



Cllr Claire Young and Cllr Ian Boulton
South Gloucestershire Council
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recycling and recovery UK

25 July 2023

Dear Cllrs Young and Boulton,

I'm getting in touch to give you a clear update on where we are with the ongoing pay negotiations now that the industrial action has been taking place for over a month. We understand that you and your members will have some queries after being addressed in your cabinet meeting last week by one of our employees who is also a local union representative.

What is the current state of negotiations?

There was a clear implication from our employee at the cabinet meeting last week that the company was not coming to the table to negotiate with the union to seek a solution to the current dispute. This is wholly incorrect. Negotiations have been ongoing for most of 2023. In November, when these negotiations began, we offered a pay increase of 7.5% but during talks to avert strike action, revised this offer to 8%. This 8% together with last year's increase would have seen our staff receive a combined increase of 15-16.75% over a two-year period depending on their role. We believe this to be a competitive and generous offer when compared to many other sectors. After Unite rejected the 8% and continued to demand a 15% increase, negotiations stalled whilst we asked them to come back with an appropriate counteroffer although we remained in contact with Unite.

At the latest meeting on Friday 14 July, our previous offer of 8% was discussed which Unite again refused and revised their demand to 10%. On this basis and to try and reach an agreement, we provided another revised offer of 9%. However, Unite also rejected this offer, choosing not to take the revised offer to its members for a ballot.

The next formal negotiation meeting is scheduled for Monday 31 July 2023; however, we remain in contact with Unite in between these meetings and hope to be able to reach a compromise position that all parties can agree to.



Below is a timeline of discussions that have happened between SUEZ and Unite:

Date	Discussion
28 November 2022	A 7.5% pay offer was put forward by SUEZ. This was rejected by Unite who demanded 15%
1 February 2023	A revised offer of 8% was offered by SUEZ. This was rejected by United who continued to demand 15%
27 April 2023	Unite continued to demand 15%. The 8% offer from SUEZ was taken to Unite members to ballot on accepting or taking to industrial action
19 May 2023	SUEZ received the result of the ballot and the intention to take industrial action
14 July 2023	SUEZ brought in ACAS to help conversations with Unite. Unite put forward a request for 10%. As a result, SUEZ revised their offer from 8% to 9% to try and resolve the dispute. This was rejected by Unite.

Throughout this whole period regular dialog has been taking place between the Regional Unite Officer and our Regional Human Resources Manager.

Why is there a two-week gap between pay negotiations, with the next one scheduled for 31 July?

To try and come to a decision with Unite on Friday 14 July, we enacted the support of ACAS to help with the discussions. SUEZ considered this to be a proactive step after ACAS' positive intervention in the Somerset negotiations which were successfully concluded without strike action.

On Friday 14 July, with the intervention of ACAS and a three-hour meeting with Unite, we were unable to come to a mutual agreement. Therefore, another meeting was scheduled to continue these conversations. The next available date for all members from SUEZ, Unite and ACAS to be able to meet was Monday 31 July.

What are we paying our employees in relation to minimum wage?

The tables below show the hourly pay and percentage increase we've provided our staff on the contract over the last few years.

	Loader	Sort It centre	Driver	National Living Wage
2021 pay	£10.73	£10.73	£11.93	£8.91
2022 pay	£11.53	£11.74	£13.02	£9.50
2023 pay with 9%	£12.57	£12.57	£14.19	£10.42

	Loader	Sort It centre	Driver
2021 % increase awarded	2.5%	2.5%	2.5%
2022 % increase awarded	7%	7%	8.75%
2023 % increase offered	9%	9%	9%

We understand the need for a fair pay increase during the current financial climate and are confident that our offer reflects this.

What does SUEZ do to support their people?

We are extremely proud of the service our staff provide in South Gloucestershire together with the Council. Our people are our greatest asset and remain at the heart of our organisation with their safety and wellbeing being our highest priority. Our suite of benefits available to all members of staff are considerable. We have an extensive wellbeing programme which includes an employee assistance programme, offering health, financial and legal support and access to a 24/7 GP service. Our employees also have access to money saving discounts and can benefit from different tax efficient schemes such as cycle to work and GymFlex.

We look to invest in our employees and provide training opportunities as much as possible. Over the last two years in South Gloucestershire, 10 members of staff have completed HGV apprenticeship courses and twice a year, outside of the normal daily operations, we carry out dedicated training days to all municipal staff across the contract. Similarly, all our employees have access to a day a year to volunteer, where they can take a day each year on full pay to give back to their local community by volunteering. These have been well received by our front-line staff across the country.

In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic, we made the decision as a company to ensure that furloughed employees were paid 100% of their wages by topping up the Government payment. We made this decision to ensure all our staff were financially supported during this unprecedented time and is an indication of the manner in which we always try and treat all of our employees fairly.

Are South Gloucestershire workers paid less than other contracts in the South West?

When conversations began late last year, our Human Resources team conducted an analysis of pay in the local labour market and across our local contracts. We presented this research at union meetings and determined that we are in line with the average local competition pay and similar to our other contracts in the South West.

What is happening to recycling that is not separated but collected mixed together?

Any recycling which is collected mixed together either at one of the temporary bring sites during the industrial action, or from schools and communal locations, gets sent to our Material Recycling Facility (MRF) in Avonmouth. This facility sorts the mixed recyclables into different materials through a complex series of conveyor belts, automatic sorting equipment and manual quality checks. Once separated these materials are sold on to be reprocessed into new products and packaging.

SUEZ pay for this mixed recycling to be transported to our MRF in Avonmouth and are responsible for the cost of separating into the individual materials. There is no extra cost to South Gloucestershire Council.

If you or your members of the council would be interested in a tour around our Avonmouth facility, please do let me know and I'd gladly arrange this for you.

I hope the answers to these questions have helped provide more insight into the ongoing situation. We continue to remain hopeful that the conversations can bring the industrial action to an end and allow our employees to receive a fair pay increase for 2023.

Once again, I do apologise for the inconvenience this has caused and we are grateful for everyone's understanding and patience.

Your sincerely,



James Pike
Regional Director South West