



**Trade Union Side of the National Joint Council for Local Government Services:  
England, Wales and Northern Ireland**

## **NJC PAY CLAIM 2026-27**

**This NJC pay claim for 2026-27 is made by the Joint Trade Union Side (UNISON, GMB and UNITE) to the NJC National Employers.**

**Our claim is for:**

- An increase of at least £3,000 or 10% (whichever is greater) across all NJC spinal column points\*
- A minimum pay rate of £15 an hour for the NJC pay spine

**In addition:**

- A two hour reduction in the working week
- An increase of one day annual leave
- The ability of all school support staff to take a day of paid leave during term time
- The abolition of Level 1 Teaching Assistant role and instead all Level 1 role holders be moved onto Level 2

*\*Based on a one-year settlement, for a multi-year offer please see chapter 3*

28 NOV 2025

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## **1. KEY POINTS IN OUR CLAIM**

### **MULTIYEAR SETTLEMENTS**

- Headline claim based on a one-year settlement: £3,000 or 10% (whichever is greater) on all spinal column points
- Open to three-year deal\* aligned with multi-year local authority funding:
  - Year 1: £3,000 or 10% + £15 minimum hourly rate
  - Year 2: RPI + 3%
  - Year 3: RPI + 2%

*\*Requires review of NJC pay spine and reopener clause for economic volatility*

### **ECONOMIC BACKGROUND**

- NJC pay has lost 26% real value since 2010, worth approx. £13,800 per worker
- Cost of living has surged: water bills +26%, energy +13%, rents +5.7%, food +5.9% (2025)
- Inflation remains high: RPI 4.6%, CPI 3.8% (Aug 2025)
- Forecast RPI: 4% (2025), 3.5% (2026)
- 50.2% of this pay claim's cost would be recouped by central government via tax and reduced benefits

### **COMPARING NJC PAY**

- NJC pay has lagged behind private sector for a decade
- Current NJC minimum (£12.65/hr) is close to National Minimum Wage (£12.21/hr) and below Real Living Wage (£13.45 UK, £14.80 London)
- SCP 2–5 fall below Real Living Wage

### **ACHIEVING A £15 PER HOUR MINIMUM RATE**

- Current claim lifts lowest point to £14.21/hr; additional bottom-loading proposed would exceed £15/hr for SCP 2–9.
- Reduces in-work poverty, improves retention, boosts morale, lowers recruitment costs.

### **RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CRISIS**

- Workforce shrunk by 552,000 (31.5%) since 2012; pay bill down 24% since 2014/15.
- 94% of councils report recruitment/retention difficulties; 1 in 5 TA posts unfilled.
- Ageing workforce: <5% under 25; 87,000 retirements annually.
- Drivers: low pay, poor morale, heavy workloads; high staff turnover

### **PAY-RELATED CONDITIONS OF WORK**

- A two-hour reduction in the working week
- An increase of one day annual leave
- The ability of all school support staff to take a day of paid leave during term time
- The abolition of Level 1 Teaching Assistant role and instead all Level 1 role holders be moved onto Level 2

### **EQUALITY IMPACT**

- Gender pay gap persists: women earn 3% less (mean), 8% less (median); 73% of workforce is female.
- Low-paid roles (schools, social care) disproportionately filled by women and minorities
- Ageing workforce and undervaluation of care roles compound equality issues

## 2. CONTEXT OF OUR CLAIM

Since 2010, NJC workers have experienced a sustained and significant decline in the real value of their wages. When adjusted for inflation and the rising cost of living, the average NJC worker has lost approximately 26% of the value of their pay. This erosion has had a profound impact on the financial wellbeing of local authority workers, many of whom are now struggling to meet basic household expenses.

The long-term decline in pay has been exacerbated by recent economic shocks, most notably the ongoing cost of living crisis. Sharp increases in energy bills, food prices, housing costs, and other essentials have far outpaced NJC pay awards. As a result, many workers are facing real hardship, with some forced to rely on food banks or take on second jobs to make ends meet.

NJC pay increases have consistently failed to keep up with inflation. This has led to a growing gap between earnings and the actual cost of living. The lower end of the NJC pay spine is now alarmingly close to the statutory National Minimum Wage and falls below the Real Living Wage, which is independently calculated based on what people need to live.

Local authorities are also feeling the effects of this pay crisis. The number of employees in England's councils has been falling year on year, with many councils struggling to recruit and retain staff. Low pay is a key factor driving this trend, particularly in essential frontline roles such as care work, refuse collection, and school support.

The NJC trade union side are calling for the immediate introduction of a £15 per hour minimum rate within the NJC pay spine. This is a vital step toward ensuring that the lowest-paid workers – who have borne the brunt of the cost of living crisis – are paid a fair and decent wage for the essential work they do.

The introduction of multi-year funding settlements for local government presents a valuable opportunity. With greater financial certainty, local authorities are better placed to plan and budget for fair pay increases. This stability should be used to invest in the workforce and reverse the damage caused by years of underfunding.

Investing in public sector pay is not only fair – it is economically sound. Around half the cost of this pay claim would be recouped by central government through increased tax revenues and reduced spending on in-work benefits. Fair pay boosts local economies and reduces the burden on public services.

Our headline claim for £3,000 or 10% (whichever is greater) across all NJC spinal column points would provide the greatest benefit to the lowest-paid workers and begin to restore the value of NJC pay that has been lost over the past decade and more.

The NJC trade union side believes this claim is both fair and appropriate. It reflects the scale of the challenge facing NJC workers and the need for urgent action. We are calling on the employers to engage in meaningful negotiations and to recognise the vital contribution of local government staff.

### **3. MULTI-YEAR SETTLEMENTS**

While our headline claim is based on a one-year pay settlement, the NJC Trade Union side also recognises that the employers may wish to consider a multi-year pay settlement. This reflects a broader shift in public sector financial planning, particularly the Government's commitment to move towards multi-year funding settlements for local authorities. In this context, it makes sense for NJC pay arrangements to align with longer-term budget planning.

A multi-year pay deal could offer greater certainty over staffing costs, enabling better workforce planning, and potentially reducing the administrative burden of annual negotiations. However, such arrangements must also protect the interests of staff, ensuring that pay keeps pace with inflation and economic conditions.

In the event of a multi-year settlement being proposed, the NJC Trade Union Side would seek the following structure to a three-year agreement:

- Year 1: £3,000 or 10% (whichever is greater) on all spinal column points, alongside the introduction of a £15 minimum hourly rate
- Year 2: An increase of RPI + 3%
- Year 3: An increase of RPI + 2%

We would also seek guarantees that any multi-year settlement would be accompanied by a review of the NJC pay spine being completed and agreed by all parties.

#### **Safeguards and Review Mechanisms**

Any multi-year agreement must include robust safeguards to protect against unforeseen economic developments. Specifically, the NJC Trade Union Side would require a reopener clause, allowing for a return to meaningful negotiations in the event of:

- Significant economic instability
- Volatile or unexpectedly high inflation

This clause is essential to ensure that staff are not locked into a settlement that becomes inadequate or unfair due to changing circumstances.

In summary, while the NJC Trade Union Side remains committed to securing a strong one-year pay deal, we are open to exploring multi-year arrangements that deliver fairness, stability, and flexibility—provided they include real-terms pay growth and protections against economic volatility.

