



Road to nowhere

A UNISON survey of roads teams

December 2017

The logo for UNISON Scotland, featuring the word "UNISON" in a bold, sans-serif font with a stylized white wave graphic behind it, and the word "Scotland" in a smaller, italicized serif font below it.

UNISON
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Introduction

This survey is part of UNISON Scotland's Damage series: a programme of surveys looking at the impact of the age of austerity on services and those who deliver them. A Road to Nowhere takes a closer look at the issues affecting staff in local authority roads teams.

The roads staff who responded to our survey undertake a wide range of jobs including road workers, engineers, technicians, team leaders and managers.

Key issues

- Across Scotland roads budgets have been cut by 21%¹ since 2011/12
- Budget cuts are severely impacting on local authorities' ability to deliver a high quality service
- Cheaper quick fixes are being used on roads but these risk higher costs in the future
- More than half of respondents are skipping breaks or working late to get work done
- Over 88% stated that morale in their team was low or very low. 78% don't expect it to get any better in the next few years
- The lack of a pay rise is impacting on both the current workforce and authorities' ability to recruit and retain staff

¹ <http://www.scotsnet.org.uk/documents/AGM2017-colin-mair-local-govt-finance.pdf>

Summary

This survey is part of UNISON Scotland's Damage series: a programme of surveys looking at the impact of the age of austerity on services and those who deliver them. A Road to Nowhere takes a closer look at the issues affecting staff in local authority roads teams. The survey was conducted in September 2017.

While trunk roads are the responsibility of Transport Scotland and the remainder of our roads are the responsibility of local authorities. The roads teams cover roads maintenance, traffic management and lighting. Some roads team work across more than one local authority or department. The roads staff who responded to our survey hold a range of jobs including road workers, engineers, technicians, team leaders and managers. This is a highly qualified workforce. Respondents hold a range of qualification including HNDs, degrees, master and charter degrees and a range of qualifications like SVQs in roads maintenance, winter maintenance and HGV licences.

Like all public services, roads teams have experienced budget cuts leading to job losses and at the same time they are also experiencing a range of increased demands. There is little sign of any increase in resources in the near future. The overall Scottish block grant will continue to fall until 20/21. Across Scotland roads budget have been cut by 21%² since 2011/12 and given the government's spending commitments elsewhere this is likely to continue.

The vast majority of respondents are over 45 (64%); only 15% were aged 26-35; and a tiny 3% aged 21-25. Job cuts mean that there are fewer young people coming into the workforce storing up problems for the future as there will be fewer experienced staff when the current workforce retires. The Roads Collaboration Programme³ is already highlighting that there will be future problems because of the age profile of both road operatives and professional staff. Unless action is taken there will be a considerable skills gap in the near future.

When we asked members about cuts in their workplaces the vast majority said that there had been budget cuts in the last year and over the last five years. More than a third (36%) of respondents stated that cuts in the last year had been severe with another 40% indicating that there had been cuts. When looking at the last five years over 40 per cent (41%) stated that cuts had been severe and 45% that there had been cuts. The cuts have led to job losses meaning remaining staff are struggling to get work done. As it is experienced staff that tend to be in a position to volunteer to leave there is also a loss of experience which again leaves remaining workers under pressure.

Not all councils replied to our Freedom of Information request regarding job losses so we are unable to get a clear picture of job cuts across Scotland. For those that did reply to the question about job numbers, there were 74 less staff in their roads teams than in 2012. When we asked different questions: How many people have left and how many people have been made redundant? The total was 458. It is worth noting that Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee did not respond to our request on time (and in some cases at all) so any job losses there are not included.

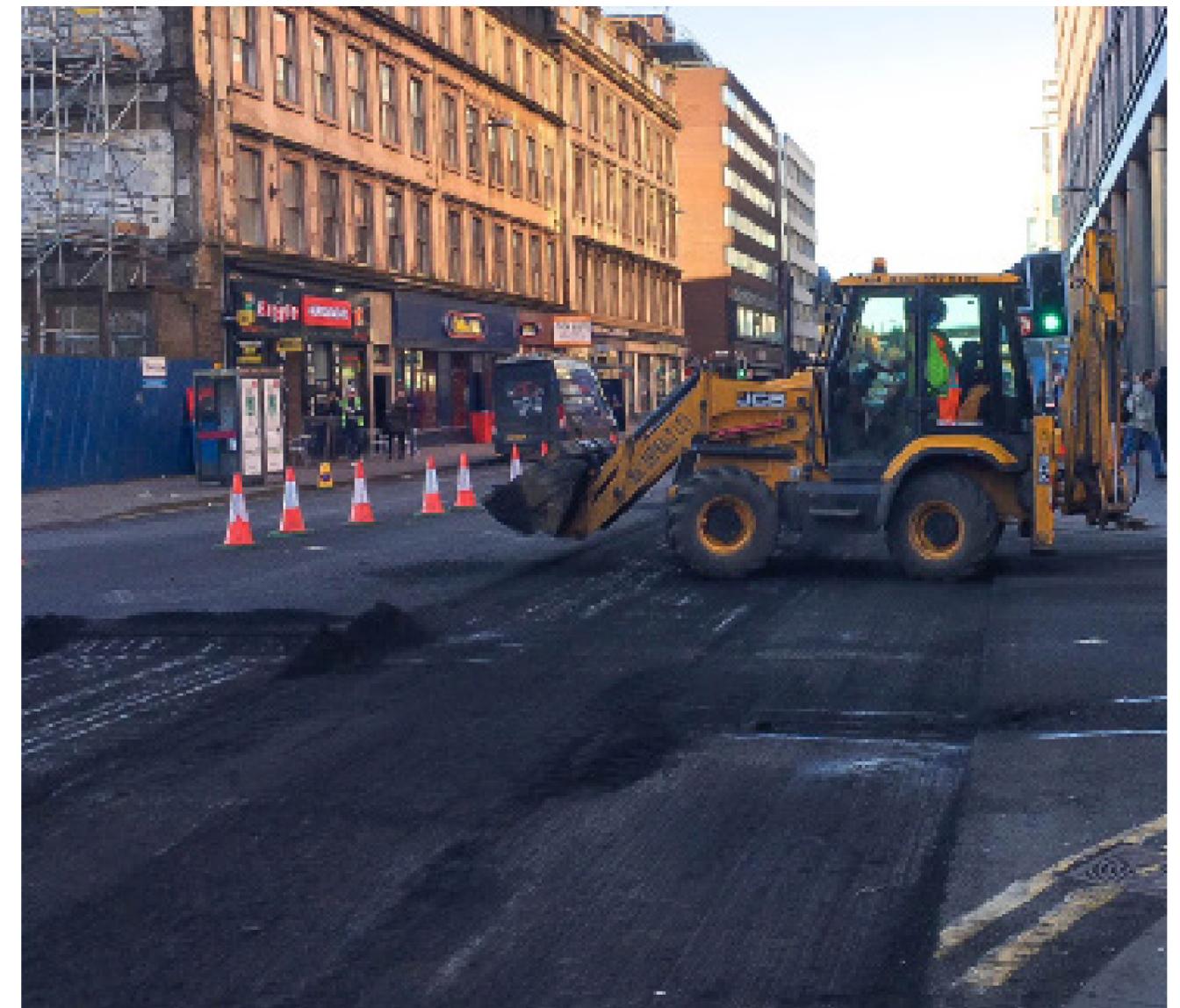
Responses from members indicate that while there are fewer instances of redundancy the non-replacement of leavers is a significant issue. This means that there is no plan of what staff numbers or skills are required for teams - it's just who doesn't leave. The loss of staff, particularly experienced staff is becoming an increasing problem and has a serious impact on the ability of remaining staff to deliver a quality service. This would be a problem even with stable workloads but demands on roads teams are increasing. Road use continues to increase; more work is needed to meet our climate targets; increased awareness and concerns round air quality lead to greater demands for traffic and air quality monitoring and delivering change in response; and the problems with potholes are leading to increases political pressure round road quality. Roads teams need more not less staff.

