



## for our **PUBLIC SERVICES**

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UNISON Scotland manifesto  
for the UK General Election  
December 2019

## This election matters

Almost all of UNISON Scotland's members work in areas which are devolved to the Scottish Parliament, rather than the Westminster Parliament, that is the subject of this election. Even so, with Westminster still having a huge influence over the overall levels of public spending in Scotland, the results of this election will have a huge impact on UNISON members' lives both at work and in the community.

The Conservatives want this election to be all about Brexit. Important as that is, our members are facing many other issues that will be being voted on. Reserved issues include overall public spending levels, most economic policy, much welfare spending and their rights at work.

In this manifesto we set out the issues that UNISON members will expect the political parties to address in the coming election. It should be read in conjunction with the UNISON UK manifesto.



**Mike Kirby, UNISON Scottish Secretary:**

***"Public services are central to the quality of life of our citizens. Not only are public services essential to those in need: they are the glue that holds our society together."***

***"Public services are the foundation of a fair society, without them economic strength and social cohesion are impossible. Their importance only increases in times of economic crisis. It is the future of those services and that of the people who deliver them that is UNISON's focus in this election."***

## Undoing the damage

UNISON has conducted a series of surveys of our members working in public services. These reached beyond the politicking about figures to show the impact of the budget levels on services. What we see in these surveys are an overworked, underpaid and stressed workforce trying hard to deliver quality services without adequate funding.

Cuts are placing enormous strain on staff. The majority of members report that their workload is growing. Many are working unpaid hours and skip breaks to try and maintain a quality service. Staff have also experienced a year on year real terms pay cut. Morale is very low. Staff feel undervalued and exhausted by the efforts they put in to maintain services.

'Protecting the front line' has been a false economy. The loss of admin and support staff means many front line staff spend time on admin tasks when they should be focusing on other parts of their jobs.

Salami-slicing of services avoids headlines but the long years of austerity are having a severe impact on our services and the staff trying to deliver them with limited resources. Scottish Parliament research on the social impact of local government budgets shows that councils make most of their savings from services which are used more by lower income groups. There is no doubt that the long term financial sustainability of public services and local government in particular is under threat.

By itself an aging population will be a challenge for our services. This challenge alongside the long decade of austerity is creating a substantial squeeze on services. We need a government that will invest in services and give citizens the high quality services they deserve.

## Paying for what we need

The last ten years have seen massive cuts in public spending, huge public sector redundancies and pay restraints across public services on an unprecedented scale. The impact cuts have been felt by the poor and disadvantaged, while Government in both Holyrood and Westminster have prioritised tax cuts for businesses. The market has consistently failed to deliver the infrastructure required for a successful economy. Public transport, roads, an educated and healthy population, a fair and binding legal system - all require public investment and direction.

The fairest way to raise the money needed to deliver services is through a progressive tax system. Taxes are not an add-on to civilised country but an essential component, a civic duty as well as a legal necessity.

We need a progressive tax system that raises enough money to pay for public services. A progressive tax system will also reduce the high levels of inequality that do so much harm to our society. This means a significant increase in current tax rates for rich. Too often the tax debate focuses on income tax. In order to ensure that we all pay our fair

share, all forms of wealth need to be taxed. Our current system taxes wages more highly than other forms of income leaving ordinary workers bearing an unfair burden. This means taxing property and other forms of unearned income like dividends. Businesses benefit significantly from public spending they need to pay their fair share towards their provision.

We need to be serious about tackling tax avoidance and ensure that taxes are paid by both individuals and businesses. Companies using aggressive tax avoidance measures should be excluded from all public procurement. We believe only companies who have shown a commitment to meet their social responsibilities, by signing up to the Fair Tax Mark or similar should qualify for contracts. Companies should be able to demonstrate they are operating within both the letter and spirit of the law at all times without use of artificial tax avoidance schemes or tax havens to reduce tax liabilities.

## Pay and Employment Rights

People need services and staff need to be properly paid for delivering them. For almost a decade workers in public services have been experiencing a real terms decline in the value of their wages. Cost of living rises this year do nothing to address that injustice – nor impact on the spiralling levels of personal debt undertaken to maintain living standards.

This makes economic sense. 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. Investment in public services should also mean investment in the staff who deliver them.

We support the principles outlined by the Scottish Government's Fair Work convention - that work should provide opportunity, fulfilment, security, respect and effective voice. We want to see Government in both Edinburgh and London putting these principles into practice.

