

Public service pay talks to resume next week

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The ICTU public services committee (PSC) and DPER officials are set to return to pay talks at the WRC next Monday, August 29, following a formal invite from the Commission earlier this week.

The PSC confirmed on Tuesday of this week that public service pay talks will resume at Lansdowne House on August 29 – some 10 weeks since the parties last formally met on negotiating a new public service pay deal.

At the end of July, the WRC had moved to invite both the union and official sides back to talks, but with talks not likely to resume until mid-August, due to the traditional August summer break for many involved.

Last June, the ICTU committee rejected DPER's June offer of 5% on top of the remaining 2% pay increase to be applied under the current Building Momentum agreement, which expires at the end of 2022.

The pay offer was rejected as falling “well short of inflation” and was something that “could not credibly have been put to [union] members.”

While it was expected for pay talks to resume not too long after the PSC's rejection of the 5% offer, given indications from the Government that an improved offer would be forthcoming, a return to the table could not be achieved in the meantime.

The original outline for BM was a 1% basic pay increase from October 2021, another 1% ‘sectoral bargaining’ uplift in 2022 and another 1% basic pay increase in October 2022.

FOCUS ON 2021-2022

It is important to note that while the original scope for pay talks was to revise the BM agreement – and possibly to extend BM for another year or so – what the union side is now focusing on is a revision of the original BM duration, that is the years 2021 and 2022.

This suggests a pay agreement for 2023 might have to be negotiated as a separate deal, which is something the official side may not have been in favour of. However, the duration of a potential revised BM has yet to be decided.

The Building Momentum review clause was triggered in early 2022, due to the rapidly increasing rate of inflation and associated cost of living pressures that have emerged, largely due to international events.

The PSC has consistently cited the rapidly rising rate of inflation across 2022, yet the Government has remained firm that a new deal will not “chase” inflation, i.e. it will not match the current rate of inflation of around 9%, which is not an annualised rate.

Fórsa general secretary, Kevin Callinan, who chairs the PSC, said that unions “would engage positively in the process and were prepared to be flexible.” But he restated the unions’ position that a significantly improved pay offer from the Government side was needed.

INDUSTRIAL ACTION BALLOTS

During the gap between the last round of talks and now, public service unions have been coordinating industrial action ballots, which are to commence at the end of this month.

The PSC accused the Government of breaching BM; something which was strongly denied by DPER minister Michael McGrath.

Mr Callinan said unions would prefer a negotiated outcome that could credibly be put to ballots of public servants, but added that this would not be feasible in the absence of a significantly improved Government position.

He said ICTU-affiliated public service unions were united in their resolution to achieve a credible public service pay offer for 2021-2022.