

Why is the mental health social worker strike still ongoing?



Barnet UNISON Mental Health Social Workers have already taken **37 days** of strike action over an eight-month period. **On 13 May 2024** they begin a further three weeks of strike action which will mean they will have taken a total of **52 days** of strike action.

If the dispute is not resolved, they begin four weeks of strike action on **Monday 17 June 2024** which will mean by the end of this strike period they will have taken a total of **72 days** of strike action.

This is an **extraordinary amount** of strike action in any workplace but to be happening in mental health services it is shocking and disturbing. This **dispute should have ended months ago** but despite UNISON trying to secure ways to reach a positive settlement, Barnet Council continues to frustrate any hopes of reaching a resolution. This coming strike action will see our members taking **seven weeks of strike action over a nine-week period**.

As news of this historic strike action spreads across the trade union movement supporters keep asking what is preventing a resolution.

In the interests of transparency and willingness to try and reach a resolution UNISON has put together a list of common questions we have been asked over the last nine months.

1. “Who is on strike?”

The mental health social workers and their other work colleagues (assessment and enablement officers) who are taking strike action all belong to three frontline mental health teams.

2. “How many staff are we talking about?”

22 social workers which includes two assessment and enablement officers.

3. “Why are they on strike?”

For the past two years there has been an exodus of experienced mental health social workers. 18 months ago, UNISON raised this as an issue with senior officers who responded by saying there was no issue. UNISON proposed that the three teams needed a recruitment and retention payment to try and stop the ongoing loss of experienced and inexperienced mental health social workers.

4. “Is this dispute about pay or recruitment and retention payment?”

It’s a recruitment and retention payment dispute.

5. “Can anyone claim a recruitment and retention payment?”

The simple answer is **no**. The policy is quite clear that to be able to receive a recruitment and retention payment you need to provide objective evidence as set out in the policy e.g.

1. exit interview results;
2. response to adverts;
3. turnover rates for post(s);
4. National Shortages;
5. Availability of Locum/Agency Equivalentents;
6. External Rates of Pay etc.

6. “How many Council workers are currently receiving a recruitment and retention payment?”

2.7 A summary of Council posts which attract RRPs is provided in Table A4. This summary does not include any posts which were vacant as at September 2023.

Function[s] / Service Area[s]	Total posts attracting RRP	RRP 3-9.9% Posts	RRP 10% posts	RRP 11-19% posts	RRP 20% posts	RRP 20+% Posts
Family Services, [Children’s] Social Care	129	12	27	26	29	35
Adults [Social Care], Communities, Public Health	16	9	4	3	0	0
Strategy+Resources, Assurance	8	5	1	1	1	0
Customer and Place, incl. Streetscene and Environment	115	4	102	4	4	1
GRAND TOTAL	268	30	134	34	34	36

Table A4: Summary of Barnet Council posts which attract Recruitment and Retention Payments by function or service area. Please note that certain service areas have been grouped together with a view to mitigating privacy risks for individual postholders.

The above table can be found on Barnet Council website here https://www.barnet.gov.uk/sites/default/files/pay_policy_statement_2024_2025.pdf

7. “What are the 16 posts in Adult Social Care that currently attract recruitment and retention payment?”

We don’t know. When UNISON saw the table above, we wrote to Barnet Council asking for a breakdown of **all posts** that attract recruitment and retention payments across the Council workforce. As of 8 May 2024, we have not had an acknowledgement or reply.

8. “Is it true that other Councils are struggling to recruit mental health social workers?”

Yes, read this article in Community Care “In relation to mental health social work, 60% of councils reported recruitment difficulties, 45% retention challenges and

26% using market supplements.”

<https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2023/01/20/most-councils-struggling-to-recruit-and-retain-social-workers-finds-lga/>

9. “Why does UNISON say that the Council has the money to settle the dispute?”

Because they have admitted they can easily settle the dispute in the negotiations.

10. “If Barnet Council has the money to settle the dispute, why isn’t it over?”

