

999 staff say no to further cuts – Final Annex E

Joint Union Statement

UNISON, GMB and Unite members working in England's ambulance services have voted to reject proposals to apply up to 25% deductions to sick pay. The proposals were put forward in June as a way of matching the changes made earlier this year to sick pay for other health workers, at a time when many NHS organisations are looking to cut staffing costs as a way of funding the Government's cost saving programme in the health service.

Ambulance services operate a shift system to ensure a 24 hours a day 7 days a week service for the public. An annual supplement known as an 'unsocial hours payment' (USH) is applied to compensate ambulance staff for working outside normal hours. USH allowances make up between 9 and 25% of salaries for most 999 staff. Employers have proposed a way of removing this USH payment when staff are absent through illness.

Paramedics and other ambulance staff have had between 8 and 12% cut from the value of their pay over the last few years. As more and more ambulance staff work extra hours to cope with the rising costs of living, the rejection shows that members can't and won't take any more cuts. In addition to worrying about paying their bills, ambulance staff are feeling the pressure of mounting workloads, increases in violence and abuse, and – unless the Government make changes to their pension plans- also face the prospect of working until they are nearly seventy.

In the course of their work, ambulance staff are exposed to high levels of physical, mental and emotional risk, which makes them vulnerable to illness. With sickness levels at consistently higher levels than the rest of the NHS, Ambulance Trusts could make more effective savings through addressing the causes of ill health rather than looking to make staff pay for Government cuts.

All three ballots resulted in overwhelming rejection and is a clear sign that ambulance staff won't accept further cuts.

Christina McAnea, Chair of the NHS Staff Council said:

“The danger now is that employers impose these changes without agreement, which in our view would be unlawful and would force our members to act. We're all keen to avoid disruption of 999 services to the public, but the employers need to take note of the strong reaction from members to this proposed cut and not risk going ahead without consent.”

The trade unions will hold an urgent meeting with employers to make sure that the dangers of imposing these changes are fully explored.