

Property Tax Winners

A new [survey](#) undertaken by MORI on behalf of Scotland's first Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy should give politicians some confidence in addressing how to pay for local government.

The key findings include:

- Two out of three Scots would be willing to pay more in council tax if they could be guaranteed that the money raised was to be spent on local services such as schools and care for older people.
- More than seven in ten people feel that one size does not fit all in terms of service delivery and that local services should be delivered in ways that meet the needs of local people in their area.
- Less than half of people think that councils have enough money to deliver the services that they think their community needs.

This shows that the public understand that decent services have to be funded properly and fairly. The current council tax freeze is simply a sticking plaster on reform and worse, it is a regressive measure that favours the wealthiest households. We need to move forward and agree decent funding for essential services.

UNISON recently published a [paper](#) outlining our support for a new local property tax. This week new research from [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) indicates that a move to a new property tax would actually lead to most people paying less to raise the same amount on money currently collected in Council tax. Scotland needs to sort out a fair way to fund local government.

JRF modelled on the impact on household bills of a new property tax across England,



sadly the results of Scotland's 2011 census are lagging behind those from England so they were unable to include Scottish households. Hopefully the data will be available soon. None the less they still make useful reading for those interested in a new fairer tax to pay for local government services.

Key findings

- A progressive property tax would reduce the size of median gross bills by £279 per year
- Almost 2/3 of households would see bills fall
- The gross medium bills for the poorest tenth of households would reduce by £202, the top tenth would see bills rise by £184

Under a model which keeps the same charge across the country bills would rise across all incomes in London. UNISON believes that councils should be able to set their own rates so areas with higher property values could set a lower rate per pound to protect the less well off.

It really is time to set a new fairer tax.

Three things to do today:

- [Learn about health and care integration](#)
- [Read about welfare reform](#)
- [Ask a friend to join](#)

Good Data

The [Office for National Statistics](#) (ONS) is the best source of statistics for campaigners. Recent updates include comparable official statistics for the four nations of the UK. Here are a few snippets from the social indicators.

- England was the wealthiest country of Great Britain with a median total household wealth of £238,600. This compared with £231,500 in Wales and £182,500 in Scotland. But Scotland has fewer low income households
- The proportion of children living in households where income is below the relative poverty threshold (before housing costs) was highest in Wales and Northern Ireland, both at 23%. This compared with 18% in England and 17% in Scotland.
- Scots still die earlier, have poor healthy life expectancy (particularly men)
- Scots are educated to a higher level but we also have more people with no qualifications.

There are reports on a range of areas e.g. children, education, labour market, health and social care population and travel. You can browse by area or theme. Using these will ensure your data is up to date and accurate.

Don't Get Old or Sick

The care of older people in Scotland is a national disgrace. Fairly paid, well-trained staff on proper contracts with time to care is the very least older people in our communities have a right to expect. UNISON Scotland has published a new survey of care staff, 'Scotland – It's Time to Care'.

Our research- including focus groups and a survey of care workers last year showed a deeply disturbing picture of care in Scotland.

A focus group with a group of care workers asked those who were on zero-hours or nominal-hours contracts, "Would you raise health and safety issues with your employer?" They said, "We're on these contracts. If we raise health and safety issues, we will not be asked back."

That is exactly the position that colleagues were in with blacklisting. We also asked "What if you saw care abuse?", they said, "We'd be pretty reluctant to raise that as well, to be honest, for the same reason."

Scared to raise concerns

People on zero-hours or nominal-hours contracts who raise difficult questions do not get asked back, and people are concerned about that.

The majority of workers believe the service is not sufficient to meet the needs of the elderly and vulnerable people they care for – both from the time they can spend and the quality of care they can provide. Almost half of carers (44%) said they were limited to specific times to spend with their clients.

One in two workers are not reimbursed for travelling between client visits, while three in four said they expected the situation to get worse over the coming year. They also revealed that one in ten are on zero hours contracts.

