

4 December 2023

DWP President's Column

Another year draws to a close, and once again our members have faced multiple challenges.

This time last year we had just seen hundreds of our members send in heart rendering testimonies about the impact the cost-of-living crisis was having on them and their families. This culminated in a successful ballot result, in which we had beaten the 50% threshold for the first time. Our members delivering a strike mandate that allowed us to take part in three days of national action, alongside periods of paid targeted action in Doncaster, Liverpool and Glasgow. Despite the ongoing financial crisis, it was disappointing that the March re-ballot saw us fall just short of that government-imposed threshold, but still produce the second highest turnout we've ever delivered in a ballot.

Despite that disappointment, by taking action alongside other PCS members we were able to put more money in members' pockets and forced the government to withdraw plans to cut the Civil Service Compensation Scheme by 33%.

The gains we made clearly weren't enough and at the time of writing we await the NEC decision on what we need to do as part of the next phase of our national campaign.

In addition to low pay our members have made clear to the GEC we are currently experiencing a staffing crisis in our department, with pressures of work across the board, higher than at any point in recent history. In early December we submitted a 64-page dossier to the permanent secretary at Caxton House. Similar to last year's testimonies on pay, this dossier included dozens of quotes direct from members, with the very real impact low staffing was having on our members and their working lives laid bare. This edition of the Voice includes a fuller article on the staffing crisis.

To compound this low morale among DWP members, the announcement by the government of a 60% return to the office in the near future has caused much consternation among members. Though the full details are yet to be shared, understandably our members who work in roles that have access to hybrid

working are angry and concerned in equal measure. PCS has made clear to the employer that we are sceptical as to whether DWP has the infrastructure to cope with a 60% workplace requirement, and we have highlighted the DWP entire estates strategy is predicted on the 40% hybrid model that we have been working to. We have also forcibly reminded the department that we expect all members, including those in Jobcentres and front-facing roles, to be given access to hybrid working. Extending the provision of hybrid working should be a higher priority than increasing workplace attendance levels and we keep arguing this point as we enter the new year.

Finally, may I take this opportunity to send my very best wishes to all members and your families for the festive season, however you spend it, and I look forward to working with you all to try and ensure we all have a Happy New Year.