



# VOICE

the newsletter of the Utility Services Branch—August 2021

## UNISON seeks Answers to IMS problems within MDS



UNISON has now conducted a survey of members about the ongoing issues with IMS – a big thanks to all of you who have taken part – we have had a great number of responses.

UNISON has now written to the company and we set out in this newsletter our correspondence to Matt Hardcastle which sets out your concerns.

As you will note, we have specifically asked for a written response, once received, we will share this with you.

Kevin Wareham  
UNISON Utility Services Branch

Matt Hardcastle  
Director of Data Collection  
Morrison Data Services  
11 Silver Fox Way  
Cobalt Business Park  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE27 0QJ

6th August 2021

Dear Matt,

### IMS – UNISON Survey of Members

As you will recall, your challenge back to the trade union side of the NSC has been for us to identify specific areas of concern relating to IMS. In response to this UNISON has conducted a survey of all its metering representative members within MDS, and I now want to share with you that feedback. In doing so and in order that I can share with members your response, I respectfully request that this is put in writing to us.

In conducting the survey, UNISON asked its members to identify five areas of concern. While I have captured all of the responses below, the first five items listed represent the most significant areas of concern.

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1. Reps report that they have lost the ability to plan ahead on how they should commence their duties – this is seen as a significant impediment of the system and a worsening of working arrangements from the previous system.
2. Reps no longer have the ability to re-visit completed or aborted jobs to edit information or call back at the customer request (this can and does cause doorstep confrontation).
3. Allocated work is effectively “all over the place” causing confusion and the constant de-allocation/re-allocation throughout the week magnifies the problem. This encourages cherry picking as re-allocated work rarely goes back to the last rep to have it.
4. In regard to the search functions (i.e. by house number/serial number/street name and postcode) the system is either lacking or time consuming. MSN search is a vital and fundamental necessity that is required for the vast amount of meters in communal cupboards eg. university lodgings, tower blocks etc.
5. Duel Fuel (Gas & Electric) are not pinned together but come out in random order, again this causes more frustration and wasted time.
6. Walk order is non-existent with Reps finding themselves having either to spend valuable time scrolling through long lists of calls or missing jobs and having to re-visit streets they have already worked on.
7. Reps not being allocated their own usual work area. Instead, they pass each other going in opposite directions, travelling into unfamiliar postcodes, Throughout the day they subject each other to phonecalls requesting location information.
8. Reps state that too many key functions are needed to process a job and meter exchanges are a nightmare (that’s even if you know how to do one).
9. Many Reps have reported that the IMS training package was poor (and that’s not the first time you’ve heard that as it has been a feature of our feedback at the last few NSCs)
10. Despite a claim to the contrary battery life in the device is very poor.
11. The Samsung device is useless in rain and snow with Reps being told to put a plastic bag over it; hardly a very high-tech solution to a problem with which we should not have to contend. We are an outdoor industry how can the company get the basics so wrong?
12. The constant need to keep logging into the device is a major irritant. If you are half hourly for example, you would need to log in again at every job with two passwords.

13. Rural connectivity is identified as a problem with a short trip into the countryside often resulting in no signal.

14. Reps are being sent into another postcode sometimes for 1 or 2 jobs with no effort being made to check if there is a rep closer to the job. How can that be economical or efficient?

15. Jobs in jeopardy cannot be recognised just by blue snowflakes. Manually allocated (or multi ownership jobs) are examples of which there could be substantial penalty charges if missed.

16. There are too many MobiControl diktats coming down. These are perceived as demoralising and patronising.

In addition to the above, many members have telephoned to say, “what’s the point of the survey as nothing will change”. It goes without saying that it is through the performance of Meter Reps that the company generates its income, but they were never considered or consulted in the procurement process; all they wanted was a handheld device that could be read in all light conditions and would work in all weather conditions; and an end to home based landline communications that took up too much of their own time because it constantly broke down. IMS is clearly having a detrimental effect on morale and earnings for our people. And the problems never end, for example, I have heard that Windows 7 notebooks used for Half Hourly work were replaced recently with Windows 10 notebooks. Last week, all the new kit was withdrawn because it was not working. I saw a text that said 297 jobs had to be revisited using any available old kit.

The company now needs to turn its attention to resolving these issues on behalf of its workforce, and as requested I should be grateful for a written response to the points raised.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Wareham

**Branch Secretary**

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**Kevin Wareham**  
**UNISON Utility Services Branch**  
**104 Furlong Avenue**  
**Arnold**  
**Nottingham**  
**NG5 7AQ**