**Pay Up Now 2020 for School and Council Workers**

**Members’ Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

**1. How** **is my pay negotiated?**

As a worker in local government or in most schools, your pay and other terms and conditions are determined by a negotiating body called the National Joint Council (NJC) for local government services. Over 1.4 million local government workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have their pay and conditions determined within the national framework negotiated in the NJC. The NJC trade union side is made up of representatives from UNISON and other trade unions. The Local Government Association represents local authorities in negotiations. Many organisations in the public and private sectors also follow the NJC’s agreements.

**2. How do I know if my pay is on the NJC pay scale?**

A handbook of NJC agreements is published as the Green Book. The NJC is not a statutory body and its agreements do not have to be applied (statutory force.) The agreement is voluntary in that local authorities are not obliged by law to incorporate NJC terms into their employees’ contracts. But the great majority of authorities and most schools do choose to follow NJC agreements. Collective agreements like the Green Book are part of your contract where local authorities or schools incorporate reference to them into individual’s contracts of employment.

**3. What are NJC spinal column points (scps)? Are they the same as grades?**

The basic pay of each employee consists of a pay point or points on the NJC pay spine. The bottom of the NJC spine starts at scp 1 and the top is scp 43. At present scp 1 is £17,364 a year (or £9.00 an hour) and scp 43 is £45,591 (or £23.63 an hour). Grades are not agreed by the NJC. Each authority (or school) uses the NJC pay spine to construct their local grading structure. Some employers start their bottom grade on a scp above scp 1 and many extend the NJC pay spine locally above scp 43.

The Trade Union Side submits an annual pay claim for a cost of living increase to be implemented in April. The increase agreed is applied to the NJC pay spine. UNISON bulletins will refer to NJC pay points or scp because employers have different grading structures. You should check with your branch how the NJC pay spine applies to your pay and grading structure.

**4. What is this year's NJC pay claim for?**

* A real living wage of £10 per hour to be introduced for NJC scp 1
* A 10% increase on all other NJC/GLPC pay points\*

In addition:

* A one day increase to the minimum paid annual leave entitlement set out in the Green Book
* A two hour reduction in the standard working week as set out in the Green Book
* A comprehensive joint national review of the workplace causes of stress and mental health throughout local authorities

*\* The pay increase is applied to the NJC pay spine. London and a few councils do not use the NJC pay spine because they have their own pay spines. In these cases, the NJC percentage increases are applied to these pay spines.*

**5. Why is the Trade Union Side calling for a £10 minimum hourly rate and 10% on all other pay points?**

A £10 an hour legal minimum hourly wage has cross party support as a common sense solution to the unsustainable problem of topping up low pay via tax credits. Many NJC workers are reliant on in-work benefits like tax credits, meaning the taxpayer is subsidising schools and councils to pay poverty wages. The savings made by increasing pay could be channelled back by the Treasury into local government and schools settlements to fund increases in pay.

On all pay points the local government workforce has suffered a sharp real terms cut in pay since 2009. Most employees’ pay has been devalued by 22% since 2009 when NJC pay increases are compared to the cost of living (RPI). For someone currently earning £18,000 pa this represents a £5,626 loss in earnings, meaning a 26.6% pay increase is needed to catch up.

In this context a 10% pay rise is reasonable in providing some catch up on lost pay. Especially as core costs in the same period have sky-rocketed e.g. bus/coach fares are up by 51%, electricity by 48%, house prices by 37% and childcare by 32%. A decade on from the banking crash, you should not continue to pay the price for austerity.

**6. Is the claim affordable?**

Councils are facing difficult decisions trying to balance budgets at a time funding has been slashed. Local government has endured central funding cuts of nearly 50% since 2010. Funding for this pay rise must come from central government and it must be new money. The claim cannot and must not be funded through councils further cutting employees’ conditions of employment.

The government says there is no magic money tree - and yet they have found approximately £4.2bn of funding to spend on no-deal brexit preparations since 2016 - £1.5bn of it in the 2018-19 tax year alone. When Theresa May's minority government entered into a supply and confidence arrangement with the DUP, they found approximately £1bn of new funding for Northern Ireland.

Since becoming Prime Minister, Boris Johnson has already pledged tax cuts for those earning over £80,000 a year plus changes to both national insurance and stamp duty - at a cost to the public purse of approximately £23bn. He's also pledged to increase spending on both education and policing at an estimated cost of over £2bn (though this would only go some way to reversing government cuts made over the last decade).

Clearly there is money available - but it is a political choice made by the government on how and where to spend it.

**7. Will this campaign really be able to change the government’s policies?**

There are major benefits to the economy that would arise from raising the pay of council and schools workers and easing the squeeze on living standards. These include:

* increasing revenue from an increase in the tax take and national insurance contributions as people’s take home pay increases,
* a boost in the collection of additional indirect taxes as additional take-home pay is spent on goods and services
* a multiplier effect arising from the stimulus to demand take home pay increases.

