



Dear Councillors Baldock, Cornell and Nolan,

Thank you for your letter yesterday.

I have read and digested the contents, but more importantly so have the members currently on strike at Canenco. They are not only Canenco workers but also residents of Canterbury, constituents, council tax payers and voters, many of whom will have delivered you to power on Thursday 4th May.

I must first correct an inaccuracy in your letter – the current offer on the table to the Canenco drivers is not anywhere near the 14.9 per cent which you quoted. In fact, the offer includes consolidating an existing drivers' retention bonus so is not additional money in the pockets of our member and it is disingenuous to say otherwise. As you will know, the demand for HGV drivers is soaring and the market pay rates have gone up by 40 per cent over the last few years [1].

It is also disingenuous to imply Canterbury City Council do not have responsibility for this dispute. Canenco is wholly owned by the council and Canterbury City Council is their only customer. The public know you could settle this dispute at any time. Whoever pays the piper, calls the tune and the people of Canterbury aren't stupid.

You were warned before you took control of the council this dispute was anticipated. You have had plenty of time to resolve it, but you have failed. In the first 10 weeks of Labour running Canterbury, the bins are piling up, morale among the workforce is at rock bottom and you've now added insult to injury with this letter.

As an aside, I notice that the online system for residents to report uncollected bins has been disabled. Since we know more and more bins are going uncollected, it would be a shame if your voters weren't able to let you know that the service they pay for through council tax is not being delivered. Perhaps you could let me know when this presumably temporary website glitch will be rectified?

The whole city and wider Labour movement is now watching this disaster unfold. You will forever be the leaders of the Labour council who couldn't resolve a dispute when Tory councils down the road can [2].

In fact, councils across the country have been funding additional pay rises for contracted workers to protect them from the extremes of the cost-of-living rises. According to Rightmove, the average house price in Canterbury is £363,655 and the average rent is £925 per month. This a huge proportion of our members' income, and homelessness charity Shelter have described private renters as "facing a crisis like never before". [3]

GMB, BRITAIN'S GENERAL UNION

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This is of course not a problem for those who can afford to own their own house, or even two, like Councillor Baldock.

GMB members on strike at Canenco today were incredulous at the tone and content of your letter. They are hard workers who go out in all weathers to keep this city clean, in the boiling hot and the pouring rain. They take tremendous pride in the work they do. They keep this city clean and, as we have seen over the last few days, the city depends on them.

You refer to GMB in the abstract but actually we are a democratic organisation and 98 per cent of our members - and therefore your workers - rejected the offer because it wasn't good enough.

Your letter was an unbelievable attempt by a Labour council to attack and emotionally blackmail working people - the very people your party was set up to defend. To blame low paid workers on poverty wages for council cuts to services is a lesson in punching down.

These workers are not responsible for difficult local government finances. You were elected by the people of Canterbury to manage the finances of the council. Our members deserve a decent wage and you have the choice to deliver that or not. Lastly, if you think the offer on the table is so generous and the members should reconsider, we wish to extend an invite for you all to come down to the picket line to address the members and let them know how great the offer is. This will be a much better way of getting your message across rather than hiding behind a letter which was no doubt written by your officers paid 3 times more than these members on strike.

You were more than happy to attend picket lines when you didn't actually have the power to effect change, so we look forward to welcoming you to meet the members one morning this week. You know where they'll be - come down any time from 6:30am outside the depot and you'll find a strong, committed picket line who will be very happy to hear about the latest developments in pay talks direct from you.

Yours sincerely,

Gary Palmer
GMB Regional Organiser

[1] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-coventry-warwickshire-58409277>

[2] <https://www.gmb.org.uk/news/ashford-and-swale-refuse-collectors-accept-large-pay-offer>

[3] <https://www.msn.com/en-gb/money/homes-property/average-rent-in-canterbury-rose-during-coronavirus-pandemic/ar-AAldsaxk>