



[15 March Strike Blog](#)

15 March 2023

15 March Strike Blog

As more than **133,000** PCS members strike together across the civil service and public sector on 15 March in our biggest day of action in years we are bringing you reports from picket lines and rallies across the UK.

Our action on Budget Day will see us strike at the same time as 8 other unions – UCU, NEU, Aslef, RMT, the junior doctors from the BMA and HCSA, Prospect and NUJ members across BBC Local.

Follow us on social media on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) and use the hashtags #PCSonStrike #BlameTheGovt

Send picket line photos and videos to strikereports@pcs.org.uk or via **WhatsApp** to **07990 665529**.

There are hundreds of picket lines, [see what's happening in your area](#). There [are also rallies](#) involving lots of other unions.

Send messages of support and solidarity to those on strike by emailing editor@pcs.org.uk

[Donate to the PCS Strike Fund](#)

It was an early and frosty start on many PCS picket lines this morning.

At **ONS in Newport, Wales**, the pickets were sporting PCS beanie hats to keep warm.

Sandra, on the picket line at the **Jobcentre Plus in West Derby**, Liverpool from 7am, said: "If we don't take a stand ..who will?"

At the first ever picket line by the Home Office at the **Soapworks in Manchester**, the early morning pickets have been getting lots of beeps from passing cars and public support. Jo, who is usually based at Strand View Seaforth Docks joined her nearest picket line at the Soapworks. She said: "It's really important to get involved on strike days, don't leave the picket lines to your representatives....Talk to your colleagues about joining PCS. I recently talked to 2 colleagues who didn't fully understand what the union does or stands for, they have now joined PCS."



at departments in the cold
ingham.

It's a beautiful sunny day today at Gatwick Airport for our picket line.

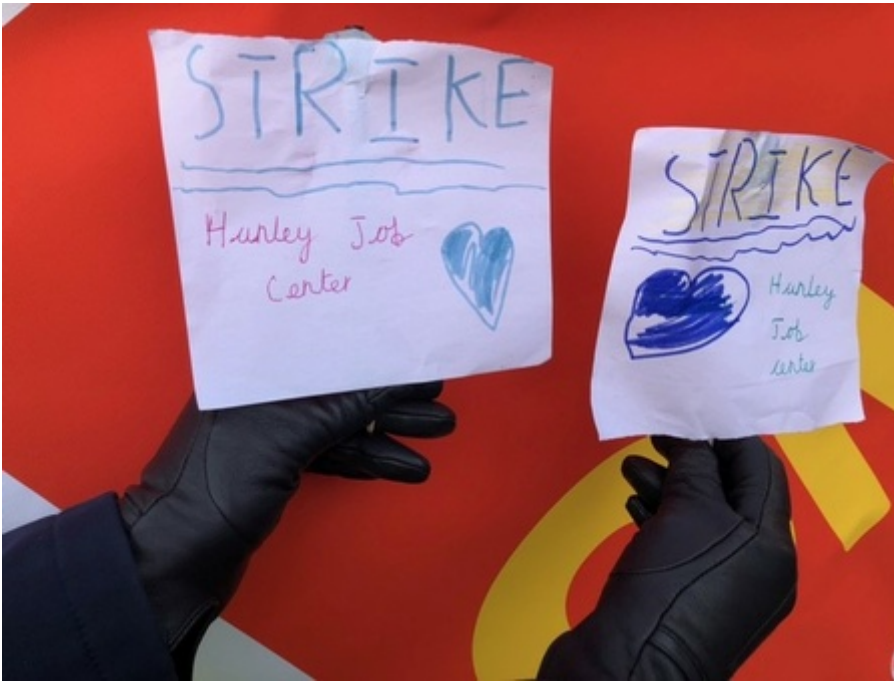


Bootle



ne in Cardiff

At DWP Durham we have another #picketlinepooch and the postal worker who refused to cross the picket line and sends solidarity.



A young supporter, Emily, at Hanley Jobcentre has got her felt tips out and made us some brilliant little placards.



rted at 7am with 7
g.

