

21 December 2022

Taking action for a happier new year

Members of the DEFRA London & South East PCS branch delivered a Christmas card to the Secretary of State, Therese Coffey, as part of our national campaign over pay. Branch committee member Dan Durcan explains what they did and why.

We were basically after a way to keep our membership engaged before Christmas, as well as build commitment to industrial action, and try and get under the skin of the secretary of state before Christmas. While we're entering the festive period many of our members are filled with dread as they look forward to a real terms pay cut.

We needed to make sure that they know we're not bluffing, so we set ourselves a target of 200 signatures from the branch (in the end we got 218).

We hand delivered the card to the secretary of state's office and it was confirmed that it was given to her.

Part of our intention was to try to subtly shift power: if members (and non-members) see us sending giant glittery Christmas cards to the secretary of state, it empowers us to see that we can always do something, there is always a way of showing our strength in numbers.

The card, with its list of 218 names, read:

"Dear Secretary of State Coffey,

We, Civil Servants working for your department, are writing to wish you season's greetings.

Unfortunately, Christmas will be a difficult time for many of us, as we struggle with 12 years of pay misery, heavy workloads, and attacks on our profession from the Government.

That's why this Christmas, we're asking for a 10% pay increase to help us manage the current 11.1% inflation rate, as well as the high rates predicted next year.

We ho ho ho hope that you recognise the pressures we are under as we deliver your government's policy agenda, and that this is unsustainable.

Perhaps as a Christmas gift to your staff, you could raise this with your cabinet colleagues?

We have made clear our intention to take industrial action. The strength of our feeling was shown by the ballot result, with 92.6% support for industrial action with a 74.6% turnout, one of the strongest votes across the civil service. It is a vote we stand by.

We also stand by our Defra colleagues in the RPA, who are taking action to defend the living standards of all civil servants.

We wish this Christmas would be merrier, but we are determined to take action for a happier new year."