UNISON Scotland

Public Service FUTURES

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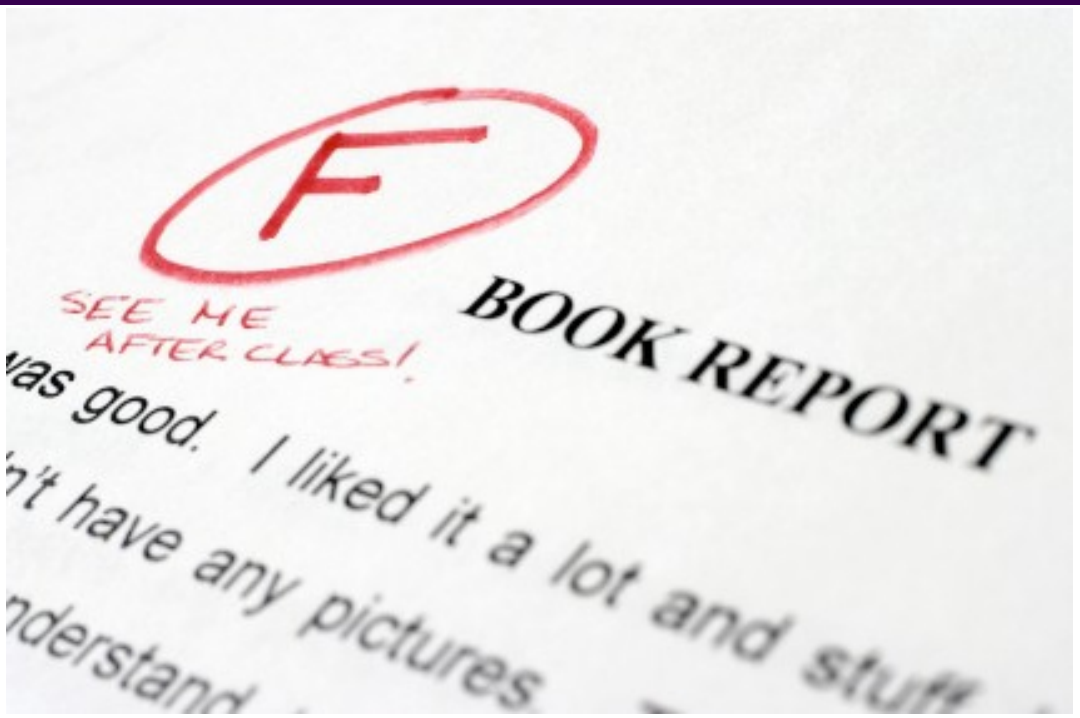
For people who care about public services



The Cuts Are Hurting

Satisfaction with public services is falling and dissatisfaction is rising. The latest Social Attitudes survey shows that people can see the impact of cuts on the quality of our public services.

In 2017 55% of people said they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with how the NHS is run compared to 60% in 2016. Now 30% of people are dissatisfied with the NHS up from just over 20% in 2016. On top of that 49% stated that standards in health services had fallen a little or a lot in the past year compared to 37% who stated that in 2016.
Improving education standards is now the most commonly picked priority. "Helping the economy" has held the top slot since 2009.

These changes show that cuts to public services are effecting the quality of those services. Parents see what is happening in their children's schools. People see what's happening in the health service. They know that no matter the spin by the government there just is not enough money or staff to deliver.

Increasingly drivers and motoring organisations highlight the growing problems of potholes and the lack of spending on roads maintenance. A survey by the AA showed that none out of ten drivers said that roads were worse than ten years ago.

UNISON's Damage reports also demonstrate the impact of a decade of austerity on our public services. These reports look at the lower profile services and expose problems austerity causes.

The decade of cuts means that services are in crisis. Staff have worked incredibly hard, despite job losses to try and maintain services. There just aren't enough resources to deliver the quality of service that people need and expect.

The Social Attitudes Survey shows that people in Scotland can now see the impact of cuts on services. Austerity has to end. We need substantial investment in public services to turn things around.

Three things to do today:

- Read about Public Energy Cos
- Learn about councillors
- Ask a friend to join

Building Safety

The Scottish government is consulting on proposed changes to building standards and fire regulations. The success of these proposal will depend on there being adequate resources in building standards teams to enable them operate effectively.

UNISON's survey of building standards teams last year revealed a dedicated workforce who are under enormous pressure. They feel exhausted, undervalued and are struggling to deal with the demands placed upon them.

