

SLT union members Vote to Fight

Sandwell Leisure Trust's (SLT) loss of income due to the pandemic means Sandwell Council, according to the Local Government Association, faces two choices.

*"When a leisure operator running services on behalf of a council begin to fail, the council faces a difficult choice. It can either allow the operator to fail, potentially bringing any facilities owned by the council back in-house...or it can choose to support the operator. **Either approach is likely to involve significant costs to the council.**"*

Instead, it is deeply disappointing that management at SLT are trying to make their staff pay the price of the pandemic by proposing not to pay the NJC pay award of 2.75% this year, plus next year's award, and leave the NJC, the national body that negotiates terms and conditions.

If SLT's staff are to pay for the £millions lost in income, then there would need to be severe attacks on terms and jobs. If you allow for the 1% of any pay award the Council pays, then the saving of not paying the 2.75% is just £97,000. Freezing pay does not make good the financial shortfall for SLT. Only the Council can do that. Kirklees Council have recently given their leisure trust a £4million bailout.

Staff have already suffered financially due to being furloughed. It is pleasing that on a 77% turnout, UNISON members voted 92% to reject SLT's proposal and 82% voted for a formal industrial action ballot. Other unions gave similar results.

In response Management at SLT revised their proposal to 1% pay award for the next two years, still leaving NJC with a promise not to attack terms and conditions for 12 months. UNISON members voted 79% to reject this offer on an 82% turnout. Other unions also voted overwhelmingly to reject this.

The Board of SLT has now begun a process of formal consultation to impose this change 17 January 2021.

The Joint Trade Unions have written to the Board pointing out that unless SLT drop their plans entirely, UNISON, alongside other unions, will ballot for industrial action. The Branch Committee unanimously voted to fully support UNISON members at SLT. Regional Officials are also supportive. We call upon SLT to reconsider to avoid a damaging dispute. Copy of the message to Board members of SLT can be read at www.sandwellunison.co.uk

National NJC Pay Offer Consultation Ballot Results

UNISON members covered by NJC terms and conditions voted 4 to 1 to accept the offer of 2.75% for 2020.

At the time of writing the national result is yet to be concluded, but with this overwhelming vote in Sandwell, the national one is unlikely to give a different verdict. The actual results were:-

445 to accept (80%)

109 to reject (20%)

Thanks to all those that took the time to return the ballot paper. National results are due 11 August.

School Return in September

The governments planned return in June didn't quite happen as the Government hoped for due to the health & safety concerns raised by trade unions.

Concerns remain for the full opening in September, particularly given a recent spike in Sandwell's cases of COVID-19.

Sandwell UNISON has been busy checking the Risk Assessments for all schools, raising issues and concerns to keep you as safe as possible.

However, these Risk Assessments are ongoing documents that change as circumstances change. If you have any concerns about your school, then please raise with your management team first. If you need to contact UNISON, please do not hesitate to do so. For contact details see www.sandwellunison.co.uk

If you would like to become a UNISON health & safety representative for your school, even better. The bigger we are, the stronger we are. www.unison.org.uk/at-work/education-services/key-issues/covid-19-closures/