When asked about changes in workload the vast majority replied that their workload had got heavier, only six per cent indicated that their workload was lighter compared to seventy-two per cent who indicated that their workload was heavier.

Several issues emerged round changes in workload but the most significant one was that there just too much work to do with the staff available in local authorities. Members indicated that cuts in other teams meant that they were now expected to do a great deal more administrative work. Job losses and in

particular the loss of more experienced or skilled staff meant that members were being asked to do work previously undertaken by those at a higher grade. Changes in culture and legislation like the Freedom of Information Act also mean that there is a lot more work involved in responding to those requests and a rise in work dealing with complaints from citizens.

There are also 296 vacancies across the councils who responded to the FOI request. Even where the decision is made to replace staff it takes time to recruit leaving teams short staffed. There is considerable pressure on those staff in roads teams to maintain service levels. Members indicated that it is sometimes hard to find staff to fill the more senior/qualified roles. Pay is continually mentioned as an issue in attracting suitable qualified staff to apply. Some state that qualifications requirements have been reduced in order to fill posts.



² <http://www.scotsnet.org.uk/documents/AGM2017-colin-mair-local-govt-finance.pdf>

³ Improvement Service: Roads Collaboration Programme <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/roads-collaboration-programme.html>

Workload

Roads teams report dealing with an increased administrative burden. Members also report both a widening of their job role and work that was previously undertaken by better paid staff moving on to them. Members also report increased work in responding to complaints about roads. The Audit Scotland⁴ report indicates that citizens are unhappy with the state of our roads and are raising these issues either direct to local authorities or via councillors. This may be linked to the final theme in members' comments: they are patching roads, doing cheaper minor repairs and short-term fixes rather than major works. This has also been highlighted as a concern by Audit Scotland⁵.

While forty-seven percent of respondents state that they rarely skip breaks or work late to get things done thirty-two percent are doing so frequently and a further twenty-one percent do so now and again. You cannot deliver a high quality service if workers are skipping breaks and working long hours. Not only does this affect the quality of their work it also impacts on people's time with their friends and family. A good work-life balance is not just a good thing for the individuals concerned: they are happier and healthier so this also means that when they are in work they are able to do their work to a higher standard than exhausted stressed-out workers.

Public sector workers have experienced an almost decade long pay freeze. Roads teams need to be able to recruit and retain skilled workers. There are many better paid jobs for people with their skills. If they are also working longer unpaid hours this adds to the attraction of the better paid private sector.

Members' comments indicate that they are under enormous stress trying to keep on top of their workloads. They accept that some jobs can't be done and that they have to prioritise effectively. Some are actively looking for new jobs.

It is also clear from some comments and from the failure of some authorities to respond to UNISON's own Freedom of Information requests within the legal timescale (or at all) that staff shortages are having an impact on authorities' responses. Freedom of information is about democratic accountability these staff shortages are impacting on citizens' ability to hold public bodies to account.

It's no surprise, given the responses given earlier in our survey, that budget cuts, job cuts and overwork mean that morale in roads teams is very low. Only ten percent described morale as good and seven percent described it as fine. Forty-four percent of respondents felt that morale was very low and a further forty percent that morale was low. Members feel overworked and underappreciated. They report increased workloads and a lack of strategic planning or interested management as key causes of low morale. The long-term pay freeze is also frequently mentioned as a cause of low morale. The public sector will lose highly skilled staff if the budget cuts continue. Where respondents indicated that morale was good it was because of their co-workers.

⁴ Audit Scotland: Maintaining Scotland's roads: A follow up report August 2016 page 15

⁵ Audit Scotland: Maintaining Scotland's roads: A follow up report August 2016 page 15

The survey

This survey is part of UNISON Scotland's Damage series: a programme of surveys looking at the impact of the age of austerity on services and those who deliver them. A Road to Nowhere takes a closer look at the issues affecting staff in local authority roads teams. The survey was conducted in September 2017.

While trunk roads are the responsibility of Transport Scotland and the remainder of our roads are the responsibility of local authorities. Local authorities have different structures for managing roads, traffic and street lighting. Those surveyed work in roads maintenance, traffic management and lighting. Some roads teams work across more than one local authority or department. Some are stand-alone teams others form part of wider departments. The roads staff who responded to our survey hold a range of jobs including road workers, engineers, technicians, team leaders and managers. This is a highly qualified workforce. Respondents hold a range of qualification including HNDs, degrees, master and charter degrees and a range of specific qualifications like SVQs in roads maintenance, winter maintenance and HGV licences. Like all public services roads teams have experienced budget cuts leading to job losses and at the same time they are also experiencing a range of increased demand. There is little sign of any increase in resources in the near future. The overall block grant will continue to fall until 20/21.

