

UNISON had a serious message for the Employers when we presented this year's pay claim. The 2004 pay award did not maintain our member's pay at the level of inflation across those three years, not even at the level of average earnings.

With the rise in inflation our members are struggling to cope with rising costs of living. NJC staff continue to be the "poor relations" of the public sector – getting treated less favourably than even their colleagues who may work along side them in private/public partnerships. In local government terms and conditions are as important as pay, yet conditions for the NJC workforce are lagging well behind those of the private sector.

We feel our claim is a just claim. It's well supported with evidence and it deserves to be taken seriously.

Government and the employers continue to press for continuous improvement in public services – it touches every corner of local government – except where the workforce is concerned. We unequivocally support the drive for quality services but it's UNISON members who deliver that quality and they deserve real acknowledgement of the job they do. They deserve better!

### Our Claim

The 2007 NJC Pay Claim:

- Our pay claim is for one year. It is a mixed percentage and flat rate claim because we need to address the high cost of living that hits low paid staff the hardest, while ensuring that those higher up the pay scale get an increase which reflects inflation and average earnings.
- 5% or £1000 whichever is the greater
- to ensure a £6.30 underpin on the minimum hourly rate
- An increase in basic annual leave entitlement to 25 days per year as the minimum entitlement for all employees and an increase in annual leave of one day for all employees – irrespective of current entitlement
- A reduction in the standard working week to 35 hours, without loss of pay

Six months after we lodged our pay claim the employer's have made a final offer:

- 2.475% on scale points 5 – 49, with no staging
- 3.4% on scale point 4 to give a minimum rate of £6 per hour
- A joint commitment to a review of the green book and bargaining arrangements

We have faced difficult negotiations this year – the Government's 2% public pay policy, their use of the Consumer Price index to measure inflation and the

employers are consulting councils over changes to the NJC agreement and bargaining arrangements without consulting the unions first.  
But our arguments are strong and indisputable:

Inflation has been over 4% for the first quarter of this year – it's 3.8 % now

- Average earnings are rising by 3.1%
- Above inflation increases in housing costs, fuel and energy, council tax and childcare. Travel, water, energy and food prices - all increased yet our members wages are supposed to stay below inflation!
- Between 2004 – 2007 local government pay rose by only 8.9% - BUT average earnings grew by 12.4% and inflation by a whopping 9.3%.

30% of all employees are on lowest 5 pay points – less than £12,747 per year

- Further 30% are on Scale 10 – 17 earning up to £15,825 per year – that's £8000 less than the median average salary across the economy (£23,850) .

The employers cannot afford to NOT improve their offer:

- There is a severe staffing crisis in parts of local government – staff shortages are particularly acute in social services.
- Employers' own 2005 survey estimated councils spent £339 million on long and short term agency staff in social care alone (LGE Social Care Workforce Survey 2005).
- 60% of councils have reported to employers that they cannot recruit manual workers
- Our members face extreme pressure leading to stress and ill-health due to unfilled and frozen posts

Last year local government saved £3 billion in efficiency savings" - twice the target. Our claim IS affordable.

It's not all about pay though. Conditions are just as important. The basic starting holiday entitlement for NJC employees is just 20 days. But basic holiday entitlement in 2006 averaged 24.9 days across ALL organisations and sectors. From 1 October statutory annual leave is 20 days, plus 4 Bank Holidays.

The Employers response to our claim is to have a joint commitment to "a review of the way that local government pays and rewards its workforce, with nothing ruled in and nothing ruled out", but they have shown a woeful disregard for the workforce and a lack of urgency over *this* year's pay negotiations – can we expect our claims for annual leave and a shorter working week to be included in time for the 2008 pay negotiations?!

Liz Brennan.