

National Employers for local government services

To: Chief Executives in England, Wales and N Ireland
(to be shared with HR Director and Finance Director)
Members of the National Employers' Side
Regional Employer Organisations

26 March 2026

Dear Chief Executive,

LOCAL GOVERNMENT PAY 2026

I am writing to update you on the work the National Employers have been doing on your behalf on the local government pay round for 2026.

You will recall that on 1 December, the NJC unions (UNISON, GMB and Unite) lodged their [2026 pay claim](#). It sought:

- a. An increase of at least £3,000 or 10 per cent (whichever is greater) across all NJC spinal column points**
- b. A minimum pay rate of £15 an hour for the NJC pay spine**
- c. A two-hour reduction in the working week, with no loss of pay**
- d. An increase of one day annual leave for all staff**
- e. The ability of all school support staff to take [at least] a day of paid leave during term time**
- f. The abolition of Level 1 Teaching Assistant role and instead all Level 1 role holders be moved onto Level 2**

However, in the event of a multi-year settlement being proposed, the unions sought the following structure to a three-year agreement (in addition to items c-f above):

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

During December and January, employers in each of the nine English regions, plus Wales and Northern Ireland, were consulted at very well attended virtual pay consultation briefings. In total, more than 900 councillors and senior officers attended. The National Employers met initially on 24 February to discuss the key themes to come out of those briefings. They then adjourned for private political discussions before reconvening, in person, on 24 March.

As explained at the pay briefings, we are in familiar territory: little has changed in terms of councils' financial challenges and how we deal with the ongoing pressure from the proximity of the [National Living Wage](#) (NLW) to the bottom of the NJC pay spine. As such, the National Employers have again been faced with very difficult decisions when considering their response to the unions' claim.

The large response¹ to our pre-briefing pay questionnaire was extremely helpful in assisting members' deliberations. I can assure you that information from every return was shared with the National Employer members and I thank you for the time you committed to this process.

Whilst the regional pay briefings are the most important part of a consultation process designed to provide the National Employers with councils' views, they are not, and never have been, intended to provide the employers with a negotiating mandate. The National Employers are tasked by their respective [LGA political groups](#) and the WLGA and NILGA to come to a decision based on all the information available to them to pitch a pay offer at a level that they believe will attract the broadest political support and, ultimately, achieve an agreement with the unions.

In their meeting on Tuesday, the National Employers considered very carefully a number of different possible pay offers, which included various options for percentage or cash figures, and different durations (ie. one-year or multi-year) all of which had pros and cons. For part of the meeting, the employers were joined by the three unions' national officials and their lay member colleagues. The unions spoke in support of their claim and engaged in a discussion with members.

The National Employers considered it important that their offer, as set out below, should provide certainty from the outset to the unions' national committees and all union members, the wider workforce and local employers, that it is the maximum they are able to make. Conscious of the usual implementation date of 1 April and concerns raised by employers and employees alike when previous Agreements have been delayed, the National Employers therefore agreed that their offer should be full and final, as explained in the offer letter to the unions.

The National Employers agreed by a majority to make the following one-year (1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027), full and final offer to the unions representing the main local government NJC workforce:

With effect from 1 April 2026:

- **an increase of 3.30 per cent to be paid as a consolidated, permanent addition on all NJC pay points 3 to 43 inclusive, and on all pay points above the maximum of the pay spine but graded below deputy chief officer (*in accordance with Green Book Part 2 Para 5.4*²)**
- **an increase of 3.30 per cent on all allowances (*as listed in the [2025 NJC pay agreement circular dated 24 July 2025](#)*)**

This offer means an employee on the bottom pay point in April 2021 (then earning £18,333) will have received an increase in their pay of £7,282 (39.72 per cent) over the

¹ 273 councils (78 per cent) responded to the online pay survey

² The Green Book Part 2 Para 5.4 provides that posts paid above the maximum of the pay spine but graded below deputy chief officer are within scope of the NJC. The pay levels for such posts are determined locally but once fixed are increased in line with agreements reached by the NJC.

five years to April 2026. For an employee at the mid-point of the pay spine (pay point 22), their pay will have increased over the same period by 26.52 per cent and for those on pay point 43, at the top of the spine, 18.10 per cent.

The National Employers are acutely aware of the current uncertainty surrounding the re-establishment of the [School Support Staff Negotiating Body](#) (SSSNB). This offer (and subsequent award when agreement is reached) applies to all school support staff currently covered by the NJC collective bargaining arrangements. The SSSNB is expected to be reinstated later this year.

The NLW pressure

As was conveyed at the regional pay briefings, since 2016 the NLW has presented a huge challenge for local government in managing to maintain headroom between the bottom pay points and the statutory minimum.

