April 2026

Dear Commissioner

Fair Pay for Change Grow Live Workers

Change Grow Live (CGL) is one of the largest health and social care charities in the UK. They provide free and confidential treatment, support and information about drug and alcohol use, smoking, homelessness, justice and probation, and employment. Their funding is sourced from the UK government.

CGL workers are dedicated to supporting some of the most vulnerable and challenging members of society with highly complex needs. The workforce is made up of experienced and highly qualified professionals - from nursing staff, to counsellors, to psychologists, to recovery workers - and they are all juggling extreme cost-of-living challenges alongside often repaying student loans, supporting their own children at university, and running households. The roles that CGL workers fulfil are essential to local communities and society – to your constituents – as can be seen by their keyworker status throughout COVID. CGL workers are intrinsic partners with mental health services, social services, the courts, and criminal justice services in keeping society safe.

As wages have been pushed down, caseloads and expectations on the workforce have gone up, professionals who have dedicated their working lives in service have felt undervalued and unpaid. We believe there has been an express policy of CGL senior management team to' de-professionalise' the sector with the aim to justify low wages, to undercut competitors, to win contracts, and to reward directors and senior staff with inflated wages. We also question the excessive reserves held by CGL and the vast amounts of money that are being paid to private agencies.

Over the past decade, CGL staff have suffered a **real terms pay cut of 18–27%** (October RPI figures) while senior executives have continued to receive higher percentage increases. In the past decade staff have only received a real terms pay rise one year out of ten - 0.5% in 2020.

The human impact is stark. A Unite survey open to all staff found:

- 42% of respondents considered using a food bank in the past 12 months; 16% are surviving off them
- 39% have to choose between heating their homes and feeding their families and 86% had to put off buying essential items until the next pay day
- 73% have sought debt counselling, 20% stopped paying into their pension, and 52% had to reschedule debt to make ends meet. 53% have struggled to pay rent / mortgage and 5% have been made homeless.
- 46% have had to get a second job and 68% have had to borrow money to survive
- 89% are no longer able to do things they enjoy, 54% state that their physical health has declined, and 79% state their mental health has declined due to the cost of living

In stark contrast the Deputy CEO received a £55,000 pay rise in one year alone, the CFO received a £21,000 pay rise in one year alone, and the highest-paid individual earns more than **nine times** the lowest-paid worker. This

Unite the Union
Unite House, 128 Theobalds Road
Holborn, London, WC1X 8TN
Kate.Attwooll@unitetheunion.org
02380 637373

Sharon Graham
Unite General Secretary

www.unitetheunion.org

imbalance is unsustainable, unjust, and incompatible with CGL's stated values. Public statements made by the CEO in October 2025 claimed executive pay rises are never higher than those received by staff. However, CGL's own 2024-5 Annual Report shows otherwise: executive pay increases of up to **4.8%**, compared with a **1.5% award imposed on the wider workforce**, an offer rejected by **84% of staff** in a union ballot last year. The CEO, CFO, Deputy CEO, and Medical Director **all received higher increases** than the workers they manage. In addition, Registered Managers were secretly paid a consolidated **£2500 each** without any consultation with the union and staff have described this as "dodgy dealings", that they have been told to "keep quiet", and that this is further evidence of "union busting" and the "direct exploitation" of the lower pay grades.

Workers are asking for fairness, not favours. A **minimum 6.7% pay rise** covering last year and this year would merely mean pay remains equal to inflation and would prevent further real-terms pay erosion across 2024–25. It does not even reach a pay rise in real terms. Beyond this, we have been calling on CGL Executives to commit to a **multi-year pay restoration deal** to reverse the damage of the last decade.

Unite members voted to reject the first pay offer – yet another real terms pay cut - by 94%. Management have so far failed to engage in good faith and they have refused to present a second improved, different offer to resolve this dispute. Nobody wants to strike but the management are currently showing workers that they have no option.

Workers are calling for an end to the unsustainable business model of exploitation which harms staff and service users. We are currently witnessing the McDonaldisation of drug and alcohol services and a race to the bottom. We want to change that for the good of all community members in the UK.

Workers are now preparing to strike, with 87% voting in favour. Industrial action will have serious consequences for already stretched local services.

This is a critical moment. Without action, vital services in your constituency will be disrupted, and the workforce they depend on will continue to be pushed into hardship.

Fair pay is essential to protecting both workers and the communities they serve.

We are asking for your support and intervention:

1. Meet with our CGL Unite representatives to understand the issues. Write to cglunite@unitetheunion.org and kate.attwooll@unitetheunion.org if you would like to meet or have any questions.
2. Write to the CEO and Chair of the Board at Mark.Moody@cgl.org.uk and Trustees@cgl.org.uk, support a fair pay rise for CGL workers, and urge them to take action to resolve this dispute and avoid a strike.
3. Raise this issue with central and local Government and with your colleagues in your role as a Commissioner

2026 is an opportunity to change a broken business model, to eradicate poverty pay, and to ensure that every CGL worker has the chance to heat their homes AND feed their families. 2026 is an opportunity to work together with staff and funders and the UK public to ensure that CGL is sustainable and future-proof and the best organisation it can be for our service users.

Publicly funded services should not be sustained by poverty pay.

Let's change this together.

Unite the Union
Unite House, 128 Theobalds Road
Holborn, London, WC1X 8TN
Kate.Attwooll@unitetheunion.org
02380 637373

Sharon Graham
Unite General Secretary

www.unitetheunion.org

Yours,

Kate Attwooll
National Unite Lead for Change Grow Live

M 07718 668612
E kate.attwooll@unitetheunion.org
W https://join.unitetheunion.org/ and https://www.unitelegalservices.org/
X https://twitter.com/unite_southeast