



Strike STILL on 14th October.

Latest on LGA proposals

- The NJC joint secretaries met on Thursday 2 October following UNISON's earlier rejection of the pay proposals.
- UNISON pushed hard for the Local Government Association (LGA) to recognise the importance of an improved offer for our members, and the response was fairly positive, though no further proposals were tabled.
- The joint secretaries' meeting was followed by a separate meeting between the employers' side, the LGA regional directors and senior elected members.

UNISON understands that our call for improved proposals was not rejected and that further discussions are now taking place between LGA political group leaders.

We are awaiting the outcome of those discussions and will obviously let members know as soon as there any developments - positive or otherwise.

Strikes across the Public Sector

In the wake of MP's receiving a pay rise of 9% and average pay for public sector employees in April 2013 being 1.9 per cent lower than the average among private sector employees (according to the Office for National Statistics). Public sector employees are fighting back.

- Members working in the NHS in England will stage a four-hour stoppage between 7am and 11am on Monday 13 October. This will be followed by four days of action short of strike action between Tuesday 14 and Friday 17 October when members will stop working through their breaks and instead take their breaks.
- Civil Servants on strike on 15th October
- UNISON local government members in Scotland are to take industrial action this month after a 'yes' vote in their ballot.

The three days of disruption will be followed by a national protest in London on 18 October under the slogan Britain Needs a Pay Rise.

As of 3rd October

PUSHING FOR IMPROVED PROPOSALS

NJC Committee meets

UNISON's NJC Committee will meet again on 9 October to consider any developments and to plan for the 14 October industrial action.

GMB and Unite – industrial action

There have been conflicting reports about GMB and Unite's current position on industrial action. The following update was sent to Regions last week:

"Dear Colleagues,

*I am writing to clarify the current position in relation to industrial action by GMB and Unite over NJC pay on 14 October. I am aware that there have been conflicting reports over the last 24 hours. As things currently stand, GMB are issuing strike action notices at regional level today and have not called off the action. However, that is pending an outcome of talks at Joint Secretarial level with the LGA in which we pushed for improved proposals. If these are forthcoming, there has been a unanimous decision of the GMB steward's conference to call off the action and consult their members. Unite have confirmed that they have called off the action as there is "a growing opinion from activists in all regions who simply want the right to be consulted before having to lose another day's pay". **Heather Wakefield National Secretary.***

Negotiations took place with the Local Government Association (LGA) over the last few weeks in an attempt to secure an improved pay offer, following an earlier offer made in March which was rejected by UNISON, GMB and Unite. Members of all three unions took strike action on 10 July to push the employers to improve the earlier offer which was for:

- One year from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015
- 1% on scale points 11 and above

- Lump sum payments between £580 on scale point 5 to £175 on pay point 10 from 1 April 2014

The recent negotiations – one of which was chaired by ACAS, though not in an arbitration capacity - led to some further proposals from the LGA. During the negotiations, the LGA consistently refused to address our joint union claim on the grounds that local government cuts would be worse this year than any year since 2010 and councils could not afford anything like the minimum of £1 an hour we had asked for. In return, the union negotiators highlighted the disastrous decline in basic pay and conditions on you as NJC workers. We also emphasised the fact that councils are not responsible for paying the pay increases of school staff, despite the fact that the LGA continues to include them in the NJC pay bill (the total cost of pay) to councils. We also spotlighted the inadequacy of the data which the LGA uses to calculate the cost of NJC pay.

At the end of those negotiations the LGA came forward with new proposals – not a formal offer - for a two-year deal, outlined below. The LGA said that it would have to consult councils over the proposals before they could become a formal offer. They asked the three unions to consult members at the same time.

UNISON's NJC Committee voted to reject the proposals and proceed with strike action on 14 October.

From 1 October the bottom rate of NJC pay – scale point 5 – has been raised from £6.45 to £6.50 in order to comply with the new National Minimum Wage of £6.50. That gives the clearest indication yet of how far NJC pay has fallen behind what members deserve to be paid and pay for equivalent jobs in the labour market.

The new proposals are for:

- Two years from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2016
- Non-consolidated lump sum payments as follow in December 2014:
 - £325 on scp's 5,6 and 7
 - £150 on scp's 8,9 and 10
 - £100 on scp's 11-49 inclusive
 - These payments will be pro-rated for part-time workers
- Consolidated increases on basic pay from 1 January 2015 as follow:
 - £1,065 (8.56%) on scp 5
 - £1,000 (7.93%) on scp 6
 - £800 (6.19%) on scp 7
 - £550 (4.13%) on scp 8
 - £350 (2.55%) on scp 9
 - £325 (2.32%) on scp 10
 - 2.2% on scp's 11 and above
- Removal of scp 5 from 1 October 2015, making the basic rate of pay in the new proposals £7.06 pence from 1 October 2015

If industrial action over NJC pay is to be effective, it needs to be hard-hitting and solid. This means we keep exemptions to an absolute minimum.

Emergency Cover

It is the employer's responsibility to provide appropriate emergency cover and this will be negotiated locally. It is not the union's intention to put vulnerable members of the public at risk.

Life-and-limb cover

The Branch will consider requests for exemptions where there would otherwise be a direct danger to life and limb of any person. In the case of any request for “life and limb” cover for this dispute a request for the health and safety risk assessment should be made.

Exemptions

It is common practice to ensure that staff in the following categories, who may suffer longer term financial loss from strike action, should be allowed to work normally on the day, subject to Regional approval. They are:

- Employees currently in their last year of service with their employer who are members of the Local Government Pension Scheme.
- Employees who have an agreed date for voluntary redundancy.
- Pregnant women who have notified their employer of the expected date of birth (unless there is a clear commitment from the employer that the member will not suffer detriment as a result of her taking strike action).

People whose state benefits may be affected if they take part in strike action. Those working under 16 hours a week may be entitled to income support. For members who are in receipt of tax credits, an employer can only stop paying tax credits when the period of absence due to strike action exceeds 10 consecutive days on which the employee should have been working. However, the claimant must keep their benefits office aware of their circumstances.

Any members receiving exemptions will be asked to donate a day’s pay to a strike hardship fund.

Hardship

In line with UNISON and Branch policy, those members who support the strike call but who will face significant financial hardship can make a request for financial support from the Branch hardship fund. A sub-committee of the Branch strike committee, chaired by the Branch treasurer will examine all requests and process payments on receipt of a claim form. Members that wish to access this support should contact the Branch office:

UNISON Newcastle City Branch
Room 145
Civic Centre
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 8HQ

Tel 0191 211 6980



Loss of Pay

UNISON has requested that deductions from pay for those supporting the strike day are not taken until the February pay when council tax payments are not paid.



Picketing

The Council have agreed that the buildings that were closed for the July strike will also be closed for the October strike. On that basis, Newcastle City Branch will be posting pickets at the following open locations:

Newcastle Civic Centre
YHN House
City Library
Rothbury Terrace Depot
Newington Road Depot
Condercum Depot
Allendale Road Depot
Sandhills Depot
Great North Museum

A Guide to Picketing

The Government's Code of Practice on Picketing says "pickets and their organisers should ensure that in general terms the number of pickets does not exceed six at any entrance to a workplace. The branch can supply "official picket" armbands. A lead picket will be designated for each location and will organise their colleagues. The branch will ensure that placards are distributed to picketing locations.

Any member, work colleague, or member of the public who approaches the picket line should be spoken to, given a leaflet and the reason for the strike explained to them in a polite and courteous manner.

Come along and join the picket lines,
support the strike call; it's **YOUR** union, it's
YOUR pay, show the employers we're
serious.

