

26 July 2024

News from the NEC July 2024

Last week saw the union's national executive committee (NEC) have its first full two-day sitting since its election earlier last month.

National campaign

The first item to be discussed was the next steps in the national campaign. This was an important discussion, following the passing of motion A315 at this year's annual delegate conference.

This motion added new demands to the campaign, while at the same time, it instructed the NEC to continue with the trade dispute that was created out of the 64 bargaining areas that formed part of the existing trade dispute from the national ballot earlier this year. That position is legally untenable as you cannot table fresh demands once you have established the basis of a trade dispute. The NEC was therefore tasked with developing the strategy to find a way forward.

The NEC came to the conclusion that rather than table fresh demands or create a fresh or separate trade disputes, the union's bargaining overall objectives with the new government would initially be tabled to the employer. The first step the NEC agreed as part of this was to submit a letter to the prime minister, setting out the union's demands and seeking negotiations on them. The demands include those that formed part of the national pay claim at the beginning of this year, as well as guarantees on pensions, redundancy and job security.

The letter, which has also been sent to the Cabinet Office permanent secretaries, and all Permanent Secretaries, goes on to state that we are seeking a meeting with the prime minister by 30 July 2024. Should that not be forthcoming, our NEC will meet to consider matters further. At this stage, however, the NEC was clear that the priority should be to seek negotiations on our demands.

For those areas that still have a live mandate from the statutory ballot earlier this year, the NEC agreed that the national disputes committee would meet to consider a potential programme of industrial action, including leverage proposals.

Alongside this, it was agreed that there should be further senior lay rep forums, one of which will be formed of the bargaining areas that currently have a mandate for strike action, while the other forum will include remaining bargaining areas in the national dispute that do not have a current statutory mandate for action.

The union will keep members regularly updated on the progress of these talks.

Rwanda

As part of the disputes round-up, NEC members were given an update on the highly praised work the union has been doing in fighting the Rwanda deportation policy.

The previous government passed the Safety of Rwanda Act in April this year, which allowed the government to declare Rwanda a safe country to deport asylum seekers, despite a Supreme Court ruling that it is not.

In our long-running efforts to defeat the Rwanda scheme, we have been exploring a range of legal options. Our argument was, firstly, that the legislation is at odds with a number of international laws and conventions.

Secondly, the Home Office may have to turn to the Department for Defence to carry out the deportations due to commercial airlines being reluctant to be involved in the scheme. Crucially, the legislation places no obligation on the secretary of state for defence that Rwanda is a safe country, who must therefore abide by the Supreme Court's ruling.

The union's lawyers believed we had a reasonable chance of success on both grounds, and we then submitted a pre-action protocol letter. We received no response in the timeframe set out and since then, the new prime minister Keir Starmer announced that the Rwanda scheme was "dead and buried".

The NEC was unanimous in its praise for the work of PCS in fighting the cruel Rwanda scheme and especially for the members involved in delivering it, who came to their union and took a stand for humanity.

Organising strategy

The NEC was also given a substantial organising update.

Membership now stands at over 190,000, which is more than 1,000 up on the start of the year. Looking closer at the data, there was growth across a number of areas over the past twelve months, including the Home Office, Met Police, BEIS and EFRA.

In more good news, younger people are joining PCS at a faster rate than at any other point in the last decade. The NEC was encouraged to hear that 60% of new joiners to PCS in the last 6 months were aged under 40.

At this year's annual delegate conference, the 2024/25 organising strategy was not agreed by delegates. The NEC agreed that further work will be undertaken across the union to develop our organising strategy.