# Nearly 400 hospital facilities staff vote for strike over ‘two‑tier’ NHS contracts



Nearly 400 cleaners, porters and catering staff at Epsom and St Helier hospitals have voted in a strike ballot as they press the Trust for full parity with the national Agenda for Change pay and conditions that apply to most NHS employees. According to the Evening Standard, the workers — represented by the United Voices of the World (UVW) union — say they remain on locally created contracts with lower pay and fewer benefits despite having been brought back into direct employment by the NHS. The union describes the contracts as a “two‑tier” system that treats staff doing the same jobs differently. (Evening Standard; UVW briefing.)

The union has published detailed comparisons to underline the scale of the disparity. UVW says some members are paid roughly £13.85 an hour, compared with the NHS Band 2 rate the union cites at about £14.92; they also point to an employer pension contribution of around 3% rather than the substantially higher contribution associated with NHS pension arrangements, reduced annual leave (about 24 days versus up to 33 for some AfC staff) and the absence of shift enhancements for nights and weekends. The union’s list of demands includes matching Band 2 pay, fair unsocial‑hours enhancements, full sick pay from day one, increased annual leave with service progression and employer pension contributions aligned with NHS schemes. (UVW news release; UVW disputes page.)

The dispute has its roots in the Trust’s phased decision to bring estates and facilities staff in‑house after previously using private contractors. The Trust says it began reintegrating staff in 2018 and completed a further transfer on 1 June 2021, when it invested more than £2 million and applied a London Living Wage uplift to the newly employed staff. Industry coverage at the time described the move as intended to improve workplace equality and formalise NHS employment for roughly 440 formerly outsourced staff. (Evening Standard; Trust statement; Facilitate magazine.)

The Trust insists the move into direct employment produced improved pay and other benefits, and says it is reviewing terms and conditions. In a statement the Trust set out that cleaning, catering and portering staff were made NHS employees in 2021 and that the in‑house approach was intended to deliver better pay and benefits. The Trust has told the press it is engaging with staff and examining contractual arrangements. The union rejects that claim as insufficient, saying the improvements fall short of full AfC parity. (Trust statement; Evening Standard; UVW.)

There are inconsistencies in the public accounts of the dispute that underline the political sensitivities. The Evening Standard reports nearly 400 staff voting in the ballot, while the union’s own material refers to almost 300 facilities workers brought back in‑house in 2021. Both figures point to a substantial cohort affected by the contractual differences, but the variance highlights how different organisations frame the scale of the problem. Trade union campaigns, including a petition hosted by UNISON, have amplified the argument that many transferred staff were not placed onto genuine Agenda for Change terms and should be compensated or re‑graded where appropriate. (Evening Standard; UVW; UNISON action page.)

Agenda for Change is the NHS’s standard pay and grading framework for most staff and encompasses not only pay bands but annual leave entitlements, sick pay arrangements, and pension provision. Unions argue that bringing staff into the NHS without placing them onto AfC terms creates persistent inequality that can damage morale and retention. Sector commentators who reported on the 2021 transfers said the expectation at the time was that insourcing would reduce pay‑inequities compared with contractor employment; the current dispute shows that expectations have not been universally realised. (UVW; Facilitate magazine.)

What happens next is uncertain. UVW says the ballot was carried overwhelmingly and that the union has launched a campaign seeking equality now; its disputes page sets out demands and a plan of action. The Trust says it is reviewing contracts and continues to engage with staff. If talks do not resolve the differences, the ballot could lead to strike action that would disrupt services such as cleaning and catering — functions that, while non‑clinical, are integral to hospital operation and patient experience. Both sides will therefore face pressure to move towards a negotiated settlement. (Evening Standard; UVW; Trust statement.)

Beyond this local dispute, the case at Epsom and St Helier feeds into a wider national debate about the legacy of outsourcing and the patchwork of contracts that followed. Unions and campaigners say it illustrates how partial insourcing without clear alignment to national frameworks can leave long‑term inequalities in place; the Trust and some sector leaders argue that insourcing was, and remains, the right policy but that practical and financial constraints complicate immediate parity. Resolving those tensions will require detailed, and often costly, remedies — from back‑dated payments to contract re‑grading — if the pay and conditions gap is to be closed. (UVW; UNISON; Trust statement; Facilitate magazine.)

