

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
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August 1st, 2019

Dear Prime Minister,

In the decade since the global financial crisis, public service workers have borne the brunt of austerity. Hundreds of thousands of jobs have been lost, with the remaining workforce expected to continually do more with less. Social care, schools and local government have been among the hardest hit.

As a result, our children, our most vulnerable citizens and our communities have suffered – as have those who work to support and care for them. Your predecessor proclaimed that “austerity is over” - yet for public service workers across the UK that’s simply not the case.

From 2010 to 2018, the cost of living rose by 31%, but the average public sector worker saw their wages rise by less than 8%. If you earned the average public sector wage in 2009, the buying power of your wage had fallen by £6,691 by 2018. At the same time, house prices have risen by 37%, electricity bills have gone up by 48% and childcare costs have risen by 32%.

As the UK’s biggest trade union, representing 1.3 million people who deliver our essential public services, we see, on a daily basis, how many of our members are struggling to pay for the essentials they need to get by.

The Health Secretary said on July 1 that it’s time to “show some love” to public sector workers. In reality that “love” should have come years ago. Instead those workers were made to pay for a crisis they didn’t cause. Now, as a result of cuts and pay caps, many public sector employers are finding it more difficult to recruit and retain staff – putting even greater pressure upon public services which are already at breaking point.

You have a duty, and the opportunity, to do something about this. If wages continue to fall behind the cost of living, the serious problems in our public services will only get worse. What we need now are pay increases for all public service workers, including those employed by private companies to provide public services, to bring public sector wages back in line with pre-crash levels.

But, just as importantly, those wage increases need to be funded by your government, not covered by existing budgets which are stretched to breaking point. Only adequate funding of public services, and investment in staff pay, can begin to repair the damage to our services and the lives of those who work so hard to provide them.

I would welcome an opportunity to meet you in the coming weeks to discuss the crisis facing public services – and outline why investing in public services, including an investment in better pay for all public service workers, is money well spent.

Regards

Dave Prentis
General Secretary, UNISON