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By email only to: nicola.gaskell@asda.co.uk and chris.hall@asda.co.uk

Friday 3rd November 2023

Dear Chris and Nicki,

I am writing to you following the extended pay conference of GMB's NSSF on 8-11th October. The conference was extended to allow us time to consider points presented to the NSSF at a meeting with yourselves on 5th September, primarily in relation to absence and productivity.

There were two points you had asked the NSSF to consider and I will address these separately below.

You may be aware that GMB has made a request for financial information which we believe to be in accordance with our right for information under S.181 TULR(C)A 1992. The information we have requested is for the purposes of collective bargaining and to allow us to engage meaningfully in the discussion you have initiated with us. Therefore, we believe disclosure to be in accordance with good industrial relations practice for the purposes of collective bargaining.

Our ability to continue what have thus far been productive and progressive discussions requires transparency from ASDA in relation to the company's financial position and therefore we require answers to the questions we have raised to allow us to continue in this vein. I hope this can be provided as swiftly as possible.

Productivity:

To be clear, GMB stewards are happy to progress discussions with ALS concerning any potential remeasure and the implementation of new rates arising from this process. However, the GMB is very clear that several criteria will need to be satisfied before we can engage meaningfully. Primarily these criteria relate to Health and Safety, however the disclosure issue and transparency around company finances as previously referenced is relevant here also.

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Where we are unable to reach agreement on these individual points, we reserve the right to consider our collective position with regards to our continued engagement in a remeasure. We believe this is compliant with the NRA where it states;

“Asda Distribution and GMB are committed to working together in good faith at every site to optimise productivity, as well as the long-term job security, health, safety and wellbeing of colleagues...”

Prior to any remeasure taking place or any new rates being implemented we therefore request:

- That a manual handling risk assessment be carried out alongside any remeasure.
- That the measurement of pick rates is conducted in full compliance with ergonomic principles and in accordance with safe manual handling practice, and that rates are measured using a range of workers to establish typicality, not simply the youngest, fittest or strongest.
- A clear picture on health and safety in relation to manual handling currently, including a full review of manual handling risk assessments, training plus a full review of the stats including reporting incidences, injuries and musculoskeletal and back related injury stats over the past 3 years.
- We would also like to work with ASDA to introduce a more proactive examination and monitoring scheme of colleague's health.
- We think it important that ASDA considers the timings of any re-measures particularly as the roll out of Manhattan appears to be causing concern amongst our membership. In short, we do not have confidence that an accurate remeasure can be achieved while a new warehouse management system is being rolled out. We are yet to see any progressive approach to involving GMB members voices in the roll out of the new system or in garnering feedback from us to assist in the roll out, identify issues and suggest improvements.
- We understand that the current Wakefield measure includes the use of 56 element codes. We would like agreement on what element codes are included in future remeasures.
- We would like a full discussion in relation to the Phase 4 Ergonomics Report by the Health and Safety Laboratory, issued in 2015 and attached for ease, which found that *“The overall rates of musculoskeletal trouble reported by ASDA colleagues throughout all 4 phases remained much higher than in the reference group of industrial workers.”* We request agreement to re-engage these experts in any further discussion on pick rates, especially as Drs Birtles and Pinder still work for the Health and Safety Executive.



- The study says that “...based on the high rates of musculoskeletal trouble measured in the three study depots, we recommend that ASDA fully assesses the ergonomic implications of any future initiatives...there should be a particular focus on incorporating improvements to reduce the musculoskeletal risks of picking.” We would like to know what proposals ASDA has, to incorporate improvements and what steps ASDA will take to assess the ergonomic implications of any changes in pick rates.
- GMB would like the opportunity to independently review and assess the outcome of any remeasure.
- We would like agreement on when the remeasures are carried out.
- We want to ensure that a remeasure is done in a way that achieves a true and accurate, average figure. This means including (for example) individuals with a range of abilities, ages, gender and speed. Reps should be involved with the selection of individuals and should be trained to assist in the overall remeasure.
- We want a reinforcement of the existing agreement that rates are an average and, in many cases, aspirational, there will be a range and rates should be managed in this respect, as per the NRA.
- We would like to reach agreement on how job rotation should be managed so as best to protect members from musculoskeletal issues.
- We have seen little improvement on the issue of pallet heights at 1.8m. Before we can be confident of ASDA’s commitment to the Health and Safety of members, we request improvements on this issue.

Sick pay/Absence policy:

As previously communicated, there is little appetite from GMB stewards to engage in a discussion with ALS on changes to the sickness and absence policy. Not least because the policy was introduced to provide a safety net for colleagues when the pick rates were initially introduced. We do however have suggestions for areas where we would be happy to work in partnership with ASDA in a bid to address and improve overall levels of absence.

The concerns from GMB stewards in relation to absence were as follows:

- GMB requests that ASDA reviews our data sharing agreement to explore options available for the sharing of information that would allow local managers and reps to work together collaboratively on solving local issues with absence levels. The management of absence is a team effort and GMB is part of the team.



- RTW forms are not being completed robustly enough. GMB suggests ASDA work with us to develop a simplified form that is easier for managers to complete and get right.
- GMB stewards are concerned that changes to the HRBP structure, increased workloads and a reduction in managers' hours is setting managers up to fail when attempting to manage sickness.
- GMB believes that managers would benefit from genuine mental health and equality act training for managers, delivered by competent independent practitioners. This could be joint training with stewards where appropriate and we would be happy to engage with the development and content of this.
- The rotation of tasks is not being managed as efficiently as it could be. This is impacting on workplace injuries and MSK problems. Proper engagement with local stewards and a revised agreement on the management of job rotation locally will improve this.
- The management of annual leave allocation is contributing to increased absence levels. The lack of holiday availability leads to frustration. Moreover, ad hoc holidays being used when local depots are trying to manage OWR means colleagues are frustrated when they don't have leave available for proper rest. GMB argue that this time would be better spent training colleagues to be better able to undertake duties on rotation.
- GMB would also like a return to full transparency and visibility of holiday availability.
- Improvements in the availability of occupational health, in particular face to face occupational health, impacts on absence levels as injuries and health problems become exasperated without proper treatment and attention.
- Wage errors contribute to absence levels. Recently additional resources were invested into wage errors at Grangemouth which led to wage accuracy reaching 95%. This resource is now being withdrawn.

The NJC and I look forward to working with you on the above.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Houghton'.

**Nadine Houghton,
GMB National Officer**