



PAY CLAIM FOR 2024/2025

Submitted to Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council
by the Tonbridge and Malling Branch of UNISON

1. Introduction

This pay claim is submitted by the Tonbridge and Malling Branch of UNISON on behalf of all UNISON members working for Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council.

The last 18 months have been exceedingly challenging for almost every organisation – and almost every individual.

2. Last year's pay settlement

This time last autumn, when CPI was running at 11.1% and RPI at 14.2%, TMBC staff were awarded a pay rise of only 5% (plus a little extra for the lowest grades) from April 2023.

UNISON members voted to accept last year's pay award – but only by a very narrow margin.

Our salaries never do seem to keep up with inflation, but last April's **huge discrepancy between our pay and the rate of inflation eroded our salaries even more than usual**. Those on the lowest grades, who never have much opportunity to save for a rainy day, will always feel it the most.

One UNISON member pointed out that *“After deductions, I actually only received an extra £80 per month, which did even cover the rise in the food bill – let alone anything else... Disheartening”*.

By comparison:

- the National Joint Council of unions (the NJC) negotiated a flat rate of **£1,925** on all pay points (backdated from last April). This was equivalent to between 3.88% and 9.42%, depending on grade, and offered significantly more to the lower paid.

- Kent County Council paid all their staff on bands KR3 to KR11 a rise of **£2,000** from April 2023. This equates to **10.4%** for the lowest paid, bringing their lowest salary up to £11.04 (higher than the Foundation real living wage for 2022 of £10.90). Pay bands above KR11 were increased by a percentage rate instead.
- According to press reports (eg. The Guardian 13th July 2023), other public services all received rather more than us too:

Police	7%
Prison officers	7%
Teachers	6.5%
Junior doctors	6% plus an unconsolidated payment of £1,250
Armed forces	5% + an unconsolidated payment of £1,000
Civil servants	5.5%

TMBC staff have been left behind.

3. Cost of living since last year

Things have not improved very much during the course of this year either.

ONS figures at September 2023:

The Retail Price Index	8.9%,
Consumer Price Index	6.7%
CPIH (which includes owner occupiers' housing costs)	6.3%.

Since last September, all our members have felt the financial pressure of most or all of their outgoings increasing: utilities, mortgage/rent, fuel, groceries, insurances and childcare or pet care (where relevant).

Some outgoings have increased significantly, by hundreds of pounds. This was particularly striking for members whose mortgage fixed rate ended. In the worst cases, 14% of our members experienced mortgage increases alone of over £300 per month.

Government energy subsidies have also now finished, meaning households will be feeling the full effect of the increased fuel bills this winter.

These expenditures are not things we can live without, like holidays or takeaways - they are **everyday necessities**.

4. Some of our staff are really struggling

Our recent UNISON members' survey completed in October revealed that an increasing number of staff are now finding they cannot survive on their monthly wages alone:

- 46% (up from 37% last year) now regularly dip into their savings to get through the month (this is money that was previously set aside for a holiday, home improvements, retirement or a rainy day – which may have a long term impact), and/or
- 32% have taken out loans (compared to 10% last year), and/or
- 7% have borrowed from friends/relatives.

Most worryingly, 18% of our members indicated their household is struggling financially overall, with 7% even struggling to pay essential utility bills. Some are single parent households or carers for dependent adults, which makes things all the more challenging.

This is clearly **unsustainable**: we need much more this year.

5. Staff Morale

This summer, it was recognised that TMBC Planning salaries were well below the market rates elsewhere, and this was likely the reason for failing to recruit into numerous vacant Planning posts over the last couple of years.

The introduction of the “Golden Hello” payments and Market Supplement awarded to all qualified Planning Officers only, caused considerable bad feeling amongst UNISON members - and non-members - in various departments. More staff joined UNISON that month than in the rest of the year!

Several survey respondents told us they **did not feel their work was valued** and one member pointed out that it was “**divisive and unfair**”.

There have been long term vacancies in other teams too. UNISON cannot help thinking that **if all salaries had kept up with inflation and other employers better to start with, TMBC may never have had the recruitment issues it has had.**

As one member put it, *“It would be cheaper to pay better to retain the existing staff, than wasting money paying for agency staff – and less disruptive to the service”.*

Another member stated *“Management and Councillors need to realise that dedicated staff give (the) best service. Investing in staff is no different to other investments to improve service delivery”*.

Several members pointed out that their own roles would also be hard to replace – but the Council will only realise this once people leave. One member stated: *“Management should recognise the shortages of trained staff in other roles even when we are fully staffed, rather than waiting for staff to leave, then struggling to recruit”*.

Our members want to feel their role is valued whilst they still work at TMBC, and salary is a very important element of that. Salaries need to increase before more people “jump ship”, leaving us unable to deliver services.

57% of our survey respondents indicated they have considered leaving for better pay during the year – this is an even larger percentage than this time last year.

A few members made it clear that they are actively looking for better paid jobs right now, despite also saying they actually enjoy working for TMBC. This seems such a waste of their skills and knowledge! And it will cost even more to recruit and train their replacements.

68% of our members said their workload had increased over the last year, and a massive 53% of respondents said work pressures had an impact on their mental health. Several members reported that their teams have had vacancies much of the time, which puts more workload and stress on the remaining staff trying to cover the work, and later whilst training new colleagues.

The cost of living crisis has led to increased demand on some of our services, especially in the Housing department, which further contributes to a stressful workload.

Several members are telling us that this work stress disrupts their work / life balance at home, and potentially damages relationships.

6. Mileage rates

In addition, it costs more and more for our members to use their cars for work.

HMRC have still not increased the National mileage rates from 45p per mile for 12 years, which feels especially unfair over the last few years, with the cost of fuel, insurance premiums, care repairs and new/used car prices all rising

considerably. UNISON and the RAC have calculated that mileage should now be more like 63p per mile.

In the current climate, many of our members are now effectively paying out of their own pockets to conduct for their site work for TMBC!

Some other employers (including some other Councils) have recognised this inadequacy and are making additional mileage payments. We are calling on TMBC to do the same - even if we have to pay tax on it.

7. In Summary

Our members are a reasonable bunch, who understand that the Council's finances are also challenged, but who also need to look after their families. **Pay rises of well below inflation once again are untenable for our members.**

Appropriate reward is needed to **recruit and retain** staff, but also to **improve morale and productivity** of the employees who deliver essential services to our community.

UNISON are seeking:

- A pay rise of 7.5% for all pay grades.
- The lowest grades brought up to at least the Real Living Wage of £12 per hour.
- A top up mileage allowance of 18p/mile, which including the HMRC allowance (45p/mile) would bring the total up to 63p/mile.

Carolyn Mell
Branch Chair

Jack Lee
Membership Officer

9 November 2023