



**UNISON Scotland response:  
To the call for evidence on the draft budget 2018-19  
Local Government  
October 2017**

## **Introduction**

UNISON is the largest trade union in Scottish public services. Our members deliver services, pay taxes and also have a wider citizenship interest in how services are provided and paid for. Our members provide essential services across local government and therefore welcome the opportunity to contribute information on draft budget.

## **Evidence**

These are tough times for local government. While sometimes the debate around local government finance can seem confused, with claims and counter claims, the people who work in local government and those who rely on those services can see that budgets have been substantially cut and are far from adequate to meet demand from citizens.

Apart from the actual money available it is also important that budgets and the announcements that follow them are clear and easily understood. Recently the budget debates have focused round different claims about budget level, what's the best year to use as a starting point etc. Last year's budget announcement in particular lacked clarity, and it is hoped that this year there will be less spin.

The Scottish Government responds to claims of budget cuts by pointing to specific ring fenced funding announcements and capital spend, but these don't deal with the funding available for the day-to day delivery of services. The continued re-announcing of funding programmes, like moving to 30 hours of free at the point of use childcare and the attainment fund for schools, as well as giving total amounts for 4 years worth of funding across 32 authorities, also gives a false impression to lay people about just how far these monies are expected to spread.

The original budget cut local government allocations by £327m (in real terms). The final budget took £160m off that figure, so the cut is reduced to £167m. However, this conflates revenue and capital funding and it is revenue funding that pays for day to day services, most jobs and pay. The original budget cut revenue funding by £355m and only £130m of the new funding was for revenue – so the revenue cut is reduced to £225m.

On the ground for councils, this meant they started with the £225m revenue cut. This was mitigated by £100m additional revenue from the changes in the council tax bands. They also had the option of mitigating further by increasing the basic rate of council tax by up to the 3% cap, generating up to £70m across Scotland. This leaves a total revenue shortfall of at least £55m.

The Scottish Government allocation is not the total picture. Councils also have what are often called 'unavoidable commitments' – additional spending that the council has no discretion over. The biggest of these this year was the Apprenticeships Levy, which could cost councils a total of around £25m. There will be others, although some of these are covered by ring-fenced grants, such as the living wage in social care. Other ring-fenced grants are for new spending that doesn't help the base line budget.

There needs to be much more transparency about the budgets this year but more importantly the budget needs to be adequate. According to the latest Fraser of Allan Institute report local government spending has been reduced by 9.5% since 2010/11 equivalent to £1billion in real terms. There are 30,000 less people working in local government than a decade ago – 9 out of 10 austerity job cuts are in local government.

On current projections, austerity is planned to continue until up to 2020/21, but the government has made very specific commitments for spending over the next 4 years:

- Increasing funds for the health service by £500million more than inflation
- Doubling free childcare
- Protecting the police budget
- Maintaining free personal and nursing care
- The £750m school attainment fund

Even if we accept that these ring-fenced monies are adequate for the tasks, this means that there will have to be substantial cuts in the rest of the public sector without additional funding. The Fraser of Allander Institute estimates that without additional funding there will be cuts of between 9% and 14% in non protected budgets like local government.

There is no doubt that local government is struggling to deliver services on the current budgets. There is no discussion about how to deal with such substantial budget cuts in Scotland. Instead we have salami slicing of services leaving staff working long hours and skipping breaks trying to maintain services on a shoestring. In order to move beyond the back on forth of budget figures UNISON has undertaken a series of surveys of our members try and get a better understanding of what it's really like on the ground in the public sector.

We have so far undertaken surveys across a eighteen different services across the public sector, in local government we contacted members in homecare, youth work, apprentices, school support staff , ICT staff, waste management, library staff, building control and leisure staff. The message we got back from members in these jobs were strikingly similar:

- Job's have been cut but no work has been reduced
- Members are under enormous stress from both the physical and emotional demands of trying to maintain a quality services without adequate resources.
- It's the more experienced staff that volunteer for redundancy or retire, this means work is now being undertaking by staff with less experience and training and at lower rates of pay. This adds pressure both as experience and training make it easier to do the work and this added to a long pay freeze is leading to a demoralised workforce.

The full set of reports is available [here](#).

Below are a range of quotes from members which give an insight into the challenges they face.

