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The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP  
Secretary of State for Education  
Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings  
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**Sent via email** [sec-of-state.ps@education.gov.uk](mailto:sec-of-state.ps@education.gov.uk)

Friday 30<sup>th</sup> August 2024

Dear Secretary of State,

**Public sector pay.**

We are writing to you on behalf of GMB union members working across Local Government and Schools.

The past 14 years have seen dramatic cuts to Local authority budgets.<sup>1</sup> As a whole, councils' overall core funding is set to be 9% lower in real terms and 18% lower in real terms per person this year than at the start of the 2010s.

This reduction is impacting and closing local services which have come at a cost to communities and a cost to our members who work or worked in those services.

GMB members working in schools and local government are experiencing increased stress and mental health issues and sickness as a result of workload increases.

The white paper produced by the Local Government Association (LGA) in June this year includes a new analysis revealing that councils in England now face a funding gap of £6.2 billion over the next two years<sup>2</sup>.

This is being driven by rising cost and demand pressures to provide adult social care, children's services, homelessness support and home-to-school transport for children with special needs.

The LGA have called for a significant and sustained increase in funding for councils in the next spending review and GMB have welcomed those calls by the employers. GMB further

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<sup>1</sup> [How have English councils' funding and spending changed? 2010 to 2024 | Institute for Fiscal Studies \(ifs.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Local Government White Paper | Local Government Association](#)

want to ensure that any funding increases goes toward restoring pay rises for NJC Green Book workers that have not kept up with the cost of living.

A wage keeping pace with the cost of living each year would have risen by 59.4% since 2010, NJC pay has risen by just 27% which means that thousands of pounds have been cut out of the value of staff wages.

An unfunded pay offer of a flat rate increase of £1,290 on all salary scales is not enough to cope with the cost-of-living crisis impacting our members, many are on poverty pay rates.

The average annual salary for Teaching Assistants is just £14,370 in 2024<sup>3</sup>. The combination of the cost-of-living crisis and poverty pay rates have a severe impact on school support staff workers.

GMB members continue to work within schools that are in a funding crisis. The number of children with education, health and care (EHC) plan according to Government's own figure are up by 11.6% since last year and a total of 83.4% since 2016.

GMB members in teaching assistant roles carrying out interventions with children with SEND, report to us the issues around understaffing, a lack of training and low pay, they also report that they regularly pay for essential items, such as food and toilet paper, for the school and pupils, out of their own pocket.

GMB unions own analysis using Freedom of Information requests at the beginning of 2024 estimates that there is a teaching assistant vacancy rate of 18 percent in England, with vacancy and turnover rates being well above the National Average for other occupations.

Since September 2023 and following GMB submissions to the Low Pay Commission. The commission has added school support staff roles to its low paid occupations including: teaching assistants, education support assistants, exam invigilators, school secretaries and library assistants.

The Department for Education has not required schools to publish or submit teaching assistant or school support staff vacancy rates or other relevant information on the workforce even though teacher vacancy rate figures are a requirement for employers to report.

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<sup>3</sup> [Earnings and hours worked, occupation by four-digit SOC: ASHE Table 14 - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#) (Estimates taken from ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings table 14.7a Annual Earnings (Gross) released: 1 November 2023)

But we are seeing numerous other employers in other sectors – from supermarkets to warehousing employers – are now offering variations on term-time only contracts in a direct attempt to recruit school support staff on more competitive terms than schools can offer.

Local Government and Schools pay awards should be fully funded, otherwise cuts in services and job losses will be inevitable and further put pressure on services.

Retention of staff needs to be at the heart of any plan for public services and this will only be achieved with significant improvements to pay as schools are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain workers for all school support staff roles.

We welcome the additional funding for schools to cover the overall financial costs for 2024/25 which includes the funding of the national support staff pay offer.

However, there is no additional funding for local government workers pay. We believe financial assistance must be given to both local government and schools' employers to ensure that they can pay the increase which our members deserve.

We call for an increase in ringfenced financial assistance to support both local government and schools' employers for the purpose of paying the wages of these public service employees for 2025/26, and will raise the matter with HM Treasury as we head into the Autumn budget.

We have similarly written to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities and we look forward to your response and would welcome any effort to further discuss the contents of this letter.

Yours sincerely,



Sharon Wilde  
**GMB National Officer (Local Government)**



Stacey Booth  
**GMB National Officer (Schools)**