SERO CO PAY

Serco’s contract in Barts Health started on 1 April 2017. In November 2016, it told the unions that it would take the staff away from Agenda for Change (AfC), the unions did not agree. On 14 June, Serco offered a 1% increase to the basic pay of AfC staff—it will not match the national rise in spine points and High Cost Area Supplement (London Weighting) and will freeze them on 2016 levels. UNISON refused to accept and began to consult members.

For a full-time worker, Serco’s offer will mean a cut of about £100 a year from the 2017/18 AfC pay award. This is totally unacceptable.

The UNISON position has always been clear: all workers in the NHS—including those hired by private companies like Serco—must be on AfC.

London Living Wage

Serco bigs up its claim of paying LLW (£9.75/hour) as a minimum, Unite says they are responsible for this success. This is not the case: LLW is the minimum wage paid by large companies in London. Hiring staff on LLW in the NHS is a way of undercutting the AfC package. For example, a full-time worker on LLW will earn about £19010 a year; a worker on 2017/18 AfC point 2 in inner London (say in St Barts Hospital) will earn about £19600, and on point 3, £19871.

Newly hired workers on LLW will not enjoy other AfC benefits such as occupational sick pay, unsocial hour rates, overtime pay etc. It’s obvious “business sense” to replace AfC staff with those on LLW over time. We must not allow ourselves to be divided, everyone who works for the NHS must be on AfC.

30p or AfC?

Unite members will begin strikes from 4 July for a 30p rise per hour. We understand this rise will not cover those on LLW, and does not challenge Serco’s wish to freeze AfC spine points and HCAS on 2016 levels. If Serco accepts this claim, it’d mean at most £30 a month more than the 2017/18 AfC award.
The Bigger Picture

However, UNISON believes that things should be, and can be, done differently. From October 2016, all staff in Scotland on AfC Band 1 had their posts reviewed and were offered Band 2 posts with very little changes to their jobs. This resulted in over 97% of the Band 1 staff moving onto Band 2, meaning a £3000-plus pay rise for thousands of porters, domestics and catering workers.

UNISON Scotland led this campaign with other unions (Unite included) by recruiting and organising workers in the whole of the NHS, and making the clear message to the bosses that divide and rule will not work. The unions made sure that this deal also covered private contractors: most Serco AfC Band 1 workers in Scotland are now on Band 2. Unity is strength: we can win much more for all workers if we come together to defend, extend and raise AfC.

The government is now under enormous pressure to lift the seven-year pay cap on public sector workers—all unions must work together for this. If Serco in Barts Health, the largest NHS Trust in the country, is allowed to settle a deal out of AfC, this will be a blow to all workers. UNISON strongly argues that a just settlement can only be made on the minimum basis of the payment of the 2017/18 AfC award to all workers now employed by Serco.

We have been informed by members that Serco is making staff to take on more work and more roles. This can only be addressed by AfC job evaluation: workloads must be reasonable, pay must reflect duties and responsibilities.

Trust’s Role

Last but not least, we must note that Barts Health’s role in this has been totally dismal: It didn’t consult the unions when the contract was being developed, it took no action when the unions refused to accept Serco’s notice to move away from AfC at the end of 2016—in fact, it “knew nothing” about any of this until a few days ago. The senior management of the Trust must do the right thing now by conducting meaningful talks with the unions to reach a just resolution.