

27 April 2023

I'm living hour by hour and fear being made homeless - this is why I've voted yes.

We need a strong yes vote in the new strike ballot (which closes on 9 May) to show the government that PCS members are determined not to back down. Young member Greg*, a site manager for Forestry England, tells us why he has voted yes for action in our national reballot and explains how he is struggling to get by.

Greg lives and works in the south of England, where he manages a local woodland for Forestry England. Low pay, together with the skyrocketing costs of living, means he can only afford unsafe, illegal accommodation and must work a second job to make ends meet. He is being treated by his doctor for stress and is on the brink of homelessness.

But how did he get to what he describes as “the point of desperation”?

Growing up, Greg's family “always struggled with money”. This upbringing made him strive to find a career that could give him “stability and comfort”.

He eventually found his calling. Having spent most of his adult life working outdoors, surrounded by nature, he developed a keen interest in conservation-based projects, particularly working with trees.

MPs getting a good deal

It is no surprise then that Greg was thrilled at the prospect of joining Forestry England. This was a civil service job – a government job – that would help “break a cycle of poverty”, he thought.

“As it would turn out, the pay is no way near as much or goes nowhere near as far as it should be for an employee of my level and responsibility,” he says.

"You see MPs in parliament getting a very good deal – I thought a civil service role was part of that," he continues. "I thought I'd have a bit more security and, if I'm honest, more support. It's completely lacking. Over the last three months, I've done about 52 hours of overtime per month. That's not me wanting to work overtime –that's just what is required in this role."

He had applied for the role during the pandemic, when his housing situation was already dire. Unable to afford decent accommodation in this rural area due to exorbitant rents, Greg and his partner's last resort was to live in an unfit-for-use rental unit that has no central heating or insulation.

Second job

Still in his twenties, he does not even have the option of moving back home because one of his grandparents – who requires full-time care – has moved into his old room. To make matters worse, he is also not a priority on his local council's social housing waiting list and is forced to work a second job that leaves him with only four days off a month.

"I am very mentally unstable at the moment. I have not felt comfortable or safe over the past ten years. I have not been in proper accommodation," he says. "I don't get much sleep, I don't really have any hobbies because I work so hard; I don't feel relax, I'm very highly strung."

So severe is his stress about his pay – compounded by the cost-of-living crisis, which eats away at any potential savings – he has had to seek medical attention for muscle relaxants due to overwhelming stress levels. At times he is unable to urinate because of how severe the symptoms get.

'I'm not allowed to enjoy my life'

"I'm only in my twenties and I feel like I'm not allowed to enjoy my life or to have a life outside of work. I just work to make sure I am not on the street. I'm trying to do what they are always telling you to do: pull yourselves up by your bootstraps. But it feels like nobody can do that anymore. The system is designed to keep people down when they are down."

Even though he loathes the thought of leaving behind his family and friends, he is even considering emigrating. He feels unrewarded and unsupported, underpaid and overwhelmed.

What does his immediate future look like if the government is not willing pay him fairly for his work?

"My future looks like it will be without a home. If the government don't want to support us, they are going to fuel homelessness, and create less trust in them. I'm living hour by hour - I don't know what tomorrow is going to bring, I don't know if I'm going to be evicted. The government are driving more people into vulnerability...I don't see any future that is positive if it continues on this way."

National ballot

Aside from sending a message to the government that PCS members are determined to continue fighting for better wages and conditions, what would a yes vote in the upcoming reballot mean for him?

"A yes vote would mean that myself and others like me feel supported and seen. It is important because it would show that we are taking steps to highlight and talk about the issues that civil servants are suffering with."

***The member's name has been changed**

Remember to vote

We can only continue strike action over this crisis if at least 50% of PCS members [vote in our re-ballot](#). Please remember to vote – and remind your colleagues too.

You can only vote by post.

[The re-ballot closes on 9 May](#). Once you have voted, please let us know by logging into your [PCS Digital account](#) and ticking the box or replying to the email or text message you receive from PCS.