Officers' Side of the Joint Negotiating Committee for Chief Officers of Local Authorities: England and Wales

JNC PAY CLAIM 2025/26

The JNC Officers' Side is submitting the following pay claim for our members covered by the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) for Chief Officers of Local Authorities:

- **An increase of 6 per cent or an increase that is no less favourable to Chief Officers than the NJC claim – as a step towards pay restoration.**
- **An additional day of paid leave, in line with NJC terms**

Key points from our claim

Chief Officers deserve a pay rise

- The pay of Chief Officers has fallen in real terms since April 2008 while comparable private sector rates have increased.
- Local authority senior managers and leaders remain in short supply. Nine out of ten councils face capability gaps in their senior management teams, and half of county councils say that they are experiencing difficulties when recruiting finance officers.

Cost of living

- The December 2024 12-month RPI rates is **3.5 per cent** and the CPI 12-month rate is **2.5 per cent**.
- Last year's settlement remained below inflation and further compounded the issue of our members facing real terms losses to their wages.
- Significant household expenses such as mortgage interest payments have increased this winter by 17.6 per cent on the previous year.
- The OBR forecasts that inflation will remain at these levels throughout 2025 (with RPI averaging 3.5 per cent and CPI averaging 2.6 per cent).

Overtime and wellbeing

- Our members report extremely high rates of unpaid overtime working, alongside the strain of stress and anxiety associated with leadership during a time of great financial pressure.

Chief Officers' pay has been eroded and is no longer competitive with external rates for equivalent roles. The Trade Union Side calls on JNC employers to recognise this contribution and make our members an offer of 6 per cent and additional day of annual leave – or an increase that is no less favourable to our members than the NJC Green Book claim.

Link to the NJC Green Book claim

The Officers' Side continues to see a close connection between the NJC and the JNC claims. As with last year, we aim to secure justified increases for Chief Officers and Green Book staff in tandem whilst respecting differentials, not at the expense of the other.

As the LGA has previously said, there is significant value to be had from treating Chief Officers with 'the same or very similar to those given to rank-and-file staff. This promotes a single organisational ethos.'[1]

We ask that this claim be read in conjunction with the arguments put forward in the main NJC claim, and that an offer is made that is either 6% or no less favourable to Chief Officers than Green Book workers.

Pay comparability

Chief Officers' pay has fallen behind comparable public and private sector rates. This dynamic is not new – the gap has only widened since the Communities and Local Government Select Committee said a decade ago that that:

> *'Salary levels for local government sector posts are significantly lower than those in the private sector … even taking account of enhanced pension provision, packages remain much lower for a top council post when compared to the packages on offer for top private sector staff.'*[2]

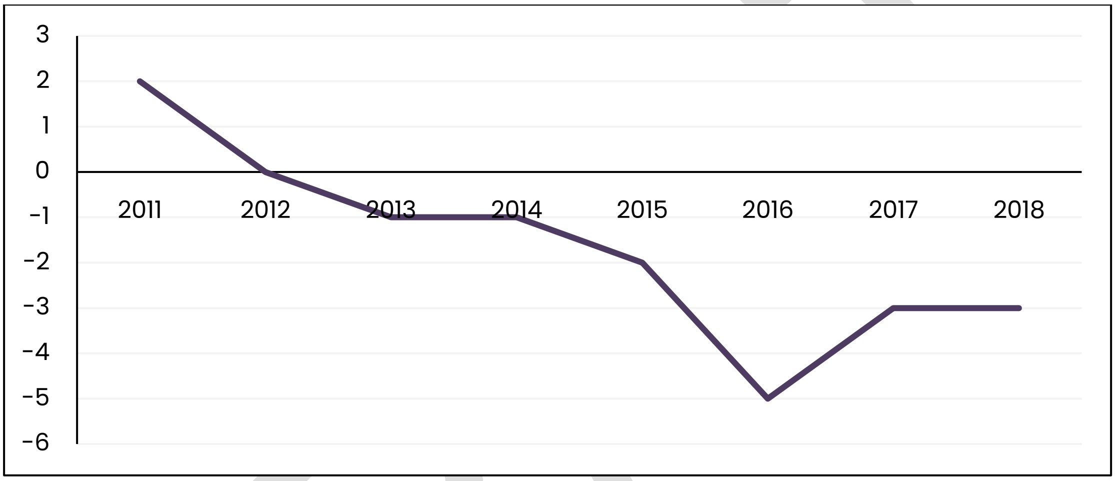
The LGA's own publication, the 'Chief executive and chief officer pay survey,' suggests that Chief Officers' pay is substantially below equivalent NHS and Further Education rates.[3] Although the survey has not been repeated since 2018, despite the LGA's intentions,[4] an uprating of the average figures contained in that survey by JNC settlements suggest that Chief Officer salaries are approximately half their equivalent public sector rates.

