



## PAY CLAIM FOR 2025/2026

### Submitted by UNISON to Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council

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

#### **Foreword**

The Council's pay award for April 2024, which included a flat rate increase for grades up to SO and a 5% rise for higher grades, was accepted by the majority of our UNISON members.

Overall, our members viewed this award as fairer than those in previous years, as it more closely reflected the prevailing inflation rate at the time—especially when compared to the previous year, when inflation had peaked at 11.6% in early 2023, but our wages were only increased by 5% that April.

#### **Historical Pay Trends**

The Council's pay awards have historically lagged behind inflation almost every year, over many years. Table 1 and Chart 2 illustrate this trend.

**Table 1: TMBC Pay Awards vs. Cost of Living (2011-2024)**

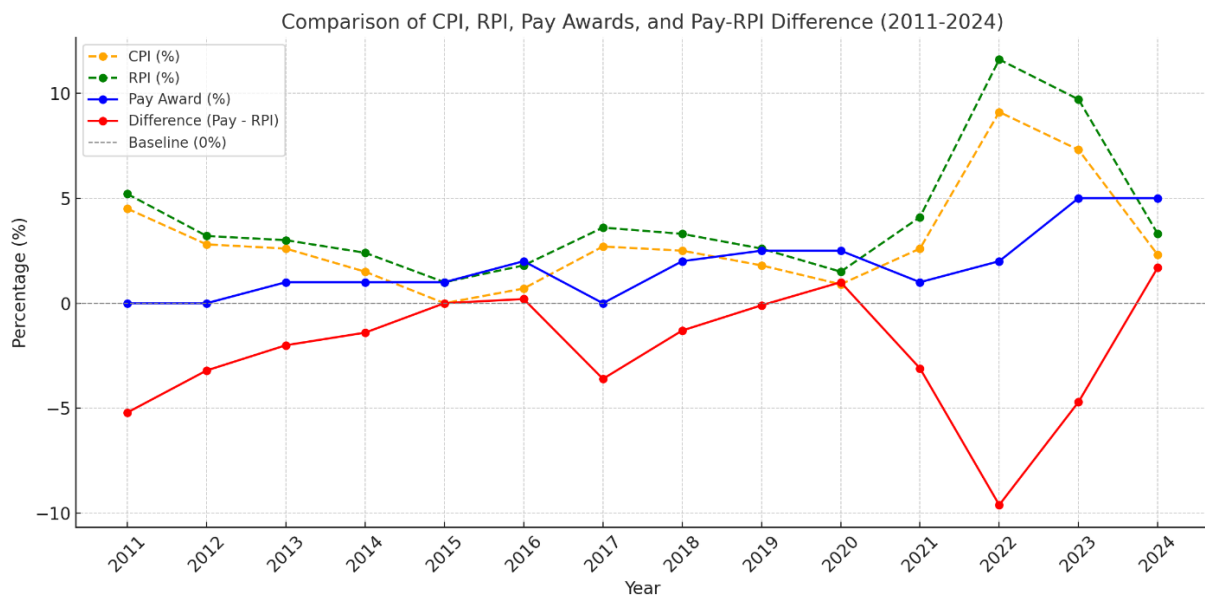
Source ONS

Year	CPI %	RPI %	Our Pay Award (%)	Difference between TMBC pay & RPI (%)
2011	4.5	5.2	0	-5.2
2012	2.8	3.2	0	-3.2
2013	2.6	3.0	1	-2.0
2014	1.5	2.4	1	-1.4
2015	0	1.0	1	0
2016	0.7	1.8	2	+0.2
2017	2.7	3.6	0	-3.6

<b>2018</b>	2.5	3.3	2	-1.3
<b>2019</b>	1.8	2.6	2.5	-0.1
<b>2020</b>	0.9	1.5	2.5	+1.0
<b>2021</b>	2.6	4.1	1	-3.1
<b>2022</b>	9.1	11.6	2	-9.6
<b>2023</b>	7.3	9.7	5	-4.7
<b>2024</b>	2.3	3.3	£1,900 up to SO 5% for M grade	(Varies per grade) <u>+1.7 (M Grade)</u>
<b>CUMULATIVE TOTAL</b>				<b>-31.3%</b>

**Chart 2:** The following chart visualises the same data as table 1 above.

(As 2024 had varying percentage increases for SO and below, 5% has been used).