When the NLW was introduced, the National Employers established a principle of seeking to ensure that the bottom rate of pay in local government is higher than the NLW, as they do not believe the sector should be a minimum wage employer. Meeting that principle each year has proved to be a challenge given the significant annual increases to the NLW rate.

This offer would achieve a bottom rate from 1 April 2026 of £13.28 (57p headroom from the NLW £12.71).

Since 2020, the NLW has increased by 45.76 per cent (£3.99 per hour). The lowest rate of pay in local government (partly achieved by removing two pay points) has increased by 43.57 per cent (£4.03 per hour). The employers are well aware that an increase next year of more than 4.48 per cent (57p) will mean our (proposed) bottom rate of £13.28 will fall below the 2027 NLW rate. If this happens, we will move quickly to issue an instruction to employers that they should temporarily increase the bottom pay point[s] rate of pay to the NLW rate from 1 April for the period until the 2027 pay round is concluded.

At time of writing, the [Low Pay Commission](#) has not published any forecasts relating to the 2027 NLW.

Conclusion

The National Employers are eleven senior elected members, many of whom are, or have been, Leader of their council. They are all acutely aware of the additional pressure this year's offer, which would need to be paid for from existing budgets, will place on already hard-pressed finances. The National Employers also acknowledged the difficulties faced by councils in recruiting and retaining key staff across and above the pay spine. However, for the reasons set out above, they believe their offer meets the immediate NLW challenge and is fair to employees, given the wider economic backdrop.

The National Employers continue to wholeheartedly support the principle of the NLW, but their remit is limited to securing pay agreements with the trade unions. Responsibility for making clear to government the cost to the sector of its NLW and wider policies, lies with

the LGA, in partnership with the WLGA and NILGA, all of whom have made clear that if sufficient funding is not available, jobs and services will be at risk as employers struggle to accommodate this additional cost when trying to balance their budgets.

You will note in the employers' offer letter they have urged the unions to expedite and synchronise the timing and duration of their membership consultations in order that a final agreement is reached so that employees, who continue to provide such critical support to their communities, can receive this award as soon as is practicable.

A copy of the letter sent to the NJC trade unions, along with a copy of the employers' media statement and details of the membership of the National Employers are set out on the following pages.

Please share this letter and subsequent updates on pay, with your colleagues in HR and Finance, and with elected members, as appropriate.

I shall continue to keep you informed of developments.

Yours sincerely,

Naomi Cooke

Naomi Cooke
Employers' Secretary

Mike Short, Kevin Brandstatter, Clare Keogh
Trade Union Side Secretaries
NJC for Local Government Services
c/o UNISON Centre
130 Euston Road
London NW1 2AY

24 March 2026

Dear Mike, Kevin and Clare

LOCAL GOVERNMENT PAY 2026

Thank you to you and your colleagues for taking the time today to meet with the National Employers to discuss your pay claim.

As you know, following receipt of your claim last December, the National Employers consulted councils and met initially on 24 February to discuss the key themes to come out of those sessions. They then adjourned for private political discussions before reconvening today.

Having heard the points raised at today's meeting, and recognising the volatility of the economic context, after a lengthy debate they agreed to make a full and final, one year offer. In doing so they hope you can consult your members on it promptly in order to expedite an agreement that mitigates the problems some employees face as a result of receiving back pay when agreement is reached later in the year.

The National Employers wish to make the following full and final, one-year (1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027) offer:

With effect from 1 April 2026:

- **an increase of 3.30 per cent to be paid as a consolidated, permanent addition on all NJC pay points 3 to 43 inclusive, and on all pay points above the maximum of the pay spine but graded below deputy chief officer (*in accordance with Green Book Part 2 Para 5.4³*)**
- **an increase of 3.30 per cent on all allowances (*as listed in the 2025 NJC pay agreement circular dated 24 July 2025*)**

In response to the other elements of your claim:

- ***A minimum pay rate of £15 an hour for the NJC pay spine***

³ The Green Book Part 2 Para 5.4 provides that posts paid above the maximum of the pay spine but graded below deputy chief officer are within scope of the NJC. The pay levels for such posts are determined locally, but once fixed are increased in line with agreements reached by the NJC.

The Employers reject this element of the claim. In order to achieve this objective would require increasing the bottom pay point by 16.73 per cent from its current hourly rate of £12.85. That, plus the subsequent knock-on effect of increases to all subsequent pay points would be prohibitively expensive for councils at any time, not least during the current difficult financial circumstances.

- ***A two-hour reduction in the working week***

The Employers reject this element of the claim in relation to a proposed 35-hour week (34 in London). Such a reduction would be out of line with norms in local government and would result in an increase in costs that would adversely affect local authority services.

- ***An increase of one day annual leave***

The Employers reject this element of the claim. All NJC employees currently receive a minimum of 23 days' leave (with a further three days after five years' service), plus two extra statutory days, plus public holidays. Many councils have a more generous basic leave entitlement.

