



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 members in your branch receive a ballot paper from UNISON, we believe they are eligible to vote and eligible 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 will receive 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 by this date

4. Why is UNISON balloting for strike action, shouldn't we be negotiating with 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 members vote?

Members will receive a ballot paper, a freepost return envelope and some additional material explaining UNISON's recommendation. The ballot paper asks members if they are prepared to take part in strike action. Members should put a cross in the box against their choice on the ballot paper. This must be returned to CES (who are running the ballot on UNISON's behalf) by 4 July 2023.

6. Can members vote online?

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

7. Is UNISON recommending how members should vote?

UNISON is recommending members vote YES to strike action.

8. Can new members vote?

New members can join UNISON and vote in the strike ballot up until 21 June 2023. They just need to join UNISON at join.unison.org.uk

9. 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.

10. How can my branch support the campaign?

Tell members and colleagues about the ballot and why they deserve fair pay. If a colleague is not yet a member of UNISON they won't be able to vote, so make sure you tell them to join by 21 June. They can join online - it takes 5 minutes at join.unison.org.uk. Make sure they understand the importance of voting – 50% of members in an employer need to have voted if we're to take any strike action in that employer.

There is a range of materials available to help you spread the word online or in-person – including leaflets, posters, graphics, digital materials and videos. You can share our branded graphics and videos via the hashtag **#PayUp2023**. All of the pay ballot campaign resources can be found at unison.org.uk/payup2023

11. What about members who are concerned their 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.

12. What about members who support children or vulnerable people feel and feel uncomfortable striking?

Most people work in local government and schools because they care about the service users or pupils they work with. But cuts to wages, jobs and services also put the public at risk. UNISON is committed to the best possible public services – and better pay and funding for services benefits everyone.

UNISON will always act in a responsible manner during a period of industrial action. UNISON will provide the employer with notice of a strike so they can ensure plans are in place for their services and that the public receive information in advance of the strike.

13. Is strike pay available if members strike?

Yes. Strike pay is £50 per day from the first day of action. The 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.

14. 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.

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

Members can 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, members can request a replacement ballot paper online via MyUnison at unison.org.uk/myunison

16. 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.

17. Can I use a workplace ballot box to collect completed ballots (in their envelopes) from members and then post them all myself?

No – this is not allowed. Branches should only encourage members to vote, use their freepost return envelopes and put that in the post box. Anything else could be found to be ‘interference’ in the ballot process which could result in the ballot result being void and UNISON being fined.

18. Where can I find out more information?

Please visit unison.org.uk/payup2023 for up to date information.