

Workforce Report

Purpose of Report

For information.

Is this report confidential? No

Summary

To update the Fire Commission on workforce matters in relation to industrial relations and more widely.

LGA Plan Theme: Support to the LG Workforce

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to note the issues set out in the paper.

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Workforce report

1. This report updates the Fire Commission on workforce matters in relation to industrial relations within the Fire sector and across the local government workforce more widely.
2. The LGA provides the employers' secretariat to a number of national negotiating bodies and the National Employers' Organisation for School Teachers (NEOST). An update on key issues across the main groups is provided below.

NJC for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services (Grey Book)

3. We continue to make progress in relation to the additional aspects of the 2023 pay agreement which resulted in the creation of two joint working groups, one to review the retained duty system pay and rewards package, and the other to establish a continued discussion around pay structure and progression, including the continual professional scheme.
4. Both groups share the intention of concluding their work within 8 months. They are not decision-making bodies, but they are designed to support and inform the work of the NJC, allowing for wider consultation and a discursive environment in which to exchange views and create shared understanding and consensus where possible. Both working groups have held been holding monthly meetings. The groups are consciously confidential working groups, but it is anticipated that the January meetings will pull together reports to go to the February NJC. It will be up to the NJC to progress matters from there.
5. A further aspect of the pay agreement included a commitment to undertake a joint evaluation process to inform the NJC in considering the matter of the pay differential that exists for emergency fire and rescue control employees. Work is underway to progress this issue, with options are currently being explored as to which organisation(s) should undertake the work.
6. Finally (in relation to the 2023 pay agreement) both parties underlined their commitment to developing the work of the fire and rescue service within the pay agreement. The Joint Secretaries maintain that commitment and continue to progress this work, with colleagues across the sector.
7. On 2nd May 2023, The Fire Brigades Union wrote to the Employers Side Secretary submitting a claim to extend the current arrangements for maternity leave within the Grey Book to 12 months on full pay following the date of birth.

The claim went on to state that pre-birth provisions must also be addressed, ensuring that expectant mothers are protected from the industry's related exposures. This was discussed at the NJC, with the employers side indicating a clear willingness to explore these issues, but requested further information should be gathered to support full consideration. This issue is therefore ongoing.

NJC for Local Government Services (Green Book)

8. The National Employers unanimously agreed to make a pay offer for April 2023-24 of £1,925 (or 3.88 per cent for those above the pay spine for the main 'Green Book'), which was made to the unions in February 2023. On 17 August, the National Employers again reaffirmed the pay offer as full and final and urged the unions to now settle this year's pay round, in response to another request from them on 16 August for an improved offer. The increase in the national pay bill associated with this offer is estimated to be over £1 billion or 6.42 per cent.
9. In rejecting the pay offer, UNISON decided to immediately ballot its members on industrial action. GMB and Unite first consulted their members and on receipt of a majority view to reject the offer from both memberships then decided to proceed with industrial action ballots.
10. UNISON's disaggregated strike ballots closed on 4 July. Overall, most votes were cast in favour of strike action. However, of the 4,700 employers that were balloted, fewer than one fifth achieved the 50 per cent turn out threshold. Unite has begun taking industrial action in a small number of councils. GMB is conducting disaggregated industrial action ballots of its NJC 'Green Book' and JNC Craft 'Red Book' members in some councils and schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The strike ballots opened on 12 September and will close on 24 October.
11. UNISON confirmed on 22 August that it will not be pursuing industrial action and will seek to progress towards agreement as soon as possible, however, it will need to engage with GMB and Unite to make that possible.

Police Staff Council

12. The Police Staff Council, which covers police staff in England and Wales, has reached a pay agreement for 2023. This is a 7 per cent pay increase on all pay points and Standby Allowance with effect from 1 September 2023. In addition, the agreement includes a review of the lower quartile of the PSC pay spine during the 2023-24 pay year. This review will take place on a without prejudice basis in the PSC Pay and Reward Working

Local authority craftworkers ('Red Book') Pay 2023-24

13. The Trade Union Side comprises Unite and GMB. Both unions continue to reject the employers' full and final offer of £1,925. In line with the approach being taking with "Green book" members, Unite is taking strike action and GMB is balloting.

