

A consultative ballot on the offer will be conducted by the branch from the week commencing 20 May and running until 12 noon on 10 June. The UNISON NJC committee makes no recommendation on the offer, describing it as the 'best ...achievable by negotiation'. **Our branch committee strongly urges members to vote to reject the offer and support 'sustained, all-out strike action in pursuit of an improved offer'.**



# 1% offer is an insult! Reject it.



After months of on-again, off-again talks the umbrella body for local

government employers covered by the National Joint Council (NJC) finally tabled a pay offer for the financial year 2013-14 on 24 April. And after three years of an absolute pay freeze for the overwhelming majority of local government workers that translated into a drastic 16% erosion in the real value of earnings, the offer amounted to all of 1% across the board. In short, the pay freeze has barely started to thaw. The current offer amounts to still another significant cut in real pay. It comes at a time when the Retail Price Index stands at 3.3%, and when increases in transport costs, utility bills and rents across London substantially outstrip the headline inflation figures. While the employers have reluctantly agreed for now at least not to push for cuts to NJC terms and conditions, such as current sick pay provisions, in exchange for the paltry 1%, the future of a national framework for collective bargaining over pay and

conditions very much remains under threat. On the one hand plummeting real pay year after year can only undermine the confidence of local government workers in any national talks. On the other some local authorities are explicitly breaking with the NJC, sometimes with the aim of pursuing still worse attacks on their workforces (as in Bromley) and in other cases to secure long-term deals with local union branches that appear to offer marginally better deals, as in Oxford.

There can be little doubt that a key objective of the Con-Dem coalition is the break-up of collective bargaining and national pay structures across the whole of the public sector. This is the agenda that Education Secretary Michael Gove is pushing with particular zeal for teachers. UNISON's NJC committee voted on 7 May by the narrowest of margins - 14 to 13 - to oppose a motion from our region's representatives. The London motion would have called for rejection of the offer in the

consultative ballot and moves toward a strike ballot among council workers across England, Wales and the north of Ireland. As a result the employers' proposals will go to members without a specific recommendation but with wording that suggests the offer is the 'best achievable through negotiations'. Some union members may genuinely believe that there is a simple trade-off between improvements in pay and jobs across local government, yet there is no persuasive evidence that years of diminishing real pay have saved a single job. Indeed, amidst the pay freeze Camden Council's directly employed workforce has shrunk by 13%, with more than 540 redundancies. Credible estimates suggest that between 350,000 and 400,000 jobs have already been lost across local government as a whole since the Coalition government took office in May 2010. The Camden UNISON branch committee discussed the employers' offer on 29 April, when members unanimously agreed that the offer was woefully inadequate and should



Photo Hugo Piene

**CAMDEN EYE PAY SPECIAL**  
 May 2013 [www.camdenunison.org.uk](http://www.camdenunison.org.uk)

## A FEW PENCE MORE

The NJC Committee believes the pay offer is an insult – the employers think you're only worth a few pence more: An extra 6 pence an hour – if you are on the bottom pay point earning only £232.92 per week; An extra 9 pence an hour – if you earn just £341.41 per week; An extra 13 pence an hour – if you earn £488.50 per week.

# Offer is an insult (cont.)

be rejected. But the committee also recognised that simple rejection on its own would not win us anything. There must also be a move to ballot for industrial action that goes beyond a single day's walkout, across the whole of local government if we are serious about securing a meaningful pay rise. Obviously, strike action involves some sacrifice and some members may fear that we would be isolated in local government, but increasingly, given the scale of the attack on the whole of the public sector workforce, we must look to forge alliances beyond our own immediate ranks with trade unionists across the public sector as a whole, not least in

The offer affords no comfort to the growing number of members, who have been obliged to apply to the union's national welfare fund. Increasingly, members are completing the 14-page form not with the hope of paying for a holiday, but to meet the costs of rent, the gas bill and weekly shopping. Michael Anderson, who administers our own branch's modest welfare fund reports that since last autumn 'I've dealt with 3 cases where members of staff were days away from eviction.'

teaching, where the two main unions (the NUT and the NAS-UWT) will be launching a joint

programme of action commencing in the North West of England on 27 June, and in the civil service, where the PCS has mounted a rolling campaign of action since mid-March. Much as we need to improve our union density through the recruitment of new members, we also need to demonstrate boldness and determination to rekindle the type of united mass action that we witnessed all too briefly during the pensions dispute on 30 November 2011, where a million or more people were involved. In Scotland UNISON members have already decisively rejected a 1% offer and are moving towards an industrial action ballot.

## Visit the branch website – and join if you are not yet a member!

Keep informed of important news on your pay and conditions on the Camden UNISON website at [www.camdenunison.org.uk](http://www.camdenunison.org.uk) UNISON is by far the largest union on the council with 3,300 members. If you want to see a fight over pay

and a defence of terms and conditions you need to join. Now is the best time! For an easy way to keep up-to-date like us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter at [facebook.com/camdenunison](https://www.facebook.com/camdenunison) and [twitter.com/camdenunison](https://twitter.com/camdenunison)

**Remember that the erosion of real pay has a knock-on effect on pensionable pay, which means that shrinking salaries now will squeeze the value of eventual earnings-related local government pensions.**

## If we do nothing, we can expect only more of the same

● 'UNISON has produced and commissioned reams of research showing how bad the situation really is. As UNISON members we know that because we are living it. Nobody is disputing it. The NJC employers don't dispute it. The government doesn't dispute it. But currently they will not do anything about it. So as it stands we only have ourselves to turn to. If we do nothing, we can expect only more of the same – we cannot just wait and hope for a

change of heart. It isn't going to happen, unless we take the initiative to make it happen collectively. We need to be prepared to campaign and take action for fair pay because we deserve fair recognition of our value and we deserve dignity. The choice is in our own hands.'  
● *From a letter to all UNISON members on NJC pay in the North West from their regional local government service group, which is urging rejection of the 1% offer.*

## Lost Benefits and debt

● ...50 per cent of UNISON members in local government responding to a recent survey, report having lost benefits in the last 12 months and half also report suffering a reduction in benefits. Over a quarter

meanwhile describe their financial situation as being 'in difficulty' or 'struggling to survive' and 42% describe their financial situation as 'not comfortable'. Nearly a quarter have reduced spending on healthcare,

such as prescriptions, dentists and opticians and nearly 60% state they are in debt - nearly 20% report personal debts of £10,000 or more.'  
**Extract from 2013-4 pay claim**

## NPower the tax dodger

● NPower, the UK based energy company has managed to avoid paying millions in corporation tax because it uses accounting tricks which supposedly mean the UK business does not make a profit. Matthew Lay, UNISON National Officer for Energy, said: "The

revelations concerning NPower are nothing less than an absolute scandal of the highest magnitude. The number of families falling into fuel poverty is rising at an alarming rate and yet we have an energy retailer who has not only increased prices substantially over recent

years but is avoiding paying its fair share of corporate tax.' UNISON is calling for a national inquiry into how utility companies operate within the UK.