

2026 NJC PAY CLAIM: BRANCH CONSULTATION

The UNISON National Joint Council (NJC) met on 19 September 2025 to consider the contents of the NJC pay claim for 2026, as well as the process for consulting branches. This circular sets out the issues the Committee discussed, before explaining the process for the consultation.

The 2025 pay settlement

For NJC 2025, we submitted a claim for an increase £3,000 on all spinal column points, and a clear plan to reach a minimum hourly rate of £15. The Employers offered an increase of 3.2% on all spinal column points. As branches know, 2025 pay was ultimately settled on the basis of that 3.2% offer. However, UNISON made clear members were not satisfied with the pay increase and would be demanding a fairer settlement in 2026.

The 2026 proposals

The NJC Committee considered various factors in agreeing its proposals for the 2026 headline claims.

Inflation remains fairly high and has seen recent increases: over 2025 Retail Price Index (RPI) inflation has averaged above 4%, and the latest figure, for August, was 4.6%. This has had an obvious negative impact on the value of members' pay.

At the bottom end of the pay spine, low pay is still a huge concern. The bottom pay point is £12.65, and this will rise to £12.85 in April 2026 due to the deletion of pay point 2. But both of these figures are expected to be below the new Foundation Living Wage when it is announced later in the autumn.

For 2026, it is expected that the Employers will at least consider making or negotiating around a multi-year offer/settlement, following the more stable funding settlements that local authorities have been given.

At Local Government Conference 2025, a motion was carried which (among other things) gave sectors within the Local Government Service Group the right to submit multi year pay claims, if they wished.

There remain benefits and drawbacks to multi year claims settlements. A two or three year deal would provide members with some much-needed financial certainty, and would give the NJC time and space to focus on negotiating on some other key issues – such as the pay spine review and maternity / paternity / family support leave and pay. On the other hand, with inflation fairly high and volatile, a multi year settlement could leave members with sub-inflation increases already locked in.

The other issue that the NJC Committee has considered is the increase in power of Reform UK in the Local Government Association and hence on the Employers' Side. If this trend were to continue, it would make year-on-year pay negotiations more challenging.

The NJC Committee is therefore proposing that our claim for 2026 is based on two 'routes' as headline claims for the 2026 pay claim.

- **If the Employers make a single-year pay offer for 2026/27, our claim is for an increase of £3,000 or 10%, whichever is the greater; and a new minimum hourly rate of £15**
- **If the Employers make a multi-year offer for 2026 onwards, our claim is for an increase of RPI + 3% in year one, RPI + 2% in year two, and RPI + 1% in year three; and an underpin of £15 an hour by the second year**
- **RPI to be defined as the annual average in the 12 months from October to September prior to the settlement date, to give members certainty of what the applicable RPI rate would be**