## 4. ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

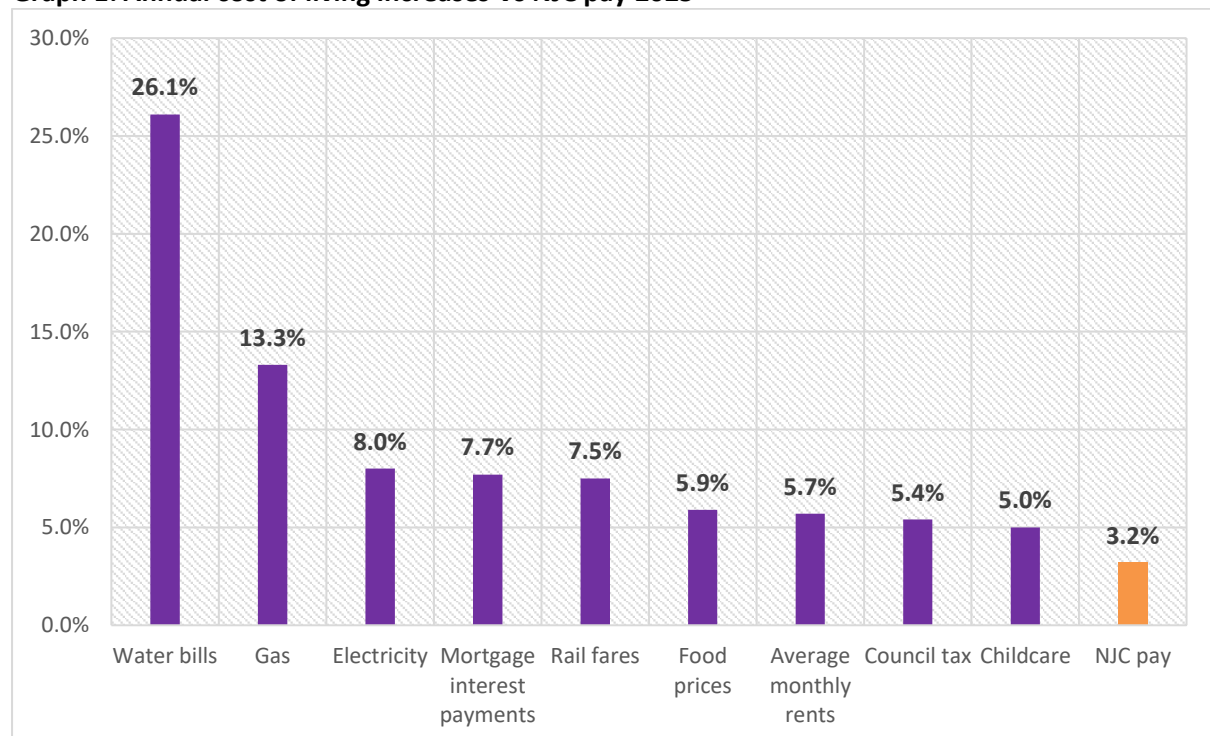
### 4.1 Cost of living crisis continues

Over 2025, household costs continued to overtake NJC pay increases for the same period. Water bills rose by 26.1%, followed by gas and electricity charges at 13.3% and 8% respectively. Mortgage interest payments increased by 7.7% while average monthly rents rose 5.7% over the year to August 2025. Rail fares increased by 7.5%, food prices by 5.9% and council tax by 5.4%. Childcare increased by 5.0%.

The cost of childcare increased by nearly 5% since 2024 for a part time nursery place in Britain. The cost rises were even sharper in Scotland and Wales.

Over the same period, NJC pay rose only 3.2%, as shown in the graph below:

**Graph 1: Annual cost of living increases Vs NJC pay 2025**



These increases have left many NJC workers relying on borrowing to cover the additional costs of their household bills. Even when inflation lowers, historic debt is carried forward, with interest. Low pay and increasing household bills are pushing our members further into debt.

### 4.2 Value of NJC pay

When measured against the overall rise in inflation since 2009/10, NJC staff are losing out. On average, staff have lost approximately 26% from the value of their pay since 2010, worth (on average) more than £13,800.

When analysed by job role, even those on lower incomes (who have benefited from bottom loading in some pay awards) are worse off than they were in 2009/10.

**Table 1: Real (RPI) changes to selected spine points 2009/10 to 2025/26\***

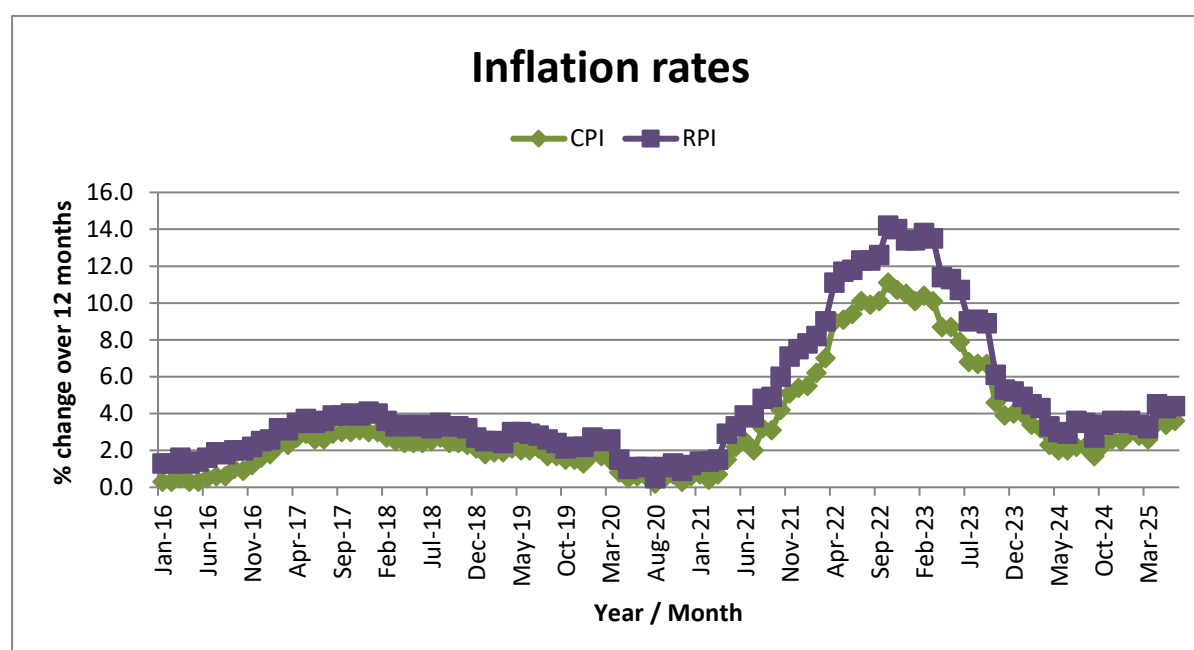
Real (RPI) changes to selected spine points 2009/10 to 2025/26					
Occupation	Old Spine Point	2009/10	2025/26	New Spine Point	Real change (%)
Cleaner	6	£12,489	£24,413	2	-0.3
Customer Services Officer	11	£14,733	£24,796	3	-14.2
Refuse And Recycling Collector	13	£15,444	£25,185	4	-16.9
Library Assistant	16	£16,440	£25,989	6	-19.4
Teaching Assistant (Level 2)	17	£16,830	£25,989	6	-21.3
Crematorium Officer	18	£17,161	£26,403	7	-21.6
Qualified Residential Care Worker	21	£19,126	£28,142	11	-25.0
HLTA	28	£23,708	£33,699	22	-27.5
Librarian	31	£26,276	£36,363	25	-29.4
Environmental Health Officer	34	£28,636	£39,152	28	-30.3
Access to Housing Officer	38	£31,754	£42,839	32	-31.2
Social Worker	36	£30,011	£40,777	30	-30.7
Accountant	41	£34,549	£46,142	35	-31.9
Children's Residential Manager	46	£38,961	£51,356	40	-32.8

*\*A full version of this table (for all SCPs) is included as appendix 1.*

#### **4.2 Falling value in NJC Pay**

Inflation exploded over 2021 and into 2022, hitting the highest rates seen across the economy in four decades. Over most of 2023 and into 2024, rates were in decline, but a resurgence has seen the figures climb to 4.6% for RPI, 3.8% for CPI and 4.1% for CPIH by August 2025.

