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30 September 2014

Dear Sarah,

NJC PAY 2014-15

I am writing in response to your letter of 26 September to Chief Execs, Leaders and others in which you outline the current proposals and refer to the decision of UNISON's NJC Committee to reject them.

I am sorry that you chose to describe UNISON's NJC Committee decision in such an unhelpful tone, which does no justice to the very lengthy and serious debate held at the meeting. It also does not help to solidify relationships within the NJC or set a positive tone for collective bargaining in the longer term.

The proposals on the table do represent better proposals for the lowest paid in order for you to meet your statutory duty to pay the minimum wage. However it is wrong that the cost of doing this should be borne by the local government workers earning as little as £23,000, this comes at the expense of a significant proportion of UNISON's members higher up the pay scales. This represents a saving of almost £13 million you are making in 2014-15 on the original offer. All of our members face basic pay cuts of over 18% since 2010 – from the top to the bottom of the NJC pay spine. In that context, robbing the slightly higher paid to compensate for poverty pay at the lowest end was unlikely to be warmly welcomed. Those higher grades include employees with high levels of responsibility in very difficult jobs, who are constantly held to account by the press, media and the public. Equivalent jobs elsewhere in the public sector are significantly higher paid.

As our claim this year demonstrated, we are alarmed at the impact of the decline in NJC pay on our lowest paid members, who this year faced the shocking prospect of their earnings falling below the National Minimum Wage. This is the result of below-inflation NJC pay increases in eight of the last sixteen years – when they should have been benefitting from Single Status reviews.

Effectively, the political decisions taken by the LGA to promote Council Tax freezes and to overlook our members' living standards while securing the services they work so hard to provide, have driven pay to the lowest possible point, designed only for those in the lowest skilled jobs. Added to this are the systemic cuts to conditions made by local authorities, which further impact on our members' incomes – especially cuts to unsocial hours pay, annual leave and car allowances.

The trade unions as a whole – and certainly UNISON – have been pressing for some time for the NJC to respond fully and strategically to the wide range of issues our members face in increasingly challenging workplaces. The pressure on the 61% of the workforce who are part-time workers has intensified significantly, with many covering vacant full-time jobs as well as their own. Training is wholly inadequate, with many employees receiving none at all. Stress levels are high and morale is low.

I understand that the LGA officials are meeting with Regional LGA Directors on Thursday to discuss the way forward. The Joint Secretaries will also meet that morning. I do hope that your discussions will recognise the very difficult issues facing UNISON's members and leadership in considering proposals which appear to be aimed at dividing the workforce. I do not believe this would be helpful for any of us.

Furthermore it's important for you and Regional LGA Directors to understand that UNISON's National Committee spent a full day considering carefully the revised pay proposals. Key to their decision was the lack of a formal proposal not yet agreed by employers. Our members needed more certainty in circumstances which would have required UNISON to re ballot all our school members and other outsourced members should employers when consulted not agree to the re packaged proposals. The other key element of concern was that the majority of UNISON members would get less than 1% in year.

I would very sincerely urge you to reconsider the current proposals and come forward with improved ones which begin to tackle the hardship facing *all* of our members.

With best wishes,



Heather Wakefield
National Secretary
Local Government Section

cc. Harry Honnor