UNISON is negotiating for around **20 members** of staff who work in three mental health social work teams. Barnet Council has told UNISON in every negotiating meeting it believes the recruitment and retention issues are no different in the mental health teams as compared with the rest of adult social care. Therefore, the Council wants to apply a recruitment and retention payment to **185 staff**. We have seen no objective evidence, as required in the Council’s own policy, that there is a wider recruitment and retention issue across the wider workforce in Adult Social Care.

14 months since UNISON first raised this issue Barnet Council has recently admitted that it **can’t provide the evidence** as set out in its own policy to justify making payments to **163 staff**, even though it has produced the evidence required for family social workers and HGV drivers to receive recruitment and retention payments.

11. “Has UNISON been prepared to lower its claim?”

Yes. UNISON has recently offered to settle the dispute for a **10% recruitment and retention** payment. That is our red line coming down from our 20% initial claim. We proposed that the Council settle our dispute then announce a review across the rest of Adults to gather objective evidence to establish whether there are serious recruitment and retention issues across the other social work teams. **Barnet Council has rejected this offer to settle.**

12. “Is there money to settle this dispute?”

Barnet Council claims it has a financial crisis as do many other Councils yet at the same time it is prepared to go against its own recruitment and retention policy simply because it does not think it is fair to only pay the mental health social workers in the three teams. Barnet Council insists it would have to apply the same recruitment and

retention payments for mental health social workers in the three teams to all remaining **185** staff including Team Managers. Please note that team managers in family social work teams do not get recruitment and retention payment because there are no recruitment and retention issues. Yet Barnet Council risks a claim from this group if it goes ahead and makes blanket recruitment and retention payments with no objective rationale.

13. “Barnet Council claims it will be unfair to other staff across Adult Social Care if it only makes a payment to mental health social workers.”

Barnet UNISON has consistently responded to Barnet Council that recruitment and retention payments are not about fairness but about recruitment and retention issues in the workplace. If they want to change the criteria to it being paid based on who deserves more money due to working hard, then UNISON would look to table a claim on behalf of our **assessment and enablement officers** in Adult Social Care, and a claim on behalf of our **loaders** who work with the HGV drivers. The list can go on.

14. “Is there a shortage of experienced mental health social workers?”

Two weeks ago, Barnet UNISON produced a factual breakdown of the previous mental health experience of social workers currently working across the three teams and discovered that almost **83%** of social workers had no previous experience before joining the mental health teams. This is clear evidence that Barnet Council can't recruit social workers with previous mental health social work experience.

15. “How many social workers have left the teams?”

In the last **20 months 21 social workers** have left the two acute teams with another social worker (making a **total of 22**) due to leave in a few months' time. **50 per cent** of the Approved Mental Health Professionals will be gone by the **end of May**.

16. “Why are Barnet Council against paying a specific recruitment and retention payment to mental health social workers?”

This is a good question. Despite the amount of evidence, we have submitted they consistently refuse to accept there is an issue. In negotiations Barnet Council has previously responded that there is no evidence other Councils are paying extra

payments/market factor supplements/ retention payments for Mental Health social workers in London. Furthermore, it has stated there is no market for Agency/Locum special rates for mental health social workers.

Below is a short piece of research carried out by Barnet UNISON that demonstrates the contrary.

1. Brent Council - Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHP)

Salary Details-PO4 roles attract a **golden hello payment of £5,000** and **an annual retention payment of £3,000 per annum**. Additional payments are available for Practice Educators and Best Interest Assessors

2. Enfield Council AMHP

Please note the salary quoted above is inclusive of additional increments paid once registered with Enfield to practice as an Approved Mental Health Practitioner (AMHP). The Senior Practitioner starting salary until AMHP registered with Enfield is £48,060 - £50,031. The salary range once registered as an AMHP with Enfield is £50,031 - £52,116.

In addition to this AMHP responsibilities also currently qualifies for a market factor supplement of £2,500.

4. Mental health Social Worker - Mental health- Richmond and Wandsworth Councils

<https://jobs.richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk/jobs/job/Social-Worker-Mental-Health/5934>

- **£3,000 retention bonus (every 2 years' service)**
- Payment of Social Work England registration fee.