**Graph 2: UK Inflation Rates 2016-2025<sup>1</sup>**



Between the start of 2010 and the end of 2025, the cost of living, as measured by the Retail Prices Index, rose by approximately 82.4%. Over the same period, NJC pay rose by 39.6%

#### 4.3 Impact on real wages

Recent years have seen the steepest rises in the cost of living facing workers in over 40 years - 11.6% in 2022 and 9.7% in 2023<sup>2</sup>. This accelerated the decline in the value of NJC pay.

NJC workers have seen a 26% decline in value of their wages since 2010, which means that 2024 wages are worth approximately £13,800 less than in 2010.

**Table 2: NJC Pay Awards Vs Rise in cost of living (RPI)<sup>3</sup>**

Year	% Annual Growth in RPI	NJC Pay awards since 2010
2010	4.6	0.00%
2011	5.2	0.00%
2012	3.2	0.00%
2013	3.0	1.00%
2014	2.4	1.10%
2015	1.0	1.10%
2016	1.8	1%
2017	3.6	1%
2018	3.3	2%
2019	2.6	2%
2020	1.5	2.80%

<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics, UK Consumer Price Inflation: November 2024

<sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics, UK Consumer Price Inflation: December 2024

<sup>3</sup> Incomes Data Research, 2024



<b>2021</b>	4.1	1.80%
<b>2022</b>	11.6	7.00%
<b>2023</b>	9.7	6.40%
<b>2024</b>	3.6	3.60%

#### 4.4 Main factors affecting inflation

The changes in the price of components of the Retail Prices Index over the year to August 2025 are shown in the table below.

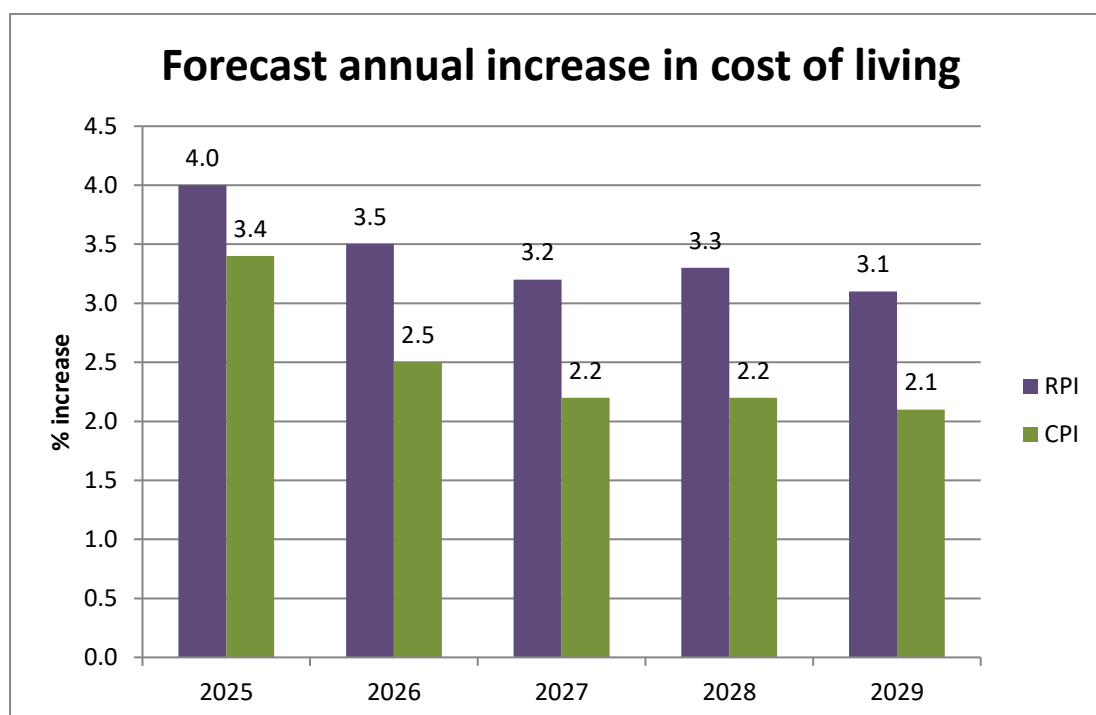
**Table 3: Price changes to RPI commodities over the year to August 2025**

Item	Average % increase to August 2025
<b>Food and catering</b>	<b>5.7</b>
<b>Alcohol and tobacco</b>	<b>5.2</b>
<b>Housing and household expenditure</b>	<b>5.0</b>
<b>Personal expenditure</b>	<b>4.4</b>
<b>Travel and leisure</b>	<b>2.8</b>
<b>Consumer durables</b>	<b>2.7</b>
<b>All goods</b>	<b>3.3</b>
<b>All services</b>	<b>5.7</b>
<b>All items</b>	<b>4.6</b>

#### 4.5 Forecast inflation rates

The Treasury average of independent forecasts states that RPI inflation will average 4% over 2025 and remain at 3.5% over 2026, as per the pattern shown in the graph below. These annual rates show the rate at which pay rises would be needed for wages just to maintain their current value.

**Graph 3: Forecast Annual increase in cost of living<sup>4</sup>**



#### **4.6 Economic benefits of increasing local government pay**

Research conducted by Landman Economics finds that the gross cost to local government of meeting the 2026/27 NJC pay claim is £3,309m in total. This includes £2,877m in salary costs, plus an additional cost of £432m in higher employer NICs.

Central government receives the £432m in higher employer NICs. Central government also benefits from additional receipts of employee NICs (£192m) and income tax (£650m) as well as reduced benefit, tax credit and Universal Credit expenditure (£74m). In total, central government saves £1,347m.

The net cost to the public sector as a whole (both local and central government) would be £1,961m. If indirect taxation is then factored in, central government recoups a further £314m, reducing the net cost to £1,648m. In total, just over half (50.2%) of the cost to local government of meeting the pay claim accrues to central government.

**Table 4: Cost of meeting the 2026/27 NJC pay Cost/Saving<sup>5</sup>**

Item	Cost/Saving
Gross cost to local government	£2,877m
+ Employer's National Insurance	£432m
<b>= Total cost to local government</b>	<b>£3,309m</b>
Employer's National Insurance (as above)	£432m
+ Employee's National Insurance	£192m
+ Income Tax	£650m
+ Reduced benefit/tax credit/Universal Credit expenditure	£74m

<sup>4</sup> HM Treasury Forecasts for the UK Economy, November 2024

<sup>5</sup> Landman Economics, 2025

<b>= Total central government savings</b>	<b>£1,347m</b>
<b>Net public sector cost:</b>	
<b>= £3,309m - £1,347m</b>	<b>£1,961m</b>
<b>+ Indirect taxes</b>	<b>£314m</b>
<b>Net public sector cost after indirect taxes:</b>	
<b>= £1,961m - £314m</b>	<b>£1,648m</b>

This research demonstrates the significant savings to government of increasing local government workers' pay. Increased tax contributions along with reduced benefit expenditure result in central government recovering around half of the cost borne by local government.

