

# PUBLIC SERVICES ELECTION



**UNISON**  
*Scotland*

**General Election Manifesto 2015**

# This Election Matters

The vast majority of UNISON Scotland's members work in areas which are devolved to the Scottish Parliament, but even so the general election will still have a huge bearing on our working lives. With reserved issues including overall public spending levels, most economic policy, welfare spending and employment rights it could hardly be otherwise. The General election will also have a bearing on how matters decided at European Union level are translated into law.

In this manifesto we set out the issues that UNISON members will expect the political parties to address in the coming election and it should be read in conjunction with UNISON's UK manifesto 'Securing the future of our public services'.



## Mike Kirby UNISON Scottish secretary:

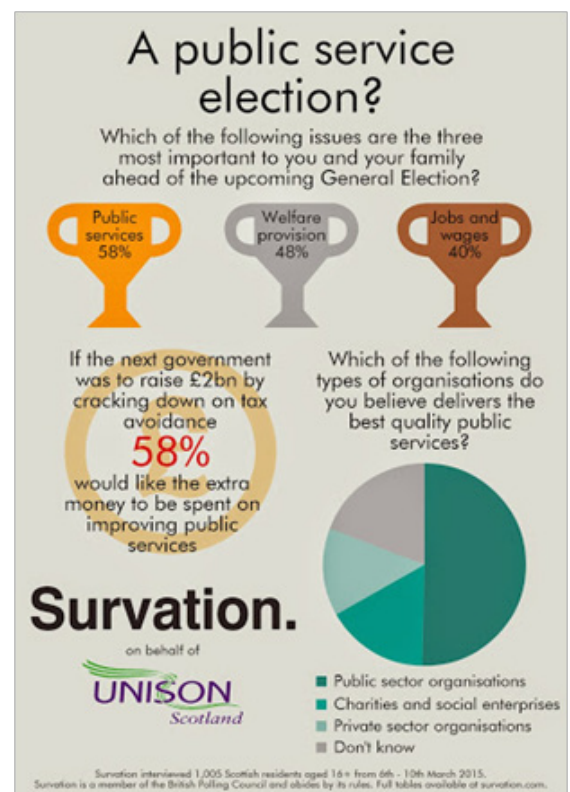
*'During the election campaign we will strive to keep UNISON policies and objectives fore and centre of the political debate. UNISON priorities of an end to Tory austerity, fair employment and trade union rights, pay and public services... by challenging all political parties on what they will do for our people.'*

## Public Services Election

In a poll undertaken by Survation, for UNISON Scotland, Scottish voters said that public services, welfare, jobs and pay were the most important issues for them in the coming general election.

Voters also had clear views about who should deliver public services. Half of respondents believe that 'public sector organisations (such as local councils and the NHS)' deliver the best quality public services. This compares to only 16% who believe that 'charities and social enterprises (such as co-operatives)' and 14% who believe 'private sector organisations (such as businesses)' deliver the best quality public services.

They were also clear about their spending priorities. If the next government was to raise £2bn by cracking down on tax avoidance, 58% of respondents believe that the money should be spent on improving public services, compared to 19% who think it should be spent on reducing public borrowing, and 17% who think that it should be used on income tax cuts.





# Public Spending Cuts

Decisions the UK government makes about spending in England matters to Scotland because of the application of the Barnett formula. Austerity economics have been as devastating in Scotland as the rest of the UK,

Scotland's budget has been cut by 9% in real terms since 2009/10, falling from £31.9 billion to £28.9 billion in 2014/15. With the capital budget facing a real terms cut of 26% as a result of the UK Government's austerity programme. Audit Scotland says revenue spending could fall to £25.6 billion by 2018/19.

 <p>DEBT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public debt rising, when reducing it was claimed justification for austerity</li> <li>• Low pay, low productivity</li> <li>• Recovery slower than previous recessions, here and abroad</li> <li>• Cost of living crisis - made worse by energy companies' profiteering</li> </ul>
 <p>HUMAN COST</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human cost for those struggling financially – including that disabled people are among those hardest hit by benefit cuts and unfair sanctions/bedroom tax</li> <li>• Increasing numbers of jobs, particularly in social care, are insecure, part-time/zero hours contracts</li> </ul>
 <p>CUTS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The economy needs investment not cuts</li> <li>• A £120 bn tax gap – massive civil service jobs cut at HMRC, while too many big companies (e.g. Vodafone, Google and Amazon) pay little or sometimes no tax</li> <li>• Low investment in research and development</li> </ul>
 <p>INEQUALITY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inequality gap increasing and rising levels of in-work poverty</li> <li>• High youth unemployment, risking a 'lost generation'</li> <li>• Focus on short-term profits not long-term sustainability</li> <li>• Risk of another financial crisis as causes not tackled properly</li> </ul>
 <p>PRESSURE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding pressures in local government made worse by council tax freeze</li> <li>• Cuts to many budgets where preventive spending would reduce future costs</li> <li>• Risk of interest rate rise pushing millions into financial difficulties</li> </ul>

The health budget has had an element of protection, but next year, 2015/16, the health DEL budget will be cut by £73 million (1%). Spending overall has increased in cash terms, but spending per head of population has decreased since 2009/10 - while the demands on the NHS are increasing.