According to KPMG's monitoring of FTSE companies, median pay rates 'other executive director' and finance directors increased in 2024 between 4 per cent and 6 per cent. These figures are for base pay alone and they do not take substantial bonus schemes into account.[5]

The most recent statistical modelling on pay for comparable jobs remains the ONS modelling published in September 2020, which found that when the differential for pay including overtime and bonuses was estimated, overall public sector wages were 3 per cent lower than comparable private sector rates (when controlled for employee characteristics).

The assessed differential is even less competitive for senior and/or highly skilled staff in large organisations (those employing more than 500 people): the wage differential for 'upper skill groups' was estimated to be -10.5 per cent, and for 'upper-middle skill groups' the differential was estimated at -14 per cent. The median hourly pay rate for 'Managers, directors and senior officials' was 14.8 per cent lower in the public sector.

ONS modelled estimate of the public/private percentage pay differential – gross pay including overtime and bonuses[6]



Equality impact

The Trade Union Side notes, again, that only limited progress has been made since the Employer Side undertook to conduct joint work on narrowing the gender pay gap in response to the 2020 claim. Pay gaps are not limited to gender. Only 6.8 per cent of Chief Officers were identified as non-white at the time of the last workforce, according to the latest figures held by the LGA.[7] The extent of the disability pay gap is unclear, as the LGA did not collect figures on this characteristic. However, the Trade Union side has reason for believing that disabled workers are underrepresented in Chief Officer grades.

We call upon the Employer Side again to undertake meaningful joint work with the Trade Union side to assess the extent of, and close, the gender, ethnicity, and disability pay gaps in Chief Officer grades.

Chief Officers' pay

Chief Officers' pay was frozen for five years following the imposition of pay constraints in local government and the gap has never been recovered. While the Trade Union side recognises that settlements have been targeted at lower-paid local government workers, the real-terms erosion of Chief Officer rates has been severe. Our members in these grades have experienced the sharpest real-terms cuts in local government, which is already the lowest-paying part of the public sector.

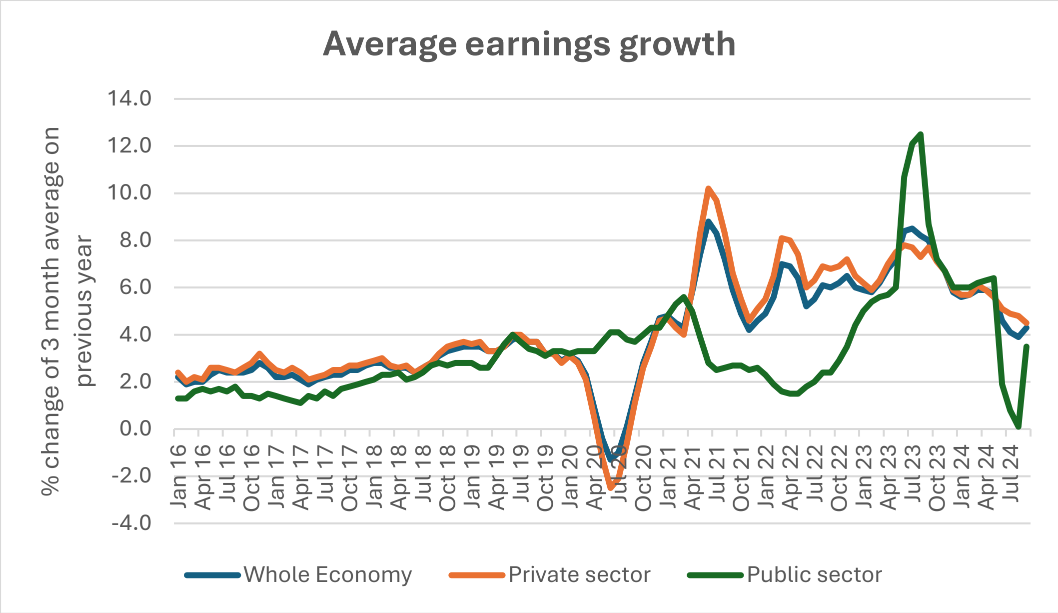
While inflation decreased last year, the 2.5 per cent settlement did not help overcome the real terms losses our members have experienced in the last 15 years of austerity. This erosion of real pay explains why the share of UNISON's members who said that they do not feel valued by their employer stands at nearly 50 per cent.

We have seen settlements across the economy average 5 per cent in the last year.

Sector	Average pay settlements
Across economy	5%
Private sector	5%
Public sector	4.98%
Not for profit	5%
Source: Labour Research Department, settlements year to November 2024	

Since 2021, average earnings growth has been running at relatively high rates and average earnings growth across the economy hit 4.3% in October 2024[8].