With just over half the cost of this pay claim recouped by the government, the logic in properly funding local government pay is clear. This reinforces our calls for proper local authority funding for pay from central government.

## 5. COMPARING NJC PAY

### 5.1 Pay settlements

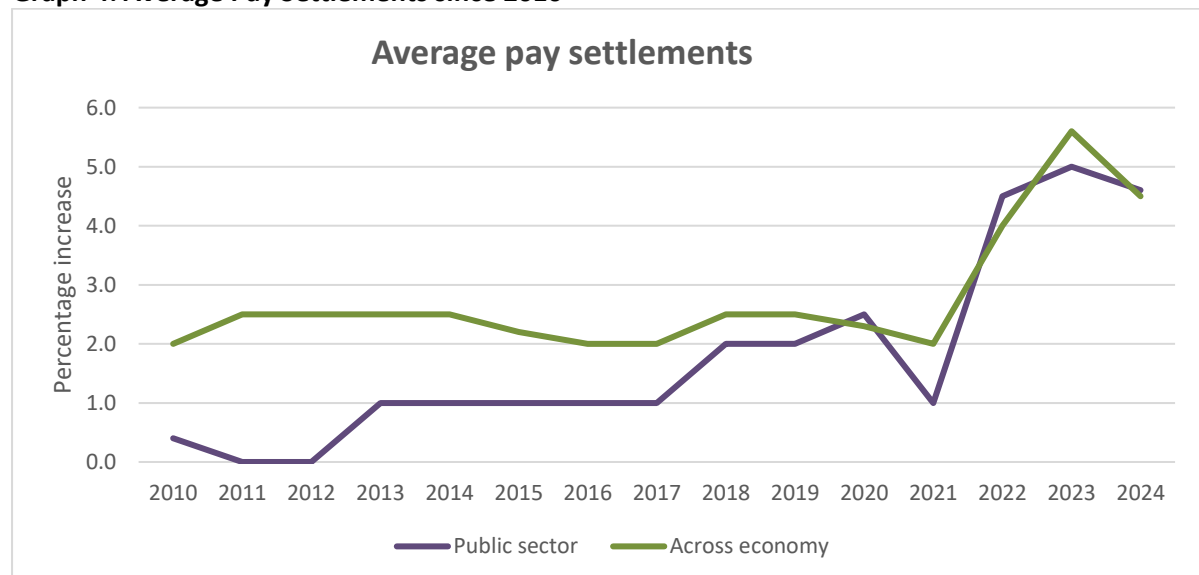
Pay settlements in the private sector have almost consistently run ahead of the public sector since 2010. While the pay freeze was in place across the public sector (2011-12), the private sector saw average rises around 2.5%, and the private sector continued to outpace the public sector by at least double the public sector rate during the ensuing period of the 1% pay cap (2013-17).

Since 2018, the gap started closing and over 2020 the public sector briefly overtook the private sector for the first time in approximately a decade.

The state's imposition of a pay cap pushed the public rate back down to half the economy average again in 2021.

Since then, the rates have maintained approximate parity as per the graph below. However, public sector and NJC pay are now carrying a decade's worth of lost value – which only a significant, above inflation pay award could recover.

**Graph 4: Average Pay Settlements since 2010<sup>6</sup>**



The table below shows how average pay settlements compare with NJC pay awards. Between 2010 and 2019, NJC pay awards fell significantly behind average pay awards across the whole economy. There was some improvement after this, specifically in 2020, 2022 and 2024 - but has not been enough to recover the cumulative loss endured between 2010 and 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Incomes Data Research, 2024

**Table 5: Average pay settlements VS NJC pay awards, 2010-2024**

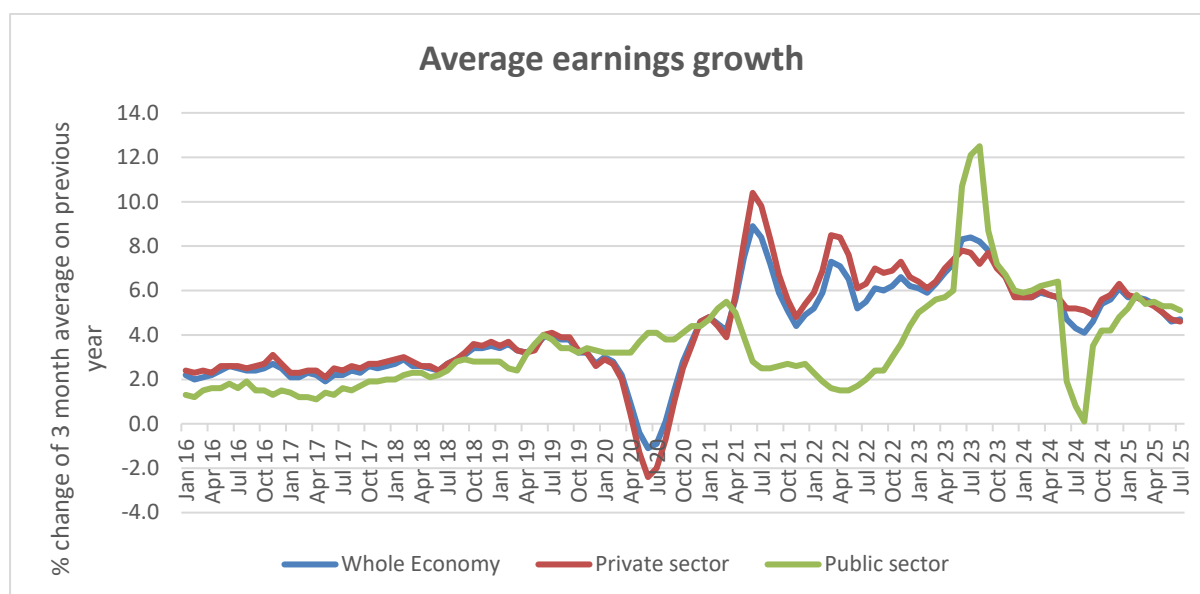
Year	Average pay settlements	NJC Pay Awards
2010	2.00%	0.00%
2011	2.50%	0.00%
2012	2.50%	0.00%
2013	2.50%	1.00%
2014	2.50%	1.10%
2015	2.20%	1.10%
2016	2.00%	1%
2017	2.00%	1%
2018	2.50%	2%
2019	2.50%	2%
2020	2.30%	2.80%
2021	2.00%	1.80%
2022	4.00%	7.00%
2023	5.60%	6.40%
2024	4.50%	3.20%

## 5.2 Average earnings

Since 2021, average earnings growth has been running at relatively high rates and average earnings growth across the economy hit 4.7% in July 2025.

As in the case of pay settlements, a gap between public and private rates has been a persistent feature of the economy for more than a decade. 2020 saw the first sustained period since 2010 when the public sector has been running ahead of the private sector. But faster growth in the private sector reasserted itself strongly over 2021 and 2022, before falling back. Latest figures show the private sector at 4.6% and public sector at 5.1% in July 2025.

