

## Loving the Local Again

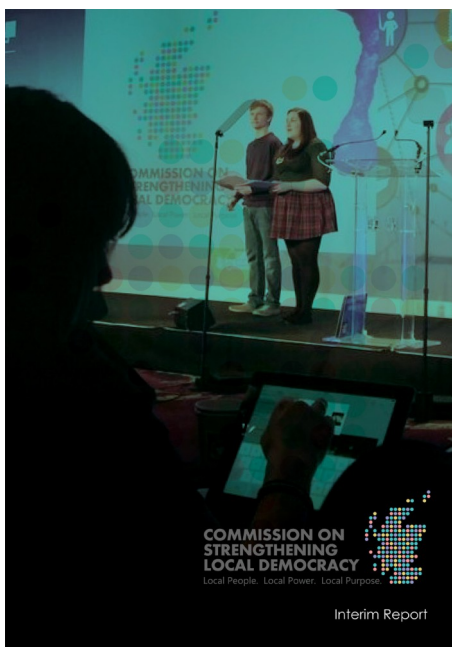
The Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy has published its interim [report](#). The report makes it clear that local democracy is under pressure as a result of “a fifty year trend” centralising power and functions in Scotland. The Commission highlights the following as the key implications from evidence they have received:

- Definite loss of trust and confidence and participation in democracy: disadvantaged communities that need the most representation are least able to participate.
- The link between representative and participatory democracy has become hard to bridge because of the gap between the scale of representative institutions and the community base for participation.
- Big government and big local government have struggled to address inequalities because they occur at a “granular local community level”. Big systems also struggle to engage with the diversity of Scotland’s communities because they are so geared to uniformity and standardisation.

The Commission suggests that to move forward:

- Scotland needs to change the way it thinks about democracy
- Strong democracy is both participatory and representative
- Services and decision making must fit communities
- Improving outcomes requires fiscal empowerment

The report focuses on democracy and delivering real change in communities rather than local government structures. It also gives a good overview of how local democracy operates elsewhere. What it also highlights is how uniform local government functions, responsibilities and electoral mechanisms are across Scotland. Many other countries operate very different mechanisms and responsibilities across villages,



towns and cities Scotland has historically operated with councils as a model for local democracy but the picture internationally is much more varied with directly elected officials like sheriffs and district attorneys, executive politicians, mayors and commissioners and a range of directly elected assemblies and corporate bodies.

As highlighted in various reports Scotland has a very low numbers of locally elected representatives.

Scotland is at the low end of the international scale for local power over raising and spending money: the figure is about 20%. Internationally 40-50% is more common.

There is only one local tax in Scotland while internationally many can call on a range of taxes. Some can also raise capital through borrowing and issuing bonds. The second section of the report looks at delivering decentralisation and empowering community governance. The Commission’s next steps will be generating further discussion and through that the production of a road map for change.

Three things to do today:

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

## What Works

Two Universities, Glasgow and Edinburgh have won £3m from the ESRC and the Scottish Government to deliver the **What Works Scotland Initiative (WWS)**.

This three year project will bring together Professor Nicolas Watson Chair of Disability Studies at Glasgow University and Professor James Mitchell Edinburgh University professor of Public Policy with Community Planning Partnerships and other stakeholders to “create evaluate and communicate the evidence of what works in delivering the Scottish model of public service delivery.”

WWS aims to take a different approach by building on the strengths and assets in communities rather than perceived problems. The Improvement Service quotes John Swinney as saying:

“I have great hopes for WWS in deepening and scaling up the Scottish approach to public service delivery and reform. I believe that it will provide the strong strategic direction needed to translate reform evidence to practical reality,”

The Scottish team will also work closely with other **What Works** centres across the rest of the UK. Work will start this summer

## Glasgow: A Future City

**G**lasgow City Council is one of the pilot Future Cities. A project aiming to improve life in cities through use of new technology. Examples include the development of apps to allow you to contact/use council services and developing motion sensors for street lights so they only come on when people are actually about. Glasgow is also working on “making data free and open to everyone”

### Easy access to data

Public bodies in Scotland collect and collate enormous amounts of data. [Open Glasgow](#) is attempting to make this data easily accessible to anyone who wants to use it.

