



COVENTRY

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30th June 2014

# STRIKE ACTION -

## FAQs

### SOME REGULAR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

#### Q and A

Unison have compiled a list of frequently asked questions regarding the strike action on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> July. Here are some of the key extracts from the document. If you have further questions please speak to your local Unison rep or call the branch office

#### Is our pay claim affordable?

Local government and school pay is now so poor that many workers have to rely on tax credits and benefits. It makes far more sense to pay this money as wages.

#### I don't agree with the pay offer – but why strike action?

UNISON stands ready to enter further negotiations at any point, as do the other unions. However, the employers are in a very entrenched position and only strike action – or the threat of it - is likely to move them to make an improved offer.

#### Will the strike make the employers change their mind?

We certainly hope so and would not ballot ask members to strike if we didn't think so. We are not a posturing or strike happy union —far from it. Strike action has always been a last resort in trying to force employers to negotiate more seriously. On the rare occasions that we have gone on strike across the local government sector in the past we have made gains on previous proposals. Although there is never a guarantee of all our demands being met, demonstrating the strength of feeling about our pay is

vital.

#### I can't afford to strike. Money is so tight at the moment.

UNISON understands your concerns. Council and school workers have already had to put up with a great deal. We are well aware there may be other very pressing difficulties you are being faced with right now on a local or personal level. But it's important to think about what you could gain and the money you need in retirement to support yourself.



Any pay gained through an increased offer may or may not offset what you lose in the immediate term through strike reductions. However, it will be 'paid back' quite quickly because:

- it means that the starting point for ANY future pay rise is higher than it would otherwise be;
- the value of ANY future increment is higher than it would otherwise be;
- the value of the pension pot accumulating is higher than it would otherwise be.

The employers are relying on workers and unions being too weak and too scared to put up enough of a fight against this attack on your pay. We have to show them that they are wrong. If we aren't able to make them re-think their stance, the employers and government will continue to cut your pay and conditions and we may never be in a position to recover the ground we have lost. Falling pay also means loss of pension, which

could affect you for the rest of your life.

### **Am I breaking my contract by taking strike action?**

Almost all effective industrial action is a breach of your contract of employment. However, UNISON has carried out a lawful statutory ballot. The law protects workers from dismissal whilst taking part in lawful industrial action at any time within 12 weeks of the start of action and depending on the circumstances; dismissal may also be unfair if it takes place later.

### **My employer is saying that a one day strike would be seen as a break in service and that my continuity of service would be broken — is this true?**

No. During a strike your continuous employment is treated as 'postponed'. This means that the period you were on strike for will not count towards your continuous employment, but it does not break the continuity of your period of employment.

### **Do I have to strike?**

As a member of a democratic union we would hope that you would participate in a strike if there is a vote for strike action. You cannot be forced to do so, but it is part of belonging to a democratic union in which decisions are made collectively. We recognise that taking strike action is very serious, which is why UNISON asks you and every other member to observe the strike (if called.) Every member who does not undermines our bargaining power and makes it harder for us to protect all our members.

### **Will I still have to strike if I voted 'No'?**

If the majority of the people balloted vote 'yes' and a strike is called, we would hope you would join your trade union colleagues by participating fully in the industrial action, in line with UNISON's democratic decision-making process.

### **What should I do during a strike? Can I join a picket line?**

When UNISON calls a strike we ask that you do not go to work, but instead contact your local representative and volunteer to help out on the picket lines. This isn't dangerous and it can be fun, as everyone shows that they are serious and united in taking action.

### **Do I have to tell my employer if I am going on strike?**

No, if the day of action is confirmed in a ballot we will officially inform your employer and they should assume that all members will be striking. It is up to them to ask for any exemptions and to provide emergency cover (see questions on exemptions and emergency cover).

Your employer might send you a formal sounding letter asking you to declare in advance whether you will be taking industrial action. You are under no obligation to inform your employer in advance as to whether you will be taking part in strike action. UNISON is legally required to give employers some statistical information about UNISON members taking industrial action but we do not give individual names.

### **Will I receive strike pay for striking on 10 July?**

Strike pay will not be paid but the union will seek to help members experiencing hardship. Your branch will be able to advise you.

### **I'm not a member yet - can I join now and still take part in the proposed action?**

New members can [join UNISON](#), and join the strike (provided that their employer is one of the employers involved in the ballot), right up to and including on the day of action. So if this is the case, the answer is very much YES you can join the strike - you just need to fill in an application form first and hand it to your local steward.