

Dear UNISON members in EA

**ENVIRONMENT AGENCY INDUSTRIAL ACTION BALLOT**

I am writing to explain the two questions on the ballot paper, and to sum up the background to this dispute.

**THE BALLOT QUESTIONS**

We are asking whether you support strike action, and whether you support ‘action short of strike’. We ask both questions for legal reasons which are set out further below.

* We are not planning to ask members to take all-out strike action of withdrawing your labour for a whole day or series of days. If you back action in the ballot, we will begin our action by asking you to stop performing some extra duties not required by your contract, and to withdraw from incident rosters on a limited basis, on no more than a single day in a week.
* We would then look at the impact of that action in assessing what to do next. Since 2017, the law has provided that a strike ballot is valid for six months, then lapses.

**Action short of strike:** there is a list of potential types of action on the ballot paper. We cannot lawfully ask you to take action beyond that specified on the ballot. We have made a long list to give flexibility to your representatives to design the most effective programme of action. These seemed, upon discussing with members, to be actions which were potentially effective and which they would be prepared to support.

**Strike action** means a “continuous withdrawal of labour”. It might constitute “strike action” for *some* members who are contractually required to perform incident response to withdraw from such duties. If you vote to support strike action it will enable these members to participate alongside others in such action.

**Avoiding risk to life:** In a similar way to the Fire Brigade Union, we will not ask members to carry out industrial action where this would endanger life. In such situations action would be suspended.

**BACKGROUND TO THE DISPUTE**

91% of UNISON members who voted in the pay ballot rejected the offer. When told this the Agency went ahead and imposed its offer, completely unchanged. The imposed offer is well below the public sector average (upon which MPs’ 2.7% pay increase has been based).

**Pay rises 2018**

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| Worker group | % award |
| Local authority | 2.7% average, lower paid getting more; minimum 2% |
| NHS | 3% minimum for nearly all staff, more for low-paid |
| Teachers on main scale | 3.5% |
| Armed forces | 2% plus 0.9% one off payment |
| Private sector average | 2.8% |
| **EA** | **1.3%** |

We believe the Agency made no meaningful effort to secure resource to enable its staff to avoid a real pay cut (adding to others in previous years that have meant real pay is 20% down since 2009).

We ask that they reopen discussion **and** seek further resources or flexibility from Government.