

Council and school staff deserve increased pay offer



Unions representing council and school support staff have today urged employers to return to pay talks with an improved offer as they prepare for industrial action over “inadequate” pay proposals.

Months of disruption to local government services could lie ahead, but the unions say councils have it within their gift to prevent community services being badly affected if they give workers the proper pay rise they deserve.

UNISON, Unite and GMB – between them representing 1.4m council and school staff in England, Wales



and Northern Ireland – have written to the local government employers asking them to return to the negotiating table to improve the 1.75% offer the unions say has left staff “disappointed and angry”.

In consultation exercises held by each of the unions, an overwhelming majority of workers who took part voted to reject the offer. UNISON, Unite and GMB are now preparing industrial action ballots, asking workers to vote for strike action in support of their pay claim.

In the joint letter, the unions say: “Over the last year these key workers have shown how indispensable they are, going over and above to provide essential services, often putting their own health and safety at risk.

“The 1.75% offer is wholly inadequate, and with inflation high and rising, it represents another real terms pay cut for workers who have seen a quarter of the value of their pay wiped out since 2010.”

In February the three unions submitted a pay claim of at least 10% for all council and school support employees in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This would have ensured pay for the lowest paid workers went above £10 per hour, more than the real living wage of £9.50 per hour (outside London).

The unions say many local authorities had already budgeted for a larger pay increase than the one on offer, and that extra money from the government should be used to provide a decent rise.

They are also asking employers to work with them to lobby ministers in Westminster for more local authority funding.

Rehana Azam, GMB National Secretary, said:



“Slashing the wages of local government workers whilst we're still in the grip of covid is grotesque.

“It's time to stop pay cuts across the public sector. If this government wants a levelled up, high wage economy it should start with the workers who've kept streets safe and clean, children in the classroom and rubbish collected throughout the pandemic.”

UNISON head of local government Mike Short said:

“Council and school workers continued working tirelessly throughout successive lockdowns. Their efforts ensured communities were safe, the vulnerable received care and schools remained open.

“But they're underappreciated and this offer – a wage cut in all but name – shows they're appallingly undervalued. Pay is slipping while the cost of living spirals.

“Employers must do the right thing and come back with a decent wage rise to recognise those who provide vital services and reward them properly.”

Unite national officer Jim Kennedy said:

“Local government workers suffered more than a decade of real terms wage cuts before the pandemic hit.

“Now, as thanks for their service during Covid-19, the local government national employers want to hand them another.

“Unless a better offer is forthcoming, Unite will be asking members at councils across the country to vote for strike action.”

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