

Government Programme 2016/17



Introduction

The Scottish Government has published its programme for the coming year outlining their legislative and administrative actions in '*A Plan for Scotland 2016/17*'.

This briefing covers the legislation and other actions that most impacts on UNISON members.

Air Passenger Duty Bill

The Scotland Act 2016 transfers to the Scottish Parliament legislative power over taxing transport of air passengers, allowing a replacement tax for APD to be introduced. Sadly, the government intends to half the tax rate, which in UNISON's view will damage the environment and result in further cuts to public services to pay for a regressive tax cut.

Budget Bill

Always the most important piece of legislation for UNISON members as it sets out the Scottish Government's spending and tax plans. Westminster austerity cuts will make this challenging again, but we trust that local government does not continue to bear the burden of cuts.

Child Poverty Bill

This is about the policies, strategies and targets to reduce child poverty. This is a welcome focus, although it needs to be backed up by practical action on inequality.

Contract (Third Party Rights) Bill

This will put third party rights on a statutory basis, rather than the current common law provisions. While this sounds like a technical law reform, UNISON members can be third parties to contracts.

Domestic Abuse Bill

This takes forward reforms that have largely already been implemented in England, including new offences that will include psychological abuse, such as coercive and controlling behaviour.

Expenses and Funding of Civil Litigation Bill

Seeks to improve access to justice, including making the costs of litigation more certain. This has been a concern to UNISON, after a significant increase in charges. We pursue many cases through the civil courts on behalf of members.

Gender Balance on Public Boards Bill

This will require positive action to be taken to redress gender imbalances on public sector boards. A welcome strengthening of good governance.

KEY POINTS:

- Plan for Scotland outlines the Scottish Government's legislative and other plans for the coming year.
- The plan includes a number of Bills that will impact on UNISON members.
- The plan also points to significant immediate and longer term actions on public service reform.



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Housing Amendment Bill

Changes to the powers of the Scottish Housing Regulator to avoid the risk of housing associations being classified as private sector bodies.

Islands Bill

Implements the actions agreed as part of the islands action plan, broadly welcomed by UNISON. We will be looking to pursue the ideas set out in the UNISON submission on the Bill consultation.

Limitation (Childhood Abuse) Bill

This Bill will remove the three year limitation period for personal injury actions where the person raising the action was a child at the time the abuse occurred. This implements a welcome recommendation of the Scottish Human Rights Commission.

Railway Policing Bill

Railway policing is being devolved to the Scottish Parliament. This Bill will integrate British Transport Police (BTP) in Scotland into Police Scotland. UNISON is not convinced that this is the right approach.

Social Security Bill

This Bill will set out an over-arching legislative framework for a new, Scottish social security system covering those aspects of social security that are to be devolved to Scotland.

Referendum Bill

This will be a consultation on a draft Bill should the Scottish Government conclude that independence is the best or only way to protect Scotland's interests in the wake of the EU referendum. While UNISON has no position on independence, we have said that all options should be considered to protect the economy and public services from the impact of Brexit.

Administrative Actions

The Plan also outlines a range of non-legislative actions. We have or will cover these issues in more detailed briefings. Key points include:

- Tackling the attainment gap in schools and expanding early year's provision. Maintaining the reduced number of college places and improving access to universities.
- A Climate Change Plan and Energy Strategy will be published this winter, outlining an intention to reduce Scottish emissions by 80% between 1990 and 2050. The promised Climate Change Bill is missing from the legislative programme, but there will be a consultation.
- The recently published Labour Market Strategy will take forward the work of the Fair Work Convention. £250k is allocated for a union modernisation fund, to help mitigate the Trade Union Act.
- There is more detail on the capital programme and a commitment to reduce the cost to the public purse of PPP schemes, including ending contracts 'where possible and appropriate'. This is a UNISON priority for savings.
- There appears to be a revision to the yield from the modest changes to the Council Tax, although the income from band changes is to be ring fenced.
- The Good Food Nation Bill isn't in the legislative programme, but there will be a consultation in 2017.
- The health focus is on shifting to community services, improving mental health services and public health. The budget includes both health and social care which will be challenging. There will be a national workforce plan and statutory safe staffing levels.
- Police Scotland will get a 'Real-terms protection of the police revenue budget' and the 'right mix and numbers of officers and staff'.
- The plan talks about decentralisation and will discuss the timing of a local government review by the end of the year.

More information:

Plan for Scotland 2016/17

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0050/00505210.pdf>

Air Passenger Duty – UNISON submission

<http://www.unison-scotland.org/2016/06/03/air-passenger-duty-consultation-response/>

Future Islands Bill – UNISON response

<http://www.unison-scotland.org/2015/12/23/future-islands-bill-consultation-response-to-scottish-government-dec-2015/>

Implications of Brexit

<http://www.unison-scotland.org/2016/08/26/implications-of-brexit/>

Education Delivery Plan Briefing

<http://www.unison-scotland.org/2016/07/04/briefing-078-policy-education-delivery-plan-july-2016/>



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