

Strike action to spread from Edinburgh across the country from Wednesday

A second wave of strike action is now due to start on Wednesday in 14 local authority areas as COSLA failed to strike a deal with the unions at meetings today.

Unite the union has confirmed that waste services workers in a further **13 councils** will join those already on strike in Edinburgh from Wednesday.

UNISON has called for urgent intervention by the Deputy First Minister who is standing in for Finance Secretary, Kate Forbes, who is on maternity leave.

Unite's local government committee has rejected outright the five per cent COSLA pay offer.

UNISON also said no agreement has been reached despite lengthy pay negotiations with COSLA on Tuesday.

Both UNISON and COSLA, the umbrella body representing council employers, will be writing to Deputy First Minister to ask for an urgent meeting to discuss increase funding for local authorities to enable talks to continue.

Johanna Baxter, UNISON Scotland's head of local government, said: "It was a very long meeting but unfortunately there has been no breakthrough and we are a long way from a pay offer that we would be able to recommend to our members.

“COSLA negotiated within the cost envelope that leaders mandated them but that simply isn’t enough and goes nowhere near matching the pay offer provided to council workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

“The only thing that both parties could agree on is that we need the urgent intervention from the Deputy First Minister to put additional funding in place and both will be writing to the Deputy First Minister to that effect today.”

NO MORE FUNDS ON THE TABLE

Following talks today in Glasgow, COSLA said that there would be no additional monies allocated to fund an improved pay deal. The offer remains at five per cent.

Unite say the details of the current offer mean that the lowest paid council workers would receive 7.36 per cent taking them to a new Scottish Local Government Living Wage of £10.50. For more than half of local government workers, COSLA’s offer represents an offer of between £900-£1,250. In comparison the union says the UK Government is offering council workers in England a £1,925 flat rate pay offer.

Unite wants to draw attention to broader inflation (RPI) soaring to hit a forty-year high of 12.3 per cent with warnings that headline inflation (CPI) could reach 18 per cent by the start of next year.

Energy bills are also expected to hit £3,554 a year come October with projections by Cornwall Insight indicating that they could top £5,300 annually in April next year.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: “Unite’s local government committee recognises that COSLA’s pay offer does not address the cost of living crisis in any way for the vast majority of workers. Unite makes no apologies for standing up for our council members across Scotland because they deserve

better. We will fully support them in their fight for better jobs, pay and conditions.”

Unite has issued a stark warning that unless COSLA and the Scottish Government improve the current offer then strike action could continue beyond the winter – and spread to even more council areas where the trade union has a strike mandate.

Unite industrial officer, Wendy Dunsmore added: “Unite has rejected outright the 5 per cent pay offer and strike action across 14 councils will go ahead. It’s a sad indictment that council workers in Scotland are being offered substantially less than their counterparts in England.”

“The cold hard reality is that inflation and energy costs are soaring – and they are predicted to rise even higher. The 5 per cent today will not be worth the same in a matter of months when the cost of living crisis will bite even harder. The offer on the table just doesn’t help the lowest paid make ends meet.”

“This dispute will continue to escalate to a point where it could now go beyond the winter causing months of massive nationwide disruption. The blame for this will lie squarely at the doors of COSLA and the Scottish Government.”

Unite says more than half of Scotland’s 250,000 council workers are earning less than £25,000 a year for a 37-hour week, and estimates that over 1,500 members will be involved in the coordinated and targeted strike action involving waste services and schools across Scotland.

GMB SCOTLAND also on strike

GMB Scotland Senior Organiser Keir Greenaway said: “The fact that COSLA couldn’t even commit to the basic principle of a flat rate offer which would help the lowest paid is bitterly disappointing and frankly shameful.

“Strike action in Edinburgh continues, GMB members in waste and recycling services across sixteen councils will start strikes this Friday, and members in Glasgow and East Renfrewshire schools and early years will strike from 6 September.

“Our members are angry about the lack of value being shown to them by political leaders and scared about the prospect of pay that doesn’t confront a cost-of-living crisis that’s getting worse by the week.

“COSLA leaders meet again on Friday, and they have got to do so much better, because until our members concerns are addressed, strikes will continue, and they will grow.”

Waste Services Strike Action

18 – 30 August – Edinburgh

24 – 31 August – Aberdeen City, Angus, Dundee, East Ayrshire, East Lothian, East Renfrewshire, Falkirk, Glasgow, Highland, Inverclyde, South Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, West Lothian.



View from George IV Bridge to the Cowgate on Sunday 21 August.
PHOTO © 2022 The Edinburgh Reporter