**Graph 5: Average earnings growth 2016-2024<sup>7</sup>**



The Office for Budgetary Responsibility Economic and Fiscal Outlook published in October 2024 estimated that earnings growth will average 3.6% over 2025.

#### **5.4 NJC pay vs the wider labour market**

The value of the UK economy (GDP) is predicted to show a small annual growth of 1.3% over 2025 and continue on a similar path at 1.1% over 2026.<sup>8</sup>

Recruitment and retention pressures on employers have been running at relatively high levels over recent years, though generally easing of late.

The unemployment rate has been in decline from a peak of 8.5% in 2011, dropping to as low as 3.6% in 2002. It has now climbed to 4.7%<sup>9</sup> in the three months to July 2025, with the number of unemployed people per vacancy running at 2.3<sup>10</sup>.

Forecasts put the average unemployment rate at 4.9% over 2026<sup>11</sup>. If correct, this would be the highest rate in a decade.

Meanwhile, the Office for National Statistics indicates that the vacancy rate across the economy has been on a steady decline from 4.1% recorded in 2022 to stand at 2.3% in the three months to August 2025<sup>12</sup>.

Sector analysis shows that human health and social work has a vacancy rate of 2.7%, while the other sectors most closely aligned with TU side membership show rates of 1.9% for public administration, 1.6% for education, 2.9% for electricity and gas and 3.2% for water supply (the highest sectoral vacancy rate across the economy)<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Source: Office for National Statistics, Labour Market Overview UK, November 2024

<sup>8</sup> HM Treasury, Forecasts for the UK Economy, August 2025

<sup>9</sup> Office for National Statistics, Labour Market Overview, September 2025

<sup>10</sup> Office for National Statistics, Labour Market Overview, September 2025

<sup>11</sup> HM Treasury, Forecasts for the UK Economy, August 2025

<sup>12</sup> Office for National Statistics, Labour Market Overview, September 2025

<sup>13</sup> Office for National Statistics, Labour Market Overview, September 2025

The acute issues that have been facing the health and social work category are reflected in publications showing that the adult social care sector has a vacancy rate of 8.3% and a turnover rate of 24%,<sup>14</sup> while the NHS displayed a vacancy rate of 6.9% in England at June 2025<sup>15</sup>.

The impact of better wages and improved terms and conditions can be seen in the contrast between figures for local authority and outsourced social care staff. The mean hourly pay of local authority care worker staff was £12.43 in 2024, compared to £11.23 in the outsourced sector, contributing to a turnover rate of 13% among local authorities, which was half the 26% displayed among the adult social care sector's outsourced providers<sup>16</sup>.

The proportion of employers reporting "hard to fill" vacancies has gone into sharp decline this year and is now running at 31% across the economy. However, the public sector faces some of the most acute problems, with the three most problematic sectors including "care, social work and other healthcare activities" and "compulsory education." Those sectors respectively recorded 43% and 42% of employers reporting hard to fill vacancies<sup>17</sup>.

Turnover rates were averaging 14% across the economy in 2024<sup>18</sup>.

## 5.6 National Minimum Wage

The legally enforceable National Minimum Wage (NMW) sets the floor for any pay scale. The minimum hourly rates that came into force from 1 April 2025 (and the change from the previous rates) are set out below.

	NMW rate from 1 April 2025	Annual increase (£)	Annual increase (per cent)
<b>National Living Wage (21 and over)</b>	£12.21	£0.77	6.7%
<b>18-20 Year Old Rate</b>	£10	£1.4	16.3%
<b>16-17 Year Old Rate</b>	£7.55	£1.15	18%
<b>Apprentice Rate</b>	£7.55	£1.15	18%

The Low Pay Commission has suggested that the National Living Wage (21 and over) should rise to at least £12.71 per hour from 1 April 2026. This would overtake the current NJC minimum of £12.65 (NJC SCP 2). It's deeply concerning that NJC pay continues to skirt the legal minimum wage year after year.

## 5.7 The Real Living Wage

The Living Wage has become a standard benchmark for the minimum needed for low-paid staff to have a "basic but acceptable" standard of living. The rates, announced annually by the Living Wage Foundation, are currently £13.45 an hour outside London and £14.80 an hour in London<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Skills for Care, The State of the Adult Social Care Workforce in England, October 2024

<sup>15</sup> NHS Digital, NHS Vacancy Statistics England, June 2025

<sup>16</sup> Skills for Care, The State of the Adult Social Care Workforce in England, October 2024

<sup>17</sup> CIPD, Labour Market Outlook, Summer 2025

<sup>18</sup> Brightmine, Labour Turnover Rates 2024

<sup>19</sup> Living Wage Foundation, 2025

Over 16,000 UK employers now pay the real living wage. This means 1 in 7 workers now work for a Living Wage Employer. This now includes almost half of the largest companies listed on the UK Stock Exchange and household names such as Aviva, Barclays, HSBC, Nationwide, Google and IKEA are among them.

Within the public sector, the Living Wage has now long been set as the minimum pay rate across all Scotland's public sector organisations and this was extended to social care workers in Scotland's private and voluntary sector from October 2016. The Welsh Government is committed to paying social care workers the Real Living Wage for 2024/25, with funding mechanisms in place from April 2024.

The latest Real Living Wage rates mean that Local Government is now competing in a labour market where many comparable employers are paying more to entry level or low paid staff – with SCP 2, 3, 4 and 5 all currently falling below the £13.45 UK Real Living Wage rate:

**Table 6: NJC SCPs Vs the Real Living Wage**

NJC SCP	2025 Annual	2025 Hourly
<b>2</b>	£24,413.00	£12.65
<b>3</b>	£24,796.00	£12.85
<b>4</b>	£25,185.00	£13.05
<b>5</b>	£25,583.00	£13.26
<b>Current Real Living Wage</b>		<b>£13.45</b>
<b>6</b>	£25,989.00	£13.47



## 6. ACHIEVING A £15 PER HOUR MINIMUM RATE

Years of rampant inflation and cost of living rises to core household outgoings (including food, housing and energy) mean that calls for a £15 per hour minimum rate are stronger than ever<sup>20</sup>. For local government workers, this would bring many benefits, including a significant boost to those struggling with low pay, lifting people out of in-work poverty and providing a direct boost to the lowest paid workers. This level of increase would lead to higher job satisfaction, reducing turnover rates and the costs associated with hiring and training new employees.

If answered in full, our NJC pay claim for 2026-27 would lift the lowest pay point to £14.21. As an illustration, additional bottom loading (as demonstrated in the table below) would bring the entire pay spine above the £15ph threshold:

**Table 7: Additional bottom loading for SCP 2-9, to achieve a minimum rate of £15ph**

SCP	01-Apr-25	01-Apr-25	Increase	01-Apr-26	01-Apr-26
	per annum	per hour		per annum	per hour
2	£24,413.00	£12.65	£5,000.00	£29,413.00	£15.25
3	£24,796.00	£12.85	£4,750.00	£29,546.00	£15.31
4	£25,185.00	£13.05	£4,500.00	£29,685.00	£15.39
5	£25,583.00	£13.26	£4,250.00	£29,833.00	£15.46
6	£25,989.00	£13.47	£4,000.00	£29,989.00	£15.54
7	£26,403.00	£13.69	£3,750.00	£30,153.00	£15.63
8	£26,824.00	£13.90	£3,500.00	£30,324.00	£15.72
9	£27,254.00	£14.13	£3,250.00	£30,504.00	£15.81
10	£27,694.00	£14.35	£3,000.00	£30,694.00	£15.91
11	£28,142.00	£14.59	£3,000.00	£31,142.00	£16.14

The NJC TU side therefore asks the national employers meet our claim and to consider a planned approach to deliver a minimum pay rate of £15 an hour for the NJC.