A new government must address insecurity at work: tackling zero-hours contracts, a big increase in the National Minimum Wage alongside beefing up enforcement. Government should promote collective and sectoral bargaining. Fairness at work cannot be separated from workers organising collectively and being allowed to do so effectively. The current legal framework across the UK hampers that process. That needs to change with the legal restrictions on unions replaced with legislation based on the Institute for Employment's Charter for Workers Rights. Ideally these rights would be administered from Holyrood.

## Wellbeing at work

Just as the value of wages has declined, so for many people has the quality of their working life. Decreasing staff numbers and increasing workloads have ratcheted up stress and other work related illnesses.

We need to see a strengthening of health and safety protections and enforcement to ensure that bad employers cannot get away with ignoring the health, safety and welfare of staff. Issues including mental health and the symptoms faced by menopausal women need to be part of comprehensive occupational health programmes whose aim is maintaining staff wellbeing rather than coercing the unwell back to work.

## The world outside work

### ■ Child poverty / Universal Credit

Almost a quarter of children in Scotland live in poverty. Without clear and focused action more and more children will fall below the official poverty line. These are children who will miss out on the things that others take for granted: a dry, warm place to live, enough to eat, the equipment and clothing needed to fully participate in education and all the fun activities like sports, music tuition and outings that let children grow to reach their full potential.

Children having lives blighted by poverty is not inevitable. We can and must end child poverty. We need a government that invests in public services, that enables the creation of well-paid secure jobs and introduces a decent benefits system that supports, rather than punishes, children and families. Universal Credit is clearly not working.

Eradicating poverty not only benefits those living in poverty but means that as a society we can all benefit from a fair economy and the strong communities that we can build. Preventing harm is also substantially cheaper than paying to fix things. There is huge potential to make savings in health, education and criminal justice spending by building a just and equal society.

## **Pensions**

UNISON has supported the WASPI women and will continue to oppose further rises to the state pension age. That more of us are living longer is a positive for our society. The issue is not that too many people are living too long – it is that too many of society's resources are in too few hands.

## **Housing**

Scotland faces a massive crisis in the availability, the cost and the quality of our housing. There were more than 150,000 people on local authority housing waiting lists across Scotland in March this year almost the same figure as four years ago. We need a government prepared to make the necessary massive investment in building and refurbishing housing – primarily for social rent.

## **Brexit**

UNISON raised many concerns about the dangers of Brexit during the 2016 referendum, when we campaigned strongly for Remain. Since the Brexit vote, we have continued to speak up loudly to defend public services, workers' rights and the interests of our many members who hail from other EU countries.

Our priorities have been to protect workers' rights and trade union rights; to make sure public services, economic growth and living standards are maintained; to keep public services out of any new Free Trade Deals, including protecting them from further privatisation; and to maintain EU citizens' rights, equalities and human rights. The UK Government's Brexit deal announced in October failed on our tests. It would risk every workplace right, with our public services left exposed and vulnerable - including the outrage of US President Donald Trump getting access to our precious health service, disastrous for families the length and breadth of the UK. We urge all political parties and candidates to guarantee they will not accept a no deal Brexit and will give people a vote on a new negotiated deal.

## **Trade deals**

UNISON believes that free trade deals are a threat to public services. We oppose undemocratic corporate courts, where private companies can potentially overturn legitimate government policies through Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) processes. Trade agreements should work for people, with workers' rights, sustainable and ethical trade policies protected. They must not be used to ride rough shod over existing standards. ISDS should be removed from existing trade deals and should not be included in any new deals. We want political parties to give guarantees on trade justice and on protecting our public services from corporate vultures around the world. Candidates can be asked if they support the Trade Justice Scotland Coalition's principles for just trade deals.

## **Climate emergency**

We face a climate emergency – a clear and present dangerous global health and safety risk. This election gives us the chance to vote for politicians who are committed to the transformation needed, through a Just Transition to a net zero economy.

People and planet cannot afford for us to keep cutting public services to the bone when massive green investment is needed, including preventative spending to reap the benefits from warmer homes, excellent transport networks and green energy and infrastructure fit for the changing climate. Working people and those least well off must not be forced to pay for the climate crisis, just as we paid for the banking crisis.

### **Questions for candidates**

*Suggested questions for members to ask candidates:*

- *If elected as my MP, how will you ensure there is investment in public services?*
- *How will you ensure my pay makes up lost ground in the next parliament?*
- *What improvements do you want to see made to peoples rights at work?*
- *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?*
- *What will you do to ensure people get a chance to vote on any deal to leave the EU?*