

23 August 2018

Andrew Dawson
Director of Workforce Policy
Department of Health
Castle Buildings
Stormont
BELFAST BT4 3SQ

(by email: andrew.dawson@health-ni.gov.uk)

Dear Mr Dawson

PENSION CONTRIBUTIONS

I write on behalf of those UNISON members who are currently experiencing deductions from pay in respect of pension contributions. We are extremely concerned to learn from our members that BSO appears to have ignored the position on pension contributions set out at the April and June meetings of the JNCF Full Committee. BSO and the Department were present at both meetings. The position is set out as follows:

April 2018

7. Pension Contributions 2017/18

“Trade Unions registered their disappointment and frustration that they were not involved in discussions around the potential options for recouping the 17/18 pension contributions for members of staff who moved into a new tier as a result of the 1% pay award. Marc Bailie explained that if payroll and pension scheme colleagues had implemented the contribution tiers policy in the same way as previous years, staff would have been expected to pay their 17/18 pension shortfall from their March 18 salary, and that the Department had worked with employers to spread the impact of the repayments over 12 months. HR Directors added that they were happy to postpone the repayments for any staff who are facing financial hardship until they are able to discuss their personal circumstances on a case by case basis, and encouraged Trade Union colleagues to contact them where they are aware of such cases.”

June 2018

“13.4 Pension Contributions

TUS noted that the Departments position is that the Pension Scheme Advisory Board will be charged to look at contribution tiers beyond March 2019 but wanted to make members aware that there is still levels of resentment in the workforce and that grievances have been lodged. Andrew Dawson noted the levels of resentment and reiterated that this was an exceptional circumstance whereby the Dept had a late agreed executive pay policy for

2017/18 which then led to 2017/18 Pay award being introduced quickly which led to pension contribution issue.”

Andrew also noted that **the Dept encouraged HSC employers to take mitigation measures ie amount not taken as a lump sum with a 12 month repayment period introduced. In terms of lessons learned the Department will work with BSO to scope which employees who will be affected by pension contributions for future pay settlements; and also improve communication in this area.”**

It is the responsibility of the Trusts, the Department and the BSO to ensure that staff are not placed in difficulty or hardship. BSO has not spoken to UNISON about its intentions in this matter. Neither does there appear to have been any consistent or coherent discussion with the 6 Trusts and other agencies. BSO has not taken steps to ascertain the position nor does it appear to have deployed the mitigation measures. Given the Department’s position as set out in JNCF minutes please advise us on the steps you will now take.

We now have members suffering hardship and financial loss. The lowest paid are again severely impacted at a time when many have additional return to school expenditure. The main adverse impact is on women workers. This is unacceptable. Please share your equality impact assessment with us, by return. Lessons were to be learnt from the previous fiasco but this does not appear to be the case.

We require that the Department direct:

- the immediate suspension of the current process;
- that BSO apply the mitigation measures as set out at the JNCF and take immediate steps to apply this mitigation to the staff who have already been adversely affected.

Please confirm by return that this is now the position.

Yours sincerely



PATRICIA McKEOWN
Regional Secretary

Copy: L. McIvor CEO, BSO
HR Directors NI Trusts