

Local Government Benchmarking Overview Report 2022-23



POLICY BRIEFING

Introduction

The Benchmarking Report examines Scottish local government performance over a range of council services. It is compiled by the Improvement Service for CoSLA. The report gives details about the latest year (2022-23) but also makes comparisons over time. The report is clear that council funding has not kept pace with increasing demand and growing need. The Improvement Service point several areas where there has been severe cuts in funding over years and the considerable, 25.7% and growing, proportion of funding that is ringfenced for Scottish Government priorities. Combined with sharply increasing demand in many service areas, this has resulted in workforce capacity issues.

Scottish Government funding for councils

The report highlights that while the Scottish Government budget has increased by 37% since 2013/14 the increase in the local government budget over the same period has been 1.3%.

When adjusted to reflect the growth in ringfencing, Scottish Government funding for councils reduced by 1.9% in real terms in 2022/23. The report states "This equates to £176.7 million less funding available to councils to pursue local priorities". The savings and cuts have to come from non-ringfenced areas.

Financial pressure

The report looks at spending going back to 2010/11 outlining where spending has gone up or more usually, down. Areas which have seen expansion include Expenditure within social care (29%), education (21%), and support for care experienced children (17%).

Areas where there is less / no Scottish Government ringfencing do less well. Between 201/11 and 2022/23;

- 20% reduction in culture and leisure spending
- 27% reduction in planning spending
- 24% reduction in corporate support service spending
- 9% reduction in roads spending
- 26% reduction in trading standards and environmental health spending
- 35% reduction in street cleaning

It's noted that in education "savings have been disproportionately targeted towards ancillary workers including support staff, janitors, caterers, and cleaners"

KEY POINTS:

- **Many areas of local government services have seen huge reductions in spending in the last 10 years.**
- **There are staff shortages across many service areas.**
- **Councils are struggling to recruit to many posts because pay isn't keeping pace with other sectors.**
- **Staff shortages mean councils are struggling to fulfil some statutory duties.**
- **The situation is described as "creating intolerable work pressure for staff."**
- **Sickness absence in councils is at record levels.**



Workforce pressures

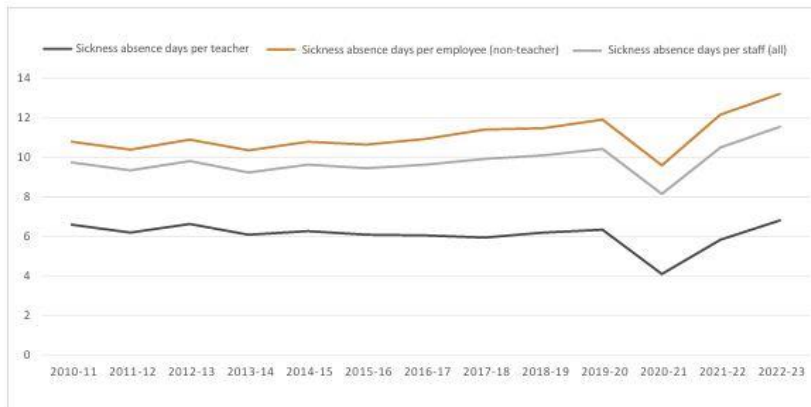
Staff shortages are becoming more widespread, with councils now facing gaps in areas not previously impacted. For example, there are a number of statutory local government professional roles facing workforce shortages. This is directly impacting on a range of critical statutory areas, including planning, environmental health, trading and building standards. (In the light of this UNISON Scotland's 'Damage Reports' look remarkably prescient).

The report's authors are clear that inadequate pay plays a significant part in causing the staff shortages "staff are choosing to leave local government for better paid jobs in other sectors to cope with rising inflation." Other workforce pressures are also mentioned, as is the ageing workforce and staff retiring earlier. Social care and social work remain the most common workforce gap with almost all councils reporting shortages. In social care minimum pay rates are described as being "not competitive in the wider labour market".

A lack of funding is pointed to as the reason that there has been insufficient development of the council workforce, and that local government is "expected to deliver the same or better outcomes with less available labour and access to development". The report does not mince words saying that this is "often creating intolerable work pressure for staff".

Sickness absence

In the light of the pressures described above it's no surprise that sickness absence in councils is at record levels. Absence levels for all staff have continued a long-term upward trend, reaching an all-time high of 13.2 days in 2022/23, which is an 8% increase from 2021/22.



Note: Covid-related absences are recorded separately and do not contribute to the trends

The growth in absence in the last two years has been driven at least in part by NHS backlogs for treatment, longer recovery times due to treatment delays and inactivity, and increased spread of infections post pandemic. Long-term absence in particular has been impacted by treatment delays. There is a sharp rise in staff being off long-term with multiple medical conditions. The impact of growing work pressure on staff due to staff shortages is going to have to be "a consideration in understanding current and future absence levels".

Conclusion

The report concludes that "it is possible that efforts in the short-term in some service areas may need to be focussed more on prioritising and maintaining performance, rather than service improvement"

Additional reading

- [National Benchmarking Improvement Report 2022-23](#)
- [UNISON Scotland damage Reports](#)
- [Improvement Service](#)



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