

To: COSLA SJC Joint Secretary
c.c. COSLA Leaders

Date: 17 January 2025

Subject: SJC Pay Claim 2025/26

Colleagues,

SJC Pay Claim 2025

The pay claim outlined below is submitted by UNISON for Local Government workers covered by SJC conditions for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

Summary of claim

Our claim is for

- **A one-year settlement** from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.
- **A 6.5% increase** to all spinal column points and related allowances, crucial for restoring pay levels and making significant progress towards UNISON claim for a minimum pay rate of £15 per hour.
- **Parity with other local government bargaining groups**, ensuring no less than equal treatment.

This claim is not just a request but a necessary step to address the severe erosion of pay and to ensure fair compensation for all Local Government workers.

This claim is set at a level which recognises the following key points

The current level of RPI, currently 3.5%. This follows two years of extreme rises in the cost of living - 11.6% in 2022 and 9.7% in 2023.¹

Latest Treasury average of independent inflation forecasts (Dec 24) predict an RPI of 3.7% in 2025

An adequate pay settlement is necessary not just as fair recompense for work done, but also to address growing recruitment and retention problems across councils.

¹ ONS Consumer Price inflation Jan 15th, 2025,
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/consumerpriceinflation/december2024>

1. A settlement that runs for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026

We are not inclined to seek a deal extending beyond a single year. We would like to highlight last year's settlement, which included a commitment to presenting a credible offer for 2025/26 before 1 April 2025, and subsequent pay offers in future years.

2. A fair settlement for all council staff

We seek an increase which will deliver a significant increase for all members of council staff.

- We therefore expect an increase which is greater than the current rate of inflation (RPI) and contributes to restoring the value of staff wages.
- We wish to see tangible progress towards delivering on previously agreed movement towards a minimum £15ph.

The falling value of pay.

At no point since 2010 has the pay award for the bulk of staff exceeded the rate of inflation (RPI). In addition to this many staff are impacted on by price rises which far exceed the indexed rate of inflation.

- Average 2-bedroom properties rents in Scotland rose by an average 6.2% in the year to end September 2024 (This represents an above index level increase in 17 out of 18 Broad Rental Market Areas, highest increases were in Lothian 14.0% and West Lothian 12.2%. The one area where there was a decrease, Glasgow – 2.4% had a 22.3% increase in 2023.²)
- Mortgage interest payments have increased by 17.6%.³
- Nursery place fees Nursery places have risen for Under 2's by 6.9% and for 2-year-olds by 6.8%.

3. No less than parity with other local government bargaining groups.

It is, we are led to believe, COSLA policy that there should be parity of pay settlements between different local government bargaining groups. We wish to make it clear that we expect COSLA to treat SJC staff in accordance with this policy.

² Scottish Government
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/private-sector-rent-statistics-scotland-2010-to-2024/>

³ Office for National Statistics
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/timeseries/czcr/mm23>

4. Sustaining Services

The declining value of pay is not only reducing living standards outside the workplace but is also severely impacting the work environment. Staff are increasingly compelled to leave, and vacancies are becoming harder to fill, leading to a real and growing recruitment crisis in local government.

The Improvement Service benchmarking report highlights significant workforce shortages in several statutory local government professional roles. These shortages directly affect critical statutory areas, including planning, environmental health, trading, and building standards. The report explicitly states, "staff are choosing to leave local government for better-paid jobs in other sectors to cope with rising inflation." In social care, minimum pay rates are described as "not competitive in the wider labour market."

The declining value of pay is a direct contributor to this crisis. In the face of increasing demand and inadequate staffing, the situation often creates "intolerable work pressure for staff," as noted by the Improvement Service. ⁴

5. Early commencement of negotiations

This claim is submitted in good time for it to be considered and an offer made in time for a 1 April implementation. We would point to a commitment to a less protracted negotiation period as having been agreed last year.

6. Fair funding for local government

UNISON has been, and will continue to be, vocal and active in campaigning for a fair financial settlement for local government. One which delivers locally elected authorities both greater resources and control over how it is spent.

Whilst we are happy to work with COSLA in advocating for an improved financial settlement from the Scottish Government it is the role of COSLA to deliver the necessary resources. It is unfair to expect our members, the services they provide, and the communities they live in to pay the price of any failure on the part of COSLA in their negotiations with the Scottish Government.

⁴Improvement Service
https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0029/47828/Benchmarking-Overview-Report-2024.pdf

7. Conclusion

There can be no doubt that SJC workers have seen the value of their earnings fall considerably over recent years and evidence suggests that they are also falling behind earnings for comparable jobs

Local government staff are delivering for their communities. To invest in a fair pay deal for council staff is to invest in the services those communities rely on.

We look forward to an early consideration and swift response to this claim.

Best wishes

DAVID O'CONNOR
Joint Secretary
UNISON