

Bolton hospital workers to ballot on action for pay parity

Wholly-owned subsidiary pays staff less than directly-employed workers

More than 600 hospital cleaners, catering staff, porters and security workers in Bolton will begin voting next week on whether to take industrial action for fair pay and national NHS rates.

The 650 support workers are employed by a company called Integrated Facilities Management Bolton Ltd (iFM), which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Bolton NHS foundation trust. They work at the Royal Bolton Hospital.

They are not being paid the wage increase agreed nationally for NHS staff. While many hospital workers in Bolton remain on the national living wage of £7.83 an hour, staff doing the same role in neighbouring hospitals are now receiving a minimum pay rate of £8.92 an hour.

Over the course of a year, these members are losing out nearly £2,000 – because they are working for separate company set up and owned by the NHS trust.

A report published this week by the Child Poverty Action Group highlights that the national minimum wage rate paid to these workers – which the government renamed the ‘national living wage’ some years ago – does not protect households from poverty.

It showed that a single parent is £74 a week short of the minimum income needed, while a couple with two children is £49 a week short.

UNISON notified the trust today that an industrial action ballot of the affected members will start next week, and that it could lead to strikes taking place from October.

“It should be an embarrassment to Bolton iFM and the trust that hospital staff are receiving poverty pay,” commented regional organiser Tim Ellis.

He pointed out that the trust and its wholly-owned subsidiary could potentially access funding from the government to cover the costs of the pay rise, “but so far they have failed even to make an application to the Department of Health and Social Care for Bolton’s share of the money available to fund the pay rise.

“They need to take action urgently.”

The workers’ case is being backed by local Labour MP Sir David Crausby, who said in an open letter:

“Our NHS is made up of more than just doctors and nurses. Without the support of many other workers they would not be able to deliver high levels of care.

“I believe that all NHS workers, be they directly employed or part of a subsidiary company, should be entitled to the same standards, terms and conditions. That includes the right to a pay rise in line with annual pay awards and access to the NHS Pension Scheme.

“We have one NHS and one workforce.”