

Single Status Action News 10 20 March 2008



Setting the Record Straight

Birmingham City Council Joint Trade Unions suspended strike action planned for the 26th of February as the Council agreed to meaningful talks on a list of agreed issues at the heart of the dispute.

Unfortunately, during those intensive talks it became clear that what the council was prepared to offer was unlikely to meet the aspirations of our members.

The Council has offered a mixed package with some very real immediate gains for many of our members. The Council has tried to say that this is a package the trade union negotiators agree with.

To set the record straight, the Joint Trade Union negotiators made it crystal clear that we did not agree with the Councils offer. As member led Unions we did agree however to report directly from the talks to mass members meetings to let our members decide if the offer was acceptable. This was confirmed in our joint statement at the top of the Councils offer document & reads:-

'The two weeks of intensive discussions between the joint trade unions and Birmingham City Council have reached a conclusion resulting in an improved offer which will be relayed to the joint trade unions membership at meetings scheduled for 13 March at the Holte Suite, Aston Villa Football Ground and 13 and 14 March at Cocks Moor Woods Leisure Centre'.

We held 9 meetings over 2 days attended by over 2,500 trade union members, many of whom reported that managers had restricted the numbers of staff allowed to attend. At every meeting the same presentation of the councils' detailed offer was explained in a neutral & balanced way. Members were then invited to ask questions from the floor. As a result of the presentation, subsequent tone of questions & contributions from the floor the joint trade union side asked the members to vote on the following resolution:-

'Are you willing to continue industrial action in the Single Status/Pay & Grading Dispute?'

Our members voted by over 95% in favour of continuing industrial action. The Joint Trade Unions are now planning further days of action in April.

So what exactly is in the Councils offer?

- Deletion of SCP4 (This effectively means that BCC Minimum Wage is £6.18ph)
- 2 extra increments for mainly female groups in the lowest 3 grades whose jobs have been valued close to the top of the grade but were to be paid at the bottom. This means an extra £554pa for General Assistants etc. in Grade 1, £640pa for Cooks, Care Assistants & Home Carers etc. in Grade 2 and an extra £1033 in Grade 3. However these job groups have been valued at £13,357 (Grade 1), £17,154 (Grade 2) & £22,845 (Grade 3) respectively.
- 1 years additional pay protection for people losing pay – but this does not reduce the overall number of losers.
- Imposed monthly pay for over 18,000 staff and a repayable loan to “cushion the blow”.
- A performance related pay policy the type of which even the CBI say is disastrous, especially for equality as it quickly wipes out the link between pay and the measured value of the job.
- A two tier workforce where new starters go to the bottom of the grade meaning that 2 cooks in the same kitchen, doing exactly the same job where one is earning £3,231 more than the other.
- An extension of the Stepped Hardship Scheme for bonus Earners for a further 12months.
- Unfortunately there was limited discussion on many of the other issues like flexibility/mobility, additional payments, bonus & schools but further talks have been promised.

What was the point of spending millions of pounds, and taking several years, to implement a process of evaluating and scoring every job in the Council if future pay will have no relation to it?

How much money will the Council save by recruiting new people and paying them far below the value of the job for many years?

Our members have faced an uncertain future since the beginning of this long process and they know and understand the issues and how they are affected very well. It is clear our members feel the Council has not gone far enough.

Next week we begin our campaign again. Our member's will be doing stalls and leafleting all marginal council wards asking the public to continue supporting us. We will be writing to every councilor to ask for their voting record on this issue and whether they support us, the answers will then be publicized to our members. Our members are ready to take to the streets in the run up to the election. We are also discussing dates for further strikes in April.

The Council, with help from their strategic partner Capita, has a vision of a glossy business like city and the council is investing millions into Capitas' ideas for the future.

We have to make sure that this isn't at the expense of services like our parks, leisure centers, libraries and street repairs. All of these services are central to life in our communities and the council should be investing more into services & the people who provide them.

None of us take this issue lightly – we know the services we provide are essential to the people of this city – however almost three quarters of Council workers are women and three quarters of all Council workers earn far less than the average wage. We are dedicated to the public services we provide and in 2008 it is not unreasonable to expect equal pay for women and fair pay for everyone.