



**DEMOCRACY
FAIRNESS & RECOVERY**
UNISON Scotland manifesto for
the local govt elections 2022



Councils after covid



These elections come at a challenging time for local government. Many services are still reeling from the pandemic, Holyrood continues to underfund councils, and the idea of direct provision of services by councils is being challenged as never before.

This is an assault, not just on an overburdened and under pressure workforce, but on a tier of democracy. Local government does not exist to enact ministerial diktat, nor as a piggy bank for central government to raid in difficult times. The deliberate undermining of Council's capacity and autonomy is an attack on everyone's right to decently funded and accountable public services.

This manifesto does what far too many of our politicians seem unwilling to do. We stand up for local government, its services and the people who provide them.

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Just as the people of Scotland should be able to expect first class services, so UNISON members should be able to expect a working environment which enables them to deliver first class services and be fairly rewarded for doing so.

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Lilian Macer
UNISON Scotland Convenor

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Local Government, democracy, and society

Local government is one of the foundation stones of Scotland's society and economy. Providing key services; educating our children, caring for our elderly, protecting vulnerable adults and children, supporting families, and keeping us fit, healthy and free from disease. Social care, housing, education, parks and leisure, environmental services, planning, transport, refuse and cleaning, are all examples of council services, without which our towns and cities would cease to function.

Local government as we know it evolved due to the failure of markets and the private sector to meet the needs of the people. Nor was charity – the great and the good deciding what services we should deserve sufficient. The 20th century seen the growth of both democracy and municipalism. A bigger idea for local councils - fair and equal access to public services, democratically run, to tackle the big strategic issues of the age: poverty, opportunity, public health, inequality, economic development, democratic participation, education and skills, full employment, and - more recently – climate change.

Democratic accountable services tend to better meet the needs of all citizens not just those able to exploit access to money, power

or information. They are more cost effective as citizen participation brings accountability and focus on needs. **Local democracy supports citizens to engage not only with services but also with each other**, helping them to find consensus, compromise and solutions.

Despite this, local decision making and direct provision of services is under attack as never before. **The Scottish Government has over many years unfairly underfunded councils and increasingly dictates how the money that is provided is to be spent.** Allied to this has been a relentless drift towards outsourcing council services. This will reach unprecedented levels if the Scottish Government proceed implement a National Care Service in the manner in which they are proposing.

Local government should not be treated as an administrative arm of national government, it should be empowered to lead community partnerships, deliver the services its local community needs and use flexible fiscal powers to pay for the services it provides.

We desperately need councillors in town halls and city chambers who are prepared to act as champions of their areas rather than managers of decline or operators of a transmission belt from Holyrood

Fairness and funding

Councils have been underfunded for many years according to a recent Audit Scotland report this has amounted to a real terms reduction in funding from the Scottish Government of 4.2 per cent since 2013/14. This is a larger reduction than the rest of the Scottish Government budget over the same period.

There simply isn't enough money in the local government budget to meet the needs of our citizens.

Services have to be paid for. Many are “free at the point of use” but they are not free. **The failure of successive Scottish Governments to either reform council tax or introduce a fair replacement is harming local government.** Although only about 13% of local government funding comes from the council tax, it is the only tax controlled by local authorities. Other measures which could give councils some measure of control over their capacity such as a ‘tourist tax’ have made little progress. This limits their choices when they are facing budget cuts and is leading to cuts in services and the introduction of or increases in charges for the services that remain.

The fairest way to fund services is through taxation – and the best way to fund local government would be through a better fairer tax on property. The link to local government services is clear. A property tax is simple to collect, local authorities can easily identify

all the properties in their area and so it is hard to avoid. The wealthiest people tend not to move to small high rise flats in poor areas to avoid paying council tax on large houses in smart areas. Property cannot be moved abroad or hidden in a tax shelter.

There are also actions which councils can take. Research suggests the Local Government Pension Scheme could save Scottish councils £1 billion over 10 years, if the current eleven funds merged their investments to get better deals. Councils need to be driving, not obstructing, the this agenda for change.

One consequence of the systematic underfunding of local government has been Councils, unable to afford to provide services themselves, proposing to hand over services and facilities ‘to be run by the community’. UNISON recognises this as the asset stripping exercise that it is. Services and facilities built up through collective endeavour and provision from all of us should not be given away. Even if issues of accountability are ignored many services are only viable if they are part of council wide networks. Working with communities in service design and delivery is a recipe for success. Trying to cope with underfunding by handing over assets is a strategy with no long term viability. Councils need the resources to deliver.