The Colin Mair's recent presentation⁶ to the Society of Chief Officers of Transport in Scotland AGM⁷, gives a bleak overview of current cuts and future funding for local government roads teams in particular. The key points he made are:

- Major spending commitments(£500m real growth for NHS, 1240 hours early learning and childcare and protecting police budget against inflation) take up over 50% of the Scottish Budgets.
- Local government will have a 3% per annum reduction until 2020/21 ring-fenced additional support for schools and social care, means more cuts will fall elsewhere.
- Substantial cuts have already taken place: Roads budget cut by 21% since 2011/12 and given the commitments elsewhere this is likely to continue.
- Roads departments don't only face financial challenges.
- Despite political action/subsidies bus travel is reducing: local bus mileage is down 7% and local authority bus mileage is down 34% since 2005.
- Increased house building and commercial developments increase demands on local authority roads teams
- Increased utilities street openings again creates increased work
- Increased traffic volumes and congestion
- Political demands for more cycleway segregation and increased use of public transport
- Driverless cars and new HGV will need different infrastructure
- Pollution from road traffic continues to rise
- Increased congestion charging and more low emissions zones

Audit Scotland's latest report⁸ on roads indicates that over half of roads users have major concerns about road condition. In response to budget pressures roads authorities have to prioritise maintenance and are using cheaper options. While these save money in the short term there are risks that issues that are not dealt with could lead to more costly repairs in the future and the cheaper treatment options may not last as long and therefore again bring higher costs in the long term. The report is also clear that overall spending on roads maintenance is not at a level that will maintain the current condition of roads.

Citizens and motoring organisations are increasingly vociferous about what they consider to be the poor quality of roads when compared to the tax they feel they pay in relation to their cars: road tax, fuel duty, increased parking charges. Members working in roads departments are therefore under substantial pressure to deliver a high quality service when budgets are being cut.

⁶ <http://www.scotsnet.org.uk/documents/AGM2017-colin-mair-local-govt-finance.pdf>

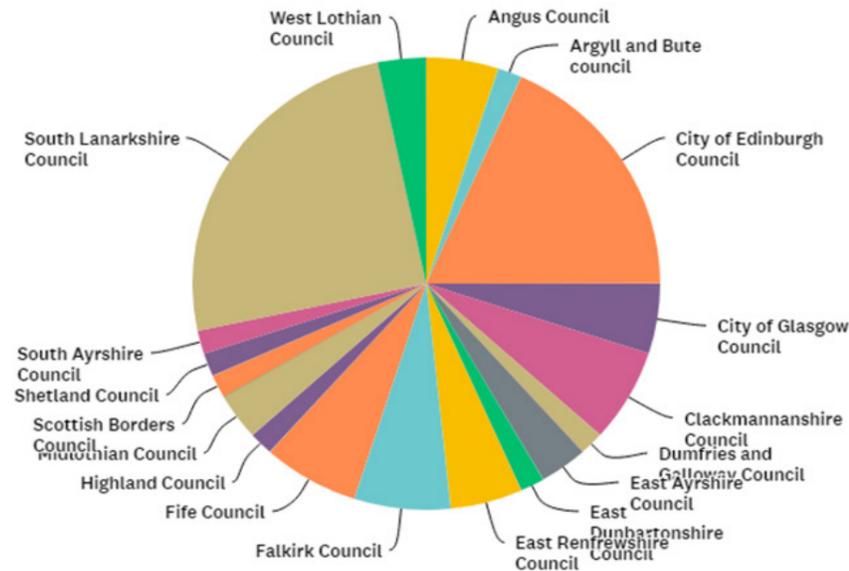
⁷ The full presentations from the day can be downloaded here <http://www.scotsnet.org.uk/scots-conference-2017.html>

⁸ Audit Scotland: Maintaining Scotland's roads: A follow up report August 2016

Survey responses

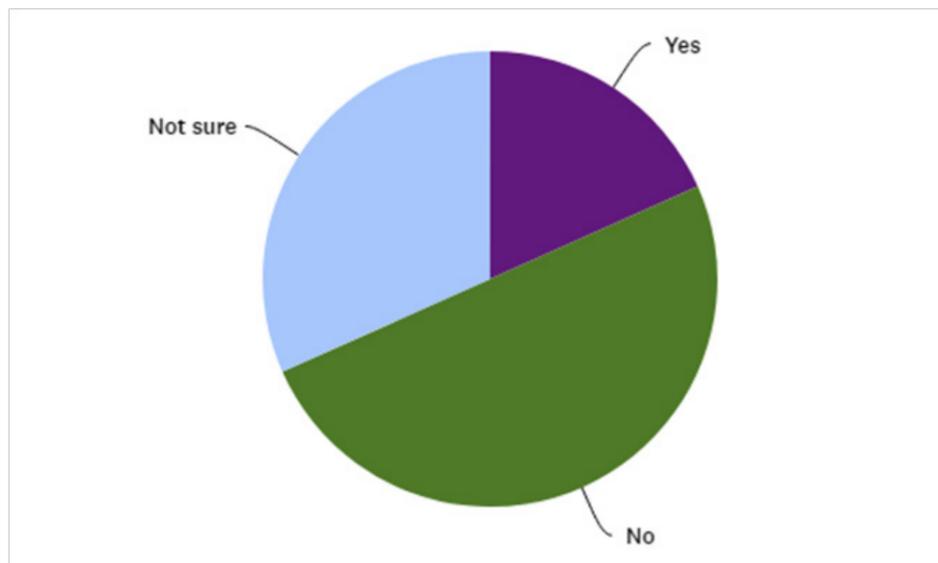
Who responded to the survey?

UNISON surveyed a range of members working in roads teams across Scottish local authorities in September 2017. Respondents worked in arrange of roles: road workers, engineering officers, managers, team leaders technicians, engineers, senior engineers, lighting and safety workers. There were responses from 18 different authorities. All respondents were directly employed by the council.



Does your employer bid for work from other organisations?

A small group of respondents (18%) indicated that their employer tried to increase income by undertaking work for external organisations.



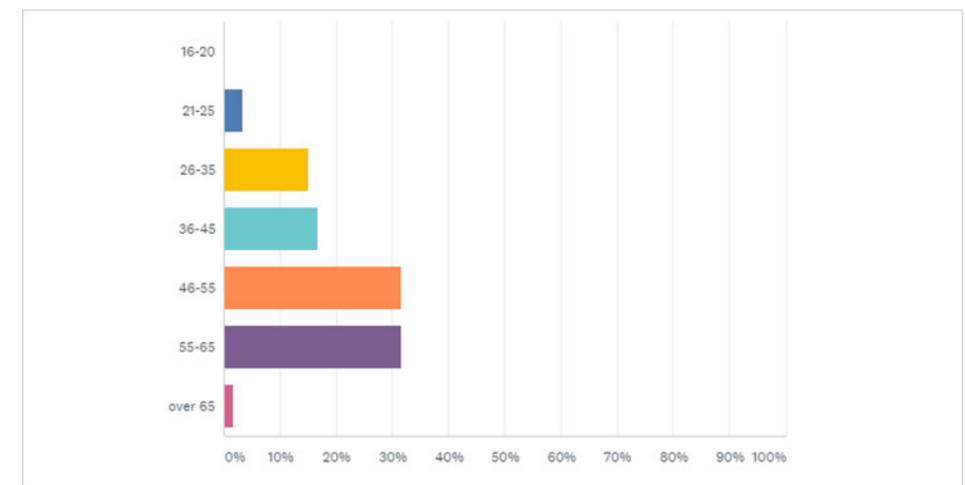
What the staff say

- Roads and Transportation Services undertake road construction / resurfacing schemes for private roads / car parks, etc. Parking restrictions are also implemented and enforced in private areas.
- XXXXX is seen as the trading arm of our roads Dept. They bid for work in the private and public sector all over Scotland. This can be Ground works for housing developments to surface dressing and contract work for other Local Authorities. We also carry out winter Maintenance duties for Arney Highways in XXX.
- Preparation of Tourist signing schemes for private companies.
- Public Utility Reinstatements, Scotland Transerve works for Transport Scotland
- Private parties drainage patching
- Scottish Road Works Register, coordinate utilities

