

**UNISON**  
**NJC Pay Ballot 2023**  
FAQs for branches

**1. Why are UNISON local government members being balloted for strike action?**

Every year, the unions representing local government workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland submit a pay claim and employers respond with a pay offer. This year's claim was for RPI + 2%, or 12.7% in percentage terms. The pay offer from employers was for a flat rate of £1,925 on all pay points (pro rata'd for part-time and term time only workers). At the bottom end of the pay scale this offer is worth 9.4% and at the top it's worth 3.9%. Across the whole pay scale, it averages about 6.4%. With RPI inflation running at over 12%, this would represent a real terms pay cut. This offer was rejected by UNISON's NJC committee, who decided to move to an industrial action ballot.

**2. Who is being balloted?**

Most members working in councils and schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (Scotland has its own pay negotiating body). If you receive a ballot paper from UNISON, we believe you are eligible to vote and to take strike action. Northern Ireland's ballot dates are later than those for England and Wales due to different ballot legislation.

**3. When is the ballot happening?**

In England and Wales:

- From 23 May 2023: Members began receiving a ballot paper in the post
- 21 June 2023: Last opportunity to join UNISON and get a ballot paper
- Midday on 28 June 2023: Last opportunity to request a replacement ballot
- 4 July 2023: Ballot closes. Papers must be returned to CES (who are running the ballot on UNISON's behalf) by this date

**4. Why is UNISON balloting for strike action, shouldn't we be negotiating with the employers?**

UNISON continues to try and negotiate a better pay offer with the local government employers. After announcing plans for a strike ballot, UNISON and other unions have continued speaking to and meeting with the employers. But at every opportunity they have refused to budge. Even knowing that we are balloting for strike action they insist £1,925 is their final offer.

**5. How do I vote?**

You will receive a ballot paper, a freepost return envelope and some additional material explaining UNISON's recommendation in the post. The ballot paper asks if you are prepared to take part in strike action. Put a cross in the box against your choice on the ballot paper. This must be returned to CES by 4 July 2023.

**6. Can I vote online?**

No. The law does not allow for electronic voting in these types of ballots.

**7. Is UNISON recommending how I should vote?**

UNISON is recommending members vote YES to strike action.

**8. Are members in academies and multi-academy trusts included?**

Most members in academies/multi-academy trusts can take part. If members receive a ballot paper from UNISON that means we believe they are eligible to vote in the ballot for strike action.

**9. What if my employer can't afford a better pay rise?**



UNISON is clear that any decent pay settlement for council and school workers must require additional funding from central government. Alongside our pay campaign, UNISON is also running campaigns for better funding for councils and schools - they are two sides of the same coin.

Since 2010, NJC pay settlements have fallen behind the rising cost of living year on year. This means that in total, NJC pay has lost 25% of its real terms value over the same period. A culture of low pay is causing staff shortages, higher turnover and increased workloads.

This is why UNISON continues to lobby the government, at all levels, for increased funding for council services and schools and for better pay. We also know that over 50% of the cost of our entire pay claim would actually be recouped by the government via increased national insurance and income tax contributions, plus a reduction in benefit costs. After over 12 years of cuts, it's time for the government to put their hand in their pocket and support local authorities, schools and their staff.

**10. Why does my ballot paper mention breach of contract? Can I be sacked for going on strike?**

We are required under the law to put wording on the ballot paper explaining that if you take part in industrial action, you may be in breach of your contract of employment. However, members should be reassured that if you take part in lawful industrial action, if you're then dismissed, that dismissal would be judged to be an unfair dismissal if it takes place fewer than twelve weeks after you started taking part in the action, and depending on the circumstances may be unfair if it takes place later. In other words, there is protection in place for striking workers providing the industrial action itself is conducted in a legal manner.

**11. Is strike pay available if we strike?**

Yes. Strike pay is £50 per day from the first day of action. UNISON's Industrial Action Committee (IAC) also has the right to pay a lesser amount than standard strike pay or no strike pay at all where a large action could exhaust the Industrial Action Fund. This will be considered by the IAC after results of the ballot are known and branches will be kept informed.

**12. What do members have to do to get strike pay?**

Members will need to show proof that they were on strike and a copy of their wage slip to show what deduction was taken from their pay. The HMRC does not regard strike payments as taxable earnings.

**13. What should members do if I they have not received a ballot paper?**

Call the UNISON Ballot Hotline on 0800 0857 857 to ask for a replacement ballot. The hotline opens 5 June 2023 and closes midday 28 June 2023. Alternatively, you can request a replacement ballot paper online via MyUnison at [unison.org.uk/myunison](https://unison.org.uk/myunison)

**14. What happens if the results are for industrial action?**

Once the results are received UNISON will consider the available options. Branches and members will be kept informed.

**15. Where can I find out more information?**

Please visit [unison.org.uk/payup2023](https://unison.org.uk/payup2023) for up to date information.