*“Glasgow opens up information that defines Scotland’s largest city. The groundbreaking approach allows easy access to the data generated by countless Glasgow stories”*

Clearly this involves more than just taking down the firewalls to the internal council system. The Open Glasgow website hosts a range of data sets which users can view, download and adapt to suit their needs. You can also request datasets be added. The hope is that citizens can drive change through using information to design practical solutions.

Access to data is rapidly changing our societies. Freedom of Information Legislation has been very useful but we are moving to a stage where we will be able to search through data held by public bodies directly rather than trying to work out who holds what and get the right question to access that information.

Data sets on the current site are broken down into sections covering:

- **Active Travel**
- **Demographics**
- **Economy**
- **Education**
- **Energy**
- **Environment**
- **Geography**
- **Health**
- **Living**
- **Public safety**
- **Tourism**
- **Transportation**

The Active Travel section not only covers cycling routes, cycle racks and weather, data sets also cover road usage rates and road casualty numbers.

The demographics section covers the population of Glasgow by age, gender, ethnicity, Gaelic speakers, age, income and working hours.

## Open Glasgow

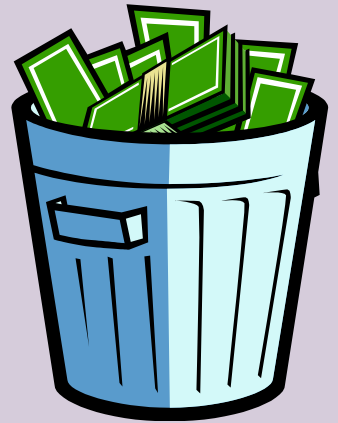
The project has been organising “hackathons” where groups of interested users meet to use the data for discussions on ways to improve Glasgow.

This data can also be used to hold public bodies to account for their decisions. The Scottish Government is operating a different model: Scotland Performs. This national performance framework claims to offer up to date data on how the Government is performing in relations to its target. The Community Empowerment Bill proposes giving this framework a statutory basis.

Technology is providing opportunities but we must make use of this data if we are to drive change.

## No-one Knows

**I**t is increasingly obvious that outsourcing of public services is more ideological than practical. A recent [article in the Guardian](#) highlights the fact that despite extensive outsourcing there is **no evidence** to show it works. It appears that there is no credible evidence of any savings made from outsourcing unless you use data from the 1980s.



Despite almost 30 years of outsourcing there is no quality evaluation of this process. There are lots of examples of outsourcing and shared services. There are plenty of plans underway but the evaluation of delivery of services is sadly lacking. Claims of savings are everywhere but when looked at they are often “potential” savings. Who is auditing these claims? The answer is no one. There is no analysis of these contracts. No one knows if it saves money or improves services.

What we do have is clear evidence of failures, high costs and fraud. As David Walker writes in the Guardian “The failures of Serco, G4S and Atos have convinced most people that the claim traditionally made for outsourcing- that contracting saves money-is false”

The public sector continues to look to outsourcing to solve the problem of severe budget cuts. We need to challenge managers to produce robust evidence of savings before they outsource a service. The reality is that the evidence doesn’t exist and highlighting this will help keep our services in house.

# Budgets

The Audit Scotland report of the financial squeeze facing public services in Scotland also contains a useful [checklist](#) to support scrutiny of public finances. It is designed to support councillors in their analysis of their authority's plans and performance and is also useful for branches to support their own analysis of employer's plans. Branches can also use these questions when asking councillors to support our campaigns around budget cuts and job losses.

