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UNISON calls for a 10% pay rise for all local government workers

UNISON, GMB and Unite on Monday lodged a pay claim for all council and school workers employed on NJC pay in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The claim calls for a substantial increase, with a minimum of 10% on all spinal column points, from 1 April 2021.

The full claim is attached and has been submitted to the Local Government Association.

Below are the key arguments made in the claim.

Context of our claim

- Local government workers have kept the country going during the Covid-19 crisis, in one of the most difficult years ever for local authorities and their staff
- Local government workers have worked over and above the cause of duty, putting themselves and their families at risk to support the national effort against Covid-19
- The government promised to do “whatever is necessary to support these efforts” and local authorities expect them to be true to their word
- More austerity is the wrong answer and will be fiercely resisted by trade unions
- Only a substantial pay award can begin to redress a lost decade of cuts, austerity and crisis
- Local government staff have faced a real term pay cut over the past decade
- Meeting this claim will begin to recognise and reward local authority workers and their continued dedication

Economic background

- Since 2010, NJC staff have lost almost a quarter of the value of their pay versus the cost of living

- Many local government roles hit by long-term low pay are those on the frontlines against Covid-19
- Prices for everyday goods continue to rise as local government wages stagnate
- A decade of below average NJC pay awards have fallen well below private sector equivalents

Comparing NJC pay

- In 2019, NJC pay briefly caught up with the Foundation Living Wage
- As of April 2020, NJC SCP 1 and 2 have dropped below the Foundation Living Wage of £9.50 per hour (outside London)
- Our claim in full would lift NJC SCP 1 to £10.17 per hour, meeting the Foundation rate
- An NJC pay rise of 3.25% a year would be needed to meet government's 2024 minimum wage target
- Pay in local government is still among the lowest in the public sector

Other pressures on members' pay

- Union members have reported cuts to overtime, standby payments, annual leave, sick pay and more
- Loss of allowances has a real impact on part-time employees
- Sickness absence levels are rising in local authority settings
- The abolition of the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) in 2010 has drastically undermined efforts to resolve longstanding issues of pay and terms and conditions
- The most common cause of sickness absence are stress, depression, anxiety, workloads and mental health
- 28% of local government staff work some unpaid overtime - compared to 15% of all employees
- Compensating local government workers for unpaid overtime would require a 25% pay rise

Post-Covid economic recovery

- Post-2010 public sector austerity actually delayed the UK's economic recovery from financial crisis

- 51% of the cost of meeting our pay claim would be recovered by taxes and reduced benefits
- More cash in the pockets of local government workers means more spending in the economy

Recruitment and retention pressures building

- More than a third of councils are still experiencing significant difficulties recruiting
- This is happening in spite of Covid-19 and a rise in job seekers
- Below average pay awards, have made local government uncompetitive and unattractive
- Brexit is also having a negative impact on the labour market

Morale under threat

- Local government staff feel they are not able to deliver the best service possible to the public
- They say this is due to cuts, redundancies and impossible workloads
- Many no longer feel secure in their job and are thinking about leaving

Equality impact

- Cuts to pay, terms and conditions have a greater impact on workers with protected characteristics
- Local government workers are older on average compared to all employees
- They are more likely to be disabled, religious, married or in a civil partnership and to be female
- Central pay policies will impact on women and minority groups more severely

Conclusion

- As the UK begins the economic recovery from Covid-19, it cannot mean more public sector austerity
- Pay justice together with paying local government staff a proper wage is an investment in local services and the economy
- New money from central government is needed to fund this claim
- The government promised in March 2020 to “do whatever is necessary” to support local authorities

- Local government employers must join us in holding the government to their promise
- Council and school workers urgently deserve a decent and fair pay rise

Gear up for the pay campaign!

The Local Government Association have told us they will be consulting councils on the pay claim in February and March, before responding in April. It will be crucial we maximize political pressure on council and school staff employers during this period. At the same time, we need to build awareness of the NJC pay claim at local level with members, get members engaged in the campaign, and recruit and organise. And of course, we need to ensure maximum publicity for the pay claim and campaign in the national and local press, media and social media.

We need YOU to make our campaign a success

A campaign plan for branches to develop at local level will be sent to you shortly, to help you plan your campaign. A range of materials are in production to be available for branches during the next month. These include:

- PowerPoint presentation for briefing activists and members in virtual meetings
- Members' leaflet
- Leaflet for use in Schools
- Recruiters Script
- A model motion for councils, supporting our claim
- Model pay claims for use in academies and private contractors

We are also planning to hold a webinar, to brief activists on the pay claim and campaign. We expect the webinar to take place at 12.30pm on Monday 1st March 2021. So please keep this time free and watch this space for confirmation and registration details.

We welcome any comments or ideas from branches about how to build the campaign. Please email us at NJCPay2021@unison.co.uk

Conditions claim

At the request of the other NJC trade unions, UNISON has also agreed a conditions claim to be submitted to the Employers. This claim has also been submitted.

The claim calls for:

- Introduction of a homeworking allowance for all staff who are working from home.

- A national minimum agreement on homeworking policies for all councils
- A reduction of the working week to 35 hours with no loss of pay, and a reduction to 34 hours a week in London. Part-time staff to be given a choice of a pro rata reduction, or retaining the same hours and being paid a higher percentage of FTE
- A minimum of 25 days annual leave plus public holidays and statutory days for all starting employees plus an extra day holiday on all other holiday rates that depend on service.
- An agreement on a best practice national programme of mental health support for all local authorities and school staff.
- A joint review of job descriptions, routes for career developments and pay banding for school support staff, and completion of the outstanding work of the joint term-time only review group.
- A joint review of the provisions in the Green Book for maternity / paternity / shared parental / adoption leave

We will report more on this in a subsequent circular, but we are clear that in line with the wishes of our members and the NJC Committee, our focus for the campaign and negotiations will be on the pay claim itself, with a strong and public demand for a 10% pay increase.