



**For fairness and democracy  
keep it local**

**UNISON Scotland's manifesto 2017  
sustaining local government**

## Introduction

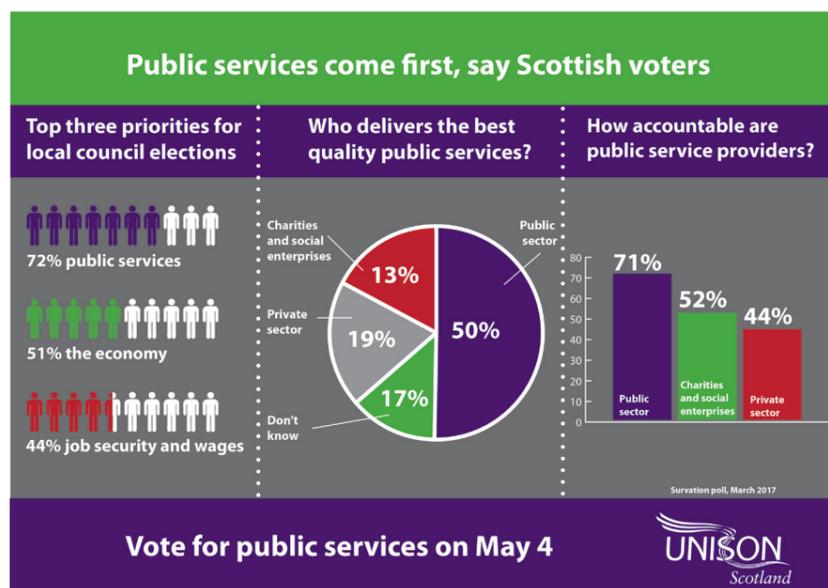
Everyone in Scotland uses the services provided by our local councils, even if we sometimes take them for granted. In this manifesto we set out some key themes including local delivery and funding, as well as how we would like to see specific services improved.

Public services are the number one issue for the vast majority of Scottish voters. We know this because we commissioned an opinion poll, by Survation, which asked voters to explain their priorities. It was no surprise that more than 70 per cent of those who took part placed

public services as their top priority, followed by the economy (51%) and job security and wages (44%).

People were also clear about whom they believe delivers the best quality public services. Half chose public sector organisations, with only 19% supporting the private sector and 13% choosing charities.

We hope this manifesto will help members and the wider public to ask relevant questions of the candidates standing in the local government elections in May.



**Public services are the top priority for the vast majority of Scottish voters.**

## Fairness and democracy

All of us rely on the services delivered by local government. From childcare to elderly care, to supporting vulnerable people, keeping our streets lit and emptying our bins, helping us to stay fit and our children to learn local government is at the heart of Scottish society.

Councils and the collective provision of services did not arise by accident, they developed from an acknowledgement that private provision and markets could not deliver the services and facilities necessary to sustain a modern society.

Councils represent more than service delivery bodies, they are also a tier in our democracy. They should have the capacity to take meaningful and accountable decisions about local areas, to make a real difference responding to the needs and wishes of their citizens.

Councils are losing their capacity to act, losing control of services and responsibility for their finances (with

consequent underfunding). A combination of centralisation and austerity has made councils institutions where far from being drivers of wellbeing in their localities, they have often been more concerned with limiting the damage of decisions taken elsewhere.

Local government services have borne the brunt of austerity and this must stop. The next round of cuts will be even worse for local government with services cut and more job losses planned. A staggering 91% of the public sector job losses in Scotland since the crash have been in local government.

A fairer more equal Scotland requires a greater investment in and expansion of the public realm – local government is key to that. Ensuring that councils are empowered, resourced and capable of meeting the demands placed upon them should be the priority for everyone in Scottish public life.

## Fairness and funding

This year's local government revenue allocation has been cut by £225m, mitigated by the income from changes to the council tax bands. As local government is considered by the Scottish government to be 'unprotected spend' the picture for the years until 2021 is similarly bleak. This is simply unsustainable – both in terms of service delivery and impact on staff. Redundancy up until now has largely been voluntary, and UNISON's opposition to compulsory redundancy is and will remain absolute, but the needs of the remaining staff must be taken into account. Piling the same, or often an increased level of work on a smaller staff is unfair, inefficient and will lead to poorer services.

However necessary a reform of local government finance is, there are actions which should be taken immediately ensure that services and jobs are protected by ensuring the maximum value is gained from existing budgets.

These are set out in UNISON Scotland's 'Combating Austerity' toolkit. Councils are struggling with the costs of private finance schemes. These are contracts often for twenty five years or longer; many were undertaken at a point where borrowing was considerably more expensive than it is now. Councils could issue bonds and buy out these contracts and bring them back in house.