On the Home Office picket line at Vulcan House, Sheffield



This girl has a powerful message to the government on the Home Office picket her mum and her



Great display of flags and placards on the Newhaven Border Force picket line



PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka proudly wears his PCS beanie as he visits picket lines.

[Previous](#) [Next](#)

Why we're on strike

Emma Bould, PCS activist at **DfE London**: "I am on strike today because I want fair pay and treatment for myself and all of my colleagues."

Owen Mooney, newly elected rep at **DfE London**: "I am strike today because all workers deserve a decent pay deal!"

Montserrat McShane from **Darlington DfE** said: "I'm striking for our conditions, and for a proper 10% pay rise to take account of inflation and rising costs. Civil servants who keep the country running should not be using food banks. I strike for everyone."

At **HMPO Durham**, Bill Brown has been a union member since he was 19 years old (he's now 73). He said "I am striking today for all of my colleagues and for the next generation of hardworking civil servants. After my years of being a civil servant, I have seen a year-on-year decline in our pay and conditions over the last decade."

Unions working together

Joint picket lines are getting set up across the country, and **Prospect and PCS** members are out together at **Wellington Place in Leeds**.

Around a dozen **PCS and Prospect** staff have gathered outside the **BEIS offices in Westminster**. The pickets are playing music on speakers outside the offices as motorists drive by and beep in support.

Tom Ford, 30, a policy adviser at BEIS, said: "This is not just about making sure people have enough to pay their bills today, this is about correcting historic wrongs. For good public services in this country, you have to pay for them. It's great to see Prospect out today - I'm confident we'll get a good turnout." He added: "I'm going to vote in the ballot on March 20 to show that we're not going away."

Stand Firm

Our general secretary Mark Serwotka has been visiting picket lines as well as taking part in media interviews. [Watch our video from this morning](#) as he negotiated the streets of central London between picket lines with PCS president Fran Heathcote.

[Read this excellent New Statesman article](#) from a striking PCS member. They said "The government has treated civil servants with complete contempt. We, as a group, have been mistreated by the government – especially in regards to pay and job security,."

Emily and Eva outside **BEIS** in central **London** explained why they are striking. Emily, a senior policy adviser working on decarbonisation said: "Everybody who works across the whole of the public sector has been affected by the cost of living crisis.

"I feel quite lucky I'm not in a dire situation but I also recognise there are a lot of civil servants and wider public sector workers that are in a worse position than I am. They have dependents they need to look after. Having a pay rise between 2-3% has not been enough to absorb that impact for a lot of people."

Eva, an international relations manager at the **UK Space Agency**, said: "I did the maths, and....I'm effectively working a day a week for free."

At the **Sennedd Commission** in **Cardiff Bay**, the picket started at 7am, with 7 members and further support joining across the morning. They will be there until 11am when they will head to the Cardiff rally.

[Find out the details of this and other lunchtime rallies taking place.](#)

There is a solid picket at the **Home Office Vulcan House, Sheffield**. Our member Victoria here with her daughter, says she's striking for the civil servants using food banks, and adds: "Living in poverty is immoral, and prevents people from giving their best at work and achieving their personal development and career goals."

Showing support

North of Tyne Mayor Jamie Driscoll sent his support, with this tweet: "Civil servants don't want to strike, but a below inflation offer with poorer conditions attached means they have no choice. I'm with @pcs_union members this morning braving the icy weather! The Govt need to get round the table and #EndTheStrikes #PCSonStrike #BlameTheGovt."

Send messages of support to editor@pcs.org.uk

Rallying support

A mini rally was held outside of the **Home Office** building in **Marshall Street, London** as dozens of PCS members demanded better pay.

The strikers, who were also joined by colleagues from **Defra**, waved PCS flags and held banners which said "47,000 civil servants need Universal Credit" and "179,000 civil servants having to skip meals."

They were also chanting: "What do we want?" "10%" "When do we want it?" "Now!"

MP Chris Stephens, PCS parliamentary group chair, joined the strikers. He said: "I think it's only correct to show my full solidarity and support with those who are on strike today.

"It's clear to me that civil servants are getting the brown end of the stick when it comes to pay offers. It's very despicable they are only being offered 2% when inflation is at 10% and rising.