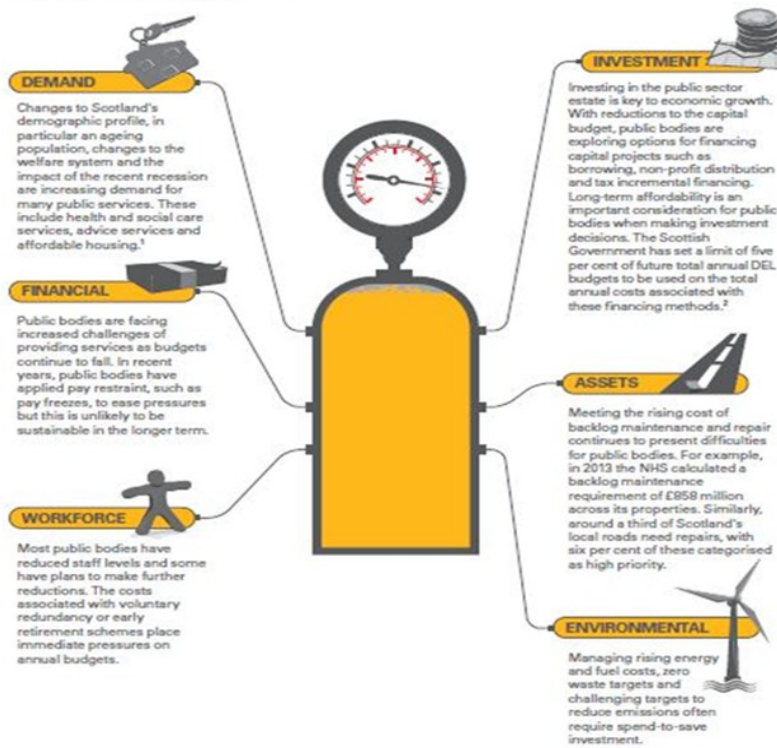


The questions are broken down into three sections: budget setting roles, responsibilities and approach; long-term financial planning and information to support effective scrutiny of public finances. Key Questions

- Are budgets clearly linked to the council's priorities and outcomes as set out in the strategy documents?
- Are the costs and benefits (financial and non financial) of each option clearly documented including the impact on service users and related risks?
- Is sufficient time built into the budget-setting process to allow for effective scrutiny and challenge to spending plans?
- Does the financial strategy consider an analysis of levels of service demand and projected income?

This checklist will be helpful for activists looking to analysis budgets and proposals to challenge employers plans to cuts services and jobs.

**Exhibit 2**  
Ongoing pressures in the public sector



Notes:  
1. Scotland's population of people aged 75 and over is expected to increase by 86 per cent by 2037. *Projected Population of Scotland (2012 based)*, General Register Office for Scotland, January 2014.  
2. *Infrastructure Investment Plan 2011*, Scottish Government, December 2011.  
Source: Audit Scotland

**Audit Scotland info graphic**

## The Big Squeeze

The latest [report](#) from Audit Scotland highlights the significant financial challenges faced by Scotland's public sector. The Scottish budget has fallen 9%, in real terms, from £31.9bn in 2009/10 to £28.9bn in 2014/15 and is expected to reduce further.

Audit Scotland believes public bodies have coped well so far, but face increasingly difficult choices in reducing spending while maintaining service standards and meeting rising demand. There is limited evidence of longer-term financial planning.

The two main components of the budget, revenue and capital, show different trends since 2009/10: The revenue budget has fallen by £1.8 billion (6%) to £26 billion in 2014/15. The capital budget has fallen by £1.2 billion (29%) to £2.9 billion in 2014/15. Although the overall trend shows a decline, this budget has increased by 15% since 2012/13 in line with the Scottish Government's policy to increase capital investment.

The Scottish Government also has a substantial PPP programme, not something they are keen to highlight. These projects create longer-term financial commitments and to reduce flexibility in how future revenue budgets can be used.