### **Registrars**

- *Several staff have left the department and not been replaced, workload has increased due to changes in legislation but staff expected to provide the same service in the same amount of time*
- *Over the past 6 years we have lost half our staff due to voluntary redundancies and staff finding other jobs and there's roles have not been replaced*
- *Increased responsibilities: increased workload due to staff shortages*
- *More pressure to take as many customers as possible again rushing and not giving the quality of service we have been known for in the past... constantly being watched*

*so that you don't take too long registering a death never mind if the person is distressed or maybe just not taking in what you are saying*

- *I cannot cope with my current workload and when I have to leave the office to conduct a marriage ceremony it holds me back and I also find it difficult to find time to make contact with the bride and groom before conducting the ceremony-poor customer service*
- *More-less staff-very stressed I feel embarrassed to work for this department now as the service is so poor. Extra work no extra pay*
- *Staff are not happy as we are rushed on our feet day in and day out The workload seems to be getting heavier and heavier*
- *Nothing seems to change the service we are in seems to be a knee jerk reaction service rather than a planned one they always seem to say this is exceptional circumstances but these circumstances are going on for years now: when do they stop being exceptional?*

### **Librarians**

- *More work, less time and resources. More and more targets to reach*
- *Diminished standards of service, lack of professional training...*
- *Down to skeleton functions to keep service going*
- *Self teaching expected for most new introductions*
- *They [service users] see staff not properly trained to provide IT and get frustrated*
- *The public are noticing the budget cuts more each year, asking why they pay their council tax when services are being cut so severely. Customers are disgruntled and unhappy with the cuts and services and rightly so*
- *Our employer needs to realise that a demoralised, stressed staff has far reaching consequences beyond just the well being of the staff themselves. My impression is that morale is low, particularly in the libraries where Communities presence is felt more, that staff feel undervalued and that their goodwill is being taken advantages of*
- *More staff would be the first priority, or even just filling the vacant positions in a timely fashion rather than just leaving them empty for months*

### **School staff**

- *Cuts to cleaners hours, same for class room assistants and auxiliaries. Funding for training and trips has ceased. Impacts on staff and pupils, the school is dirty, extra classroom support is missing impacting on the whole class, including the teacher; staff are not learning new skills and are unaware of changes to legislation: pupils are missing out on fun activities and educational trips which previously provided them with a deeper insight and understanding in many subject areas*
- *We have lost a lot of additional needs assistants over the last few years*
- *Technician numbers have been cut*
- *Reduced support hours*
- *Reductions of hours for PSAs and cleaning staff. Hard to cover break and lunch times re supervision of children. Not meeting the needs of children*
- *Stationary, books for children leaning tools, all to be shared and has an impact of learning*
- *Maths resources are woeful, every book has either no front cover, no back cover and pages missing not because of damage to the resources but because the school has not been able to purchase new books*
- *No longer a weekly roast dinner only a formed roast chicken once every four weeks. Prices of gone up significantly frozen bread and rolls instead of fresh*

- *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 stationary for children and also bread, juice etc for nurture children*
- *Well we used to have 5 cleaners now we have 2 cleaners and a supervisor*
- *This year 46 classroom assistant hours have been lost so three staff have gone. More of the office staff are now term time, leaving only one staff member to work during holidays along with the finance officer*

## **Building Control**

- *Too many builders take the easiest option available without following the warrant drawings, if you only see a building once it has been completed then a lot of potentially dangerous construction is hidden.*
- *Visits on site during works are important otherwise it becomes a wallpaper inspection.*
- *It is on site and not in the office that, failing (or avoiding) to meet building regulations, result in consequences for the users or occupiers of buildings.*
- *We have been restricted to 1 morning per week on site. This is wholly insufficient to do our jobs.*
- *While we will never see everything, I now regularly have to sign jobs off when I have seen nothing at all.*
- *People are building without telling the council they started. Builders have got used to there being no available surveyors so they now crack on. When I started in building control that would seldom happen*

## **Conclusion**

Local government delivers essential services to Scotland's citizens. It is a cradle to grave service which plays a vital role in people's everyday lives. The services provided like refuse collection, parks and leisure facilities are as vital to our health and wellbeing as the NHS.

Without adequate investment local government will not be able to meet the needs of citizens. No matter what the UK government decides in its budget, the Scottish government needs to use its full powers to ensure adequate funding to deliver these essential services and decent pay for the workers that the services rely on.

## **For further information, please contact:**

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