

Epsom Hospital workers to strike for equality?

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More than 200 essential hospital cleaners and porters could strike over NHS equality at a Surrey Hospital Trust. Approximately 258 NHS facilities workers at St Helier and Epsom Hospital Trust will vote whether to go on strike as they demand full equality with their hospital colleagues. The ballot will open today (July 1) and close on August 12, with potential strike dates to be announced in mid August. The workers, most of whom are from migrant and minority ethnic backgrounds, are NHS employees but are allegedly denied the NHS's national pay system, terms and conditions. United Voices of the World (UVW), a campaigning trade union, is representing the group.

Dennis Gyamfi, a cleaner at Epsom Hospital and UVW member, said: "I've cleaned this hospital for seven years. My fellow cleaners, porters and caterers do essential work — yet we've never been treated with the same dignity as other NHS staff." Key workers such as cleaners, porters and caterers were brought in-house in 2021 and released from private contracts. Campaigners and UVW claim they were not given the standard NHS contracts and remain on inferior terms. The union states workers get lower pay and also miss out on key benefits such as paid sick leave from day one, enhanced nights and weekend pay as well as lower pension contributions and are stuck on 24 days' holiday, with no increase for length of service. The trade union argued the pay has been frozen and they are now formally moving toward strike action after the CEO and Board of Trustees refused to enter negotiations.

Mr Gyamfi added: "We are the pillars of this hospital — if we don't clean, transport people around or serve food, patients and their families suffer. The board knows this. It's time they gave us the respect we deserve. Change our contracts. Give us equality, dignity, and the recognition every NHS worker should have." But Epsom and St Helier Hospital claim those on the London Living Wage have seen annual increases in the last three years which is well ahead of staff on the standard NHS contracts. The Hospital Trust also said staff have recently had a pay rise between 3-5.3 per cent was effective from April 1

"This is not just disappointing — it's outrageous," said Farrokh, a porter at St Helier Hospital and UVW member. "It is deeply troubling that a publicly-run organisation - whose duty should be to uphold fairness and protect its employees - appears to be taking steps that deprive its lowest-paid workers of rights and benefits long established by the NHS, government and unions." Frustration has also deepened at St Helier Hospital, where staff reportedly contend with unsafe, degrading conditions, said to be impacting the wellbeing of both patients and hospital staff.

Around £60 million has been spent in the past five years improving facilities across the hospitals. But the ageing hospitals are deteriorating faster than the NHS can fix them, and bosses have accepted staff and patients deserve better. Through the New Hospital Programme, the government has committed to investing in plans to build a new hospital in Sutton and upgrade the existing hospitals, but construction will begin later than originally planned.

Petros Elia, UVW General Secretary, said: "These workers are as much a part of the NHS as any doctor, nurse, or administrator. They kept our hospitals running during the pandemic, yet in 2025 they're still treated as second-class NHS employees. This two-tier system is degrading, demoralising and discriminatory. It sends a message that their labour matters less, and their lives matter less. And it must end." An Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals spokesperson said: "Our porters and cleaners and everyone who works in our trusts are hugely valued and respected colleagues, and we were pleased to recently announce a pay rise of up to 5.3 per cent effective from 1st April. When colleagues were brought in-house in 2021 they received improved pay and conditions compared to their private contracts, including the London Living Wage. We understand their concerns and remain open to engaging with our colleagues and their Unions."

Workers at Epsom and St Helier Hospitals to vote on strike action. (Credit: United Voices of the World)