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## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/south-london-hospital-staff-strike-contracts-st-helier-b1243176.html), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/south-london-hospital-staff-strike-contracts-st-helier-b1243176.html), [[3]](https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/en/news/2025/06/hundreds-of-nhs-facilities-workers-at-st-helier-and-epsom-hospitals-launch-historic-strike-ballot-in-major-push-for-equality/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[3]](https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/en/news/2025/06/hundreds-of-nhs-facilities-workers-at-st-helier-and-epsom-hospitals-launch-historic-strike-ballot-in-major-push-for-equality/), [[4]](https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/en/disputes/equality-now-for-st-helier-epsom-hospital-staff/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/south-london-hospital-staff-strike-contracts-st-helier-b1243176.html), [[5]](https://www.epsom-sthelier.nhs.uk/news-and-events/clean-caring-and-catered-for-2-million-pledge-for-vital-epsom-and-st-helier-staff--3258/), [[6]](https://www.facilitatemagazine.com/content/news/2021/06/22/hospital-trust-brings-cleaning-and-catering-staff-house)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.epsom-sthelier.nhs.uk/news-and-events/clean-caring-and-catered-for-2-million-pledge-for-vital-epsom-and-st-helier-staff--3258/), [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/south-london-hospital-staff-strike-contracts-st-helier-b1243176.html), [[3]](https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/en/news/2025/06/hundreds-of-nhs-facilities-workers-at-st-helier-and-epsom-hospitals-launch-historic-strike-ballot-in-major-push-for-equality/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/south-london-hospital-staff-strike-contracts-st-helier-b1243176.html), [[3]](https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/en/news/2025/06/hundreds-of-nhs-facilities-workers-at-st-helier-and-epsom-hospitals-launch-historic-strike-ballot-in-major-push-for-equality/), [[7]](https://action.unison.org.uk/page/131610/petition/1)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/en/news/2025/06/hundreds-of-nhs-facilities-workers-at-st-helier-and-epsom-hospitals-launch-historic-strike-ballot-in-major-push-for-equality/), [[6]](https://www.facilitatemagazine.com/content/news/2021/06/22/hospital-trust-brings-cleaning-and-catering-staff-house)
* Paragraph 7 – [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/south-london-hospital-staff-strike-contracts-st-helier-b1243176.html), [[3]](https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/en/news/2025/06/hundreds-of-nhs-facilities-workers-at-st-helier-and-epsom-hospitals-launch-historic-strike-ballot-in-major-push-for-equality/), [[5]](https://www.epsom-sthelier.nhs.uk/news-and-events/clean-caring-and-catered-for-2-million-pledge-for-vital-epsom-and-st-helier-staff--3258/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[3]](https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/en/news/2025/06/hundreds-of-nhs-facilities-workers-at-st-helier-and-epsom-hospitals-launch-historic-strike-ballot-in-major-push-for-equality/), [[7]](https://action.unison.org.uk/page/131610/petition/1), [[5]](https://www.epsom-sthelier.nhs.uk/news-and-events/clean-caring-and-catered-for-2-million-pledge-for-vital-epsom-and-st-helier-staff--3258/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/south-london-hospital-staff-strike-contracts-st-helier-b1243176.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/south-london-hospital-staff-strike-contracts-st-helier-b1243176.html> - This Evening Standard article reports that nearly 400 cleaners, porters and catering staff at Epsom and St Helier hospitals, represented by the United Voices of the World (UVW) union, voted overwhelmingly in a strike ballot over what they describe as inferior, ‘Mickey Mouse’ contracts. The piece states the workers are now directly employed by the NHS but remain outside the national Agenda for Change (AfC) framework. UVW says staff were brought back in-house in 2018 and 2021 yet still receive lower pay, reduced annual leave, weaker pensions and no night or weekend enhancements, while the Trust says it has improved pay and is reviewing contracts.
3. <https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/en/news/2025/06/hundreds-of-nhs-facilities-workers-at-st-helier-and-epsom-hospitals-launch-historic-strike-ballot-in-major-push-for-equality/> - This UVW news release sets out the union’s account of the dispute at St Helier and Epsom, describing almost 300 facilities workers who were brought in-house in 2021 but remain excluded from Agenda for Change terms. UVW details concrete comparisons: members earning £13.85 per hour compared with an NHS Band 2 rate of £14.92, no shift enhancements for nights or weekends, pension employer contributions at around 3% rather than the NHS rate, only 24 days’ annual leave versus up to 33 for AfC staff, and lack of full sick pay from day one, motivating the strike ballot.
4. <https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/en/disputes/equality-now-for-st-helier-epsom-hospital-staff/> - The UVW disputes page outlines the campaign aims: parity with Agenda for Change contracts and equal terms and conditions for facilities staff at Epsom and St Helier. It lists the union’s demands — fair pay to match Band 2 rates, proper shift enhancements for unsocial hours, full sick pay from day one, increased annual leave with progression for service, and employer pension contributions in line with NHS schemes. The page emphasises that staff are employed directly by the Trust yet remain on locally created contracts that the union describes as a two‑tier system requiring urgent redress.
5. <https://www.epsom-sthelier.nhs.uk/news-and-events/clean-caring-and-catered-for-2-million-pledge-for-vital-epsom-and-st-helier-staff--3258/> - This news release from Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust explains the Trust’s 2021 decision to bring cleaning, catering and portering staff back in‑house from Mitie and invest over £2 million to improve pay and benefits. It states that from 1 June 2021 staff became NHS employees and would receive a London Living Wage uplift and other improved terms. The statement presents the Trust’s position that re‑integration into the NHS family would bring better pay and conditions, and it provides the official context for the transfer from contractor employment to direct NHS employment.
6. <https://www.facilitatemagazine.com/content/news/2021/06/22/hospital-trust-brings-cleaning-and-catering-staff-house> - Facility management sector coverage reports on the Trust’s 2021 move to bring cleaning and catering services in‑house when the Mitie contract ended. The article sets out the background to the change, noting that the Trust expected the in‑house approach to improve workplace equality and raise pay to the London Living Wage for around 440 staff. It summarises the Trust’s rationale, the anticipated benefits for staff, and the scale of the investment, corroborating that formerly outsourced staff became directly employed by the Trust rather than by an external contractor.
7. <https://action.unison.org.uk/page/131610/petition/1> - This UNISON action page hosts a petition calling on Epsom & St Helier Trust to put estates and facilities staff onto genuine Agenda for Change contracts and to acknowledge that, despite being brought back in‑house, many such staff do not enjoy full NHS pay, sick pay and other AfC benefits. The page summarises concerns that staff transferred from Mitie were not put onto standard AfC terms, describes the injustice of different treatment for the same employer, and urges the Trust to remedy the two‑tier arrangements by granting proper AfC pay and lump‑sum payments where due.