Local government spending allocations will drop by 3%, from £7.7 billion to £7.5 billion. Those reductions come on top of six years of cuts. The overall fall in Local Government funding between 2009-10 & 2015-16 has been 10%. It's the only major spending portfolio to suffer a real terms cut.

The financial pressure on Local Government is often passed on in turn to third sector providers with whom Councils have procurement contracts. Some of the worst impacts of austerity affect the community sector, where many staff working with vulnerable groups have been facing cuts to pay and conditions.

Other sectors have also been subject to so called austerity savings. Maintaining police officer numbers at the arbitrary figure of 17,234 mean that massive cuts are falling on police staffs. Police officers are being used to backfill posts at greater expense, taking them off the streets.

# Spending Cuts to Come

A Conservative Government will see the continuation of the austerity programme that has caused so much damage. We know that 60% of the total revenue cuts are still to come, with the deepest cuts in 2016-18. The IFS has described this as a 'rollercoaster'. We estimate that the Barnett consequential of these cuts for Scotland means another £2bn of cuts to vital services and a further 30,000 public service job losses.

Austerity economics aren't working. Further reductions will not increase efficiency; they will merely decrease the quality of services and the quality of life of those who provide them. Austerity has already resulted in the longest and slowest recovery from recession on record. The medicine nearly killed the patient, so we need to stop administering it.

We also need to ensure that taxes are collected and not dodged. Instead of cutting the benefits of the victims of austerity, we should be clamping down on the individuals and companies that avoid paying their fair share. Companies that avoid taxes should not be awarded public contracts.



# Pay and Employment Rights

Ensuring that the public has the services to which they are entitled and that the staff delivering them have decent wages and working conditions is incompatible with the continuation of austerity economics

Public sector pay in Scotland has been cut by 16% in real terms and the average worker is now almost £2,000 a year worse off than in 2010. This has cut living standards and stifled demand in the wider economy. Give a millionaire a tax break and they buy another yacht or stash the money in a tax haven. Give low paid workers a pay rise and they spend most of it in the local economy. One in five of the workforce are earning less than the Living Wage – including some 39,000 workers delivering Scotland's public services.

The Conservative economic plans rely on a big increase in household debt. We need a wage driven, not household debt laden recovery. Scotland needs a pay rise.

There has been a massive increase in nominal or zero-hour contracts and other forms of insecure work. Britain mustn't compete in a race to the bottom of the world economy, based on insecure work, low-wage, and low-skilled economy.

A new government must tackle insecurity at work: outlawing exploitative zero-hours contracts, a big increase in the National Minimum Wage alongside beefing up enforcement. There should be an end to Employment Tribunal fees that have shut so many workers out from access to justice in the workplace. The cuts in health and safety provisions should be reinstated and enforcement strengthened.

# Further Devolution

With the political will to use its powers the Scottish Parliament could help maintain a greater level of services, this is one of the reasons UNISON has supported moves towards greater devolution. The Smith Commission agreement - concluded by the SNP, Scottish Conservatives, Scottish Lib Dems, Scottish Greens and Scottish Labour does constitute a significant shift of powers to Scotland.

Both Labour and the Conservatives say they will fully implement the Smith Commission Proposals. The SNP would like to see proposals go further arguing for 'full fiscal autonomy'. This would see further powers devolved to Scotland but also lays open the possibility of unpredictable public finances.

While there are certainly positive elements in these proposals, the package as a whole falls short of our aspirations. Energy, employment, equalities and other powers should have been devolved, if the Smith Commission had applied the subsidiarity test we argued for. We will continue to press the next UK government to go further.



Whilst we welcomed the proposal to retain Pensions and Universal Credit at a UK level we were disappointed with the limited devolution of Housing Benefit. Devolving housing benefit (as Labour is now committed to) would give the Scottish Parliament and local authorities all the policy levers to tackle Scotland's housing crisis.

# Conclusion

It doesn't have to be like this. Austerity economics don't work in Scotland any better than they work elsewhere in the UK. Public services need investment - this will not just improve services but also help local economies.

UNISON Scotland will continue to work in the interests of public services and the UNISON members who provide them. We will argue and for campaign for investment in services and wage led growth throughout this election and beyond. It is by their commitment to this agenda that we will judge candidates and parties who look for our support.



## Suggested questions for members to ask candidates

- What will be the consequences for public services of the Conservatives proposed job cuts?
- If elected as my MP, how will you protect these threatened jobs?
- How will you ensure my pay makes up lost ground in the next parliament?
- How would further cuts to public services help me and the local economy, exactly?
- Personal debt is rising again, how do you expect low-paid workers to make ends meet?
- How will you ensure rich individuals and corporations pay their taxes like the rest of us?
- How will you use further devolved powers to support and protect Scotland's public services?

For further information contact  
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