Key findings from the survey showed:

- Almost half (48%) said there have been budget cuts this year (2017) while one in five (20%) said the cuts had been severe.
- The overwhelming majority (89%) feel their workload has got heavier in the last few years.
- Almost half (47%) felt they should spend a lot more time on site visits.
- Three quarters stated that they worked unpaid hours to keep on top of workloads

These proposals offer some opportunities to better protect citizens through increased inspections and clearly defined roles but without increased funding for more staff they will not protect the public from harm

NEWSLETTER

Transport Bill

While the Scottish government is progressing with its tame Transport Bill Joseph Rowntree Foundation have published a report showing just how vital transport is to the wellbeing of our society. Tackling Transport-related barriers to work in Scotland is part of a wider study looking at the experiences of residents in 6 areas across Scotland and England.

It is clear that poor public transport makes it very difficult for people to to travel to work, This means that their job options are severely curtailed by unaffordable or unreliable public transport. Low pay and insecure work make this even harder. How can you afford a monthly pass if you don't know how many hours you will be working?

The report found that transport is a significant barrier to work for people in low-income areas. Poorly paid and insecure work limits the areas where people look for work. Transport networks are not set up for the location of much of the lower skilled work available. The industrial estates on the periphery of many of our towns and cities have very poor public transport links. Despite what some may think there was very little evidence that people were unwilling to travel for work, there just wasn't transport available for them to get there.

Transport is a significant barrier to employment.

Much low paid work operates with shift systems that public transport does not support. Some of those who took part indicated that while they were willing to get to a job with a 7 am start there was no transport available to get there and the wages offered did not enable them to run a car.

The need to take two or three buses to reach a destination were also raised because the unreliability of the service meant their were really high risks of missing connections and so being late for work. The insecure nature of much work means that lateness is not a minor mishap but leads to loss of pay or being offered less hours.

improve the availability, reliability and affordability of public transport to make it easier for people to access employment.

The cost of transport is also a key barrier to low paid work. On top of those costs people with childcare costs struggle to afford the extra time for their children in care when they have long commutes. This further curtails their job opportunities.
The report calls for coordinated action by the Scottish government , local authorities transport bodies and partner agencies to deliver:

- Stronger models of partnership or bus franchising powers to improve the availability, reliability and affordability of public transport to make it easier for people to access employment.
- That new housing and employment developments include planning approaches which ensure that they are well served by public transport that reduces travel times, costs and distances between home and work.
- Transport and employment policy should be better integrated to enable employment support staff to help clients understand their options when they are planning a return to work.

These approaches would enable people to get to work, would improve their finances by cutting their expensive and cut down on carbon emissions.

The Transport Bill is an ideal opportunity to take on board these recommendations which could lift many people out of poverty.

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Supply Vs Demand

The expansion of the early years service is still almost two years away so we can learn from the problems created by the similar English model.

The policy has been in place in England since September 2017 and as promised here the money follows the child. What parents are finding is that while they may have access to funding there aren't nurseries for them to spend it in.

According to Full Fact only 28% of providers responding to a survey provided the service for free. Private sector nurseries complain that the money from the government doesn't cover their costs. Nurseries have or are planning to increase their chargers for top-up hours. Nurseries are closing rather than expanding. They are also charging fees for a range of "extras" The Guardian has an example of one nursery charging £15 for lunch.

Research indicated that this method of subsidising childcare means that the better of benefit more than those on lower incomes.

It is also clear that private sector organisations are only interested in opening nurseries in areas where parents can afford to pay charges on top of their free hours. Lower income families are also struggling to find places for their children. In Coventry there are 23,000 under fives but only 7174 nursery places.

The demand model just isn't working. The Scottish government needs to avoid these mistakes. The answer is for local government to take control and supply childcare just like it does schools. Tied to adequate finding this will give parents get a high quality service without a complex shopping trip.

Making Power

A Scottish publicly owned energy company (POEC) has a key role to play in the Just Transition to a low carbon economy. This needs to be integrated into an industrial strategy, with Fair Work principles, and Scotland's Climate Change Plan. We believe that a POEC must have an ambitious remit, involving generation and transmission as well as supply.

In our response last year to the Scottish Government's Scottish Energy Strategy consultation, we made the point that creating a government owned energy company is just one step in extending public ownership throughout the system. We want this to include co-operatives and municipal energy companies.

We believe the POEC has a major role within a proper balanced energy strategy for Scotland that aims to deliver security of supply, at an affordable cost, meeting climate change targets, with communities supported to develop local energy solutions.

