Glasgow City Council unions vote for strike action over equal pay

Workers at Glasgow City Council have voted overwhelmingly for legal strike action over equal pay measures *writes Mike Picke*n.

The trade union Unison's ballot ended on 1 March and the results were announced on 2 March (see below). Nearly 9,000 Unison members employed directly by the Council voted in a postal ballot, 96% in favour of strike action on a turnout of 52.5%.

Under the reactionary anti-trade union laws of the Conservative UK Government, postal ballots for strike action have to exceed a legal threshold of a 50% turnout. Given the difficulties of postal ballots sent to home addresses having to be returned through the post in an era of electronic communication in the workplace, this is an extremely difficult challenge and the fact that this threshold was exceeded and an overwhelming vote for a strike carried shows the huge strength of feeling among rank and file workers. Unfortunately the 50% threshold was not quite exceeded in the subsidiary employer "Glasgow Life", an 'Arms Length Management Organisation" (ALMO) notionally a charity, used by the Council to deliver cultural, leisure and recreation services such as sports centres, arts venues, museums, libraries and community centres across the City. Nevertheless the 91% vote for strike action on a 48% turnout indicates the strength of feeling in that part of the Council's services.

The GMB union also balloted its Glasgow City Council members affected by the dispute and achieved a 97.8% vote for strike action on a more than 50% turnout from its members in social

care, cleaning and catering services.

GMB Scotland Organiser Sean Baillie told the Glasgow Times:

> *"Our members need equal pay justice and an end to the discriminatory pay and grading system that remains in place.*
>
> *"That's the clear message this ballot result sends to the council officials who should be negotiating properly with our claimant groups and to every councillor seeking election in May.*
>
> *"The council's liabilities are growing every working hour of every working day and the cost will likely run into the hundreds of million yet again, so the situation is critical for our members, the services they deliver, and the city's finances.*
>
> *"That's why we need an urgent negotiation process to be conducted in good faith between the council and the claimant groups, if strike action is to be avoided." Sean Baillie GMB Scotland Organiser*
>
> *https://www.glasgowtimes.co.uk/news/19964224.equal-pay-strikes-hit-glasgow-end-month-unions-back-action/*

GMB members demanding equal pay

Unite, the third union involved in the equal pay dispute, is balloting members currently, with a closing date of 14 March.

The pressure is now on the SNP-led Council to come up with a

resolution by introducing new proposals for compensation and equal pay grading. The SNP leadership inherited the crisis in Glasgow City Council in 2017 when it took over from a Labour Council found guilty of pay discrimination against women workers over decades but promised to settle the issue and introduce both compensation and a new pay and grading system that they have failed to do.

In the run-up to the local Council elections on 5 May, resolving this dispute is major challenge for the SNP Council leadership and also raises the question of whether the SNP-led Scottish government and their Scottish Green partners have the wherewithal to come up with financial support for the cash-strapped Council that can enable resolution. If they fail in this, then strikes will almost certainly go ahead against the backdrop of the Council elections. Solidarity and support from workers and residents across Glasgow and beyond will be vital in the event of strikes to ensure a victory in this long-running battle for equal pay. A separate Scotland-wide pay award campaign for council workers from 1 April is also ongoing by the unions.

3 March 2022

UNISON Glasgow media release:

UNISON
the public service union

UNISON members in Glasgow City Council have voted overwhelmingly for strike action in the dispute over equal pay compensation payments.
96% of members voted for strike action, on a turnout of 52.5%.
Just under 9,000 workers were balloted.
Lyn Marie O'Hara, UNISON Branch Depute Chair, said:
"This is a huge vote for action and a clear message to the council to resolve the dispute.
The UNISON branch will now request authorisation for strike action from our NEC and be liaising with our sister trade unions on the next steps in the industrial dispute.
The trade unions will also continue to receive regular updates from the claimants joint legal team on the current negotiations with the council lawyers. The council should now listen."

To Unison Glasgow members:

UNISON Strike Ballot Results – Equal Pay Compensation Payments Dispute
UNISON members in Glasgow City Council have voted overwhelmingly for strike action in the dispute over equal pay compensation payments.
96% of members voted for strike action, on a turnout of 52.5%.
This is a huge vote for action and a clear message to the council to resolve the dispute. The UNISON branch will now request authorisation for strike action from our NEC and be liaising with our sister trade unions on the next steps in the industrial dispute. The trade unions will also continue to receive regular updates from the claimants joint legal team on the current negotiations with the council lawyers. The council should now listen.
The vote in Glasgow Life was also for strike action however the turnout in the ballot was just short of the 50% threshold required under the current UK anti-trade union laws. Nevertheless, this is still a very clear message from UNISON members in Glasgow Life on the need for equal pay justice. 91% of members in Glasgow Life voted for strike action, on a turnout of 48%.

Further communications will be issued in due course.
Well done to all who voted in the two strike ballots.
UNISON Glasgow Branch
https://www.facebook.com/UnisonGlasgowCity/