Age

The vast majority of respondents are over 45: 32% are aged 46-55 with the same percentage aged 55-65, only 15% were aged 26-35 and a tiny 3% aged 21-25. Budget cuts mean that there are fewer young people coming into the workforce storing up problems for the future as there will be fewer experienced staff left when the current workforce retires. The Roads Collaboration Programme⁹ is already highlighting that there will be future problems because of the age profile of both road operatives and professional staff. They are concerned that very few entry level staff are being brought in and trained. Unless action is taken this will lead to a considerable skills gap.

To add to the information on age we also asked how long they had been in their current post. Just over 40% (43%) had over 20 years experience and 15% having been in post for less than five years. Specialist skills in street lighting, road safety and traffic engineering are in short supply and there are now fewer opportunities for formal training. This is already leading to the use of costly consultants. It will only get worse if new people are not being recruited and trained.



⁹Improvement Service: Roads Collaboration Programme <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/roads-collaboration-programme.html>

Impact of austerity

What members tell us about austerity

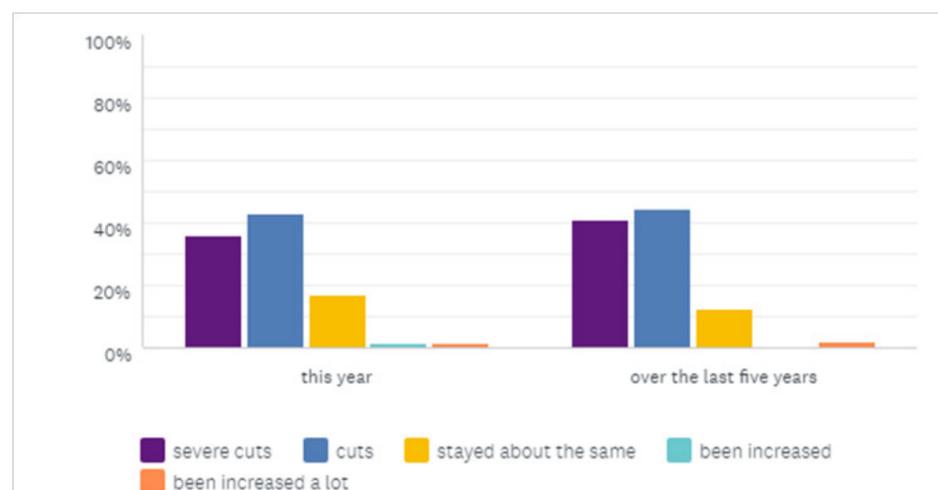
The survey asked members a range of questions on what their working lives are like. The current debate round public sector finance has become very confusing, with claim and counterclaim round levels of cuts and job losses; using different starting points for comparisons and using lack of clarity round capital and revenue spend. The Damage series attempts to add more detail to the figures and let people hear directly from workers about whether budgets and staff levels are adequate to deliver a high quality service. We conducted the survey of members using a questionnaire via Survey Monkey and encouraged them to leave comments to expand on their answers.

Budgets

It's difficult to get comparable figures for roads budgets. Local authorities organise budgets in different ways so when we asked for information through Freedom Of Information requests we were unable to get a clear breakdown of spending. Some authorities did not respond at all while others stated that they didn't have figures for 2012 which was the year we had hoped to use for comparison purposes. What we do know is that across Scotland roads budget have been cut by 21%¹⁰ since 2011/12 and given the government's spending commitments elsewhere this is likely to continue.

Survey responses

When we asked members about cuts in their workplaces the vast majority said that there had been budget cuts in the last year and over the last five years. More than a third (36%) of respondents stated that cuts in the last year had been severe with another 40% indicating that there had been cuts. When looking at the last five years over 40 percent (41%) stated that cuts had been severe and 45% that there had been cuts. The cuts have led to job losses meaning remaining staff are struggling to get work done. As it is experienced staff that tend to be in a position to volunteer to leave there is also a loss of experience which again leaves remaining workers under pressure.



¹⁰ <http://www.scotsnet.org.uk/documents/AGM2017-colin-mair-local-govt-finance.pdf>

What the staff say

- Team reduced/reorganised. Increase in workload, decrease in staff resource.
- Increase in workload to increase revenue to offset cuts. Working longer hours. Increased stress levels
- No replacement of staff who retire/leave, leading to unrealistic workloads
- Contracts have been changed to 36 he week from 37 as well as first 4 hours overtime at single time then time and a third from 1.7.
- Areas have increased as staff have left increasing the workload also workload from staff that have left and not been replaced is being divided between remainder of staff
- Increased workload, complaints. Management will not admit to public or councillors that they cannot get the same service as previously.



Job cuts

Again not all councils replied to our Freedom of Information request regarding job losses so we are unable to get a clear picture of job cuts across Scotland. For those that did reply to a question about job numbers they report 74 less staff in their roads teams than in 2012. When we asked a different questions: How many people have left and how many people have been made redundant? The total was 458. It is worth noting that Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee did not respond to our request on time (and in some cases at all) so any job losses there are not included. Salami slicing doesn't attract the headlines that follow a factory closure but it's still job cuts.

Responses from members indicate that the non-replacement of leavers is a significant issue. This means that there is no plan of what staff numbers or skills are required for teams it's just who doesn't leave. The loss of staff, particularly experienced staff is becoming an increasing problem and has a serious impact on the ability of remaining staff to deliver a quality service. This would be a problem even with stable workloads but demands on roads teams are increasing. Road use continues to increase, more work is needed to meet our climate targets, increased awareness and concerns round air quality increase demands for traffic and air quality monitoring and delivering change in response, and the problems with potholes are leading to increases political pressure round road quality. Roads teams need more not less staff.

