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Epsom and St Helier hospital workers bring pay and pension claims

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Around 250 cleaners, porters and catering workers at Epsom and St Helier hospitals are pursuing employment tribunal claims over the pay and pension arrangements they were given after becoming NHS employees in 2021.

The workers, who are predominantly Black, brown and migrant, allege indirect race discrimination by Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust. Their union, United Voices of the World (UVW), says they are seeking to recover four years of lost pay and pension contributions, as well as compensation for injury to feelings.

The staff previously worked for contractor Mitie. When the trust took the services in-house, the workers became direct NHS employees but remained on different terms from colleagues covered by Agenda for Change, the NHS pay and conditions framework. The union says affected staff were paid £13.85 an hour compared with £14.92 for Band 2 colleagues. They were enrolled in the Nest pension scheme, where UVW says the employer contributed 3 per cent of qualifying earnings.

Dispute over backdated pension contributions

The trust told the Morning Star that it had agreed to pay backdated employer contributions for staff who chose to join the NHS Pension Scheme. A spokesperson added that the trust was “sorry we didn’t get this right first time.”

The dispute now includes how workers can make up their own pension contributions for the four years. UVW says staff were asked to find the money upfront. The hospital group disputes that account, saying it offered workers the option of making back payments. The union says the group should have considered alternatives, including whether existing Nest contributions could be transferred or whether arrears could be recovered from future pension benefits.

Ioana Paduraru, a cleaning and portering supervisor at St Helier Hospital, said: “Nobody explained to us at the time that we should have been enrolled in the NHS pension scheme.” She said finding four years’ worth of contributions at once would be unaffordable for her household.

Claims follow deal on NHS terms

Epsom and Ewell Times previously reported on the workers’ campaign for the same pay and conditions as NHS colleagues. In November 2025, after staff voted in favour of strike action, the trust reached a deal covering more than 500 workers. It provided for full NHS terms to be phased in, including improved sick pay and enhanced rates for nights and weekends. The tribunal claims concern losses the workers say they incurred before those improvements.

The case follows a separate ruling involving cleaners at Great Ormond Street Hospital. In January, the Employment Appeal Tribunal upheld their indirect race discrimination claims for the period after they became direct NHS employees, when they waited 18 months to move onto full NHS terms. The Epsom and St Helier claims will be decided on their own facts.

UVW says the pension hearing is scheduled for 14 June 2027 and the back pay hearing for 7 July 2027. The union is representing workers in the pension claim, while law firm Leigh Day is acting in the back pay case.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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