As in the case of pay settlements, a gap between public and private rates has been a persistent feature of the economy for more than a decade. 2020 saw the first sustained period since 2010 when the public sector has been running ahead of the private sector. But faster growth in the private sector reasserted itself strongly over 2021 and 2022, before falling back. Latest figures show the public rate at 3.5% in October 2024 against private sector earnings growth of 4.5%.



Source: Office for National Statistics, Labour Market Overview UK, November 2024

The Office for Budgetary Responsibility Economic and Fiscal Outlook published in October 2024 estimated that earnings growth will average 3.6% over 2025.

Cost of living

Cost of living pressures will remain elevated in the year ahead. The OBR forecasts that RPI will average 3.5 per cent in 2025 – with a widening gap on CPI – due to their expectation of stronger growth in house prices and mortgage interest payments.[9]

This claim must be read against both the immediate context of uncompetitive local government pay rates and the long-term degrading of Chief Officers' pay since 2008. The effective functioning of local government services requires dedicated senior managers, who are under exceptional strain as the pandemic gives way to severe funding pressures. A pay increase in line with this claim is in the wider interests of local government services.

Workload and work-life balance

Fifteen years of austerity has significantly added to the stress levels and workload burdens of Chief Officers. 207,000 jobs were lost in local authorities across the UK between June 2014 and June 2024 – a fall of 19 per cent – despite a dramatic and sustained increase in demand for local government services.[10]

Local authorities are experiencing significant recruitment and retention challenges, impacting various sectors, particularly education and social services. This crisis is exacerbated by low pay, high workloads, and budget cuts.

Local Government Employment decreased by 6,000 (0.3%) from June to September 2024, and by 11,000 (0.6%) from September 2023. Nationally, unemployment remains low at just over 4%, through to October 2024 – lower than at almost any point in the last 40 years. With low unemployment and a vibrant jobs market, local government employers are struggling to compete with employers who often pay more for less demanding work (such as administrative, retail and hospitality).

The already severe funding pressures on local government have escalated into a national crisis as more authorities have been forced to issue Section 114 notices.

Last year's claim found that The ONS's Labour Force Survey suggest that Chief Officers normally contribute, on average, an additional **11 hours** each week.[11] GMB and UNISON members are still reporting high levels of working hours above and beyond their contractual obligations, and as such remains as a goodwill contribution to the effective running of public services.

The vacancy rate has remained stubbornly high in public administration. According to UNISON's 2025 Chief Officers' survey, three quarters of respondents said that Chief Officer pay was a recruitment issue at their local authority – up from two thirds the year before.

The pressure of balancing competing priorities while meeting statutory duties is having a severe effect on the health and wellbeing of many of our members. Our members reported higher levels of stress than last year in both GMB and UNISON's member surveys. 80 per cent of UNISON members believe their job has become more stressful than last year

We believe that pay awards should be fully funded – while noting that up to 62 per cent of the cost of raising public sector management pay is returned to the Treasury in the form of taxation and National Insurance.[12] We ask the Employer Side to work with us to lobby central government for a more favourable funding settlement.

Conclusion

Local Government relies upon its Chief Officers. As the Local Government Association has said:

> *"Great leadership from managers … is crucial to our shared vision for local government—efficient, accountable, reliable and changing lives for the better. So now, more than ever, we need to ensure our officers are bold and ambitious leaders; equipped to tackle these challenges and lead local government to make a difference, deliver and be trusted."*[13]

Chief Officers' wages have fallen by more than third in real terms since 2008.

We are asking for an offer that is 6% or no less favourable to our members than the main NJC claim as a step towards pay restoration, and action to close gender, ethnicity, and disability pay gaps.

Our members understand and are uniquely sensitive to the pressures that our public services have faced in the last 15 years. They have weathered pay freezes and below inflation awards – which is why our members are asking for an offer of 6 per cent or an increase that is no less favourable to Chief Officers than the NJC claim.

Their goodwill and dedication to ensuring that our local authorities serve our communities in the additional hours they work, often unpaid, must also be rewarded by way of an additional day of annual leave.

We look forward to discussing this claim with the Local Government Employers.

Appendix – results of GMB and UNISON surveys

Below is a summary of GMB and UNISON members' survey (excluding internal questions):

Unpaid hours

- Eight out of ten GMB respondents said that they regularly work additional unpaid hours.
- Of the respondents who regularly worked unpaid hours, they reported working an average of 12 additional hours per week.

Strain

- 80 per cent of respondents said that their job had become either 'much' or 'slightly' more stressful over the last year. Only 20 per cent reported no change.

