

6 July 2023

PCS members in British Museum will strike after it refuses to pay cost of living payment

More than 150 PCS members belonging to the British Museum's visitor services and security teams will begin a six-day consecutive strike over fair pay, protections to pensions, job security and the museum's continued refusal to pay a once-off cost of living payment.

As part of its ongoing targeted strike action, PCS members at the museum will strike on **11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16 July** (picket lines will be from **8.45am** to **11.15am** each day) to seek a cost of living payment of £1,500 and a 10% pay rise considering the cost-of-living crisis, as well as pensions justice, job security and no cuts in redundancy terms.

Despite the UK government's recommendation for all employers to pay staff a non-consolidated **£1,500 lump sum** in recognition of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, the British Museum is currently refusing to do so at a time of record-high inflation.

The PCS national executive committee is pursuing targeted action where an employer does not commit to the £1,500 payment.

PCS attended a meeting today with the British Museum (6 July). Unfortunately, the employer continues to refuse to improve their "deeply insulting" pay offer and agree to a cost-of-living payment - so members have no other option other than to go ahead with industrial action next week.

In our national re-ballot in May, British Museum members - on a huge turnout of 75% - voted 86% in favour of strike action, showing their commitment to keeping the pressure up on the employer.

The strike action is expected to cause significant problems for the museum during a peak summer month. During previous strike actions, members have managed to shut down the museum.

Many of the museum's front of house staff are currently receiving wages well below the London Living Wage. Over half of our members have had to use a foodbank in the last 12 months. In some cases, members are working second jobs, taking out Universal Credit to scrape by, accruing credit card debts to pay bills, and exacerbating health issues because of stress. Many are even unable to afford to commute.

Depressed wages are stripping the museum workforce of vital skills and knowledge, and pricing talented people out of the sector. This has worrying implications for diversity and inclusion, with staff from ethnically diverse low-income backgrounds already poorly represented in the sector.

Even George Osbourne, chair of trustees at British Museum, acknowledged in the museum's annual report for 2022 that "the challenges that come from running one of the greatest and most visited cultural places in the world" are only possible "thanks to its incredible staff", who the Trustees noted for "their gratitude for the hard work of staff throughout another extraordinary year".

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said:

"Our members in the British Museum were part of our national campaign of strike action that forced the government to recommend the cost-of-living payment. And so, it is deeply insulting to members that the British Museum continues to refuse to improve its pay offer and give our members this one-off sum, which the government recognises they desperately need to cover their basic needs."

"Our hardworking members are sorry they're taking this action during a busy period for the museum because their working life is dedicated to helping members of the public feel safe and sharing information with them about exhibits and artefacts when they visit.

"But for years staff have been taken for granted by management even though the museum's Trustees acknowledge themselves that they are the backbone of one of the greatest cultural institutions in the world. It is a disgrace that members are using food banks, struggling to afford their bills and medication for health conditions, and racking up credit card debts to pay for necessities. They will not sit back and accept an insulting offer with no cost-of-living payment, and they have proved that they are willing and able to shut down the museum if a fairer deal is not agreed."