

To: MSPs

2 August 2022

Dear MSP,

RE: A Strategy for Council Pay and Services

I am writing to outline the ongoing dispute around local government pay between GMB Scotland and other unions; and COSLA and the Scottish Government.

You will be aware of the recent ballot for industrial action GMB Scotland has taken which successfully secured a mandate for strike action in waste and recycling, and schools and early years services in local authorities across Scotland.

Our members have resoundingly rejected the derisory 2 per cent pay offer made to them amid a growing cost-of-living crisis. Without an improved pay offer, GMB estimates that as many as 50,000 local government workers could swell the ranks of the working poor during this turbulent period of inflationary pressure and high energy costs.

This is against the significantly better pay offer made by the UK Government in England which will deliver a 10.5 per cent increase for the lowest paid in local authorities. The current offer in Scotland therefore stands as the lowest offer to public sector workers in the UK.

Over the last two years, the Scottish Government has found additional funding for an improved offer for NHS staff – announced on the eve of the

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2021 Scottish elections – and for a ‘thank you’ payment to frontline workers. The Scottish Government celebrated that this year’s NHS pay offer as “the largest single year increase since devolution”. Whether the pay offer goes far enough or is fair enough is a matter for GMB members, what it does demonstrate is that when the political will is there, a better offer for public sector workers can be presented.

That responsibility lies with both COSLA and the Scottish Government. The correspondence from Deputy First Minister John Swinney MSP to the UK Chancellor Nadhim Zahawi MP on 1 August 2022 does not recognise the powers available to the Scottish Government to adequately fund local services and properly pay local government workers. It is an attempt to divert attention and use council workers as a political football. The Scottish Government cannot rebuke COSLA’s call for additional investment by claiming it is local authorities’ responsibility while simultaneously looking to the UK Government for more investment when the powers available to Holyrood far outweigh those of Scottish councils.

Services and workers in local government are suffering from years of a vacuum of leadership and vision. The threats made in the Deputy First Minister’s correspondence and the Scottish Government’s 2022 Spending Review of cutting services and the workforce to meet union pay demands is unacceptable and will be catastrophic to our members in local government and the communities that rely on their services. Given the plans of both Tory leadership hopefuls to cut taxes across the board, looking to the current UK Government for support is a pointless endeavour. The Scottish Government can and must do more with the powers it has to confront the crisis within local government.

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The Scottish Government and COSLA must radically rethink their approach to council workers. The cost-of-living crisis will tighten and the strain on local services will mount. Therefore, instead of continuing with the approach of managing the decline of services, a renewed strategy is paramount. This begins with an improved pay offer for workers who faced the challenges of COVID-19 and will continue to serve communities as the cost-of-living crisis deepens.

It is the responsibility of all MSPs of all parties to ensure council workers are properly paid and services adequately funded. I therefore urge you to join GMB Scotland's calls and write to the Deputy First Minister for an improved pay offer in local government and a renewed strategy of the financing of local services.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Keir Greenaway'.

Keir Greenaway
Senior Organiser for Public Services

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