

UNISON Briefing

PROGRESS REPORT – 2015 SPECIAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONFERENCE DECISIONS

The Service Group Executive (SGE) has considered how to implement the Special Local Government Conference decisions. The SGE took immediate decisions on some issues and referred other decisions which affect some UK wide and national sectors to its Pay and Service Conditions Working Group (which comprises SGE members from the four UK nations, plus representatives from all of the sectors), which will meet on 29th May. The NJC Committee has met and considered NJC-specific decisions.

This short briefing updates branches on decisions taken so far and outstanding decisions to be taken. Once the Pay and Service Conditions Working Group (PSCWG) has reported back to the SGE, an updated report will be issued. The report should be read in conjunction with the Special Conference decisions report issued to branches on 7 April 2015.

1. Pay consultation procedures

The new procedures have been adopted, with the additional inclusion of the words “Sector committees should take responsibility for making a positive or negative recommendation either to accept or reject an offer on which members are being consulted.” The new procedures make it clear that the SGE and sectors have a responsibility to encourage maximum participation of members in union decisions. The SGE will arrange a meeting of representatives from the devolved nations, to discuss specific needs and the flexibility that the devolved nations may need when consulting members according to the new procedures.

2. NJC pay: 2015/16 and 2016/17

The additional re-opened UNISON pay claim for NJC workers for 2015/16 was submitted to the employers on 22 April 2015. It demanded that the full-time equivalent Living Wage should be the new minimum, and an equivalent flat rate increase for all scale points. The Employers responded stating that they would not consider this new pay claim. The NJC Committee considered this at their meeting on 12 May, along with the results of the consultation of members on the content 2016/17 pay claim. The NJC Committee agreed to refuse to accept the Employers’ response to our 2015/16 claim and to merge the 2015/16 campaign into the 2016/17 pay campaign.

The new claim to be put to the NJC joint union side to be:

- The deletion of pay points 6-10, to achieve the Living Wage as the minimum pay rate (with a variation for London to reflect the higher London Living Wage), and a £1 an hour increase on all other pay points
- The settlement date be backdated to 1 April 2015 (to attempt to achieve the intention of the additional pay claim for 2015/16)

This will be discussed at the NJC executive and then the Joint Trade Union Side meeting on 20 May 2015, which will discuss what the joint union claim should be.

The NJC Committee is committed to submitting the 2016/17 pay claim early with a view to lodging a dispute (with reference to the Industrial Action Committee) at the end of 2015 if the Local Government Association (LGA) refuses to negotiate.

The NJC Committee considered the decision to submit parallel claims for 2015/16 for outsourced/transferred workers. It was noted that additional claims to employers who are sticking to NJC could be detrimental, as they may interpret this as UNISON accepting that the link to the NJC is broken. The NJC Committee therefore agreed to submit claims to outsourced/transferred out employers which have moved off NJC and discussions will be held with relevant sectors.

3. Lay involvement in pay negotiations

The NJC Committee reaffirmed the requirement for at least two lay representatives to participate in pay negotiations. UNISON has three lay reps on the NJC Executive – the body with responsibility to conduct pay negotiations. The NJC Committee recognised the need to re-emphasise the role of the NJC Executive and will ensure that pay negotiations must be carried out by the NJC Executive and NJC Committee and not in informal joint secretarial meetings.

The SGE referred the issue of lay members' involvement across sectors to the PSCWG, which contains representatives of all of the sectors, as this decision will impact on them in different ways.

4. Better communications about pay negotiations

The NJC Committee will issue regular pay bulletins, to achieve greater transparency around negotiations. Dates, times and venues of any talks will be shared in advance, and a 'headlines' report will be sent to NJC Committee members and branches within 24 hours. Work is in progress to agree a protocol to ensure that UNISON lay reps are advised of any democratic decisions first.

5. Pay campaigning: our vision and strategy

The SGE asked the PSCWG to consider issues linked to pay campaigning, including: a clear vision for local government; the need for future pay campaigns to be well-planned, intensive and nationally led, backed by a central high quality pay claim; and a political strategy on pay, encompassing political campaigning and raising public and media awareness. Broader cross union discussions will take place on UNISON's economic strategy and the need for something to underpin our campaign for decent pay and conditions.

6. Regional communication networks, pay meetings

The NJC Committee will stress to regions the vital importance of regional pay meetings (or slots on the Regional Local Government Service Group), and branch email networks, so branches can feed back to regions and NJC reps can be informed, throughout the negotiating period. This will be inserted in model regional pay campaign plans and the NJC Committee Members' Handbook.

The NJC Committee agreed to recommend as good practice the requirement for Regional Local Government Committees to meet as part of the process for speedy consultation on suspension of industrial action over NJC pay.

7. Conduct of industrial action including suspension

The SGE and NJC Committee reaffirmed that effective and lawful industrial action at NJC and local level remains an important weapon in our armoury; to resist cuts and pay and conditions and secure pay offers that our members deserve, informed by current membership and density information. Where a decision has been made to pursue discontinuous industrial action, the NJC Committee will include a clear commitment to and timetable for potential escalation of action from the outset of the action in the campaign plan. This will include a possible ballot timetable.

The PSCWG will discuss how to ensure how to achieve a meaningful, clear and transparent consultation process on suspension of industrial action involving branches and regions/nations, by email if timescales are pressing.

The NJC Committee will continue to include in model branch pay campaign plans encouragement to either establish or expand industrial action/hardship funds.

8. Recruitment and organising

The SGE is clear that we need to raise our density to enable industrial action to have a bigger impact on pay campaigns and strengthen the union in collective bargaining. Recruitment and organising work will contain strong messages about the importance of joining and getting active in UNISON, so as to contribute to improving local government pay. All recruitment and organising tools and materials to be based on this and pay campaigns to feature a stronger recruitment and organising angle.

9. Table showing the value of NJC pay

A table setting out the value of NJC pay was agreed by the NJC Committee at its May meeting and will be issued to branches imminently.

10. Summary

Since the Special Local Government Conference, the SGE and NJC have met to enact the decisions taken at the Conference. All those decisions have now either been addressed and incorporated into our procedures and ongoing work, or will be following the meeting later this month of the PSCWG. The work of the NJC, SGE and the PSCWG has sought to ensure the necessary lay participation in pay matters, appropriate consultation on pay matters, and the pay claim and campaign that our members in local government, who for far too long have been the public sector poor relations, deserve.