5. Mental health social worker – Newham Council

Job Description

Social Worker - Mental Health Adult Social Care Access Team

£36,138 - £43,815 per annum **plus £3,000 Market Supplement**. The post also **attracts £3,000 if trained as an AMHP**

https://www.glassdoor.co.uk/job-listing/social-worker-mh-newham-council-JV_IC2671300_KOO,16_KE17,31.htm?jl=1009121524022

6. AMHP - -Lambeth Council

<https://www.talentify.io/job/social-worker-amhp-london-england-lambeth-council-1056>

Social Worker- AMHP REF: 1056 Hybrid Working

PO4: £45,711 pa inc LW rising in annual increments to £48,747 pa.

Permanent and Full Time

- **Welcome Payment- £1000**
- **AMHP Retention Allowance- £3000**
- **Market Supplement- £1000**

7. Mental health social worker – Westminster Council

<https://careers.newjob.org.uk/WCC/job/Westminster-Social-Worker-WCC616183-LND/1068046201/>

£40K – £54K/yr

17. “What do Barnet Council pay for a basic grade mental health social worker?”

Barnet Council Mental Health Social Worker is in **Grade I £39,951 to £44,019.**

Below are salaries for similar posts in London.

1. Mental health social worker NHS **£40,701 to £48,054** a year per annum inclusive of HCAS

<https://beta.jobs.nhs.uk/candidate/jobadvert/C9222-24-0259>

2. Mental health social worker in Southwark **£40,503 - £47,736** a year.

<https://jobs.southwark.gov.uk/jobs/social-worker-mental-health-move-on-support-team-sc06092>

3. Mental health social worker in Southwark **£42,855 - £50,088**

<https://jobs.southwark.gov.uk/jobs/social-worker-sc05930-1>

18. “What does Barnet Council pay Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHP)?”

An AMHP in Barnet Council earns **£45,021 to £50,031.**

19. “What are some examples of AMHP payments in other Councils?”

1. AMHP role -Hillingdon Council £50,031.00 - £54,129.00 per year

[https://jobs.hillingdon.gov.uk/talentlink/FO/details.html?jobId=6556&jobTitle=Approved%20Mental%20Health%20Professionals%20\(AMHPs\)](https://jobs.hillingdon.gov.uk/talentlink/FO/details.html?jobId=6556&jobTitle=Approved%20Mental%20Health%20Professionals%20(AMHPs))

2. AMHP role - Bromley Council

<https://rb.gy/wlo0za> Social Workers (AMHPs) Community Mental Health Teams across the service including Adults and Older Adults. Salary: Up to £42,786.00 (BR11/BR12+2) (Pro rata part time) (increasing to £44,070.00 from 1st of April 2024)

In addition, you will receive **£1,500 annual retention** and **£1,000 Golden Hello** and other excellent benefits

3. AMHP role Agency Newham Council £40 an hour fulltime equivalent £75k

<https://rb.gy/cqyjnl>

4. AMHP role in Kensington & Chelsea

<https://rb.gy/en702c>

Salary range: £41,967 - £50,088 per annum plus a **AMHP enhancement up to £3,000 per annum**

20. “What are the hourly rates of Barnet Council Mental Health Social Workers?”

1. A Barnet Council **Grade I Mental Health Social Worker** is earning **£39,951 to £44,019**; their hourly rate is between **£21.28 and £23.45 per hour.**

2. A Barnet Council **Grade J** (this group includes lead practitioners and AMHPs) **Mental Health Social Worker** is earning **£45,021 to £50,031**; their hourly rate is between **£23.99 and £26.65 per hour.**

21. “What are the Agency/Locum rates for mental health social workers in London?”

£38 per hour full-time equivalent £72k

<https://uk.indeed.com/q-mental-health-social-worker-l-london-jobs.html?vjk=651fa898cf0bb7f1&advn=5666201695628065>

£36 per hour full-time equivalent £66k

<https://uk.indeed.com/q-mental-health-social-worker-l-london-jobs.html?vjk=3c4edb202d30cd98&advn=211397725770488>

£32 per hour full-time equivalent £60k

<https://uk.indeed.com/q-mental-health-social-worker-l-london-jobs.html?vjk=0305f73e2877221d&advn=7159625590475950>