"The fact that civil servants are having to use food aid provision and benefits tells you everything you need to know about the low pay that is in the civil service.

"It's clear to me that we have to show that full solidarity and support, and also demonstrate to PCS members that there are members of parliament that support them all the way."

Fellow MP Paul Maskey was on the picket line outside **HMRC** in **Belfast**, and said: "We are here today to support PCS members on strike. Solidarity with all workers fighting for a fair pay for a fair work."

There was solidarity too from members of Waltham Forest Trades Council who visited a number of picket lines in Leyton, Leytonstone and Walthamstow this morning.

Strike causing disruptions

At **HMPO Newport** the strike has stopped production of passports and limited counter same-day appointments.

And the **British Museum** is warning that its "Museum visitor offer will be disrupted" because of strike action. Entry is limited to pre-booked ticket holders and galleries may close early or at short notice.

In **HMRC North West and Central Lancs**, the strike has reduced capacity to deal with Tax Credit services.

At **Aberdeen Sherriff's Court**, counters are closed, courts are not running, with reduced staff and a reduced service.

At the **Procurator Fiscal Office, Glasgow**, all trials have been adjourned today with a massive knock-on effect for the rest of the week and all delayed trials have to be rescheduled. Warrants can't be actioned, and custodies are affected.

Inverness Jobcentre members have been receiving solidarity from Post Office and rail workers. The posties said "It's all our fight". All appointments have been cancelled at the Jobcentre.

On Merseyside, six out of the seven **National Museums Liverpool** sites are closed to the public, with a lively picket line at the World Museum, the only site still open.

The **British Museum** is opening late, multiple galleries are closed and it is only open to members and pre-booked tickets. Prospect members at the British Museum are also on strike today.

At **Wester Hailes Jobcentre in Edinburgh**, work coaches' diaries were blocked so no job centre appointments are happening today.

Banbury jobcentre disruption: All work coach diaries blocked prior to strike, therefore, no appointments have taken place.

Stretford jobcentre: Severely reduced service. New members joined on picket line, and some who went in last time joined the strike.

HMPO Scotland: Counter closed, application processing at a very low level.

National Galleries of Scotland: All 4 national galleries buildings are closed to the public.

Why we are striking

On the picket line at **HMRC East Kilbride**, Melissa explained why she is out today: "I'm striking for fair pay and to stop all the cuts and for fair pensions. And so my family can live and not just survive."

Holly, branch organiser and young members officer, said: "I was a key worker during the height of the pandemic but we're only appreciated when it suits the

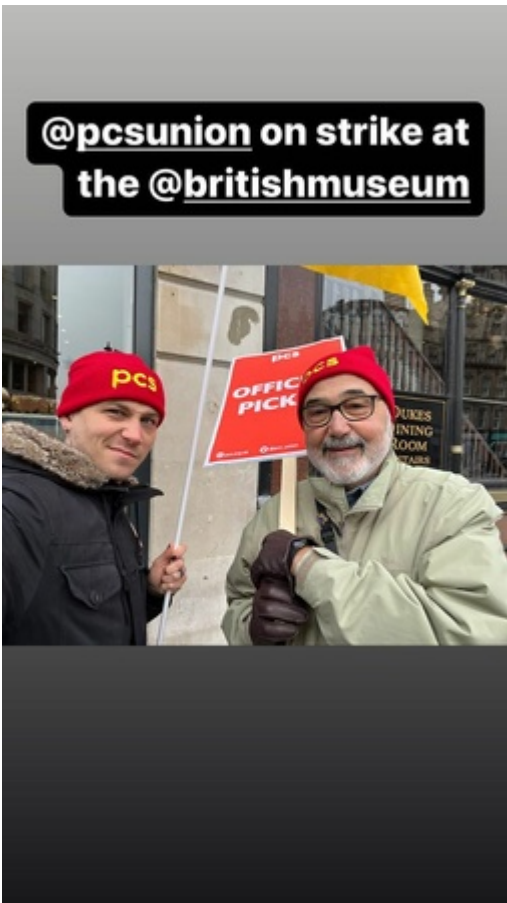


At Leicester Charles Street Inbcentre pickets were dressed to impress - "the top would notice if the civil service saw!"



pool.