Local Authority Chief Officers

14. Agreement was reached on the 2023 pay award of 3.5 per cent on 5 May 2023

Local Authority Chief Executives

15. The Staff Side has rejected the employers' full and final offer of 3.5 per cent but has said it will review its position once the main NJC pay deal has been reached.

Youth and Community Workers

16. The Staff Side has submitted its pay and conditions claim for 2023. The headline claim is for an increase of RPI plus two per cent across all grades and in addition there are a range of health and work life balance elements. The National Employers is undertaking a consultation of local authorities on the claim.

Soulbury Committee

17. The National Employers remains in dispute with the Soulbury Officers' Side on pay for 2022. Further negotiations are taking place at Joint Secretarial level in an effort to reach a settlement.

Teachers Pay 2023-24

18. The publication of the **STRB's 33rd Report** in July 2023 was aligned with the publication of a [joint statement made by the Government and the education unions NEU, NASUWT, NAHT and ASCL](#).

19. The headlines of the proposed pay award are a 6.5 per cent uplift to all pay points and allowances for both teachers and leaders, apart from a 6.8 per cent increase to the starting salary in the London Fringe area and a 7.1 per cent increase to the minimum starting salary for teachers in the England range. As a result, the minimum starting salary in England is £30,000, meeting the Government's commitment aspiration.

20. The teachers' pay award is being funded via an additional £525m in 2023-24 and £900m in 2024-25. In addition, the [Secretary of State announced](#) an extension to the support currently available to individual schools facing the most difficult financial circumstances by up to £40m. It is envisaged that this will provide

additional funding to strengthen the existing financial support available to schools.

21. The unions (NAHT, ASCL, NEU and NASUWT) recommended members accept the offer, which they did following indicative ballots, thus ending any further industrial action related to the dispute on teachers' pay.
22. However, NASUWT has notified a significant number of councils and schools that they have a legal mandate for industrial action and will be starting a period of 'action short of strike action' from 18 September 2023 as a result of a dispute over workload and working hours.

T Levels support programme

23. The LGA Workforce Team has extended the LGA T level support programme until 31 March 2024. The LGA have supported over 50 councils through the programme helping over 100 students access Industry placements in local government. The T level 16–19-year-old T level qualifications continue to be part of a wide pathway into local government employment or career choices. We are seeing T level students progressing from their T level course onto apprenticeships in councils. We are working closely with the Department of Education to help councils work with their local further education college with regional workshops being planned in early 2024.

Minimum Service Levels Act

24. Following the passing of the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023, the Government is consulting on draft guidance on issuing "work notices" under the Act. As with the previous consultation, the LGA Economy and Resources Board (ERB) will respond on behalf of the LGA, but the views of Lead members of the Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) were sought in advance of the ERB meeting.

Culture in the Fire and Rescue Service

25. The Inclusive Fire Service Group met twice in June and July, in joint agreement that this group (which was designed to be stood up and down as necessary) should re-establish itself in the light of the many challenges identified across Fire and Rescue Services. The group is working on a statement of intent, and to refresh their improvement recommendations. This UK-wide group is unique in the fire service in that it is comprised of employer and employee interests on the NJC, senior managers (NFCC) and employee representative bodies (FBU, FOA, FRSA) and remains keen to engage with all stakeholders.

Employment Law Updates

26. Advisory Bulletins Advisory Bulletin 715 provides an overview of the latest employment law issues, including religion and belief discrimination (looking at the Higgs v Farmor's School EAT), and covers the consultation on the Acas draft Code of Practice on handling flexible working requests as well as the usual employment law timetable.

Financial Implications

27. Any cost implications will also need to be included in the work of the NJC for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services' joint working groups.

Equalities implications

28. Equalities issues are taken into account in all workforce issues.

Next steps

29. Workforce issues will continue to be progressed as set out above.