Between 2011 and 2024, our pay awards rarely came close to matching inflation. Over that time period, **the cumulative shortfall in the value of TMBC earnings was -31.3% - almost a third**. High inflation years, like 2022 when the difference was -9.6%, significantly exacerbate the pay gap.

This pay erosion is most felt by those who have previously reached the top of their grade, who will not receive any further pay increments.

### The current situation

As of December 2024, the latest inflation rates were:

CPI 2.6%, and RPI 3.6%.

Note: UNISON believes that the RPI is a more accurate reflection of the cost pressures faced by working people, because it also includes housing costs.

While inflation is currently lower than last year, it is expected to rise again shortly.

In our recent member survey, TMBC UNISON members highlighted **significant price increases** over the past year, particularly for mortgages, energy, childcare, groceries, and insurance premiums (especially car insurance).

For those re-mortgaging in 2024, mortgage interest payments were **projected to rise by an average of 22.9% (an average rise of £2,900 annually)** according to the Resolution Foundation, marking a substantial additional financial burden.

Average **monthly rental costs** have also **increased by 8.4% up to August 2024**.

Though the Bank of England reduced interest rates by 0.25% to 4.75% in November 2024, rates are expected to rise again above 5% in 2025, which will further affect mortgage rates and inevitably impact rental prices.

Furthermore, Ofgem increased the energy price cap by an average of 9.5% (for those on dual fuel plans), then announced that prices will rise again from 1st January 2025 by another 1.2%. It is predicted to increase again in Q2 of 2025 (source: [Price Cap Predictions and Changes - British Gas](#)).

According to the Coram 2023 Childcare Survey, **childcare costs have increased by 80%** between 2010 and 2023 - and fees look set to rise even further now, due to National Insurance increases. A [2024 survey](#), revealed that 59% of parents said that a rise in nursery fees would lead to one parent in their household having to reduce their working hours or leaving work altogether.

Data from Eurostat shows that **car insurance premiums have increased by 82%** in the UK over the past 3 years. Our members have given examples of their premiums doubling, even when shopping around.

### **Recruitment and Retention at TMBC**

In recent years, TMBC has faced significant challenges in recruiting for a number of vacant positions, particularly in Planning, Legal, Licensing and office cleaners. Certain roles are in high demand across both the public and private sectors, but with the private sector typically offering higher salaries, it has led to a loss of qualified and experienced professionals from the public sector.

Being close to London offers the opportunity to earn a higher salary (plus London Weighting) with only a short commute—or even whilst working from home. This is a compelling factor that further contributes to our recruitment issues.

**64%** of UNISON members who responded to our 2024 survey believe that **TMBC pays less than other local authorities** in the South East for similar roles.

To confirm this, we compared some recent local job adverts with equivalent roles at TMBC:

- Maidstone: Customer Services £24,673 - £26,476  
vs. TMBC £22,201-£24,051.
- Sevenoaks – Civil Enforcement Officer - £29,330 - £31,773  
vs. TMBC £24,495 - £27,159.
- Dover: Housing Officer £32,491 - £37,362  
  
vs. TMBC £27,882 - £33,297.
- Folkestone – Environmental Health Officer - £41,567 - £47,516  
vs. TMBC £40,587-£45,480.
- Sevenoaks – Food and Safety Team Leader - £51,157 - £53,256  
vs. TMBC £48,273 – £51,027.

In general, we found **TMBC's pay seems less competitive** than other Kent local authorities. If TMBC continues to fall behind, its ability to attract and retain qualified staff will be further damaged.

Whilst paying a Market Supplement and offering Golden Hello payments has helped to fill most of the Planning vacancies that TMBC faced last year, it has caused **significant dissatisfaction** among staff—particularly those within the Planning department who did not receive these payments, many of whom had been working exceptionally hard while covering vacancies; but also staff in other departments at similar grades, many of whom would also be difficult to replace.

Had salaries been more comparable from the start, the Market Supplement and Golden Hello would likely not have been necessary, and staff morale would not have been as negatively impacted.

### Workload

According to our UNISON survey, **92%** of respondents reported an **increase in their workload** over the past year.

Nearly half (**46%**) of respondents had **seriously considered leaving for better pay**, while 17% were looking to leave for a **less stressful workload**. One member shared,

*“The stress caused by my workload is having a negative effect on my health.”*

**48%** of respondents said their **mental health had been impacted by their work**, and **24%** reported that **financial concerns were a contributing factor**, too.