Time to do more than just deliver a few manual tasks was important to staff and the people they care for. As one worker put it, "By doing the best that we can with the time given. I'll admit I sometimes miss out a job so that I can sit for two minutes with the person receiving care. That means more to them than the dishes needing dried."

Zero hours

Adequate training is another concern, particularly for newly appointed younger staff. One said: "Staff are not receiving the training they need to carry out their roles, only the training which is low cost or has been identified as core."

All of this adds up to staff stress and higher turnover that results in limited continuity of care. As another worker put it: "I feel the staff in our organisation are paid pretty poorly for the standard of work they are expected to provide. This means we often have difficulty in recruitment and cannot attract a quantity and more importantly a 'quality' of staff. It can be hard to keep experienced, well-trained staff as staff shortages and low wages lead to overwork, stress and dissatisfaction to a point where employees resign."

Procurement action should include a requirement that all care provision should mandate:

- The Scottish Living Wage: this will help the recruitment and retention of staff and support continuity of care;
- Improved training: to ensure that care is delivered by properly qualified staff;
- Proper employment standards: ending the abuse of zero and nominal hour contracts;
- Adequate time to care in every care visit.

Scotland's older people and others, who rely on our care services, deserve better.

Private Failure

The recent failures and subsequent closure of the private Hamilton School in Aberdeen show the important role that public services play in protecting us all. While many who opt for private over public provision don't think they use the public sector its clear that their taxes turn out to be great value when things go wrong.

Investigations by the Care Inspectorate, Police Scotland and Education Scotland uncovered serious risks to children at the school which led to its immediate closure. Not only have these public bodies stepped in and removed the children from a risky situation, the local authority has taken the costly step of opening a building and providing teachers for those children to ensure that there is as little disruption to their education as possible. The [report](#) from Education Scotland is breathtaking and concludes that:

"Due to the extreme and serious management failings, along with the endemic, negative ethos within the school, HM Inspectors are not confident that children at the Hamilton School and Nursery are safe. In addition, the wellbeing and welfare of staff is of major concern.

HM Inspectors recommend that the Registrar for Independent Schools takes immediate and serious action with regard to The Hamilton School including reviewing its registration as an Independent School."

The myth of the efficiency and effectiveness of private delivery is well and truly quashed.

Where the private sector fails to deliver essential services the public sector has to step in. This is why everyone must pay a fair share of taxes. You never know when you may need to call on public services, even when you explicitly opt out and choose a private provider, you may, like the parents of Hamilton, school be very glad that the public sector came to your rescue.

Welfare Reform

The Improvement Service has undertaken a [literature review](#) in order to shed some light on the impact of welfare reform on public services in Scotland. While the findings make bleak reading in terms of the impact on people's incomes the review found no studies attempting to assess the likely impact on demand for services. This work is urgent: authorities need to plan for such fundamental change.



The three main figures given vary:

- £2bn per year from the Scottish Government
- £1.6bn from Sheffield Hallam University
- £780m from Local Government Forum Against poverty

But all point to a significant amount of spending power coming out of the economy. This will clearly impact on public services. It will increase demand for some services while income from other services that authorities charge for may also fall as people cut back.

Public services urgently need better information on the impact of welfare reform on public sector delivery. The lack of information will impact on planning and preparation leading to higher costs in long run when demand appears or income falls.

Discussions between COSLA and the Scottish Government are being taken forward about the possibility of undertaking this research. This needs urgent attention.



Managing demand

The now famous "[jaws of doom graph](#)" highlights the gap between growing demand for local government services and falling funding to pay for those services. Given the lack of political will to increase funding nationally and the council tax freeze locally, authorities are focusing on routes to cut that demand.

Following up on last year's Beyond the Nudge the RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) has produced a new paper: [Managing Demand](#). This looks at the emerging science of demand management which is changing behaviours and using the values of service users to effect change. It gives examples of this in practice. The aim is to change the relationship between citizens and services.

"What motivates people and what do they value?"

There are an interesting range of case studies on community budgeting in Cheshire, Whole System Whole Place in Oldham, Cambridgeshire's Chronically Excluded Adult Services and increasing the number of foster carers in Buckinghamshire.