The bigger agenda is that the government has cut council funding more than any other sector, although education cuts are starting to bite hard. You have borne the brunt of these cuts. Pressure can change government policy.

**8. Won’t more pay mean more jobs and services have to go?**

Keeping your pay low will not protect jobs and services. You are doing far more for less – and working unpaid overtime. But your job is still threatened and less secure than private sector jobs. Councils say they cut pay to save jobs but while your pay is held down year after year, jobs still disappear and services continue to be stripped to the bone, privatised or stopped altogether. Your pay should reflect the fact that you are keeping services and schools going – against the odds.

**9. How is the £10 per hour that UNISON is campaigning for different from other Living Wages?**

There are a number of ways that a ‘living wage’ can be calculated. The Foundation Living Wage (as calculated by the Living Wage Foundation) is an hourly rate of pay set independently and updated annually. It is calculated according to the basic cost of living in the UK. The calculation takes into account things like accommodation, travel, food and extras like birthday presents.

The current Foundation Living Wage is £9 an hour (and £10.55 an hour in London). The Foundation Living Wage is reviewed each year by independent academics and increases in the rates are announced in November during Living Wage Week. Employers can choose to pay the Foundation Living Wage on a voluntary basis. This minimum rate of £9 an hour is what UNISON achieved in the two-year 2018-20 NJC pay award last year.

UNISON is now campaigning for £10 an hour minimum in the new 2020 NJC pay claim. A £10 an hour minimum already has some cross party support and the Labour Party have committed to setting this as the new legal minimum if they win the next election.

Since 2016, the government has paid a so-called 'National Living Wage', currently set at £8.21 per hour - but only to those aged 25 and over. For those under 25 it is even less:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Type of wage** | **Ages covered** | **Minimum hourly rate** |
| NJC 2020 Pay Claim | All Ages | £10 (£X in London) |
| Foundation Living Wage | All Ages | £9 (£10.55 in London) |
| National Living Wage\* | 25 and over  | £8.21  |
| National Minimum Wage\* | 21 to 24 | £7.70  |
| 18 to 20  | £6.15  |
| Under 18  | £4.35  |
| Apprentice | £3.90 |

*\* Employers must pay this by law*

The government’s so-called 'National Living Wage' of £8.21 is over £3,400 per year LESS than the Foundation Living Wage and is over £4,400 less per year than the £10 per hour minimum UNISON is asking for in the current 2020 NJC pay claim. The government’s National Living Wage is not calculated using any real cost of living data and is further weakened by historic government cuts to working tax credits and increases in the threshold at which people can claim benefits.

**10. Why are we calling for improvements to the Green Book annual leave entitlement and working week and a review into the causes of workplace stress?**

You are working under immense pressure – with ever increasing workloads and job insecurity. The most common cause of sickness absence in the local government workforce is stress, depression, mental health and fatigue. Your work-life balance must be a priority too. That is why our claim calls for a one day increase in the minimum annual leave entitlement, a two hour reduction in the working week and a review of the workplace causes of stress and mental health in local government.

The minimum annual leave entitlement in the Green Book is 21 days although some councils have increased this by local agreement.

The standard working week is 37 hours (36 in London) although some councils have reduced their working week by local agreement. The one hour less for London reflects extra commuting time into London for those who can’t afford London housing prices.

**11. Why is this a women’s campaign?**

Women ARE the majority of the workforce. 78% of school support and council workers are women. 61% of all school support and council jobs are part-time and women do over 90% of these part time jobs. Many of you have more than one part time job to make ends meet.

Women are being hit by the impact of the cuts on both sides. As workers in councils and schools, you are struggling with low pay, increasingly heavy workloads and the constant threat of further redundancies. As service users, the cuts to local services mean that there is less help available to them, forcing many to go without the support they need for themselves and their families.

Many women in councils and schools depend on benefits to make ends meet. Benefits now make up twice as much of women’s income as men’s. They will be the hardest hit by working tax credit cuts. Women are more likely to pay for childcare and children’s clothing. So children’s wellbeing depends on women earning a decent wage.

Councils and schools are the largest employers of women in the UK. Schools and councils should set the highest standard on pay, equal pay, maternity rights, childcare, eldercare and flexible working. Instead, Government cuts are turning them into hardnosed ‘bargain basement’ employers. Join our campaign and demand pay justice for women.

**12. How can I get involved in the campaign/help get the message out better?**

Sign up to our campaign on this web page to receive campaign updates. Help your branch by handing out leaflets and speaking workmates about joining UNISON and our campaign.

Get them to follow us for the latest news, like us and share us on Facebook and add comments: facebook.com/UnisoninLocalGovernment

Share your campaign ideas with us at njcpay2020@unison.co.uk