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Dear MJ

Regrettably the headline in last weeks MJ was yet again another council in the dock on equal pay. (£50m equal pay bill MJ 06 04 06). Whilst there are clearly issues of fairness in simply calling on the Government to fund back pay when some councils have already paid out from their own coffers the stand off between councils and central Government can no longer continue.

A settlement at the hands of a Tribunal is rarely as a result of a deliberate attempt by councils to deny pay equality. It is almost without exception one of affordability. Phil Woolas has openly stated that the Government is not to blame for these problems, arguing that they were never party to the single status agreement. But should that mean an abdication of responsibility for a statutory requirement for pay equality enshrined in statute under the Equal Pay Act?

There are two options. One is to continue adding to the riches of Stefan Cross. The second is for central government to consider some soft ring fenced money to allow a package of measures to be introduced immediately with affordability spread over a longer term, linked to auditable service improvements. It seems to me that this is entirely in line with the Government thinking on modernising public services and efficiencies.

Paul O'Brien

Chief Executive, APSE