The picket line at HMRC in Belfast has been really well supported.



ing a message to Rees-Mogg on the picket line
ilbride.

Pickets sharing their images on social media and tagging us in.



nd in Dundee has been making his voice heard at

Pickets from the Student Loans Company in Glasgow rocking the #PCSbeanies early this morning

Standing with PCS in Northern Ireland

Gerry Carroll, MLA for West Belfast, People Before Profit Alliance, addressed PCS members on strike at HMRC Belfast. He said: "Workers in HMRC and across the public sector deserve a proper pay rise. They work hard to collect the money that pays for vital services."

"If the Tories tackled tax avoidance there would be more than enough money for above inflation pay rises across the public sector and fully funded services."

Paul Maskey MP for West Belfast said: "We are here today to support PCS members on strike. Solidarity with all workers fighting for a fair pay for a fair work."

The well-supported picket line at HMRC in Belfast was also joined by a group of Unite members in solidarity.

Solidarity, support and sausages

At its peak, there were over 60 PCS pickets and supporters on the line at Unity Square, Nottingham, from a range of government departments and including two reps from Prospect union in the VOA. Hot sausage and bacon cobs were cooked on site as well as playing music. Several pickets left to join the NUJ picket at the BBC, in solidarity with journalists taking strike action from 11:00 today.

The picket was visited by a local journalist from the West Bridgford Wire. [Read the article.](#)

From 12 noon, a picket and supporters social will be held at the Canalhouse pub in Nottingham, with food, quizzes and a raffle. All profits from the raffle will be paid into the [PCS strike fund](#).

More disruption

Members from the **Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)** picketed the local office at **High Trees, Hemel Hempstead**. The building is in front of Asda and Iceland and opposite the hospital, and there was great engagement from the public and the private sector who also occupy the building.

Home Office Midlands reports appointments with visa nationals cancelled, and only 2 staff were seen going into the building. The **Home Office in Sheffield** was struggling to operate in many areas and lots of agency staff wanted to [join PCS](#) on the picket.

At **Middlesbrough Driving Test Centre** all tests were cancelled with a 100% solid strike.

The **Passport Office in Durham** saw no counter or interview appointments available.

In **Leven Jobcentre** managers were brought in from other areas to open the office in name only.

At **HMRC East Kilbride**, phone lines were inaccessible, webchat unavailable, tax not being collected.

Strike rallies

After picket line duty, many PCS members made their way to local rallies in many places including **Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow** and **Edinburgh, London** and **Manchester**, organised in many cases jointly with other striking unions and attended by thousands of people.

[Watch the videos of the London march and rally on our Facebook page.](#)

Thousands of PCS members have paraded down Embankment towards Downing Street as part of the strike action.

The members are holding a huge yellow balloon with the slogan “PCS Union” emblazoned on it and are being led by the PCS Samba Band who are playing rhythmic drums.

Long-time PCS supporter, MP John McDonnell joined the strikers as they began their parade and said: “I have absolute solidarity with the strikers. We can’t continue on when civil servants are treated with such disrespect and are paid so little.

“We can’t allow our civil servants to be forced into poverty in this way. Trade union after trade union has taken industrial action today, coming together to force the government to act.”

Fellow MP Ian Byrne told us: "How can we have civil servants using food banks? The system is broken, let's fix it."

The workers are also blowing whistles and chanting "hey!!" as they parade down Whitehall.

In **Belfast** more than 500 braved the freezing weather to attend a rally. Unite, GMB, UCU, PCS and Unison.



PCS and UCU members in Birmingham setting up their banners ready for the rally.



One of our members from the Department for Transport in Birmingham has travelled down to London for the march and rally and took this picture of the PCS contingent heading down towards Westminster.