Below is a summary of UNISON's 2024 members' survey:

Pay

- When asked whether they are well paid for the job they do, over one quarter of chief officers agreed (25.5% agreed and 1.8% strongly agreed), whereas the most (41.8%) disagreed (32.7% disagreed and 9.1% strongly disagreed). 30.9% neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.
- While 49.1% of chief officers agreed or strongly agreed that they are valued by their employer, 32.8% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. This is 5.2 percentage points lower than the number of chief officers that disagreed or strongly disagreed (38%) with the same statement in the 2024 survey. 18.2% neither agreed nor disagreed.
- The majority (73.6%) of chief officers agree that pay has become an increasing concern for them as local authority chief officers (49.1% agree and 24.5% strongly agree). A further majority (75.9%) agree that the pay on offer to those in senior roles is causing recruitment and retention problems in their local authorities (38.9% agreed and 37% strongly agreed), 10.8 percentage points higher than the number of chief officers that agreed or strongly agreed (65.1%) with the same statement in the 2024 survey.

Hours of work

A majority (57.1%) of chief officers disagree that they have a good work-life balance (23.6% disagreed and 34.5% strongly disagreed), down 4.2 percentage points on the number of chief officers that disagreed or strongly disagreed (61.3%) with the same statement in the 2024 survey.

A significant majority (92.7%) said they constantly work more than their normal contracted hours and of these, over a third (37.3%) said they work 6 – 10 extra hours in a typical week, 29.4% work 1 – 5 extra hours, 25.5% work 11 – 15 extra hours, and 7.8% work 16 – 20 extra hours.

One half (49.1%) of chief officers said there is no system in place to claim back time for the extra hours worked. For the other half (50.9%) of chief officers that do have a system in place, most said Time Off in Lieu (TOIL) or flextime. Additional comments include:

- *I keep timesheets and then take time back when I can. Usually, the odd afternoon off.*
- *TOIL, but it is limited to how much we can accrue so it is so hard.*
- *TOIL, although I would estimate I only take about 25% of the extra hours worked.*
- *We work flex time so in theory can bank hours & reclaim them. In practice this has become more difficult to do in recent years due to work pressures.*
- *Flexi, although only entitled to claim back up to a maximum of 13 days a year, so every month I lose hours, meaning I work for free.*
- *Flexitime is there, but nobody at our level uses it.*
- *Flexible working, but excess hours can no longer be moved to Lieu time and used later.*
- *Flexi, although my over worked hours are never fully recovered.*
- *We have a flexible working system, but it is limited in how much additional time accrued can be used.*
- *Flexi time - but rarely have the chance to take it.*

· *Flexi, however, lose this every month when unable to use add hours accrued due to volume of work.*

· *Claims through oracle.*

New ways of working

- Most chief officers strongly agreed (40%) or agreed (32.7%) that they are now working in a more agile / hybrid manner, with more homework than two years ago and most agreed (41.8%) or strongly agreed (10.9%) that they are experiencing increasing costs because of increased homeworking. This is 8.3 percentage points higher than the number of chief officers that agreed or strongly agreed (44.4%) with the same statement in the 2024 survey.

References

[1] LGA, Written Evidence to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee's inquiry into Local government chief officers' remuneration, January 2014 https://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/housing-communities-and-local-government-committee/local-government-chief-officers-remuneration/written/5649.pdf

[2] CLG Select Committee, *Local Government Chief Officers' Remuneration*, 12 September 2014, page 9 http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmcomloc/191/191.pdf

[3] LGA, Chief executive and chief officer pay survey: Research report, December 2018 https://web.archive.org/web/20220131232049/https://www.emcouncils.gov.uk/write/LGA_Chief_executive_and_chief_officer_pay_survey_-_report_Winter_2018.pdf

[4] https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support/workforce-blog/june-blog-numbers-game

[5] KPMG, Guide to Directors' Remuneration, 2024, page 21 https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/uk/pdf/2025/01/guide-to-directors-remuneration.pdf

[6] ONS, Public and private sector earnings: 2019, 23 September 2020 https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/publicandprivatesectorearnings/2019#econometric-modelling-of-private-and-public-sector-earnings-analysis

[7] LGA, Local government workforce summary data – January 2025, https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support/local-government-workforce-data/local-government-workforce

[8] ONS, Labour Market Overview, November 2024

[9] OBR, Economic and Fiscal Outlook: October 2024 https://obr.uk/efo/economic-and-fiscal-outlook-october-2024/#chart-2-d

[10] LGA, Local government workforce summary data – January 2025, https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support/local-government-workforce-data/local-government-workforce

[11] Trade Union Sid analysis of ONS Quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS) data for October to December 2023. Chief Officers are taken to be included under 'Managers, Directors And Senior Officials' employed in local government.

[12] IPPR 2023 estimates provided to GMB.

[13] https://web.archive.org/web/20150624215252/http://local.gov.uk/officer-development