

Council workers vote for strike action rejecting two per cent offer

Members of Unite the union have voted for strike action in the pay dispute involving 26 councils include The City of Edinburgh.

The current pay offer is two per cent and has been branded “derisory” by the union.

Council workers who are members of this union include those who work in schools and cleansing. It is reported that more than half of Scotland’s 250,000 council workers are earning less than £25,000 a year for a 37-hour week. Unite will now finalise the strike dates in the coming week with action expected to begin in mid-August and that impacting on schools will begin in September.

With inflation at 11.8 per cent Unite says it has constantly advised both the government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) the the current offer is unacceptable.

COSLA has asked for a higher pay offer of five per cent if the Scottish Government makes extra funding available.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: “The message for both the Scottish Government and COSLA is crystal clear: thousands upon thousands of members won’t tolerate real terms pay cuts anymore, and they have had enough. Our members are being forced to take this action due to a derisory pay offer,

and we will support them in this fight for better jobs, pay and conditions in local government.”

Wendy Dunsmore, Unite industrial officer, added: “Our members are at the end of their patience. They are being forced to take this action due to being completely undervalued despite working throughout the pandemic. Let’s be clear here: a 2% pay offer when the broader cost of living is at 11.8% is a punishing real terms pay cut. In the coming weeks we will now plan for targeted strike action in 26 councils across Scotland and the blame for this lies squarely with COSLA and the First Minister.”

UNISON

UNISON members in all councils across Scotland have also overwhelmingly voted to reject the COSLA final pay offer with nine local authority branches, and so exceeding the required 50% turnout threshold required by the Trade Union Act.

Johanna Baxter, UNISON head of local government said: “COSLA leaders meet on Friday and must put an improved offer on the table if we are to avoid large-scale disruption to council services across Scotland.

“Council workers south of the border yesterday were offered a flat rate uplift of £1925, which for those on the lowest pay equates to a 10.5% increase. You have to wonder why council workers north of the border have only been offered a measly 2% increase when the cost of living continues to spiral. UNISON have been calling for a flat rate payment to help those on lower incomes. Most council workers earn less than £25k per year.

“It is clear now that local government workers have had enough and are prepared to strike in the coming weeks unless we see a sensible offer, from COSLA, on the table on Friday. This is the largest strike ballot by local government workers in over

a decade and the first-time workers across Scotland have voted to take strike action in these numbers. It really shouldn't take this for them to receive the recognition, respect and reward that they deserve."

COSLA and Labour response

Cllr David Ross, Leader of the Labour Group on the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and Mark Griffin MSP, on behalf of Labour councillors and MSPs across Scotland.

"The results of the local government trade union ballots on industrial action in support of their pay claim shows the level of anger and frustration within the workforce.

"Labour councillors stand in solidarity with the claims of the workforce for a fair and decent pay increase that meets the rising cost-of-living. We are disappointed that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) has been unable to make a pay offer that would avoid the need for industrial action, but the responsibility for this lies fairly and squarely with the Scottish Government.

"Over 80% of council funding comes from the Scottish Government and without fair funding, the only way councils can meet these pay claims is by making severe cuts to services and the jobs that provide them. It is not good enough for the Scottish Government to say pay negotiations in local government are nothing to do with them when they hold the purse strings.

"If councils cannot provide a decent level of pay then they won't be able to recruit or retain the staff needed to run local services. Many local government workers are already low paid. With inflation running at over 9%, it's not right that they should be forced to rely on benefits to bring their income up to a decent level as the Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary has been quoted as saying. These are the same key

workers we clapped for throughout the pandemic – they deserve fair pay not just platitudes.

“And remember that most council workers live locally and spend their wages in local shops and on local services, so there is a knock on effect that will impact on the whole community.

“Within COSLA, Labour councillors have consistently argued the need for a decent pay rise for our workers and we will continue to press the Scottish Government for the funding necessary to provide this.

“Now that results of trade union ballots are being announced, Labour councillors and MSPs are calling for an urgent emergency meeting of council leaders to discuss COSLA’s response. We are also renewing our calls for a joint meeting with the Scottish Government and the trade unions to seek additional funding to make a decent pay offer and avoid industrial action.”

Following Jenny Gilruth’s interview on BBC Good Morning Scotland on Wednesday, Scottish Liberal Democrat leader Alex Cole-Hamilton said: “This is the largest industrial action amongst council workers for over a decade. Yet the response from the Scottish Government is to play blame games and point the finger. Jenny Gilruth had an absolute mare trying to explain why she expects the UK government to intervene to end rail strikes, yet claiming her government has no responsibility for council workers heading for picket lines.

“There is an simple explanation for why these strikes are being called – years of SNP/Green cuts to local authority budgets. These cuts have meant tough times for waste and recycling staff and now with the cost-of-living crisis biting they are at their wit’s end.”

“Any single day of a child’s education lost is nothing short of a travesty. Children’s interests have been sorely neglected over several years of a devastating pandemic.

“The responsibility for these strikes lies squarely with the SNP/Green government. They need to step up to the plate and sort it out.”