Two respondents highlighted that their **workload often extended beyond normal working hours**. They were unable to claim overtime pay—either due to their M-grade contract, or because there was no overtime budget—whilst the current workload made it difficult to take time off in lieu (TOIL). As a result, these members are, at times, **working without any compensation**.

### **Agile**

The introduction of the Agile computer system this year has placed considerable pressure on staff across multiple departments. Whilst some colleagues were seconded to focus on the setup and implementation of the new system, many staff have been forced to juggle their regular workload with additional responsibilities.

Despite the best efforts and dedication of our staff, the system is still not fully operational. More recent setbacks, particularly related to data transfer, have led to significant delays in the go-live date. This **ongoing pressure and lack of resolution is creating frustration and stress, which is taking its toll on staff well-being**.

As a result, the overall **morale among employees has taken a noticeable hit**. It would not be surprising if some employees have already left due to the added strain, or if others are seriously considering resigning, feeling that the ongoing challenges are no longer sustainable for their personal and professional well-being.

### **The National Living Wage**

The National Living Wage (NLW) represents the legal minimum wage an employer can pay. Following the Government’s recent budget, the NLW will increase from the current £11.44 to £12.21 per hour (for workers over 21) from April 2025. This rise of 77p per hour translates to an additional £28.49 per week or £1,481 annually.

While UNISON has limited data on the specific impact for TMBC, it appears that around 10 employees on scale 2 and part of scale 3 will benefit.

### The Real Living Wage

By contrast, the Real Living Wage (RLW) is independently calculated by the Living Wage Foundation to ensure a "basic but acceptable" standard of living, reflecting the current cost of living. For the 2024-2025 year, the RLW is set at £12.60 per hour.

While the RLW is voluntary, 15,000 employers are already paying it, including several local authorities in the South of England, such as Crawley, Brighton and Hove, Reading, Oxford City, Winchester, and Milton Keynes. These employers report benefits such as higher productivity, lower turnover and absenteeism, and an enhanced public image.

Notably, companies like Amazon and Lidl are paying a minimum of £13.50 and £13.64 per hour in 2024.

When recruiting, TMBC faces competition from these employers.

UNISON believes **TMBC should set a positive example for other local employers** in the borough by adopting the RLW for its own staff.

Paying the current RLW rate of £12.60 would cost the Council an additional 39p per hour per employee, amounting to £14.43 per week or £750.36 annually. This would benefit approximately 45 employees on scales 2, 3, and a few on scale 4.

### What is happening to pay Nationally?

The new Labour Government has accepted the **Independent Public Sector Pay Review Body's recommendation for pay increases of up to 6%**, in recognition of the years of austerity and real-terms wage cuts that have made it challenging to recruit and retain staff within the public sector.

The most recent Government budget has allocated 5% for public sector pay for the year ahead, although some sectors have secured higher pay settlements over the last year, including:

- NHS, teachers, and armed forces: 5.5-6%
- Civil servants: 5%
- Doctors and dentists: 6%
- Junior Doctors: 22%.

UNISON's national data as of September 2024 indicates that the **average annual pay settlement across the public sector is currently 5.7%**.

### The local situation

TMBC's recent financial reports show that the fiscal situation at this time is not as bad as it has been in previous years, or quite so dire as some other local authorities. UNISON members have played a key role in this improvement.

UNISON's 2024 Member Survey revealed that **29% of members** have faced financial difficulties over the past year, with **17% struggling to even pay utility bills**. Additionally, **42% of respondents have made lifestyle adjustments** to cope, such as cancelling gym memberships, socialising less, shopping at cheaper supermarkets, delaying haircuts and purchasing second-hand clothing.

**Summary:**

To boost staff morale, and improve recruitment and retention, UNISON is calling for:

- A pay rise for all salary points and allowances of **6%**, **OR a flat rate of £2,400** (equivalent to 6% for those on grade SO, but worth more for those on lower grades), **whichever is the higher**.
- An additional increase for those on the bottom of the pay scale to bring their pay up to at least the **Real Living Wage** as our minimum starting salary – not just the National Living Wage.

*Submitted by TMBC UNISON branch for and on behalf of our members.*

**Carolyn Mell**  
Branch Chair

**Jack Lee**  
Membership Officer

**31 December 2024**