

SINCE Birmingham City Council first embarked on its pay and grading review, the issue has barely been out of the headlines.

The review includes the compulsory national single status

agreement and is designed to remove historic inequalities both in pay, and in terms of conditions of employment, for 41,000 staff.

Under the recent intense scrutiny, a number of myths about

the review have arisen. Here, Cllr Alan Rudge, Birmingham City Council's cabinet member for Equalities and Human Resources, responds to these in order to clear up any confusion...

# Single status: the truth behind the headlines

## MYTH 1 >>>

'The single status review is a cost-cutting exercise'

CLLR RUDGE: *This is not true, the council will in fact be making a sizeable investment to the wage bill amounting to £23.3m in 2007-08 and in excess of £29m in 2008-09 and ongoing as a result of the review.*

*We are settling back-pay claims in respect of equal pay. Unlike when the NHS went through the same process, local authorities have to fund this entire exercise themselves, without any financial support from the government.*

## MYTH 2 >>>

'The single status review doesn't generate equality'

CLLR RUDGE: *It does. The new seven-grade structure has been analysed by external experts, TMS, who determined that, for the first time, the council's salary structure is compliant with the Equal Opportunities Commission.*

## MYTH 3 >>>

'More women than men lose money – so single status can't generate equality'

CLLR RUDGE: *The review ranks jobs objectively regardless of gender. As 75 per cent of our staff are women, inevitably, in raw numbers, more women than men see a decrease.*

*Likewise more women than men see an increase. Changes are distributed proportionately between genders across the workforce.*

## MYTH 4 >>>

'The council is funding pay increases for its lowest paid staff by cutting wages to other relatively low paid workers'

CLLR RUDGE: *This is not true. As stated above, the net result of the review will see the council's overall wage bill rise significantly year-on-year, with more than 86 per cent of staff seeing either an increase in, or retention of, their current basic salary.*

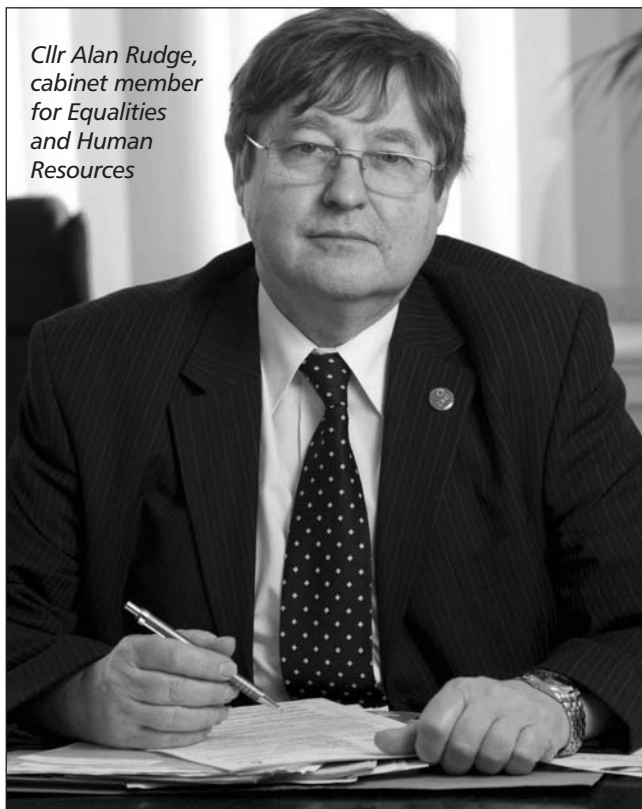
*Within the 14 per cent set for a reduction are a number of roles which historically have been very highly paid thanks to complex bonus systems which legally the city council is no longer able to sustain.*

## MYTH 5 >>>

'The council is sacking 41,000 staff and then imposing new contracts upon them'

CLLR RUDGE: *This is simply not true. No one will lose their job through the council's action. More than 52*

Cllr Alan Rudge, cabinet member for Equalities and Human Resources



*per cent of staff have accepted their new contract.*

*For those remaining the law allows a process of termination and immediate re-engagement on the new contract to be implemented.*

## MYTH 6 >>>

'The council has cut a special deal with refuse collectors to dissuade them from striking in the future'

CLLR RUDGE: *Nonsense. We have been in discussions for 18 months to redesign jobs in order to improve the quality of service delivered to the public.*

*We have redesigned a number of roles in care and legal services, as well as with refuse collectors and street cleaners.*

*Work on improving the effectiveness in refuse collection and street cleansing services pre-dates implementation of single status by many months.*

## MYTH 7 >>>

'The council has not consulted properly or has been inflexible in talks with trade unions'

CLLR RUDGE: *Absolutely untrue. The council has held hundreds of meetings with trade union representatives over*

*the past 12 months. We continue to listen carefully to what unions and staff say and, in many cases, we have already made changes to improve our proposals for staff.*

*Most recently we put forward a range of significant offers to the unions, all of which were rejected. These included:*

- *Withdrawal of the termination and re-engagement notices;*
  - *Extension of the protection period;*
  - *Re-consideration of assimilation proposals;*
  - *Further discussion with unions on key areas of concern.*
- Despite this the council remains committed to continuing talks with a view to reaching an amicable outcome.*

## MYTH 8 >>>

'New terms and conditions are being introduced which offer no benefits to employees'

CLLR RUDGE: *No, there are many benefits to employees:*

- *Increased leave entitlement – in some cases as much as ten extra days per year;*
- *A standardised working week, which for some may reduce the number of hours worked without affecting pay levels;*
- *Pay increments available to all;*
- *Longer grades giving potential for higher salaries for many;*
- *A commitment to training and development.*

## MYTH 9 >>>

'As a result of my drop in salary, I'll have to sell my house tomorrow'

CLLR RUDGE: *No one's basic salary will show any reduction until April 2010, and then only seven per cent of people will have a reduction.*

*In order to help staff, we have put in place a number of support mechanisms:*

- *Salaries will be protected until April 2010;*
- *Hardship payments will be made;*
- *An appeals process is in place;*
- *Financial and other counselling is available.*

## MYTH 10 >>>

'Single status has been implemented elsewhere without strikes, so this council is being unreasonable'

CLLR RUDGE: *Not at all. Birmingham is well ahead of many councils; only 50 per cent have reached the same point. Of those, none have implemented without opposition and some, such as Coventry and Staffordshire, have had more than one go. Just 14 per cent of Birmingham staff will see a reduction in salary, compared with a national average of 20 per cent.*

“ We continue to listen carefully to what unions and staff say and, in many cases, we have already made changes to improve our proposals for staff ”