

Strike for Pensions Justice on 30 November



UNISON members in Scotland have voted decisively for strike action on 30 November. 73% of members covered by the Local Government Pension Scheme voted yes - 88% of health members also voted for action.

Members of 25 trade unions have voted for action with some three million workers across the UK going on strike.

UK Ministers have published some new proposals but there are no firm offers for members to consider.

Even then, contribution increases in health, increases in pension age, and the 15% cut in pension benefits caused by RPI to CPI indexation remain unchanged.

Why we must take action

● Pensions not 'gold-plated'

The average Local Government pension is £3,500 - £5,000 a year and for women it is just £2,800.

The average pension of a Director of a FTSE 100 company is £174,963 a year. These are the real 'gold-plated pensions'.

● Losing more year on year

The change from RPI to CPI in calculating index linking means the average public service pensioner is losing £117 a year and that will be cumulative with pensions worth less and less each year.

● Paying more, getting less

Plans to move to a 'career average' pension instead of final salary could see another drop in our pensions. To get roughly equal to what people get now, the pension would have to accrue at about 1/55th of salary. Currently the Scottish scheme accrues at 1/60th. The government plans an accrual rate of 1/65th of salary meaning less in retirement while paying more.



“We must not forget how important this strike is. Enough is enough. We have to stand up for pensions justice.

John Stevenson, Branch President

● No pensions deficit

Don't believe the myth about a pensions deficit. There is no funding gap - the public sector schemes were assessed for long term risk and adjusted accordingly three years ago and are now very secure.

Both the local government pension scheme and NHS pension scheme are currently cash rich with income far exceeding outgoings. So there is no need for this government to cut pensions.

The UK government's proposals to have ordinary workers pay an extra 50% on their pensions contributions is nothing more than a pensions tax to bail out the banks. This money will not even go into pension funds. IT WILL GO STRAIGHT INTO THE TREASURY.

Yet again people like us, on modest wages are being made to pay for a crisis that we didn't create, whilst the government happily cancelled the

- **Strike on 30 November 2011**, starting at midnight for 24 hours.
- UNISON will agree 'life and limb' cover with the employer.
- The Branch has a hardship fund, see website for details.
- **March and Rally on 30 November** starts at 11.30 at the Usher Hall pedestrian precinct, marching to the Scottish Parliament
- Check the website, blog, facebook and for updates

bankers' bonus tax which could have raised £3billion.

The Scottish Government has decided not to make Local Government workers in Scotland pay extra but it will make our colleagues in health, teaching and other pension funds pay more because the UK Government will dock their budget if they don't. **We need to put down a marker to make sure that the extra increase is not visited on us down the line.**

● Fair pensions for all

Cutting public sector pensions won't make private sector pensions better. That's why our colleagues in private sector trade unions are supporting our action.

Continued over...

Off sick just three times in three years and you could be sacked?

Unions reject 'punitive' new sickness absence policy as Council plans to impose from January. See over...

Unions reject 'punitive' sickness absence policy

Council serves notice to impose in January

Edinburgh Council is to impose new sickness absence rules from January 2011 which could see people sacked for being off ill three times in three years.

And because the new rules allow the process to be shortened, you could be out of a job even sooner.

In addition, those who may not have hit triggers under the current scheme may find themselves on Stage 1 of the new scheme at point of implementation!

After months of negotiation, the unions have refused to sign up to the deal and the Council has served notice to end the old agreement.

"We managed to negotiate some improvements but at the end of the day the policy was so bad we could not recommend it to members", said Branch Secretary Agnes Petkevicius.

The talks removed plans to do away with self certification (ie you would have had to get a doctor's line for every absence) and they got a clause where managers can assess some sickness (like a planned operation) as a 'one-off' which would not kick in the procedures but lead to a 'review' instead. However, staff will only be allowed one

these measures could create more sickness as worried staff struggle into work with colds and flu and infect their colleagues'
We've sent the policy to workplaces or see www.unison-edinburgh.org.uk/sickness

'one-off' and if you are already in the process then you would go to next stage.

And the thresholds for entering the procedure are set ridiculously low:

Currently the policy kicks in if you have three self certificated absences in six months. The new scheme reduces this to **three instances of sickness absence within any 12 months.**

The other current threshold is 10 days off in any six months. The new scheme kicks in after **6 days of sickness absence in any 12 months.**

So, if you are off three times (or just once for six days) in a year, you can get put on 'monitoring' and the next time you are off it can go to Stage 2. Catch the flu after that and you could be at Stage 3 where you can be sacked!

The unions are worried that, far from improving absence, these measures could create more sickness as worried staff struggle into work with colds, flu and other

infections and infect their colleagues.

Absence levels are already made to look worse by employers forcing those on medical redeployment to stay signed off until an alternative job is found.

One bright point is that you are ok if you have been given a timescale for dying - they won't put you through procedure.

Managers have also been put in an impossible position with targets in their PRDs to keep absence down.

"As a union we have no time for people who abuse sickness absence because we know the effect it has on our members who have to cover", said John Stevenson, Branch President.

"However, this is not the way to resolve that. Excellent workers could be sacked for minimal sickness. Instead of punishing people for being sick, the Council would be better looking at how their actions are creating more stress.

They should be looking at the work related causes of sickness, not punishing the symptoms".

Ballot

The Branch is considering running a consultative ballot on the decision to reject the scheme. Look out for details.

FirstCare Pilot boycott?

UNISON is taking advice on boycotting a pilot scheme where staff have to call a private company, FirstCare, rather than their manager, when they go off sick. The unions have **not** agreed to this pilot and have major concerns about confidentiality, conflict of interest in medical advice and operational problems at workplace level.

Action today for fairness tomorrow

PENSIONS from page 1

Private sector pensions used to be better than the public sector but were eroded by Margaret Thatcher's government. We mustn't support a race to the bottom.

The real pensions divide is between the final salary pensions of those at the top of big business and the rest of us, and the gap is getting wider. While public sector workers' wages are frozen, boardroom pay went up by almost 50% this year.

● Defending our children's future

We need to take action not just for ourselves, but for our children and our grandchildren. If we lose our entitlement

to decent pensions it will be very difficult to get it back and the people who will suffer most are future generations.

● Now is the time to stand up

Now is the time to stand up and be counted. If the UK government thinks it can get away with making us pay more for our pensions, and making us work longer, for a poorer pension at the end of it, then it will come back for more.

Already public service workers have suffered a wage freeze and cuts to jobs and services at the same time as the price of basics like food and fuel is rocketing.

We need to tell this government that enough is enough. We won't be pushed around on our pensions too.

Join us! It's easy to join UNISON, Scotland's biggest and best public service union. Join up before the strike!

Call 558 7488, or 0845 355 0845 or visit www.unison-edinburgh.org.uk



In-house £20 million cheaper - and better

As we go to print, the Council was about to decide whether to privatise a range of Environmental services.

UNISON has produced a briefing for councillors showing that if the private bid and in-house options were compared like with like, the in-house option would save £20.5 million more. The figures come from calculations if issues like pensions, recycling and jobs were fairly compared.

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