

# Empowering Scotland: Legislation 2013-14



## POLICY BRIEFING

The Scottish Government has published its legislative and other activity programme for 2013/14 - 'Empowering Scotland'. This briefing highlights the main legislative proposals that impact on UNISON members.

### Budget Bill

The annual Budget Bill provides Parliamentary approval for the Scottish Government's spending plans. The draft spending plans are usually published at the end of September and will address the further spending cuts imposed by the UK Government in the Chancellor's June statement. This will include some £400m of revenue cuts with the consequential impact on services and jobs.

### Revenue Scotland and Tax Powers Bill

This Bill will establish Revenue Scotland as the tax authority which will be responsible for collecting taxes devolved to Scotland in the latest Scotland Act from 1 April 2015.

### Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill

The Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill will include measures designed to: strengthen joint working in Community Planning Partnerships; strengthen community voices in shaping and delivering outcomes; easier for communities to take on public sector assets; streamline community right to buy; and make it easier for local authorities to recover costs in respect of dangerous and defective buildings. UNISON Scotland's response to the consultation expressed concerns that this Bill could lead to further privatisation and centralisation of democratically accountable local services.

### Courts Reform Bill

This Bill will take forward many of the recommendations from Lord Gill's Scottish Civil Courts Review including a new Personal Injury Court. UNISON is concerned that these proposals together with the **Damages Bill** will downgrade personal injury claims with the consequential impact on health and safety.

### Licensing Bill

This Bill will change aspects of alcohol and civic government licensing including new powers to regulate sexual entertainment venues. It will also create a new licensing regime for air weapons.

### Food Standards Scotland Bill

This Bill will set up Scotland's own food safety and standards body, Food Standards Scotland. Its primary concern should be making sure that food is safe to eat. However, UNISON has identified concerns over the introduction of 'light touch' regulation as a result of lobbying from some in the food industry.

### KEY POINTS:

- This paper sets out the Scottish Government's legislative programme for the coming year.
- It also outlines non-legislative action it plans to deliver.
- There is a significant legislative programme most of which impacts on UNISON members.
- The current legislation rolls forward.
- However, the focus of the Scottish Government is on next year's independence referendum.

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## **Mental health and adults with Incapacity amendment Bill**

This Bill aims to improve the operation and efficiency of the mental health and adults with incapacity legislation for service users and practitioners.

## **Scottish Welfare Fund Bill**

This Bill implements the new discretionary Fund to provide vulnerable members of the community with a safety net in an emergency. The Bill will make provision about how the Fund will be delivered, what the public reporting arrangements will be, and how applicants to the Fund might challenge decisions.

## **Housing Bill**

This Bill will end all right to buy entitlements for social housing tenants; create a new Housing Tribunal to resolve disputes in the private rented sector; strengthen the regulation of Letting Agents; increase flexibility for landlords in the allocation and management of social housing; modernise the licensing of mobile homes and park homes; and enhance local authorities' powers to improve the quality of private sector houses. While most of these measures will be welcomed, the urgent need is to build more affordable houses as set out in UNISON Scotland's Housing Strategy.

There are no legislative proposals on lobbying after the Scottish Government indicated that they would take over the proposals in Neil Findlay MSP's member's bill. This is being delayed until later in the parliamentary term.

## **Current legislation**

As well as the new programme of Bills set out above there are a number of Bills that have already been introduced and these will conclude their parliamentary stages in the coming year. These Bills include: Scottish Independence Referendum Bill; Children and Young People Bill; Regulatory Reform Bill; Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill; Public Bodies (Joint Working) Bill; Procurement Reform Bill; Criminal Justice Bill. There are UNISON briefings and submissions on these Bills on our website.

## **Other measures**

This programme also describes other planned government activity for the coming year. There are three key themes:

- accelerating economic recovery and creating more jobs;
- creating a fairer Scotland and empowering communities; and
- mitigating the impacts of austerity on people in Scotland.

The coming year will also include the independence referendum on 18 September 2014. Unsurprisingly, this is a constant theme within the programme. The programme confirms that a White Paper containing the Scottish Government's detailed proposals will be published in the autumn. No date has been specified in this programme.

## **Conclusion**

This legislative programme and other government activity will have a significant impact on UNISON members. However, the legislative elements are not huge and it is very clear that the focus of the Scottish Government is on the independence referendum.

### **Further info:**

#### **Programme for Government 2013-14**

[www.scotland.gov.uk/about/performance/programme-for-government/2013-14](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/about/performance/programme-for-government/2013-14)

#### **UNISON Scotland responses**

[www.unison-scotland.org.uk/response/index.html](http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/response/index.html)

#### **Public Works**

<http://publicworksscotland.blogspot.co.uk>



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