<sup>20</sup> TUC, 2024

## 7. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CRISIS

### 7.1 Recruitment and retention overview

Local authorities are experiencing significant recruitment and retention challenges, particularly in education and social services. This crisis is exacerbated by low pay, high workloads, and budget cuts. Local government employment has decreased by 16% over 10 years to 2025<sup>21</sup>.

Nationally, unemployment remains lower than at almost any point in the last 40 years. With low unemployment and a vibrant jobs market, local government employers are struggling to compete with employers who often pay more for less demanding work (such as administrative, retail and hospitality).

94% of councils report recruitment and retention difficulties, particularly in key sectors including:

#### Social work

- 80% report recruitment difficulties in children's services
- 77% report retention difficulties in adult services

#### Adult social care

- Vacancy rate: 7% (111k posts).
- Turnover: 23.1%.
- Projected need: +2.2m posts by 2040

The reasons local government staff give for leaving are primarily low pay, followed by poor job satisfaction and low morale<sup>22</sup>. Many report unmanageable workloads due to unfilled posts and budget cuts.

### 7.2 Ageing workforce

A survey by public sector trading organisation Commercial Services Group (CSG)<sup>23</sup> has warned that Councils are 'on the brink of staffing crisis' due to their ageing workforce. CSG argued in their research that councils were struggling to recruit younger workers, with fewer than one in 20 local authority staff aged under 25. It found seven in 10 council workers were aged between 40 and 65, and there were 87,000 retirements each year, which 'presents a succession headache for council recruiters'.

Among 18- to 25-year-olds surveyed, one in four said they had no interest in working for councils and three in five said they had not considered a local government career.

According to the LGA<sup>24</sup> "the apprenticeship levy has highlighted the lack of good workforce planning across councils. There is a need for Human Resources (HR) to better inform service planning (transformation) in the short and long term."

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<sup>21</sup> LGA workforce survey, 2025

<sup>22</sup> Low Pay Commission, 2023

<sup>23</sup> [EXCLUSIVE: Succession headache for sector](#)

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support/recruitment-and-retention/workforce-planning#:~:text=The%20LGA%20provides%20practical%20support,have%20and%20are%20being%20cut.>

- Local government has an ageing workforce and in certain key professions this is reaching a crisis point in an increasing number of councils
- 74 per cent of councils in England said they were experiencing recruitment and retention difficulties – it hasn't changed for over a decade
- There is too much focus on addressing short term needs which is compounding the existing long-term workforce problems

Recent LGA statistics<sup>25</sup> clearly illustrate the challenge; less than 5% of the local government workforce is aged under 25. At the other end of the spectrum is the aging nature of the existing workforce, many particularly in crucial areas such as planning, leaving local authorities facing a staffing crisis.

### **7.3 Workforce survey data**

The Local Government Association reports that the total gross council staff pay bill in England has fallen by 18% since 2014/15. Prior to this decline, the gross pay bill stood at approximately £43.7 billion in 2014/15; by 2024/25, it had decreased to around £35.8 billion. The average FTE salary in local government is approximately £37,000, compared to the UK median of approximately £39,000.

This shrinking workforce is sadly a long-term trend. The County Councils Network (CCN) survey (February 2024) reveals England's councils have shed 552,000 employees since 2012—a 31.5% drop (even steeper in rural areas at 32.5%). 26% of local government staff now plan to work in the sector for less than four years, while only 46% expect to stay for over a decade. The report further highlights widespread negative perceptions around local government as an employer. A further CCN dataset (March 2025) shows that 71% of council employees feel they lack sufficient training—especially in digital and AI skills—to protect their future prospects.

### **7.3 Solving the recruitment and retention crisis**

All of the above evidence shows that improving pay will go a long way towards addressing the recruitment and retention crisis in local government. However, this must be in addition to other key measures including improving working conditions and job satisfaction, providing adequate training, offering clear career pathways to retain young employees and improving the perception of local government as an employer.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.commercialservices.org.uk/insights-in-action-local-government-new-generation/#:~:text=Recent%20LGA%20statistics%20clearly%20illustrate,attracting%20applications%20from%20this%20group:>

## 8. PAY-RELATED CONDITIONS OF WORK

### 8.1 Workload and stress

Over the past decade and a half, the local government workforce has decreased significantly, leading to increased workloads for remaining employees.

TUC analysis has repeatedly highlighted that public sector staff are now working excessive amounts of unpaid overtime. 3.8 million people did unpaid overtime in 2024, putting in an average of 7.2 unpaid hours a week. For those workers, that's equivalent on average to £8,000 a year of wages going unpaid for work done —contributing an estimated 31 billion of unpaid overtime. As with previous years public sector occupations were disproportionately working this unpaid time<sup>26</sup>.

This level of goodwill is unsustainable and must be acknowledged. The Staff Side is clear: all hours worked should be properly paid, and employers must urgently address the issue of unpaid overtime.

The evidence is stark: long hours contribute to serious mental and physical health problems, increased fatigue, workplace accidents<sup>27</sup>, lower morale, and high turnover<sup>28</sup>—ultimately reducing the effectiveness and productivity of services<sup>29</sup>.

According to the latest Health and Safety Executive analysis of data from the Labour Force Survey<sup>30</sup>, 1.7 million workers reported work-related ill health in 2023/24. Of those, an estimated 776,000 cases were due to stress, depression, or anxiety. Sectors most affected include health and social care, education, and public administration.

Taking holidays and reducing working hours have been shown to improve morale, health, and productivity.

**The Trade Union Side is therefore calling for:**

- **One extra day of annual leave for all staff**

### 8.2 Reduction in working time

Reducing working hours can lower unemployment, increase productivity, reduce carbon emissions, and improve overall well-being. The standard NJC working week is 37 hours (36 in London), but some local authorities have reduced this to 35 hours without negative impacts on services.

Many employers have gone further, with over 200 UK companies have committed to a permanent four-day working week without reducing employee pay<sup>31</sup>. Companies moving to this model argue

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/uk-workers-put-ps31-billion-worth-unpaid-overtime-during-last-year-tuc-analysis>

<sup>27</sup> <https://press.hse.gov.uk/2024/11/20/hse-publishes-annual-work-related-ill-health-and-injury-statistics-for-2023-24/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/352.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> <http://ftp.iza.org/dp8129.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> <https://press.hse.gov.uk/2024/11/20/hse-publishes-annual-work-related-ill-health-and-injury-statistics-for-2023-24/#:~:text=Approximately%20half%20of%20those%20reporting,from%20910%2C000%20in%202022%2F23.>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2025/jan/27/two-hundred-uk-companies-sign-up-for-permanent-four-day-working-week>

that the traditional five-day workweek is outdated and that a four-day week can enhance work-life balance, increase employee satisfaction, and maintain productivity. The move is particularly popular among younger workers, with many prioritising mental health and well-being.

South Cambridgeshire District Council became the first local authority to trial the 4-day week (with no loss in pay). That trial produced significant savings for the council, particularly on retention and recruitment. In July this year they voted to adopt the four-day week on a permanent basis<sup>32</sup>.