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Councils help keep us healthy

Being poor is bad for your health. Average life expectancy in Scotland has stopped improving, and the gap in life expectancy between the most and least deprived areas has increased. COVID-19 has increased these inequalities because the harms were not spread evenly across society. Vital though our NHS is – the responsibility for keeping the population healthy is far wider. Council services have a key role in tackling health inequalities; education, housing, leisure, and social work amongst others help to sustain healthy communities.

Local Government & the 'National Care Service'

These services need to be supported not seen as soft targets for cuts .

Even after decades of legislation promoting a market in care services, a significant amount of the care delivered in Scotland, both residential and especially care at home is provided by locally authorities. Since the latest efforts to combine health and social care much of this is commissioned through integrated joint boards - who also commission services from the private and third sector. The Scottish Government have announced their proposals to create a National Care Service. This would involve transferring legal responsibility for the delivery of many services from Councils to new quangos (Health and Social Care Partnership Boards). If it goes ahead as proposed this 'national care system' would still be based on having a market in care with services being commissioned and procured from private and third sector providers as well as the public sector.

The Scottish Government are also proposing to transfer statutory control of a wide range of social work services from councils to the new health and social care partnership boards. This would mean councils would no longer have any responsibility to deliver these services and the council workforce delivering these services would be doing so under contract to an outside body.

Social care is a community service, delivered in the community with the aim of supporting people to continue living independently in the community, linking with, and integrating with several community based services such as housing, education, leisure, culture, community organisations, families, and neighbours. **No case has been made for the transfer of more services out of local government authority into the new quangos.** This will weaken links with other council services and expose existing services and the workforces who deliver them into competitive markets. This will not improve services.

Given the fractured nature of care provision in Scotland, there are potential merits in some action at a national level; mostly around setting standards, workforce planning and extending collective bargaining in the private and voluntary sectors. Centralising under a national structure risks weakening these community connections. UNISON stands by the belief that there is distinct and irreplaceable value in the local accountability of services under the governance of elected councillors. **Fundamentally we believe care should be a service for citizens – not a commodity in a market, care should be delivered on a not for profit basis and any reforms should have that aim as a central principle.**

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Social work

Underfunding of social care services has had a direct impact on service users. It has meant a rationing of social care support through the raising of thresholds and the tightening of eligibility criteria. This has led to the reduction and erosion of contracted services. It has also affected the services provided by workers in statutory social work. Because of this, statutory social work has become increasingly more reactive and crisis-led, with scarce capacity for preventative initiatives such as working alongside children and their families, or for practising early intervention.

If social work services are to deliver on their potential to support and change lives. Then adequate funding must be provided – whether this be for Drug Action Teams, Criminal Justice Social Work or those Children and families workers striving to implement “The Promise”. staffing and caseloads at a level that enables relationship-based work, a properly supported workforce, funding sufficient to enable a shift towards earlier intervention and community based social work; a rebalancing of social workers’ time away from administrative workloads; - funding for the wider services needed to support people within the community.



Education

Early years and schools

UNISON believes that education, including early learning and childcare, should be both comprehensive and delivered free at the point of use by local authorities.

This route offers democratic local accountability and efficiency through economies of scale. It also ensures that education services are embedded in wider children's services.

The key issue for school education is not structures but adequate funding, adequate staffing including both numbers, skills mix and ongoing training and professional development of the staff to support children and young adults as individuals to achieve their potential. A whole range of professional, technical and administrative staff, not just teachers or lecturers, are responsible for delivering education in Scotland. An investment in that team is an investment in our children's future equally a failure to invest in that team is to risk blighting our children's prospects.

Early years

UNISON has welcomed the successive expansions of Early Learning, while doing so we have also cautioned that expansion requires investment. Public delivery is the most cost effective way forward. Money won't be lost to profit and public delivery is where we will be best able to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive service. Public delivery also makes it easier to ensure that the workforce is properly paid and well qualified. That the Living Wage guaranteed for those working on the 1140 hours is an improvement for many reflects the continuing undervaluing of work traditionally done by women. Even this level is far too low for the skills and qualifications needed to work in the sector. Appropriate pay and good terms and conditions are how you attract and keep skilled workers.

Schools

Schools should remain under the control of local authorities to ensure the best balance between local democratic control and economies of scale. Local authorities are best placed to manage education provision, capital spending, the procurement of goods and the provision to schools of support services such as social work and educational psychologists.

