

Homeworking Additional Costs.

Firstly I hope you are well?

This Pandemic has highlighted the importance of Local Authority Services in our communities. I am sure you will agree that the workforce response in adapting to new ways of working has been unprecedented, significant and has allowed us to provide essential services during these difficult times.

I am writing formally to request that staff who have incurred additional costs because of either homeworking, lack of normal meal/break provision, transport and/or extra laundry are recompensed retrospectively.

I am aware that some of the above costs can be claimed directly through HMRC, however this is a complicated process and only provides a tax free element that in no way meets the expenditure incurred. I also think that it is unfair to ask employees who are familiar with only PAYE to claim through a process they do not know.

As the employer can make payments directly tax free or for some on a taxable basis, I would ask that this is a better way forward. I understand for 'homeworking' a tax free amount equal to £6 per week can be paid directly.

Homeworking has played a significant part in the response to the pandemic and may continue for some occupations. It is therefore important for us to establish individual 'risk assessments' which must include guidance, equipment, PPE, family/home circumstances, insurance and allow flexibility where required.

Our care at home workers have been absolutely marvellous during the pandemic response and key to our successes, despite the fact that their service was never really designed for such. They are often isolated workers who have limited uniform provision, requiring significant increase in laundry costs, to meet with increased recommendations of hygiene. With the closure of shops and facilities they have had very limited options for break arrangements.

In residential care, I have been made aware that extra laundry is also needed as the number of uniforms does not cover an entire pattern of working.

The joint SJC trade unions are making similar calls across all local authorities as part recognition of the costs incurred by workers. I understand that these adaptations/workforce accommodations have resulted in a projected saving this financial year of £88m across Scottish Councils.

I am all too aware of the financial difficulties of Aberdeenshire Council, but the costs of carrying out work for and on behalf of Aberdeenshire council cannot simply be passed on to the workforce. They should not be subsidising/absorbing the costs of the council, in order for the council to make further savings.

Many staff have had no choice whether to work from home or not, they have nonetheless had to continue to deliver their services to the community, many having to go out and visit clients/establishments for which they no longer have access to pool cars. Staff are using their own vehicles that have to be insured appropriately but are still having to deduct 'commuting mileage' from their claims, despite the employer not allowing them to work from their base.

I am asking that whilst staff are required to continue to work from their homes that mileage be paid as incurred and from their 'designated' base which is their home.

UNISON is embarking on a campaign both in Scotland and UK wide on the importance of Local Government and the need for appropriate funding in order to deliver the essential services both now and into the future.

UNISON has met with ministers and Scottish MSPs to forward our case for local government finance, particularly in light of the costs of the Covid Pandemic thus far, and the probability of increased costs going forward should further waves of infection arise. Local authorities will need to be able to respond again and with budgets now at unprecedented levels of debt that cannot be guaranteed. Other public bodies have had debt written off and we seek similar for local government.

We understand the financial position and are taking steps to address this. Meantime our members and vital staff should not be the ones to subsidise those losses and shoulder the burden of that debt when they have had no part in its making and have been the ones that have delivered the successes thus far.

Without recognition we cannot guarantee that the workforce will be so willing to respond in the future should needs arise.

I look forward to hearing from you and I am happy to have further discussion on this matter.

Take care

Inez Kirk

Joint Trade Union Secretary, UNISON.