**We welcome an end to the council tax freeze which has left us with a regime overly reliant on charges and undermined local democracy and accountability. Reform of local taxation is long overdue**

We welcome an end to the council tax freeze which has left us with a regime overly reliant on charges and undermining local democracy and accountability. Reform of local taxation is long overdue. UNISON supports the introduction of a progressive property tax for the funding of local services. This should be based on accurate up-to-date property values – it is simply not tenable that taxes should continue to be based on property values from 1991. Legislation for the new tax should include mandatory regular revaluation to avoid the current situation reoccurring. UNISON argues that councils should raise more of their own funding and have control over business rates.

A UK wide apprenticeship levy is to be implemented from April 2017 and collected by the HMRC from large employers including councils. Employers in England, including public sector bodies, will be able to directly access this funding.

However, in Scotland the money goes into the Scottish Government's budget. Councils spend at least £25m on providing hundreds of valuable opportunities for young people such as modern apprenticeships, craft apprenticeships, graduate trainees, probationer teachers and formal work experience. By centralising funding, the Scottish government is discouraging public service employers from taking on apprentices. We call for the return of this funding to those local employers who want to develop quality apprenticeship programmes.

A comprehensive programme of refinancing could save billions across Scotland; we call on all councils to actively explore this option working with the Scottish government to do so where necessary.

Because of the long-term nature and wide range of PPP/PFI/NPD contracts their provisions can go out of date. Similarly they are often not subjected to the same scrutiny as other contracts. A strict regime of contract management can deliver significant savings for councils and we call on all councils to ensure they have dedicated staff assigned to the contract monitoring role which encourages people to report poor service.

Councils can also generate additional resources through municipal enterprise, income generation and use of services outwith the local authority as set out in APSE research.

The Scottish government has indicated its support for 'community budgeting' with a proportion of council spending being decided on a ward by ward basis. UNISON has always supported the idea of 'co production' – the joint design of services by users and staff – and done properly, community budgeting could be a step towards this. The council workforce should be involved in community budgeting, which if it is to be meaningful at all, must be properly resourced. There is little to be said for devolving decision making about which cuts to make.

“Classroom resources dramatically cut. We have less money every year to provide the basic material for teaching. All I can say is we have not had a school summer outing for the last 2 years and supplies run low. Staff provide lots of stationery for children.

School support staff, *Hard Lessons*, UNISON Scotland Damage series



**A comprehensive programme of refinancing could save billions across Scotland; we call on all councils to actively explore this option.**

## Education

Our commitment to the modern comprehensive principle is rooted in our belief in a decent society. Every child should have an equal chance of the best education. Investment in the whole team of professional, technical

and administrative staff, not just teachers and lecturers, is the only way to ensure that education in Scotland achieves a high standard.

## Early years

We welcome the consensus in Scotland to expand free childcare. However, promises must be accompanied by adequate funding to deliver a quality service that meets the needs of children. The private sector already struggles to deliver childcare and pay the living wage and pension contributions, far less the pay required to retain qualified staff over a long-term and make a profit. We must learn lessons from adult care which is fragmented, costly and hard for users to navigate, with varying quality of service and a race to the bottom for staff terms and conditions. We will need a substantial increase in staff numbers, to cope with both the extra hours and the extra children who take up the service. There also needs to be equal access

to training and continuous professional development across the education sector. Public delivery is the most cost effective way forward. Money won't be lost to profit and 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. It also gives better protection to childcare workers who need all the same rights and opportunities, for example flexible working, as other workers. Appropriate pay and good terms and conditions are how you attract and keep skilled workers.

## Schools

The Scottish government is consulting over plans to shift the legal responsibility to educate children from local authorities to individual schools. We are against this. 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.

As it stands Scottish government seems intent on centralising these wider services to regional bodies. This will be an expensive exercise in replicating functions and structures which already exist. Reducing the role of councils will both create more bureaucracy at school level, as head teachers will have more of a business manager role and take decision making further away as regional bodies replace local authorities. Our schools require investment – not reorganisation.

## Social work

The reality for the social work workforce in Scotland is they have bigger caseloads, shorter timescales, and greater demands. Social work simply cannot deliver the quality of services that they are committed to. And social workers are concerned about making mistakes and misjudgements.

The demands upon social workers are increasing due to changing demographics and legislative and regulatory changes. It is also the case that the impact of austerity in other areas serves to increase the demands placed on social work departments as other systems of support break down.