[Previous](#) [Next](#)

At our rally outside Downing Street, PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka was full of praise for the tens of thousands of members on strike today and had a defiant message for the government: "Our message to Rishi Sunak and Jeremy Hunt is we are not going away. We can't afford not to win because there is a crisis of poverty and morale in the civil service. Every man and woman in this country should not be poorer at that end of the year than they were at the start, when you are working harder than you have ever worked before.

"If all the staples of life are going up 16% and you have a pay rise of 2%, you have got a crisis in your cost of living."

During the rally, the strikers chanted "What do we want?" "10%" "When do we want it?" "Now!"

Former tax office worker, Kim Johnson MP joined the rally and gave her full support to all those on strike today when she spoke at our rally near Downing Street.

"13 years of austerity have had a major impact on our public sector workers and civil servants. I'm proud to be here to support workers," she said.

Home Office worker Arisa said: "I've decided to come out and protest today as I believe everyone deserves a fair wage, including civil servants. We want 10% pay rise, we think 2% is an insult. Hopefully we get it."

Hannah, who works in the Department of Health's policy fast track scheme, said: "I'm on strike for the people who work in regional offices and who are having to claim universal credit. I'm here in solidarity with them."

Mia who works in the Department of Energy as a project lead, has recently joined PCS as a new member.

Outlining her decision [to join](#), she said: "We need to make it fair for all the colleagues across the pay bands, as well due to the general treatment of the civil service at the moment and the rhetoric that is being put out at the moment."

On to Trafalgar Square

Thousands of union members have arrived at Trafalgar Square for a joint union rally to call for better pay and conditions for public sector workers.

Members of PCS, Prospect and the National Education Union gathered in front of a stage near Nelson's column to hear speeches. The strikers are also cheering and blowing whistles during the rally and waving their flags.

Show of strength

Thousands of people cheered as PCS President Fran Heathcote took to the stage and gave a speech at the rally in Trafalgar Square.

She told strikers: "We want to send a clear message to this government today. When they tell us they don't have enough money to pay us a decent wage, tell us we have to put up with worse terms and conditions, and lower pensions, because it's all about the economy and what they can afford, let me tell you this: they are lying."

"This current strike is about cuts on our living standards, but attacks on our living standards are just one part of this class war that was expanded over Thatcher

and has been pursued ever since. The strength of the strategy is cuts and a privatisation agenda, holding down public sector wages, is not because there's no money, not because the Tories are mean, although they may be, but because they want to demoralise the public sector, make us feel undervalued and unsupported.

"All of these attacks stem from the same source: this rotten government. If we're going to defeat them, we have to unite like never before. That means joint campaigns, joint demands, joint activity. It also means coordinated, joint strike action so that we can put the maximum pressure on this government, and that's what worries them the most.

"Today has been huge, it's been a fantastic show of strength and it looks fantastic. I'm really, really proud to be here today."

Strike until we win

PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka also spoke at the rally, praising all the different unions who were on strike.

He told the crowd: "What a fantastic turnout, everyone here should be proud of what you've done today, and you should remember today this day as the day we all stood up and made a difference.

"What I want to say to all our educators who are on strike, the Tories may moan about the disruption, but I say this, the best lesson young people can learn, they have learned today. It's about solidarity, it's about standing up for yourself when other people are treating you badly, and it's about the fact that while Jeremy Hunt knows the cost of everything, you know the value of everything, including your own importance to our future.

"On a personal note to our junior doctors who are here today: the last time you were on strike, I was in hospital for five months having a heart transplant and it was you that kept me alive. It was because of you I'm here today. We stand with every junior doctor and health worker.

"I also want to say solidarity to RMT, Aslef and all the other workers who are striking today.

"To our PCS members: we have 133,000 people on strike today in over 130 government departments. These people are all on strike, and we are proud of each of our members who have taken action today.

"I want to say this to them and to everyone else: PCS members working for the government here today on strike, 30% of the Department of Work and Pensions and HMRC are on the national minimum wage. Just think about that. We have people chasing tax dodgers, sending out pensions, we have people in our justice system, our courts and our borders on the national minimum wage. They have been given a 2% pay rise and the government is threatening to cut tens of thousands of their jobs.

"What we're saying is: absolutely no way, we are not having it, and we're going to strike until we win."