- ***The ability for school staff to take a day of paid leave during term time***

The Employers reject this element of the claim. With the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) expected to be reinstated later this year, which will have responsibility for considering changes to pay and conditions for this group, we believe school employers in particular would have concerns about the NJC reaching a national agreement that gave all their non-teaching NJC employees the right to take a day of paid leave during term time. The cost of having not only to pay for that day but also for cover, would be significant at a time when schools are struggling financially.

- ***The abolition of Level 1 Teaching Assistant role and instead all Level 1 role holders be moved onto Level 2***

The employers reject this element of the claim. We believe school employers in particular would have concerns about the NJC reaching a national agreement on this issue ahead of the reinstatement of the SSSNB, which is expected later this year.

We have a duty to balance your claim with the interests of local residents, in terms of the level and quality of services provided by local authorities. The proposed increase, greater than last year's, will again be very difficult to fund in a number of local authorities as this offer is at the limits of most councils' levels of affordability.

The National Employers of course respect that each of your unions will have its own processes and procedures to follow, but we hope you will again be able to synchronise the timing and duration of your membership consultations, as you did helpfully last year, in order that a final agreement is reached and employees, who continue to provide such critical support to their communities, can receive this award as soon as is practicable.

Yours sincerely,



Naomi Cooke
Employers' Secretary

PRESS RELEASE: 24 MARCH 2026

Council employees' pay offer announced

Following the announcement of a full and final one-year pay offer for council employees, Chair of the National Employers for local government services, Cllr James Lewis, said:

“Council employees have been offered a pay increase of 3.30 per cent from 1 April 2026.

For the lowest paid (currently earning £24,796 per annum), the offer means their pay will have increased since April 2021 by £7,282 (39.72 per cent).

The National Employers are acutely aware of the additional pressure this offer will place on already hard-pressed council finances as it would need to be paid for from existing budgets. However, they believe their offer is fair to employees given the wider economic backdrop.”

Notes to editors

The National Employers negotiate pay on behalf of 350 local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland that employ around 1.5 million employees.

The increase to the national paybill resulting from this offer would be £869.57m (3.32 per cent, which includes the 0.02 per cent cost of the deletion of pay point 2 on 1 April 2026, as agreed as part of the 2025/26 pay deal).

The National Joint Council for local government services negotiates the pay, terms and conditions of staff in local authorities. It agrees an annual uplift to the national pay spine, on which each individual council decides where to place its employees. Each council takes into account a number of factors such as job size and local labour market conditions when deciding an employee's salary. There are no nationally determined jobs or pay grades in local government, unlike in other parts of the public sector.

Separate national pay arrangements apply to teachers, firefighters, chief officers, chief executives and craftworkers.

-ENDS-

NJC LGS EMPLOYERS (incl JNC CRAFTWORKERS; JNC CHIEF OFFICERS; JNC CHIEF EXECUTIVES) for the year ending 30 September 2026

LGA NOMINATED

LABOUR:

Cllr Amanda De Ryk (Lewisham, London)

Cllr James Lewis (Leeds, Yorks & Humb) (Chair / Lead member⁴)

Cllr Peter Marland (Milton Keynes, S East) (Lead member)

Sub: Cllr Kelly Chequer (Sunderland, N East)

Sub: Cllr Vince Maple (Medway, S East)

Sub: Cllr Tom Renhard (Bristol, S West)

CONSERVATIVE:

Cllr David Leaf (Bexley, London)

Cllr Roger Phillips OBE (Herefordshire, W Mids) (Vice Chair / Lead member)

Sub: tbc

LIB DEM:

Cllr Keith House (Eastleigh / Hampshire, S East) (Lead member)

Cllr Mark Jeffery (Portsmouth, S East)

Sub: Cllr Paul Smith (Colchester, East of England)

INDEPENDENT:

Cllr Julian Dean (Shropshire, W Mids)

Sub: Cllr Doug McMurdo (Bedford, East of England)

REFORM UK:

Cllr Tom Catton (Lincolnshire, E Mids)

Sub: Cllr John Lawson (Derbyshire, E Mids)

WELSH LGA NOMINATED

Cllr Anthony Hunt (Torfaen) (**Labour**)

Sub: Cllr Jane Gebbie (Bridgend) (Labour)

N IRELAND LGA NOMINATED

Cllr Christopher Jackson (Derry City & Strabane) (**Sinn Fein**)

Sub: Alderman Aaron Callan (Causeway Coast & Glens) (DUP)

NATIONAL ASSOC OF LOCAL COUNCILS NOMINATED

vacant

⁴ Lead members act on behalf of the full Employers' Side, eg, meeting the unions, when convening the full group is impractical. The full National Employers' Side remains responsible for reaching all formal agreements.