What the staff say

- 3-4 out of 12
- Yes. Client and DLO staffing virtually cut in half making efficient works very difficult
- yes people have left 5 and not been replaced
- 1 vacant post taken away. 1 current post in savings proposal for redeployment - saved.
- No compulsory redundancies. Some posts not filled if employee leaves.
- Yes. Vacancies have not been filled and there have been voluntary redundancies. Section reduced from 17 a couple of years ago to 12 now.
- 1.5 post lost in last 12 months. We had been previously protected from cuts due to the large increase in workload
- Staff numbers in my section have reduced to half the number we had 10 years ago. This has reduced the experience within the section, reduced the amount of work and type of work we can carry out. It has also had a negative impact on staff morale as staff have been overwhelmed with the increased workload resulting in staff reduction.
- Natural wastage through retirement and the vacant posts not refilled becoming saving for the council.
- Yes More pressure on remaining staff in attempt to deliver same level of service
- Job cuts have been when people have left and not been replaced.
- In my area we have seen a 50% reduction in staff over the past 5 years, not all areas have experienced the same level of staff reductions but all have been reduced to some extent. There have been no compulsory redundancies most have left under ERVS or are so fed up they have simply moved on. XXX are now below the minimum staffing level to deal with a medium impact winter and are now looking at other ways to fill the gaps.
- Yes from 30 team leaders down to 12. Whereost of them are officed based despite their Job descriptions saying they are manual workers.

- Many roles not being filled when people leave/retire
- Each member is having to take on additional duties as the three retirements have not been replaced. Most members of the Traffic Team are now undertaking some duties from the post above theirs
- Staff have left/retired team almost halved in numbers and business support staff removed with the remaining staff expected to take up the workload of the missing staff leaving the staff stretched and stressed with an impossible workload including being unable to fulfill legal obligations for road inspections.
- 3 members have retired and only 1 replaced. their workload has been distributed to others in team.
- Yes my team has been cut by half and I now have to cove double the area and do double the work with a 1% wage rise!!!
- Gone from 5 squads to 3
- I'm now doing the job previously done by 4 people of the same grade!
- We have had cuts, our team has diminished from 5 people to 3 now. This has been with staff moving to different jobs and their jobs not being replaced in our office.

There are also 296 vacancies across the councils who responded to the FOI request. Even where the decision is made to replace staff it takes time to recruit leaving teams short staffed. There is considerable pressure on those staff in roads teams to maintain service levels. Members indicated that it is sometimes hard to find staff to fill the more senior/qualified roles. Pay is continually mentioned as an issue in attracting suitable qualified staff to apply. Some state that qualifications requirements have been reduced in order to fill posts. There are plenty of well-paid alternative jobs for people with those skills.

What the staff say

Wages impacting on recruitment

- Yes notably Electricians & HIAB/HGV staff. Low pay & conditions appear to be putting people off
- No vacancies in my team. Difficult to recruit road workers due to poor wages and prospects.
- Extremely difficult to fill posts due to paycales
- We had jobs advertised a few years ago for skilled roadworkers but had no interest as wages are poor compared to other councils
- Yes a few times they struggle to fill them due to wages offered it takes new employees 5/6 years to get to the top of the grade and that's only providing they don't get disciplined
- No, but qualification standards have been reduced to attract people at the low salaries.

Shortage of experienced staff

- Yes there has, and it has been difficult to recruit quality, experienced staff.
- We expanded the team 2 years ago due to the workload. it has not been easy getting suitably qualified and experienced applicants

Road to nowhere

- *Difficult to find people qualified for the post*
- *Yes there has and not got enough experienced men now*
- *No vacancies for skilled staff only take on school leavers for the past 6 years leaving our workforce stretched for skilled workers. Using trainees as cheap labour and gap filling for*
- *difficult most new staff have little roads experience*

General comments

- *Yes the areas covered by individuals has increased. Were 5 officers covering whole council area now only 4*
- *vacant posts have been deleted*
- *Yes they have extreme difficulty filling posts.*
- *Difficult - people don't want to come to public sector*
- *Been talk of recruiting another member of staff for the last 5 years or so but its never happened.*
- *Difficult to fill posts*

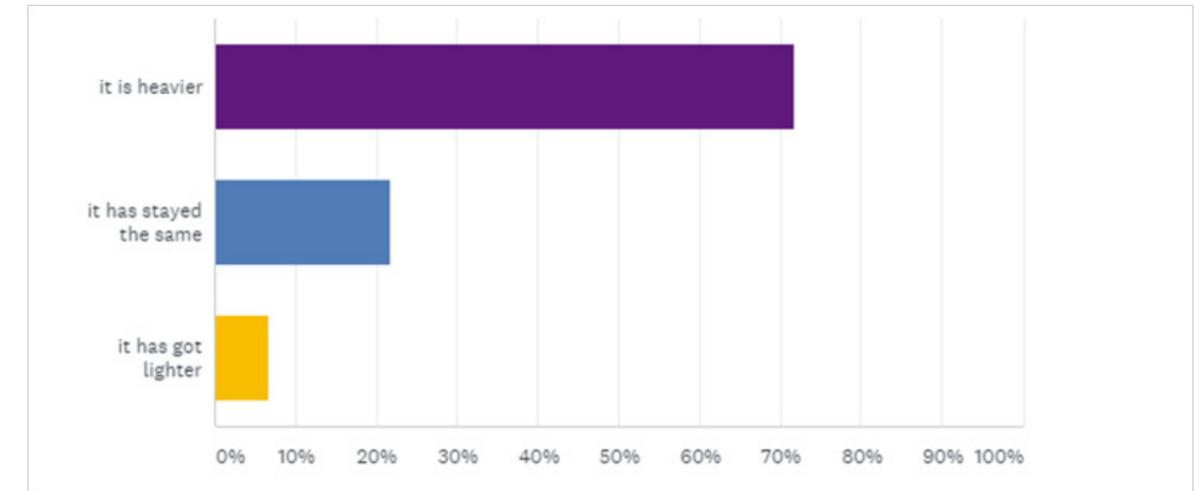
Not all felt that is was difficult to fill posts

- *Yes, but very limited. Reasonably easy to fill posts.*



Workload

Has your workload changed in the last few years?



When asked about changes in workload the vast majority replied that their workload had got heavier. Only six per cent indicated that their workload was lighter and just over twenty percent that it had stayed the same compared to seventy-two percent who indicated that their workload was heavier.

Key issues emerged round changes in workload but the most significant one was that there just too much work to do with the staff available in local authorities. Alongside those issues members indicated that cuts in other teams meant that they were now expected to do a great deal more administrative work. Job losses, and in particular the loss of more experienced or skilled staff, meant that members were being asked to do work previously undertaken by those at a higher grade. Changes in culture and legislation like the Freedom of Information Act also mean that there is a lot more work involved in responding to those requests and a rise in work dealing with complaints from citizens.