Rather than focusing on cutting costs, different shift patterns and IT programmes in cleansing departments some authorities have been working with citizens to change behaviour to cut down on litter, increase proper recycling and stopping fly tipping. Working in partnership with Keep Britain Tidy, some authorities conducted an experiment. For 48 hours they only

cleaned one side of certain parks and streets. They used photographs and videos and local media to document and publicise the scale of the problems and highlighted how much was spent every year clearing up rubbish dumped in the streets. This was linked to council budgets. They then supported community clean-ups to sort out the mess.

"Develop interventions that go with how they think and behave not against"

This highlighted the cost to communities and allowed workers to engage with people to understand the problems better and so develop ways make it easier to do the right thing.

Demand management requires insight into communities:

- Why people make certain decisions or behave in ways which cause problems for themselves and others
- The influence of social networks and norms
- Understand what motivates people and what they value
- Develop interventions that go with how they think and behave not against

What the theory seems to be drawing together is tackling failure demand both within authorities and communities and empowering communities to set priorities and design solutions. So instead of the costs of fixing things councils can deliver what people want and need.

Health and Care Integration

As health and care integration moves forward in Scotland, UNISON activists from our local government and health committees visited Belfast to talk to workers there about their integrated system. In 1971 local authorities in Northern Ireland were stripped of a range of powers and responsibility for care services came under remit of the Department of Health. Despite the differences in structures workers find themselves facing very similar challenges to those in Scotland: budget cuts, privatisation, low pay in the care sector, growing workload in terms of both volumes and range of tasks that care workers are expected to undertake, a race to the bottom in terms and conditions and the increasing use of third sector organisation to deliver services leading to pressure on pay and poorer terms and conditions across the sector.

Working in the health service has not protected care workers from low pay or privatisation. Even direct health services are increasingly at risk of privatisation.

Shared services are being introduced and creating the same issues as they have elsewhere. IT sys-



tems are not able to cope with the complexity of shift work. Staff wages are either being paid, are wrong, and holiday entitlement is mis-recorded or lost.

Despite officially following the UK partnership model the Health and Social Care trade union rep was removed from the commissioning board following accusations of breaching confidentiality. Unions have not been allowed to appoint a replacement. There are no trade union seats on the Trusts' boards.

Integration has not promoted a social model of health, the medical model still predominates with funding and care heavily focused on hospitals and medical services. This leaves NI facing the same chronic health issues as Scotland. Despite almost forty years of working in the same services the professional disciplines remain separate.

Both UNISON NI and UNISON Scotland emphasised the importance of personal relationships rather than structures in making multi-disciplinary teams work.

Regional Organisers will be organising meetings with branches and services group chairs to support members during the change.

The Great Rip Off

Serco and G4S have been forced to pay back £179m after they were caught overcharging us for tagging offenders. Overcharging remains under investigation by the Serious Fraud office. Its not the famed cost saving efficiency we are promised by the those who promote outsourcing and privatisation.

Currently G4S are banned from applying for government contracts. As Mark Wallace wrote in the Guardian *"the remarkable thing about the ban on G4S applying for contracts isn't that they were banned across government— its that anyone should need telling that its unwise to hire a company which has so grievously let you down before"*.

A government minder has been appointed to check their behaviour in the future. You wonder how badly they would have to behave to lose all their contracts and the work come back in house.

If like BT they are no longer able to make a profit they may pull out themselves. The troubled joint



venture between BT and Liverpool council is finally at an end. We previously [covered](#) the problems the council had with BT when an internal report was leaked to the Liverpool Echo.

Following this the council negotiated £5million of savings per year. Moving forward the council needed to cut costs further but BT felt it was better to withdraw than meet the savings required. So the partnership has been scrapped three years early.

Once again promised savings have not been realised. The private sector gets to walk away and the public sector is left to pick up the pieces.

If you would like more information on any of the articles in this newsletter or have information you would like to share in the next issue please contact: [Kay Sillars](#) in the Bargaining and Campaigns team on 0141 342 2819 k.sillars@unison.co.uk



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