The TU side recognises the complexities involved in reducing working time for some groups of staff, and we look forward to discussing them with the employers as part of meaningful negotiations.

**The Trade Union Side is therefore calling for:**

- **A reduction in the working week by two hours, with no loss of pay**

### **8.3 Paid personal day for school support staff**

Members working as school support staff are seeking at least one guaranteed paid personal day each year, to use as they want. This is not a claim for an additional annual leave day, simply the ability to take at least a day's leave during the school term. Many schools and academies already implement this policy. If applied universally, it would help raise the job satisfaction and work-life-balance of school support staff.

**The Trade Union Side is therefore calling for:**

- **The ability for school staff to take [at least] one day of their annual leave during term time, with no loss of pay**

### **8.4 Job evaluations and Pay Justice in Schools**

We note that both unions and employers in local government would agree the importance of ensuring that NJC scores and grades accurately reflect the duties and work that employees carry out.

However, many members working in certain roles within schools that cover NJC spine points 2-6 increasingly find that their original job evaluation scores no longer reflect the additional duties and work they are undertaking since their jobs were last evaluated. In some local authorities job evaluations for Level 1 Teaching Assistants have not been reviewed in many years, and in a few cases for over a decade.

In that time, nearly all Level 1 Teaching Assistants in Leeds now undertake additional duties and work that are Level 2 at minimum. These include providing support for pupils with special needs and assisting with individual pupil education, behaviour and personal care programmes.

**The Trade Union Side is therefore calling for:**

- **The abolition of Level 1 Teaching Assistant role and instead all Level 1 role holders be moved onto Level 2. This covers NJC spine points 2-6.**

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/employment/395-employment-news/61647-council-becomes-first-to-permanently-adopt-four-day-work-week>

## **9. EQUALITY IMPACT**

### **9.1 Gender Pay Gap**

Low pay in local government disproportionately affects workers with protected characteristics under the Equality Act, particularly women.

On average, women in English local authorities were paid 3.0 per cent less than men by mean pay and 1.6 per cent less by median pay. This compares to 6.1 per cent and 4.0 per cent in 2018/19, and 3.5 per cent and 1.7 per cent in 2023/24<sup>33</sup>.

Women were paid less than men in 160 authorities, the gap was zero in 25, and women earned more than men in 108 (based on median pay).

The proportion of women was highest in the second-lowest pay quartile (64.9 per cent) and lowest in the highest quartile (57.0 per cent), a similar pattern to previous years.

Despite women making up 73 per cent of the workforce, the Local Government Association reports that the gender pay gap remains 3 per cent (mean) and 8 per cent (median). Roles dominated by women—such as schools and adult social care—continue to be undervalued. Adult social care also employs a high proportion of workers from Black, Asian and Mixed ethnic backgrounds (18%, 11%, and 2% respectively), in a sector marked by low pay, high turnover, and stressful conditions.

Whilst we recognise that progress has been made in reducing the gender pay gap, it is essential that the work that women typically do is valued more by fulfilling the demands of this claim.

### **9.2 Ageing workforce**

An ageing workforce and job market competition across numerous sectors continues to be recognised by industry voices as one of the fundamental challenges facing local government. The Local Government Association continues to recognise that “Local government has an ageing workforce and in certain key professions this is reaching a crisis point in an increasing number of councils.”

As reported by the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) in 2021, “With an ageing workforce and competition from places like retail, for jobs that are paying better with less stress, it is little wonder that care worker shortages are being acutely felt in local authority care services” and in APSE’s survey of local councils for that year, 86% of councils responding believed that an ageing workforce presented a high to medium risk to recruitment and retention of the workforce.

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<sup>33</sup> LGA’s 2024/25 pay gap report and LG Inform data

## 10. CONCLUSION

Local government workers have endured more than a decade of real-terms pay cuts, with NJC wages losing significant value against inflation and the cost of living. Since 2010, pay has fallen by over 26% in real terms, leaving many employees struggling to meet basic needs. This erosion has been compounded by the recent cost-of-living crisis, where essential expenses such as housing, energy, and food have risen sharply while NJC pay increases have lagged far behind.

The lowest points on the NJC pay spine now sit dangerously close to the statutory National Minimum Wage and below the Real Living Wage, undermining the ability of councils to recruit and retain staff.

The economic case for fair pay is clear. Investing in local government pay is not only just but fiscally responsible: over half the cost of this claim would be recouped by central government through increased tax revenues and reduced benefit expenditure. Fair pay strengthens local economies, reduces in-work poverty, and alleviates pressure on public services.

Recruitment and retention challenges across local authorities—particularly in education, social care, and frontline services—are at crisis point. Low pay is a key driver of high vacancy and turnover rates, threatening service delivery and workforce stability. Addressing pay is essential to reversing these trends and restoring local government as an attractive employer.

### **The NJC trade union side therefore calls for:**

- An increase of at least £3,000 or 10% (whichever is greater) across all NJC spinal column points\*
- A minimum pay rate of £15 an hour for the NJC pay spine

*\*Based on a one-year settlement, for a multi-year offer please see chapter 3*

### **In addition:**

- A two hour reduction in the working week
- An increase of one day annual leave
- The ability of all school support staff to take a day of paid leave during term time
- The abolition of Level 1 Teaching Assistant role and instead all Level 1 role holders be moved onto Level 2

This claim is fair, affordable, and necessary. It reflects the scale of the challenge facing NJC workers and the urgent need for action. We urge the National Employers to engage meaningfully and support this claim, recognising the vital contribution of local government staff to communities across the UK.