What the staff say

Sheer volume of work

- *More work, less staff*
- *As above, less officers equal more work.*
- *The work of 8 people is now being carried out by 6.*
- *With the advent of City Deal the size, complexity and number of projects we are working on has grown.*
- *The workload has not reduced by a significant amount over the past 10 years but staff numbers have reduced by half therefore workload for each staff member has increased dramatically.*
- *It is no exaggeration to say my own workload has doubled in the last few years covering new areas emerging from within current work areas and also the responsibilities that were left following staff reductions*
- *The area of inspection has gotten bigger because there has been no recruitment 1 inspector is doing the job intended for 3 and the removal of the business support staff means spending time in the office doing admin instead of inspections*

Work changes

Has the work you do changed in the last few years?

There were similar responses to those on workload. There are clear issues with increased administrative burden. Members also report both a widening of their job role and work that was previously undertaken by better paid staff moving on to them. Members also report increased work in responses to complaints about roads. The Audit Scotland¹¹ report indicates that citizens are unhappy with the state of our roads and are raising these issues either direct to local authorities or via councillors. This may be linked to the final theme in members' comments: they are patching roads, doing cheaper minor repairs and short term fixes rather than major works. This has also been highlighted as a concern by Audit Scotland¹².

What the staff say

Admin

- more work and more paper work more computer systems which all take time increase in duties
- Yes, it has become less technical and more administrative.
- Work has changed from mainly field work and technical assessments to more office based reporting.
- Yes. Having to do increased amounts of clerical/admin work which is not what i am employed to do and takes me away from my core duties.

Short term repairs/reductions in quality

- There is far less focus on what should be delivery of a quality finished product and more focus on other admin based work.
- Yes - We no longer carry out large scale projects due to lack of resources. This is now contracted out to consultants when required which costs more and has a negative impact on our budgets. We also do not make significant improvements to our roads assets anymore and tend to maintain the condition to an acceptable level. We are now noticing that the overall condition of our assets are reducing.
- No just doing less. It's as if we are being run down to end up being a maintenance department.
- Went from big capital jobs and large tar jobs to minor repairs

Work done by higher grades or additional to role

- more involvement in other areas of work.
- Yes. Additional inspection work due to lack of inspector. Fewer Engineers employed means technicians have to do work that was previously engineer's
- Additional work from emerging areas + cover for others as above.
- The main concern is lack of team leaders on site. The management is expecting Roadworker to take charge even though it is not in their Job description.
- Moved to an acting up post of Principal Engineer in Roads Maintenance from Senior Engineer in Structures due to lack of experience in the Roads Maintenance team.
- the work is more skilled due to more paver operator work

- Far too many job requirements and not enough time to actually complete complex tasks.

- Half the staff double the work!

- Less workers more work taken on

- Same amount of issues/ inspections with less people. Doing more work with less taskforce

Unpaid Additional Responsibilities

- Additional work such as inspections and associated computer and database work. I am sometimes required to carry out work above my grade.

- Took on [more] responsibility of foreman for not any more pay

Increased admin/ additional functions

- carry out duties outside my job title and current job discription

- I now have a significant responsibility and input into Personnel matters, which were previously the responsibility of others. We are also increasingly taking on Support and Procurement functions, which previously were done by others. These other Services have suffered their own cuts to staff levels which has simply placed the burden on others.

- More admin works, as they are losing staff and not being replaced

- Now doing administrative, clerical as well as technical work.

- Moved away from an engineering post now covers elements from finance, team management, public engagement

Growth in customer complaints

- More expected in less time. Expectations from public, managers and elected members too high.

- That said, I'm undertaking strategic procurement for the Council jointly with two other partners and I sit on two national working groups, but I'm still not fit to be placed on the top of my pay grade because I don't have the right piece of paper

- Workload in Traffic has always been heavy and with none of the retirements being replaced, although budgets have reduced, the workload has stayed the same. In some ways it's become more onerous as there's more Councillor involvement. This problem is compounded by having Management who often say yes to things first, rather than delegate to council officers who are more knowledgeable in the field.

Freedom Of Information

- I have had a work overload for most of my time with the council. The major change is in the collection of data for various reports and Freedom of Information requests.

Growth in complaints from citizens

- increased surveys increased complaints as new avenues of contacting /complaining are opening up increased pressure to hit targets under financial constraint

Work pressure

Do you feel under pressure to take on work you are not experienced/qualified to do?

While some members were happy about the type, if not the volume, of work they were undertaking others were less so. The key themes in their comments were:

- there were now expectations that they would meet and correspond with elected officials and take part in consultations when they didn't feel qualified for that type of role
- that the shortages of experienced staff meant that work was now being done by staff with less experience and on less pay
- that many were now responsible for managing and supervising when that would have been done by better paid staff in the past
- work now involves using ICT and many felt that they had not had adequate training in this area
- some now have finance and budgeting roles but don't feel adequately trained

What the staff say

- *I feel I do have the experience to take on work, but time to learn to do such work properly is very limited so mistakes occur.*
- *Not under pressure as such but like every other employee the job is constantly changing with new legislation/technology*
- *I have direct responsibility for significant budgets and have had no financial training whatsoever.*
- *Sometimes as we have lost a number of experienced staff we no longer have the adequate experience to carry out complex design.*
- *Responding to elected officials demands, carrying out monitoring, organising and fulfilling assessment requirements and reporting on these findings without oversight or collaboration is very very stressful. I find I make many more mistakes than I used to when I had time and carried out tasks that contributed to reports than having to do everything including the final publications that go before committees or government.*
- *I'm being asked about installations and projects that I've had no involvement with previously and that have been carried out by other sections.*
- *yes, no proper technical help.*
- *The inspection side is fine as I have 30 years experience in roadworks but no IT admin training*
- *A lot of the job requirements now state... Lead, Manage, Direct, yet the pay rate for the job does not reflect these areas of responsibility.*
- *I do more skilled jobs as lack of skilled men now in the squads they get filled with trainees*
- *YES RESPONDING TO CERTAIN ENQUIRIES ALSO RESPONDING CERTAIN INSURANCE CLAIMS*
- *Yes, often asked to do site visits or assessments on behalf of technicians/engineers.*
- *Yes, now supervising staff who do a different role from me.*
- *We have to take roles as foremen which we dont get paid for and also have to do more work with fewer men*

- *I have been matched and assigned to my currant post and even though I'm new to the job I have had to take on the roll of other post that I know nothing about! I'm having to take over the Technitions roll as well as my inspectors duties as there is just not enough staff!*

