as a whole. Terry Pye points to '*a great number of improvements of working conditions for the people we represent down there*' in this short period of time.

Immediately after the completion of the agreement, Community began negotiations with Serco around a bonus payment for staff working through the Olympic and Paralympic Games period. Workers including bus drivers and railway staff had received bonuses and Community argued that their staff should too. They were able to secure a tax-free bonus payment of £500 for every employee inside Serco Cycle Hire, one of the better settlements of its kind.

Community also began discussions with Serco around overtime pay. There was no existing recognition for overtime on weekends but Community managed to convince Serco to introduce time and a half on Saturday and double-time on Sunday, significantly benefitting many staff. This has since been formalised as a standard condition of employment in the 2013 pay deal.

Community are continuing to work with Serco, negotiating over issues including annual pay settlements. They are representing their members and giving them a voice at work.

Benefits for the organisation

In addition to improving conditions for employees, there is also a recognition that the agreement with Community is good for the organisation as a whole.

Carol Butler describes how bad industrial relations can be bad for business; *'there's nothing worse than when you sit around the table with a union and they just don't listen, they bang their fist on the table and say "this is how it's going to be!"'* She sees Community as different, describing them as *'listeners'* and saying that both sides are *'always able to work out the issues we have had with them sensibly and to reach a mutual agreement.'*

The union is seen as providing a valuable contribution to employee voice and employee engagement. Carol admits that *'sometimes businesses can get too focused on delivering the objectives and overlook the employee engagement stuff.'* They are also seen as useful in helping the company understand employees; *'it's an objective ear. It's good to get around the table with them and see things from their perspective.'*

Moving forward

The relationship between Community and Serco on the London Cycle Hire contract has delivered significant benefits for the employer and for workers themselves.

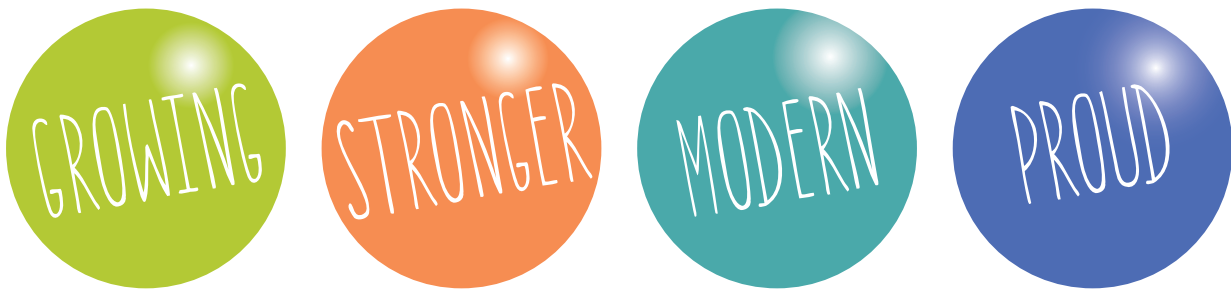
Serco have a valuable and trusted interlocutor in Community. They are able to work with them to better understand and communicate with their staff. The partnership helps ensure good and stable industrial relations with an engaged workforce. Staff have seen real gains in terms of their terms and conditions, and they've been given a say in the issues that matter to them at work.

Serco expect the relationship to *'go from strength to strength'* in the future. Community are open to working with Serco and their employees in other areas where they lack union representation.

The relationship shows that Community are a forward-looking union that is able to adapt to the changing economy and labour market. It demonstrates also that – by working in partnership – they can deliver real improvements in conditions for employees.



Community the Union: Empowering working people – Creating better communities



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