**APPENDIX 1: NJC SPINAL COLUMN POINTS - REAL TERMS CONVERSION\***

<b>NJC SPINAL COLUMN POINTS - REAL TERMS CONVERSION*</b>						
<b>Old SCP</b>	<b>2009/10</b>	<b>2025/26</b>	<b>New SCP</b>	<b>Old SCP if inflated by RPI to April 2026</b>	<b>Real-terms change (£)</b>	<b>Real-terms change (%)</b>
<b>8</b>	£13,189	£24,413	<b>2</b>	£25,871	-£1,458	-5.6
<b>9</b>	£13,589	£24,413		£26,655	-£2,242	-8.4
<b>10</b>	£13,874	£24,796	<b>3</b>	£27,214	-£2,418	-8.9
<b>11</b>	£14,733	£24,796		£28,899	-£4,103	-14.2
<b>12</b>	£15,039	£25,185	<b>4</b>	£29,499	-£4,314	-14.6
<b>13</b>	£15,444	£25,185		£30,294	-£5,109	-16.9
<b>14</b>	£15,725	£25,583	<b>5</b>	£30,845	-£5,262	-17.1
<b>15</b>	£16,054	£25,583		£31,490	-£5,907	-18.8
<b>16</b>	£16,440	£25,989	<b>6</b>	£32,248	-£6,259	-19.4
<b>17</b>	£16,830	£25,989		£33,013	-£7,024	-21.3
<b>18</b>	£17,161	£26,403	<b>7</b>	£33,662	-£7,259	-21.6
<b>19</b>	£17,802	£26,824	<b>8</b>	£34,919	-£8,095	-23.2
<b>20</b>	£18,453	£27,254	<b>9</b>	£36,373	-£9,119	-25.1
		£27,694	<b>10</b>			
<b>21</b>	£19,126	£28,142	<b>11</b>	£37,516	-£9,374	-25.0
<b>22</b>	£19,621	£28,598	<b>12</b>	£38,487	-£9,889	-25.7
		£29,064	<b>13</b>			
<b>23</b>	£20,198	£29,540	<b>14</b>	£39,619	-£10,079	-25.4
<b>24</b>	£20,858	£30,518	<b>15</b>	£40,914	-£10,396	-25.4
		£30,518	<b>16</b>			
<b>25</b>	£21,519	£31,022	<b>17</b>	£42,210	-£11,188	-26.5
		£31,537	<b>18</b>			
<b>26</b>	£22,221	£32,061	<b>19</b>	£43,587	-£11,526	-26.4
<b>27</b>	£22,958	£32,597	<b>20</b>	£45,033	-£12,436	-27.6
		£33,143	<b>21</b>			
<b>28</b>	£23,708	£33,699	<b>22</b>	£46,504	-£12,805	-27.5
<b>29</b>	£24,646	£34,434	<b>23</b>	£48,344	-£13,910	-28.8
<b>30</b>	£25,472	£35,412	<b>24</b>	£49,964	-£14,552	-29.1
<b>31</b>	£26,276	£36,363	<b>25</b>	£51,541	-£15,178	-29.4
<b>32</b>	£27,052	£37,280	<b>26</b>	£53,063	-£15,783	-29.7
<b>33</b>	£27,849	£38,220	<b>27</b>	£54,627	-£16,407	-30.0
<b>34</b>	£28,636	£39,152	<b>28</b>	£56,170	-£17,018	-30.3
<b>35</b>	£29,236	£39,862	<b>29</b>	£57,347	-£17,485	-30.5
<b>36</b>	£30,011	£40,777	<b>30</b>	£58,868	-£18,091	-30.7
<b>37</b>	£30,851	£41,771	<b>31</b>	£59,986	-£18,215	-30.4
<b>38</b>	£31,754	£42,839	<b>32</b>	£62,286	-£19,447	-31.2
<b>39</b>	£32,800	£44,075	<b>33</b>	£64,338	-£20,263	-31.5
<b>40</b>	£33,661	£45,091	<b>34</b>	£66,027	-£20,936	-31.7
<b>41</b>	£34,549	£46,142	<b>35</b>	£67,769	-£21,627	-31.9



<b>42</b>	£35,430	£47,181	<b>36</b>	£69,497	-£22,316	-32.1
<b>43</b>	£36,313	£48,226	<b>37</b>	£71,229	-£23,003	-32.3
<b>44</b>	£37,206	£49,282	<b>38</b>	£72,981	-£23,699	-32.5
<b>45</b>	£38,042	£50,269	<b>39</b>	£74,621	-£24,352	-32.6
<b>46</b>	£38,961	£51,356	<b>40</b>	£76,423	-£25,067	-32.8
<b>47</b>	£39,855	£52,413	<b>41</b>	£78,177	-£25,764	-33.0
<b>48</b>	£40,741	£53,460	<b>42</b>	£79,915	-£26,455	-33.1
<b>49</b>	£41,616	£54,495	<b>43</b>	£81,631	-£27,136	-33.2

## APPENDIX 2: £3,000 and 10% increases applied to NJC Pay Spine

	2025/26		£3,000.00		10%	
SCP	01-Apr-25	01-Apr-25	01-Apr-26	01-Apr-26	01-Apr-26	01-Apr-26
	per annum	per hour	per annum	per hour	per annum	per hour
2	£24,413.00	£12.65	£27,413.00	£14.21	£26,854.30	£13.92
3	£24,796.00	£12.85	£27,796.00	£14.41	£27,275.60	£14.14
4	£25,185.00	£13.05	£28,185.00	£14.61	£27,703.50	£14.36
5	£25,583.00	£13.26	£28,583.00	£14.82	£28,141.30	£14.59
6	£25,989.00	£13.47	£28,989.00	£15.03	£28,587.90	£14.82
7	£26,403.00	£13.69	£29,403.00	£15.24	£29,043.30	£15.05
8	£26,824.00	£13.90	£29,824.00	£15.46	£29,506.40	£15.29
9	£27,254.00	£14.13	£30,254.00	£15.68	£29,979.40	£15.54
10	£27,694.00	£14.35	£30,694.00	£15.91	£30,463.40	£15.79
11	£28,142.00	£14.59	£31,142.00	£16.14	£30,956.20	£16.05
12	£28,598.00	£14.82	£31,598.00	£16.38	£31,457.80	£16.31
13	£29,064.00	£15.06	£32,064.00	£16.62	£31,970.40	£16.57
14	£29,540.00	£15.31	£32,540.00	£16.87	£32,494.00	£16.84
15	£30,024.00	£15.56	£33,024.00	£17.12	£33,026.40	£17.12
16	£30,518.00	£15.82	£33,518.00	£17.37	£33,569.80	£17.40
17	£31,022.00	£16.08	£34,022.00	£17.63	£34,124.20	£17.69
18	£31,537.00	£16.35	£34,537.00	£17.90	£34,690.70	£17.98
19	£32,061.00	£16.62	£35,061.00	£18.17	£35,267.10	£18.28
20	£32,597.00	£16.90	£35,597.00	£18.45	£35,856.70	£18.59
21	£33,143.00	£17.18	£36,143.00	£18.73	£36,457.30	£18.90
22	£33,699.00	£17.47	£36,699.00	£19.02	£37,068.90	£19.21
23	£34,434.00	£17.85	£37,434.00	£19.40	£37,877.40	£19.63
24	£35,412.00	£18.35	£38,412.00	£19.91	£38,953.20	£20.19
25	£36,363.00	£18.85	£39,363.00	£20.40	£39,999.30	£20.73
26	£37,280.00	£19.32	£40,280.00	£20.88	£41,008.00	£21.26
27	£38,220.00	£19.81	£41,220.00	£21.37	£42,042.00	£21.79
28	£39,152.00	£20.29	£42,152.00	£21.85	£43,067.20	£22.32
29	£39,862.00	£20.66	£42,862.00	£22.22	£43,848.20	£22.73
30	£40,777.00	£21.14	£43,777.00	£22.69	£44,854.70	£23.25
31	£41,771.00	£21.65	£44,771.00	£23.21	£45,948.10	£23.82
32	£42,839.00	£22.20	£45,839.00	£23.76	£47,122.90	£24.42

<b>33</b>	£44,075.00	£22.85	£47,075.00	£24.40	£48,482.50	£25.13
<b>34</b>	£45,091.00	£23.37	£48,091.00	£24.93	£49,600.10	£25.71
<b>35</b>	£46,142.00	£23.92	£49,142.00	£25.47	£50,756.20	£26.31
<b>36</b>	£47,181.00	£24.46	£50,181.00	£26.01	£51,899.10	£26.90
<b>37</b>	£48,226.00	£25.00	£51,226.00	£26.55	£53,048.60	£27.50
<b>38</b>	£49,282.00	£25.54	£52,282.00	£27.10	£54,210.20	£28.10
<b>39</b>	£50,269.00	£26.06	£53,269.00	£27.61	£55,295.90	£28.66
<b>40</b>	£51,356.00	£26.62	£54,356.00	£28.17	£56,491.60	£29.28
<b>41</b>	£52,413.00	£27.17	£55,413.00	£28.72	£57,654.30	£29.88
<b>42</b>	£53,460.00	£27.71	£56,460.00	£29.26	£58,806.00	£30.48
<b>43</b>	£54,495.00	£28.25	£57,495.00	£29.80	£59,944.50	£31.07