Complaints

- *yes job has changed completely seem to be spending more time in office doing admin tasks answering complaints dealing with insurance claims dealing with members of the public than being able to do the original roads inspectors job*
- *More about resolving complaints rather than carrying out road maintance improvements and small works*

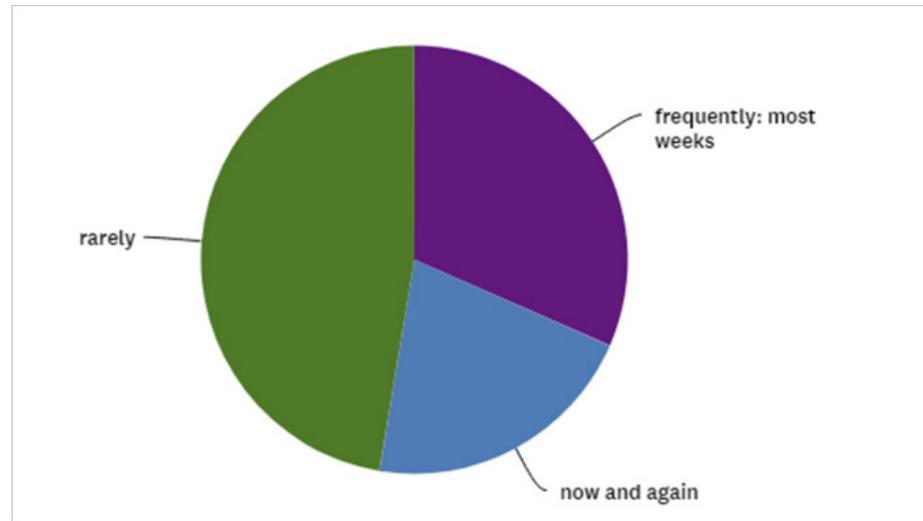


¹¹ Audit Scotland: Maintaining Scotland's roads: A follow up report August 2016 page 15

¹² Audit Scotland: Maintaining Scotland's roads: A follow up report August 2016 page 15

Unpaid work

Do you work unpaid hours (stay late skip breaks) to get work done?



While forty-seven percent of respondents state that they rarely skip breaks or work late to get things done thirty-two percent are doing so frequently and a further twenty-one percent do so now and again. You cannot deliver a high quality service if workers are skipping breaks and working long hours. Not only does this affect the quality of their work it also impacts on people's time with their friends and family. A good work-life balance is not just a good thing for the individuals concerned: they are happier and healthier but this also means that when they are in work they are able to do their work to a higher standard than exhausted stressed-out workers.

Public sector workers have experienced an almost decade long pay freeze. Roads teams need to be able to recruit and retain skilled workers. There are plenty of better paid jobs for people with their skills. If they are also working longer unpaid hours this adds to the attraction of the better paid private sector. Members' comments indicate that they are under enormous stress trying to keep on top of their workloads. They now accept that some jobs can't be done and that they have to prioritise effectively. Some are actively looking for new jobs.

It is also clear from some comments and from the failure of some authorities to respond to UNISON's own Freedom of Information requests within the legal timescale (or at all) that staff shortages are having an impact on authorities responses. Freedom of information is about democratic accountability these staff shortages are impacting on citizens' ability to hold public bodies to account.

What the staff say

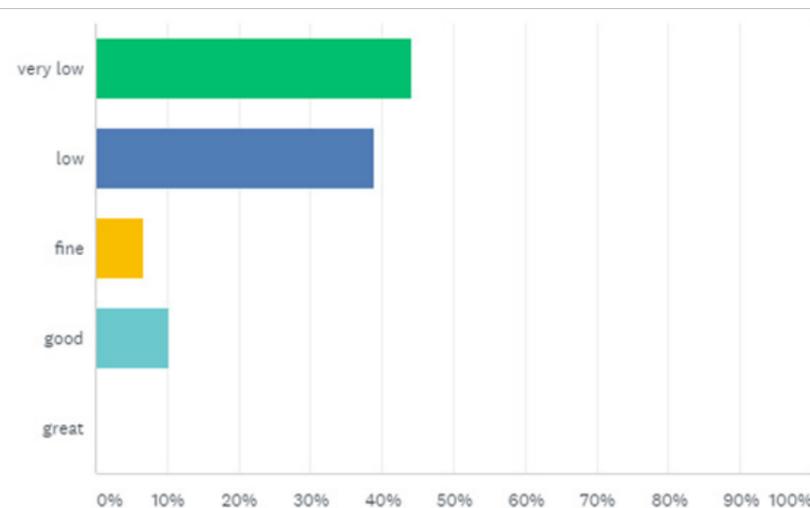
- *Workloads as they are are unsustainable and generate significant stress amongst most of the colleagues I know.*
- *unable to complete work load with in the hours allowed so work waits till time available and lose flexi hours most months as hours are well over 1 flexi day of*
- *I now accept that I am unable to complete everything so have to prioritise certain things to the detriment of others.*
- *not enough hours in the day. See colleagues stressed with their workload*

- *Stress due to the pressures of works is a real issue for the first time in my career.*
- *I used to regularly work through lunchtimes and work later after hours in the evening, but I have stopped as it has been affecting my health. I have since gone onto a work/life balance to try and escape the pressures of the service. Pressures that have been imposed by austerity to handicap the public service.*
- *Freedom of Information requests have increased the workload and impacted on the time available to deliver the service. Other data gathering and reporting exercises have a similar impact.*
- *Frequently work through lunch to allow time to check works on way home. This DOES NOT mean that I'm home early - Just trying to get the work done.*
- *It is unrealistic to achieve the legal requirements of the job due to lack of staffing levels*
- *It's a joke! Iv had enough and currently looking for another job!*
- *Overworked and underpaid*
- *I am taking breaks but am aware of colleagues who do not take a lunch break as they do not want to be seen as failing.*
- *Over worked and underpaid*
- *A lot of work is being passed down to lower levels to complete*



Staff morale

It's no surprise, given the responses earlier in our survey, that budget cuts, job cuts and overwork mean that morale in roads teams is very low. Only ten percent described morale as good and seven percent described it as fine. Forty-four percent of respondents felt that morale was very low and a further forty percent that morale was low. Members feel overworked and underappreciated. They report increased workloads and a lack of strategic planning or interested management as key causes of low morale. The long-term pay freeze is also frequently mentioned as a cause of low morale. The public sector will lose highly skilled staff if the budget and wage cuts continue. Where respondents indicated that morale was good it was because of their co-workers.



