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OCS strike: severely disrupted courts lead to meeting with employer

PCS members in OCS forced closures and caused severe disruptions in courts across England and Wales during a hugely effective four-day strike action over pay.

Security officers in 149 courts across England and Wales took this action for four days (22, 25, 27 and 29 September) after being offered just 38p above the National Living Wage. They are currently paid the national minimum wage of £10.42 by OCS, an outsourced contractor.

Due to the action undertaken by members, OCS has agreed to meet with the union to discuss pay next week.

The strike saw hundreds of PCS members forming strong and lively picket lines in 16 locations, including Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Yorkshire, Birmingham and Brighton.

The momentum was strong and spirits were high throughout. A virtual strike rally on 27 September was attended by over 100 OCS workers.

On the final day of strike action (29 September), PCS held a strike rally at the civic centre in Newcastle, where PCS president Fran Heathcote was joined by colleagues from UNISON, RMT, UCU and others to talk about the success of this action.

The rallies reminded members that their action had singlehandedly caused the closure of many courts across England and Wales, leading to a large number of court cases and hearings to be cancelled or disrupted.

As a direct result of the action, many courts have also either operated with inadequate staffing levels or used contingency labour.

In addition to the health and safety concerns that were raised due to use of inexperienced, untrained, or unvetted security, there were also long queues to get in and out of courts in most locations.

At Liverpool Crown Court, for instance, [the court building had to be evacuated](#) during the strike action by PCS security officers because security guidelines were breached.

This occurred because agency workers were asked to cover a role they are not trained for. Although no harm was done, the chaos underlines the importance of having trained professionals running the security of our courts.

PCS is looking into how - and to what extent - agency staff were used to cover strikes. It appears that the courts covered for our members with a variety of agency staff, OCS workers on different contracts and other employees on zero-hour contracts.