Further steps need to be taken to gain stronger recognition and integration of the work of all school staff into the life of education establishments; the qualifications, career pathways and personal development of all staff; and to consider the potential implications of this work for pay and conditions.

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Leisure trusts and libraries

Culture and leisure services are amongst the most visible and high profile of services associated with local authorities. Almost everywhere though these are delivered, not directly, but through arms length organisations (ALEOs) and specifically leisure trusts. This was done on the basis that it would be easier to find other sources of income and protect them from cuts. It was obvious before the pandemic that this had not happened – and it is undeniable now. **Across Scotland many libraries and sports facilities remain closed operating at reduced capacity, or under threat not so much because of Covid -19 but because of financial limitations.** This is a price communities should not have to pay,

made all the worse by the role that cultural and leisure services can play in helping tackle the residual health issues (including mental health) left by the pandemic. As the cost of living crisis takes hold people will cut back on buying books and private gym membership, relying on libraries, museums and parks for free leisure and recreation.

Councils have a statutory duty to provide these services and they must be provided adequately. **UNISON believes that services should return to direct local authority control.** They need resources in terms of not just of affordable facilities, but also of sufficient numbers of well-trained and rewarded staff.

Councils should be the drivers of transforming our economy

Local authorities have a huge role to play in both driving economic recovery from covid and shifting to the greener, more sustainable economy necessary to tackle climate change. **They can and should be taking the lead in energy efficiency, procurement (including food), transport and workplace policies.** This should include public ownership of buses – a power specifically included in the recent Transport Act.

There are many examples of Councils developing projects to reduce energy use, generate energy from renewable sources utilising their properties and land assets, and linking with other public sector organisations, businesses and communities. However there is not enough support or direction to ensure

that successful projects are then built upon in other areas and become widespread.

Local authorities and their partners in other public sector bodies can provide ‘shovel ready’ projects, while at the same time delivering quality training and apprenticeships, and a jobs guarantee, while targeting employment opportunities at the most vulnerable people in their communities.

Some examples of these shovel ready ‘green’ tasks include delivering energy efficiency retro-fitting schemes, building cycle paths; planting trees, developing parks and green open spaces in urban areas (in severe decline after a decade of cuts).

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Councils must be at the heart of tackling our housing crisis

Scotland is in the midst of a housing crisis – with over 140 000 people on waiting lists for social housing and thousands of disabled children and adults in unsuitable homes. People in the most insecure jobs on the lowest pay, including young people and families with children, face housing insecurity and spiralling rents in a poorly regulated private rented sector. Homelessness and rent arrears are rising steeply.

The first priority is to build homes for social rent, including council housing, on a large scale. At a time when the cost of borrowing is at a historical low, public investment is the most cost-effective way of achieving the new social homes needed so urgently. Relying on private finance undermines our ability to prioritise homes for social rent (rather than mid-market rent).

The climate crisis demands the energy efficiency retrofitting and heat conversion of over 1 million homes before 2030, which can deliver thousands of jobs and apprenticeships for local people. **To make sure these**

are quality jobs, this work should be led by councils and delivered by the public sector. Investment must be made to expand and upskill the council workforce in direct labour, property maintenance, planning and building control.

Improving the standard of private rented housing requires investment in the workforce responsible for enforcement, so private landlords are held to account, and tenants' rights enforced. Housing departments and homelessness services must be resourced in line with need.

We can tackle the housing shortage by investing in staffing so councils can bring the thousands of empty homes back into use. We need to resource councils to control and regulate Air B'n'Bs which are reducing the supply of permanent homes. And we must cut the waiting lists for housing adaptations for disabled people by resourcing this properly and funding councils to buy back specially designed and adapted disabled housing.

“ Services can only be as good as the workforce delivering them. ”



Fairness for council staff benefits everyone

Services can only be as good as the workforce delivering them. Ensuring proper staffing levels, decent wages, security of employment and adequate training has an impact not merely on the workers, but to the sort of society we live in.

Public services are primarily about people – and delivered by people. The high quality services people need and deserve can't be delivered by a workforce that is understrength, overworked and watching the value of their wages declining year on year. **Ensuring proper staffing levels, decent wages, security of employment and adequate**

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Councils should use their position as employers and commissioners to embed the principles outlined by the Fair Work Convention firmly in Scottish society. This needs to be extended by using public procurement, not just on wages, but by driving up employment standards generally. They should also have confidence in their own capacity to manage and deliver services directly and end the practice of outsourcing services to arms length bodies and make efforts to bring services back in house.

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