What the staff say

Workload

- *Far too much to do, not enough time, insufficient management and political support.*
- *The level of cuts has started to impact the service we provide at a time when the public expectation has never been higher. Large part of day is spent dealing with public enquiries.*
- *Everyone stressed with ever increasing workload and expectations*
- *people stressed*
- *too much work not enough time*
- *Increased work load, staff reduction, no information about future, wage cuts worries*
- *Workload has significantly increased for each member of staff to the extent that it is now too difficult to manage.*
- *Staff are realistic about what is achievable but put pressure on themselves as they feel like they dont want to let their colleagues down so over work themselves*
- *Increasing pressure, workload, unnecessary internal barriers that slow or restrict being able to get jobs done.*

- *Quality and quantity of work has dramatically changed. Quality going down and quantity going up but still expected to produce work to tight budgets and time.*
- *Pending restructuring and budget reductions are very demoralising*
- *Uncertainty and not enough qualified colleagues to help out*
- *Lack of quality work and looks like the organisation is coming to the ground*
- *For all the reasons mentioned above staff are being done away with and remainder are expected to cope management dont really care as long as they are ticking all the right boxes*

Lack of leadership

- *poor comunication of whats going on*
- *Coupled with the severe cuts being experienced now, there seems to be insufficient strategic direction or longer term forward planning for the service. This generates increased uncertainty and a general feeling of unease.*
- *Excessive work, with a decent chunk below grade. Poor management. Lack of trust shown to employees, increase in paperwork for every job due to lack of trust.*
- *As above, feel very undervalued and earning less due to ill thought out changes and been told my main roll is an after thought then expected to fell into line*
- *no proper management*
- *we are under constant review, the review at the moment has been going on for two years but without producing any results. We feel the service is being run down and will be put out to the private sector or LLP.*
- *Management seem to try and do as they wish. The organisation is terrible.*
- *Management dont seem to care*

Pay

- *Low pay and work load increasing*
- *Pressure of workload, low pay and lack of recognition for the work we do. Constantly being told by media that average wage increases at 2-5% across industry when our wage increases don't cover the basic increases in fuel bills, petrol, food prices etc.*
- *Expectations haven't changed, Chief Executives promise elected officials that work will continue as usual when it is impossible to continue with greatly reduced resources, heightened demands and a diminishing workforce. Allied to that, we have taken a £5000 pay cut in the past 7 years as a result of working in the public service and furthermore our pensions have been changed 3 times in 10 years and each changed has only been detrimental to the staff.*
- *Staff overworked and underpaid, due to decrease in pay over the years, and everyone spoken with feeling much the same way, frustrated that we cannot provide the same level of service as we used to do, due to continues staff cuts.*
- *Low wages, high workload*

The future

- *Hardly any overtime and everyone is thinking there is no point doing overtime as the first 4 hours are at single time then the rest are at time and a third. Knowing that we are one of the lowest paid councils to be doing roadworking within the councils.*

Good morale

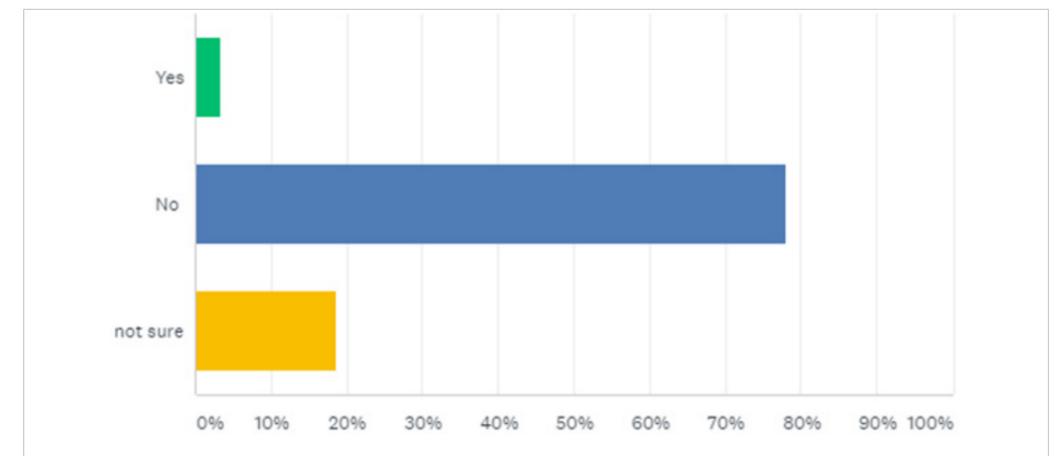
- *Team is relatively new and good mix of skills - team works well together*
- *Good team and better work planning.*
- *Work is still being down to a good standard.*
- *We have a fairly new team and everyone is generally very positive*



The future

The low morale is also partly due to a feeling that things will get worse rather than better in the next few years when asked Do you expect morale to improve in the next few years? Only three percent said yes while 78% said no.

Comments here were very similar to the comments on current morale. Members are well aware that there are more budget cuts to come. There are few, if any, efficiencies left to be found. Budget cuts mean cuts in services. They also point out that the short-term fixes that are being used on roads now just mean that there will be more costly work in the future. Again the ongoing reduction in the value of workers' wages is a key issue.



What the staff say

- *Significant budget cuts for LAs are said to coming in the next several financial years*
- *I expect there will be more cuts to the service and with no or only 1% pay increases it does not make a happy workforce. Loss of working conditions we have fought for over the years are also being chipped away bit by bit, making the older staff disillusioned and the younger ones not interested in joining a union because they say they 'can't afford it' and 'it makes no difference 'cos the management will do what they want anyway'. I have tried telling them that a Union is only as strong as it's members and a united staff is needed to make change to no avail - Thatcher has a lot to answer for!*
- *no pay rises work load increased hours reduced*
- *I think it will be at least a further 5 years before things start to pick up for the better. Several years of severe cuts are ahead and any of the "easier" savings have already been made.*
- *Expect a heavier workload as we will be losing a post in our small team soon.*
- *Budget significantly cut for next financial year with minimal pay awards.*
- *Ever increasing workload and expectations.*
- *Substantial additional budget cuts have just been announced*
- *Budgets are being cut year on year. Understandably services like Education and Social Care Budgets are being loaded first, however if the roads are left to deteriorate at the current levels there will be a huge bill to repair them and someone will have to pay.*
- *Can see no significant changes on the cards that will impact upon the guys on the ground*

- *More cuts are forecast*
- *More cuts less money declining wages and shrinking workforce*
- *No light at end of tunnel*

Conclusion

UNISON surveyed members working in roads teams in September 2017. We asked them a range of questions about the impact of public sector budget cuts on themselves and the work that they do. This report analyses their responses and allows you to hear directly from the workforce about what it's like trying to deliver high quality public services under austerity. The report reveals a dedicated workforce working hard to maintain roads and keep traffic moving safely but who are under enormous pressure. They feel exhausted, undervalued and are struggling to deal with the demands placed upon them.



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