



**UNISON Scotland consultation response.
Scottish Parliament Local Government and
Communities Committee
Workforce Planning**

Introduction

UNISON Scotland is the largest trade union representing members in Scottish local government. We welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to the committee's thematic budget scrutiny, focussing on the issue of workforce planning in local government.

Workforce planning is the process that organisations use to make sure that they have the right people with the right skills in the right place at the right time. To create the workforce plan, organisations need to consult with staff, unions and managers, use internal information and past experience to develop thinking and then look forward, to shape the new workforce structure.

Impact on local authority workforces of financial restraint

Local government has taken the brunt of austerity in Scotland. Council revenue funding from the Scottish Government has fallen in real terms by 9.6 per cent between 2010/11 and 2018/19¹. We have set out the financial impact on councils in previous submissions to the committee². This is not simply a question of cuts in the Scottish Government budget allocations, but also the increasing demands on councils. We highlight some of the service impacts reported by our branches in our latest cuts impact briefing³.

Austerity has had a disproportionate impact on the local government workforce⁴. 2009 was the first full year after the crash when staffing numbers fell in line with budget cuts. Devolved public sector jobs have fallen by around 31,000 since the end of 2009 (allowing for transfers out). Over this period, (with same transfers) local government has now lost around 29,000 jobs, which means 9 out of 10 austerity job losses have been in local government. There was a welcome, if modest, recovery last year with an increase of 720 jobs.

There is very little strategic discussion on how to deal with such substantial budget cuts in Scotland, or in local government. 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 debate on budget figures, UNISON Scotland has undertaken a series of surveys of our members to try and get a better understanding of what it's really like on the ground.

We have so far undertaken surveys across twenty different services across the public sector. In local government we contacted members in homecare, youth work, apprentices, school support

¹ Accounts Commission 2018 overview - http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2018/nr_180405_local_government.pdf

² <http://www.unison-scotland.org/library/draft-budget-2018-19-local-gov-cmtt-oct-2017.pdf>

³ <http://www.unison-scotland.org/library/Bargaining-Briefing-Cuts-Impact-Jan-2018.pdf>

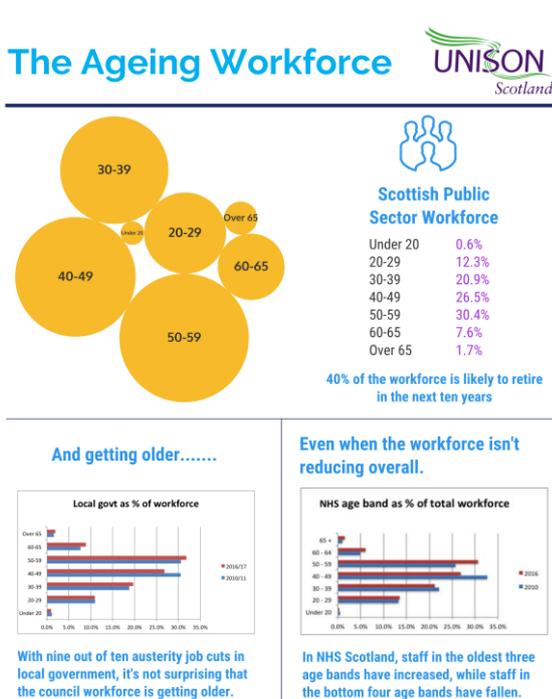
⁴ <http://www.unison-scotland.org/library/ebrief-workforce-stats-2018.pdf>

staff, ICT staff, waste management, library staff, planning, building control, leisure staff, sheltered housing and most recently in trading standards. The message we got back from members in these jobs were strikingly similar:

- Jobs 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, which means work is now being undertaken 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 coupled with pay restraint is leading to a demoralised workforce⁵.

Ageing Workforce

The committee will be well aware that we are on average living longer, even if averages hide huge inequalities. However, we are also working longer and the workforce is getting older. By 2020, one in three workers in the UK will be over 50 and the number working past the State Pension Age (SPA) has doubled since 2000.



Research published⁶ by UNISON Scotland last year shows that the average age of the public sector worker in Scotland is 45. There has been a small increase in the number of staff working past the State Retirement Age. The largest growing age band as a proportion of the workforce is the 50-60 age group. This means that around 40% of the public sector workforce in Scotland is likely to retire within ten years. That has huge consequences for service delivery.

As local government has borne the brunt of austerity, it is therefore not surprising that this is an ageing workforce, as this infographic shows. However, very few councils have strategies in place to address the ageing workforce. At best, we are still at the awareness raising stage.

There are also health and safety implications of this change. While there is no evidence that older workers are at greater risk in the workplace, there

are some age-related factors. Older workers are at marginally higher risk from slips and falls; physical strength and stamina declines with age; as does sight and hearing. However, we could produce a different list of risks with younger workers.

We therefore need to respond to the challenges and opportunities of an ageing workforce as we would for any other safety risk. By risk assessment and if necessary by redesigning jobs to reflect age factors.

⁵ <http://www.unison-scotland.org/2018/02/21/local-government-pay-claim-feb-2018/>

⁶ <http://www.unison-scotland.org/library/Bargaining-Briefing-87-ageing-workforce.pdf>

Overall, as part of workforce planning, we need to change workplace culture to regard older workers as a positive gain to the workforce. This starts by raising awareness and developing a strategy. Such strategies need to recognise the health and safety implications - always remembering that work needs treatment too, not just the worker.

Workforce planning

Workforce planning in Scottish local government is generally very limited, at best local and largely ad-hoc. There is some national discussion with specific professions, or when a recruitment crisis highlights specific difficulties, such as planning. There is little strategic engagement with workforce representatives across the sector.