The specific role for the POEC within this should be to support a Just Transition to a balanced, low-carbon energy system in ways which address fuel poverty, protect workers' livelihoods, create a new industrial base and deliver a fairer Scotland.

As noted above, this means its remit must include generation and transmission, as well as supply. It certainly must be more than a 'white label' branding of an existing supplier. It should have a role in encouraging and supporting energy efficiency, with the related benefits to fuel poverty, climate targets and job creation, ensuring decent, quality jobs.

Councillor Demographics

Are Scottish councillors all still white middle aged men? Well not quite all but the latest survey of councillors shows we still have a long way to go to build a more diverse body of representatives. So just who is running our local authorities?

The average councillor (who responded to the survey) is a married while male aged 50-59. They are a home-owner from a managerial or professional background. Despite many parties talking a lot about making their candidates more diverse the only change from the 2013 survey is the average councillor is a bit younger.

- The average age of respondents was 53.
- 67% of respondents over 50 and less than 29% under 40
- Only 33% identified as women
- Just over 98% of respondents identified as white. (96% of the Scottish population are white)

80% of councillors are home owners. Compared to 61% of Scotland

- Respondents were slightly more religious than the population as a whole. 59% of respondents as against 48% of the population.
- While 61% of the Scottish population are owner occupiers over 80% of councillors are. Just over half have another job alongside their councillor duties: 14% with another full-time job.

Only 33% identified as women

- Just over 60% stated that they had a degree or other professional qualification. For the general Scottish population 30% of people are similarly qualified.
- Nearly two thirds of councillors are married/in a civil partnership compared to 47% of the general population.

There is still lots of work to be done to ensure that councillors are a more diverse group. For many MSPs and MPs local elections are where they learn their trade. This isn't just when they win and act as councillors but standing and losing can still be a springboard to other positions. A focus on diversity in council candidates could make a huge difference. More importantly for citizens having a wider range of voices in power should mean that there is a better chance of policies being developed by people who understand their lives and challenges. That will lead to better services for us all.

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Homes Out of Reach

.Owning a home has become virtually impossible for many public sector workers across Britain, according to a Priced Out a report published by UNISON.

The research which covered all 9 English regions, Wales and Scotland showed that it would take a minimum of 14 years to save the required deposit. Assuming they could afford to save £100 a month., they would still face the challenge of persuading a bank or building society to lend them 16 and a half times their salary as an NHS cleaner in London would have to do.

Given that the recommendation is four and half times your salary then Priced Out shows that a mortgage in out of the question for and NHS cleaner or classroom assistant in every part of the UK.

The same is true for workers in all sector on these salaries. There needs to be urgent action in the UK to ensure that there are homes for more than the rich.

It's not just about the quality of life for people doing these essential jobs. We all rely on their services. Hospitals need to be clean otherwise lives are at risk. Schools need classroom assistants. We are already seeing the impact of cuts to classroom assistants jobs on pupils, particularly those with additional support needs.

Availability of housing is vital but workers also need a pay rise. Workers cannot provide high quality services if they are constantly worrying about how they will feed and clothe their families.

The Scottish government is putting lots of money and energy into reforming public services. Planning reform, a review of local governance and education reform. Services are delivered by people not structures so investing in the people that deliver them, paying them decent wages, giving them control over how they work will be much more effective route to quality.

Local Governance Review

The Local Governance review has moved forward and is attempting to engage with communities through an online consultation. You can see the full paper here.

The key questions are:

1. Tell us about your experienced of getting involved in decision-making-processes that affect your local community or community of interest?
2. Would you like your local community or community of interest to have more control over some decisions? If yes, what sorts of issues would those decisions cover?
3. When thinking about decision-making, "local" could mean a large town, a village, or a neighbourhood. What does local mean to you and your community?
4. Are existing there forms of local level decision-making which could play a part in exercising new local powers? Are there new forms of local decision making that could work well? What kinds of changes might be needed for this to work in practice?

It has been clear from the start that this review is not only focused on local government. The remit includes all services and service decision making processes.

The Community Empowerment Bill alongside growing numbers of development trusts, the widening role of housing associations and groups taking control of public assets has already changed the way services are being delivered.

The review is also engaging with public sector organisations through different routes. It remains to be seen whether the results will end up on a shelf beside the Christie Review and the Local Democracy Commission or lead to a reform Bill

If you would like more information on any of the articles in this newsletter or have information you would like to share in the next issue please contact: Kay Sillars in the Bargaining and Campaigns team on 0141 342 2819 k.sillars@unison.co.uk

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