PAY CLAIM FOR 2027/28
SUBMITTED BY UNISON TO COSLA

1. INTRODUCTION

This pay claim is submitted by UNISON on behalf of all SJC conditioned staff across Scotland.

The claim is set at a level that we believe recognises the following key points:

- Over recent years, the cost of living has surged to a 40-year high, causing deep cuts in the value of staff wages which continue to hit the workforce hard. While the inflation rate has fallen back since those peaks, it has surged once again over the last year;
- Appropriate reward is needed to sustain the morale and productivity of staff in their crucial role of delivering high quality services;
- Appropriate reward is needed for the increased workload and stress placed on staff;
- Average earnings and pay settlements continue to rise at relatively high levels across the economy, adding to the problem of rates running ahead of those received by SJC conditioned staff over recent years and increasing the likelihood of recruitment and retention problems in the long term;

2. SUMMARY OF CLAIM

We are seeking:

- A £1.60 per hour or 7% increase, whichever is greater, on all spinal column points and allowances.
- COSLA commits to work jointly with trade unions to oppose cuts to jobs, services and local government funding including threats arising from the Scottish Government public sector reform agenda.
- To ensure there is parity of esteem for SJC workers COSLA agrees to negotiate an overarching organisational change approach that has the same safeguards as the NHS Scotland policy.

3. FALLING VALUE OF PAY

Wages in Local Government have not kept up with inflation for many years and in recent years the steepest rises in the cost of living facing workers in over 40 years have occurred - 11.6% in 2022 and 9.7% in 2023[1].

The table below looks at the disparity between inflation increases and what private sector pay has risen by since 2009.

SJC Point	CPI	RPI	Average Private Sector Pay
30	1.79%	17.08%	9.51%
50	8.1%	22.41%	15.32%
70	10.6%	24.52%	17.62%
90	11.52%	25.3%	18.47%

This clearly shows that UNISON members pay is falling behind in all metrics and that urgent action to correct this trend should be taken. This is borne out by survey results which show 94% of UNISON members feel that their pay has not kept up with the cost of living,

Inflation is still running at 3%, with many core expenditures showing much higher surges[2]:

- Petrol and oil up 21.8%
- Vehicle tax and insurance up 12.6%
- Water charges up 8.7%[3]
- Phone charges 6.5%
- Council tax / rates Band D up 7.7%
- Nursery charges up 5%
- Mortgage interest payments up 4.2%
- Private rent up 1.3%[4] and social rent up by 4.7%[5]

And forecasters are predicting that inflation will escalate again to average 4.3% over 2026 and then 3.9% over 2027[6].

Looking over a longer timescale, the last decade and a half has seen enormous jumps in the basic costs shown below[7].

Expenditure Item	Mortgage interest payments	Bus & coach fares	Electricity	Gas
Price rise 2010 - 25	140%	108%	148%	98%

[1] Office for National Statistics, Consumer Price Inflation Reference Tables, December 2024
[2] Office for National Statistics, Consumer Price Inflation June 2026, published July 2026, Office for National Statistics, and Coram Family and Childcare, Childcare Survey, March 2026
[3] Scottish Water
[4] Office for National Statistics, Private Rent & House Prices, July 2026
[5] Sanctuary Scotland
[6] HM Treasury, Forecasts for the UK Economy, July 2026
[7] Office for National Statistics, UK Consumer Price Inflation Tables, December 2010 and December 2025

For the value of staff wages not to fall back even further, they must at least keep pace with rises in the cost of living.

4. MORALE UNDER THREAT

Working against a background of tight budgets, staff have been facing greater workload pressures. The resulting increased stress puts the morale of the workforce at risk and poses a long-term threat to Council's across Scotlands ability to provide a consistent quality of service.

With over half of UNISON members sitting at the top of their grade a fair cost of living increase is essential to ensure that staff feel valued, particularly as yet more cuts are being indicated as part of the Scottish Government's Public Sector Reform work.

Recruitment and retention is already an issue in certain areas of Local Government; SOLACE and SPDS themselves report recruitment challenges across a range of roles, mainly but not exclusively in professional roles such as Mental Heath Officers, Planners and Procurement. They cite competition from other sectors and pay as being an issue being reported by 90%+ of members. It is clear that these issues will only intensify as pay continues to fall behind inflation and other sectors.

5. CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt that SJC conditioned staff have seen the real value of their earnings fall considerably over recent years and evidence suggests that they are also falling far behind earnings for comparable jobs in other sectors.

Combined with these developments, the last year has seen intensified pressures placed on staff, with consequent effects on the workforce which can only damage retention and productivity.

Therefore, this pay claim represents a very reasonable estimate of the reward staff deserve for their dedication, skill and hard work and the minimum improvement in pay needed to maintain workforce morale for delivering consistently high-quality services.