Political debate is often focussed on arguing how best to protect the NHS and make education a priority. However both of these universal services suffer when social work is weak. Cuts in social workers mean less support to families where children's school attendance and educational attainment is a concern. Increasing charges for older people's day care centres and closing centres for people with learning disabilities, increases the likelihood of hospital admissions. Reductions in care in the community services place greater pressure on young carers. Failure to properly resource home care services leads to delays in people getting out of hospital and later re-admission to hospital. The Scottish government has a laudable commitment to move toward preventative spending –

Councils investing in social work would represent just that.

Innovative ideas, which could be to the benefit of service users and staff alike, have been introduced with the emphasis not on improvement but reducing budgets. These include personalisation, re-ablement, self-directed support, health and social care integration, flexible and agile working. In many cases, rather than creating greater independence for service users and more rewarding work for staff, they have added to insecurity and isolation for service users and additional bureaucracy for staff. Workers in many areas of social work complain they spend far more time facing a computer screen that speaking to service users.

There is a recruitment crisis in many parts of the Scottish social care sector as low wages, challenging workloads and unsocial hours make a career in social care seem less attractive than should be the case in a sector where it is possible to help make a difference to people's lives and gain real job satisfaction.

UNISON calls for protection of social work budgets, and investment in the services that make a difference. There should be recognition that social work needs greater resources to be able to continue to deliver the quality of services that they are committed to.

## Care services

Even with the integration of health and social care, much of Scotland's care services are provided by Local Authorities, whether directly, via commissioning from Integrated Joint Boards or through their own procurement. This, as numerous UNISON Scotland reports have shown is a service which is underfunded and struggling to keep up with demand, putting unsustainable pressures on the workforce and the quality of care is suffering as a result.

Recent advances in procurement legislation and welcome commitments from the Scottish government have ensured that all care workers should be receiving the Scottish

Living Wage. However, as UNISON's recent research shows, councils are not giving sufficient weighting to fair work matters in contract evaluation and rarely directly monitor the quality of services.

We believe that there should be sectoral wide collective bargaining for the care sector. That some 96% of spending on social care budget comes from the public purse is in itself a strong argument for this approach, creating sector wide standards for wages and conditions and adoption of the standards contained in UNISON's Ethical Care Charter.



*Service users not getting their full care. We don't have time to listen properly to their problems as we just have time to do the set tasks and leave*

**Care Workers, We care. Do you? UNISON Scotland Damage series**

*Clients want a wee natter but not got time for that so you feel your rushing them. It's not a real caring service now its all about the clock ticking unfair on elderly who don't have family.*

**Care Workers, We care. Do you? UNISON Scotland Damage series**

*It means clients receiving less time and care packages being reduced or cut altogether; rushing to maintain acceptable service levels* **Care Workers, We care. Do you? UNISON Scotland Damage series**

## Leisure trusts and libraries

Although culture and leisure services are amongst the most visible and high profile of services associated with local authorities, almost everywhere these are delivered, not directly, but through arms length organisations (ALEOs) and specifically leisure trusts. Here, as in other areas, a shrinking workforce are under increasing pressure. This while delivering highly valued services which contribute massively to the public good. In recent years charges for leisure services have risen faster than inflation (considerably in some cases).

This has happened at a time when staff wages have been all but stagnant and numbers employed have been falling. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that charges are being used as a replacement for a funding deficit. Councils have a statutory duty to provide these services and they must

be provided adequately. They need resources in terms of not just of affordable facilities, but also of sufficient numbers of well-trained and rewarded staff.

The Scottish government, CoSLA and many others took part in an exercise drawing up a national strategy for Scotland's public libraries. This declared the mission of Scotland's public libraries was to be part "of a shared civic ambition to fulfil the potential of individuals and communities". As UNISON members in libraries will attest, this is very far from being the reality as they cope daily with increasing workloads, widening responsibilities, and more demand for services. Councils need to invest in library services and facilities and consult with their staff as to how the service could be delivered better and adapted for the future.

“We work alone much more, because of staffing levels. This means we are more stretched than we have ever been before, and sometimes have to limit how much time we can spend with a service user in order to serve more people. There is a much higher use of casual staff”  
**Librarian, Read it and Weep, UNISON Scotland Damage Series**

“Budget cuts and restraints make providing the excellent services customers are used to and expect from staff much more difficult.” **Librarian, Read it and Weep, UNISON Scotland Damage Series**

## Housing

Scotland is in the midst of a housing crisis. There are over 180,000 people on local authority waiting lists, almost 60,000 homes are overcrowded, and the vast majority of these are families with children. Home ownership is out of the reach of a huge number of people and in recent years private sector rent increases have outpaced earnings growth.

