



# Local Government

for a fairer Scotland

April 2016

**Manifesto  
Election 2016**

**UNISON**  
*Scotland*

## Local Government for a fairer Scotland

Scotland's councils deliver the services upon which we all rely. From childcare to care for our elderly and vulnerable, 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.

Local government services have borne the brunt of austerity and this must stop. Of the 50,000 jobs cut in the public sector in recent years 40,000 have been in local Government. The next round of cuts will be worse for local government with thousands more job losses planned.

This year local government across Scotland will be expected to make £500m worth of cuts, in real terms. This is simply unsustainable – both in terms of service delivery and impact on staff. Redundancy up until now has 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 both unfair, inefficient and will lead to poorer services.

Services need to be funded properly and the Scottish Government should use all of the means at its disposal including its tax raising powers to ensure that local government is funded adequately to deliver the services that Scotland needs.

Funding services properly means paying the staff who deliver those services properly. Wages for staff in local government have suffered in dramatic drop in real terms since the financial crash in 2008. This needs to be tackled urgently by councils and the Scottish Government, local government needs investment and that includes investing in fair pay for those who deliver the services.

The Conservative Government's (Anti) Trade Union Bill is an attack on workers in local government's right to organise and campaign, for themselves and for a fairer society. We welcome the cross party condemnation this Bill has received. Should this Bill pass the Scottish Government should refuse, and support councils in refusing, to comply with any of its provisions that fall within their remit.

There has been good progress in recent years in Scotland in securing the Scottish Living Wage for workers in local government. This needs to be extended by using public procurement, not just on wages, but by driving up employment standards generally. The community and voluntary sector has too often been viewed as a cheap alternative to health and local government. Properly funded procurement policies should be used to deliver better standards for the third sector workforce. The abuse of limited hours contracts must be tackled and those commissioning services should use their influence to promote the Ethical Care Charter and in tackling poor health and safety in the sector. A commitment needs to be made to ensure that the integration of Health and community Care does not become a vehicle for further outsourcing and is focussed on delivering better care rather than cheaper care.

Alongside the reductions of funding there has been a tendency towards centralisation. We believe that local democracy needs to be reinvigorated and welcome the work done by CoSLA's Commission on Local Democracy. Any reform or change to local government needs to be focused on making services responsive to citizens. The Christie Commission suggested bottom up change. This means involving staff as partners in designing structures and systems, not as bystanders expected to make things work afterwards.

## Funding Local Government Fairly

We welcome an end to the Council Tax freeze that left us with a regime overly reliant on charges and has undermined local democracy and accountability. This starvation of resources has to be reversed.

Reform of local taxation is long overdue. Councils should raise more of their own funding and have control over business rates. A property-based tax is the best way to fund local services. Parties in the Scottish





Parliament need to consider the work done by the Local Taxation Commission and work together to create a fair local property tax.

The recent scandal round PFI Schools in Edinburgh shows one weakness of the PFI model of funding and building infrastructure. We believe that PFI whether labelled as PPP or NPD or Hubco is an inefficient method of delivering infrastructure projects. The inquiry into the failings in Edinburgh should be widened to include all projects built using this method including considering how to make the costs more transparent.

As set out in our 'Combating Austerity' report, the Scottish Government should support councils to buy back PPP/ PFI etc projects, using historically low interest rates to refinance borrowing.

Scotland urgently needs a programme which will improve the availability and the quality of social housing, including a substantial council house building programme. Tackling fuel poverty and strengthening tenants' rights in the private rented sector, including introducing rent controls are a necessary part of the housing strategy we need. UNISON Scotland has outlined how this can be done in our paper Funding and Building the Homes Scotland Needs. Making use of pension funds needs for stable long term investment and the demand for affordable rented housing makes it feasible for a great deal of investment to be done without massive public borrowing.

## Questions for Candidates

- What are you going to do to stop the cuts to Local Government?
- Most local government staff have seen a more than 10% decline in the value of their wages in the last seven years. What will you do about that?
- Do you support the buying back of PFI/PPP/NPD projects by councils?
- How will you make councils more democratic and responsive?
- Do you support unfreezing of the council tax, and the creation of a fair property tax to improve funding for local government?

For further information contact

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