This report notes that since 2010, contracts for projects with a value of around £1.7 billion have been agreed using revenue-financed methods with a further £1.7 billion planned for future years.

## Local government has taken the brunt of the cuts

The much vaunted 'ring fencing' of health spending has never quite lived up to the headline, largely due to above inflation costs in this sector. By 2015/16 even this protection goes, with the health budget reducing by £73 million (1%). Area health board budgets are increasing by 1%, while special health boards are cut by 1% and central spending is cut by 3%.

Local government has taken the brunt of the cuts in Scotland. The Scottish Government provides over 80% of local government funding. The rest comes from council tax and charges. The Scottish Government's budget for local government will decrease by £200 million from £7.7 billion to £7.5 billion, a cut of 3%.

NEWSLETTER



## We hate to say “We told you so”

The Public Audit Committee has published a [report](#) on police reform. The report covers many of the concerns that UNISON raised at the time the Bill and the subsequent merger was rushed through.

Despite promising such a document no full business case was ever produced and instead was merged into a short term financial strategy. As the Committee says:

*“The Committee considers that by not developing a full business case neither the Scottish Government, Police Scotland nor the SPA were able to comprehensively test the accuracy of the projected costs and savings in the outline business case following parliamentary agreement to the Bill.”* Longer term savings are only now being identified.

Another key UNISON concern was that the structure chosen by the Scottish Government meant that Police Scotland would be unable to recover VAT. Again we have been proven correct as the report says:

*“previously the eight police forces were able to recover VAT but that from 2013/14 a VAT liability of approximately £22 million will be required to be met each year by Police Scotland and the SPA. The Committee heard that part of the funding for police*

*reform of £147 million was to be used to meet the additional VAT costs arising from the creation of a single police service. The Scottish Government had not yet decided whether it would meet the VAT costs of Police Scotland and the SPA from 2015/16.”*

There are several other critical comments in the report, although the SNP majority on the committee has watered down criticisms of the Scottish Government. Publishing their own stronger version, MSPs Hugh Henry, Ken Macintosh, Tavish Scott and Mary Scanlon said it was not their job to put out a “flattering interpretation.”

The minority report adds, “The Committee therefore seeks confirmation from the Scottish Government that its post implementation review will scrutinise what worked well as well as not so well.” The Committee Convenor Hugh Henry MSP said, “There’s a cult developing here of obedience and slavishness which some governments and regimes elsewhere in the world would be proud to have, and it’s unfortunate we’re seeing this in 21st-century Scotland.”

While the minority report is stronger, even the watered down version confirms the warnings UNISON gave at the time over the lack of a robust business strategy.

## Its Our Water

Scotland's public water service continues to deliver high levels of investment with charge increases below the rate of inflation. However, they persist in disowning their public corporation status and we the consumer continue to waste £millions on bottled water

Scottish Water has published capital investment plans totalling £3.5bn for the period 2015 to 2021. The overall cost of delivering the plan will be £8bn. met by customer charges of £7bn and net new government borrowing of £720m. There will be a fixed nominal annual price increase of 1.6% for the years 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18. Well below the rate of inflation.

These plans show the continuing benefits of having a public water service in Scotland that doesn't have to fund private profit. Not that you would recognise that from Scottish Water publications that talk about being a trusted 'business', rather than a public service. Despite getting high quality water from the tap, the



UK market for bottled water is now worth £1.6 billion per year and Britons drink more bottled water than fruit juices or wines and spirits. Consumption per person exceeded 34 litres in 2012, up from 26.9 litres in 2001 and is set to reach 40 litres per person by the end of the decade.

Given the fact that UK tap water is widely considered to be better for you than the bottled variety and subject to more stringent safety checks, why do we insist on purchasing something which is up to 300 times more expensive than what comes out of our taps?

Let's celebrate our public water service even if Scottish Water dreams of privatisation. And save yourself cash by using the tap not the shop.

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](mailto:k.sillars@unison.co.uk)



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