UNISON Scotland welcomed the Scottish government's abolition of the so called right to buy, but for this to make a real impact a massive programme of building social housing will be needed. We advocate councils, individually and jointly, working with public service pension funds as a source of investment for this house building programme. As recommended in UNISON Scotland's report 'Funding and Building the Homes Scotland Needs'.

## Housing has been left to the market for too long and has failed to deliver.

Housing is a key policy for any country that aims to reduce poverty and inequality, and their long-term effects on health and wellbeing. Housing has been left to the market for too long and has failed to deliver. Improving our housing requires investment from the public sector. This investment would also provide a massive boost to our economy by creating skilled jobs, increasing labour mobility and increasing the disposable incomes of ordinary workers.

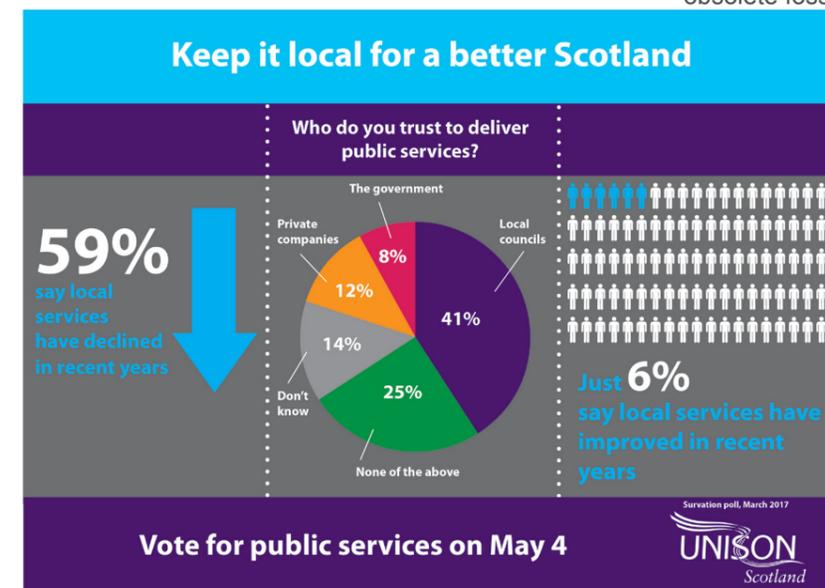
As well as creating much needed jobs, action to refurbish our housing stock would also help to tackle fuel poverty, which currently stands at 940,000 homes in Scotland. Building new homes and refurbishing housing stock will improve health and wellbeing, reduce NHS expenditure, improve energy security, and deliver substantial emissions reductions. Action on energy efficiency is a clear win-win, for all of us.

## Putting councils at the heart of the green economy

The challenge of climate change is one that cannot be avoided but it also represents an opportunity. Councils are key to tackling climate change as they are involved in so many of the areas where changes will have to be made if we are to make the shift to a low carbon society.

the potential for job creation around energy generation, recycling and energy efficiency measures including home insulation.

Too many local government pension funds are investing in obsolete fossil fuel technologies and risking our members



**Local authorities are well placed to lead and support the creation of green jobs in local communities in the private, voluntary and public sectors.**

Local authorities should be leading by example in areas including energy efficiency, procurement (including food), transport and workplace policies. Climate Change Scotland Act guidance says that it is crucial for councils (and other public bodies) to mainstream climate change action into all business processes and functions.

hard earned contributions. Our pension funds need to be part of the green energy future, not the past.

Local authorities are well placed to lead and support the creation of green jobs in local communities in the private, voluntary and public sectors. There are opportunities in all areas of Scotland. The green economy is not just about the countryside. Cities, towns and rural communities have

UNISON supports councils establishing energy companies that generate renewable electricity helping households to install energy efficiency measures, funded from the long-term savings in their energy bills. An example here is Nottingham's not-for-profit Robin Hood Energy, which made it into the Which Top 5 Cheapest Energy Deals in September 2015 and offers customers considerable savings on energy bills. Options could include teaming up with Scottish Water, for 'Hydro Nation' inspired projects.

“Maths resources are woefully, every book has either no front cover, no back cover and pages missing, not because of damage to the resource but because the school has not been able to purchase new books. Also, classes are having to share this resource. It's the same with everything else.”  
**School support staff, Hard Lessons, UNISON Scotland Damage series**

Have to feed two schools from one old kitchen.

**Catering staff, Hard Lessons, UNISON Scotland Damage series**

Toast is being served at break times twice a week to raise funds for school. I am pushed to the limit I have to devote time to arranging purchase of bread, toppings, assist the one parent who is on a rota to make toast for 70+ Children.

**School support staff, Hard Lessons, UNISON Scotland Damage series**