Workforce planning should be a feature of community planning given the need to integrate services. It should include staff across the public sector and those in the voluntary and private sectors who deliver public services.



The Improvement Service offers ⁷ some support to councils in undertaking workforce planning. They correctly identify that to be fully effective, workforce planning needs to include longer term thinking about future service provision. Councils and their partners then need to put strategies in place to link service, financial and change management priorities alongside people plans.

Audit Scotland published⁸ a good practice in workforce planning guide in 2014. Councils including Fife, East Ayrshire⁹ and West Lothian have developed local guides. Others use the CIPD¹⁰ guidance.

Effective workforce planning requires access to good workforce data. This is limited in Scottish local government to high level data on

numbers employed. Our experience of collating data across the sector for a variety of initiatives, demonstrates that councils often struggle to produce even the most basic workforce data. In some councils the data is only held at departmental level and because every council has a different structure, it is very difficult to put together a national picture.

Figure 1- CIPD main steps

⁷ <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/workforce-planning.html>

⁸ http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/central/2013/nr_131128_public_sector_workforce_guide.pdf

⁹ <https://www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/Resources/PDF/H/Workforce-Development-Plan.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/strategy/organisational-development/workforce-planning-practice>

Care sector

The one part of the local government workforce that has received workforce planning attention is social care. The Scottish Government and COSLA have published¹¹ Part 2 of the National Health and Social Care Workforce Plan, which covers social care in Scotland.

Workforce planning in the social care sector has many more challenges than in NHS Scotland, which constitutes Part 1 of these plans. These include the fragmented range of providers, together with the absence of strong institutional structures that bring the sector together. This is reflected in the seven recommendations in the report that are largely focused on the process measures required to start workforce planning in the sector. UNISON welcomes this as a start in the right direction, although somewhat short of the measures we argued for in our submission¹² to the consultation.

As in the rest of local government there is only limited workforce data. There are around 200,000 workers across the whole care sector, employed by over 14,000 providers. These are already suffering from high vacancy rates and staff turnover rates of around 25% are not untypical. It has been estimated that Scotland will need some 65,000 additional health and care workers by 2022. Workforce planning measures are urgently required to address this issue.

Pay and conditions in the sector are poor, although the living wage for adult care workers is an important step forward. Employment practices are also notoriously poor with the prevalence of zero or nominal hour contracts. There is also gender segregation with men making up only 15% of the social care workforce and only 3% of the early years workforce. One of the barriers in attracting young men into the sector is the prevalence of part-time working. The gender pay gap is also an issue here.

Workforce planning also needs to recognise the role of training and development. This includes a review of traditional planning links to the numbers of student places to ensure a supply of qualified staff. Some work has been undertaken on competence frameworks and common training modules, although as yet this has not reached the level recommended in the Christie Commission report.

There are significant risks for health and social care workforce planning from Brexit and we have outlined these in evidence to the External Relations Committee¹³. Our interviews with UNISON members who are EU nationals indicate that many are planning to leave the UK and the supply of new immigrants is reducing. Amongst other measures, we have argued for the devolution of immigration powers on the Quebec model.

It is important to emphasise that many of the labour market issues facing the health and care sector pre-date Brexit. We have outlined these to the Health and Sport Committee on several occasions. Brexit will simply exacerbate these problems.

To meet the demands of the planned expansion of early years and childcare provision, Scotland needs to recruit up to 20,000 extra staff. Skills Development Scotland has undertaken some

¹¹ <http://www.unison-scotland.org/library/ebrief-social-care-workforce-planning.pdf>

¹² <http://www.unison-scotland.org/library/health-and-care-workforce-planning-response.pdf>

¹³ <http://www.unison-scotland.org/2018/01/25/impact-eu-exit-health-care/>

workforce planning¹⁴ for this, although the focus is on training. Sadly, the report barely mentions pay as the route to attracting people to the sector and despite the fact that half the current workforce work part-time, doesn't seem to acknowledge that perhaps the same proportion of new recruits will want to do that as well. UNISON has long argued¹⁵ that there is a real risk of a substantial staff shortage.

A new approach

A new approach to workforce planning is required across the public sector, including local government. Service integration means that this can no longer be undertaken in silos. Effective workforce planning requires a range of policy interventions and structural approaches. These could include:

- While UNISON generally opposes the centralisation of services, we recognise that in a country the size of Scotland there is a case for national staffing frameworks, which include workforce planning.
- These would include widening the scope from the narrow group of professions currently included in central planning.
- A detailed review of workforce data, with the aim of increasing the quality and quantity of data that would enable meaningful comparison across authorities.
- Take account of public service reform and changing workforce roles.
- Cutting administrative support is a false economy, leaving other operational staff to perform these functions, usually not as competently. Investment in IT systems and equipment also impacts on workforce planning.
- Structurally, in care at least, the fragmentation of providers has to be addressed. In the meantime, there is a need for a forum that engages the care sector more strongly than current plans envisage.
- Training providers should also be included in the planning process.
- No amount of workforce planning will work unless we value the workforce. Paying them properly with fair work principles being delivered through collective bargaining, and procurement. That will also help to address gender segregation.

Conclusion

Workforce planning in local government needs to be viewed in the context of wider public service delivery. At present it is largely a local and ad-hoc approach, which is simply inadequate for the challenges created by austerity and will not cope with future demand. It is time to develop a more coordinated approach as set out above.

UNISON Scotland
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¹⁴ <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/43127/early-learning-and-childcare-sip-digital.pdf>

¹⁵ <http://www.unison-scotland.org/2016/12/16/expansion-early-learning-childcare/>