

## UNISON conference 2021

Local government workers should be prepared to take the fight to ministers, conference agrees



## ‘Attack is the best form of defence’ against cuts and pay freeze

**Anger and disbelief hung in the air as delegate after delegate at the special local government conference condemned the government’s public sector pay freeze.**

Speakers reacted with dismay at ministers’ ‘divide and rule’ tactic that pitted public sector workers against private sector staff, and manufactured a divide between ‘deserving’ NHS frontline workers and the ‘non-deserving’ who kept schools open, classrooms clean, collected refuse and fought crime throughout the three lockdowns.

The service group executive called on the union’s national executive committee (NEC) to launch a campaign to fight the government pay freeze, led by

general secretary Christina McAnea and the TUC’s public services committee.

Claire Marriott from Camden summed-up the feeling of delegates. She said: “We have all continued to provide essential services in local government throughout this pandemic, none more so than those on the frontline, those in social care, cleaners, caretakers, school support staff, refuse collectors and many, many more.

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"Yet as a reward the government announced a pay freeze. But there is money in the country. There are now 171 billionaires in the UK - 24 more than in pre-COVID times.

"It's scandalous that Boris Johnson can spend £840 on a roll of wallpaper. His annual refurbishment allowance for Downing Street is £30,000. That's significantly more than my own annual salary.

"No politician's room should be worth more than a worker."

NJC committee member Debbie Lydon, who brought the motion, believes the individual sectors that make up the service group must come together to develop a shared campaign to fight government cuts and push for a fair pay settlement.

She told delegates that local government workers need to be on the front foot and be prepared to take the fight to the government, and that includes preparing to strike.

"There needs to be a proper strategy for industrial action. We need to know how we build for it, how we get the systems in place, how we support local action and how we maximise turnout in national ballots and get maximum participation in any industrial action.

"Council funding has been massively cut over the past decade and it must be reversed. We need to be organised and act. Enough is enough.

"We need to continue our legal work for equal pay and we need to be ready to build for industrial action. To make the case for it and to make it work when we have pay offers that fall short.

Conference called on the service group executive to:

- seek agreement with all the sector bargaining committees to agree to launch an immediate 'break the pay freeze' campaign;
- encourage and support local government branches to organise rallies and protests, whether virtually or physically with suitable social distancing;
- urge the service group executive to

call on the NEC to build unity with other public sector trade unions - and within UNISON - including, where possible, coordinated lawful industrial action.