

Why We Need Local Government

Introduction

Local government is bearing the brunt of the ideological austerity cuts to public sector budgets. Of the 50,000 jobs cut in the public sector 40,000 have been in local Government. The next round of cuts will be worse with another 15,000 jobs under threat. While redundancy has been voluntary work doesn't disappear and the remaining staff have had to take on extra work and services are salami sliced. This is no longer sustainable this round of cuts will have a substantial impact on service levels. We need to ensure that people understand the impact of these cuts to the services they rely on and the risks they will face without them. We need to encourage politicians and communities to support our campaign to save local government services.

Local Government

Most of us hope that we don't need to use the NHS very often. We also have a general idea of what the service is and what the key staff like doctors, nurses and paramedics can offer us. Politicians know how much people value the fact that we can access doctors and emergency services if required. No matter what really happens with funding for NHS services no serious politician stands up and campaigns to cut the health budget.

The contrast with local government is stark. The word "council" is used to denote a poor quality or basic service. Many people think they don't use any local government services but they are wrong. All of us use local government: our streets are swept and lit, roads maintained, our own and the street bins emptied and the contents dealt with, fly-tipping cleared, we take public transport, our children go to nurseries and schools, we walk in the park and we swim in sports centres. There are also the vital care services for those with disabilities, chronic conditions and of course the elderly. These are all services that make as much difference to our health and wellbeing as doctors and nurses.

As the residents discovered in the BBC documentary, *The Street That Cut Everything*, people only notice services when they disappear. In the programme, for example people were really surprised to be denied access to their local swings: they hadn't made the connection between the park and the council

We no longer need a TV documentary to withdraw services to show what we would be missing: the cuts are very real and many people are already struggling with poorer services and increased and new charges. This will only get worse if we don't build support for local government.

A vital part of our campaign will be highlighting the role of local government in delivering health services, protecting public health and preventative spending to stop many health problems building up in the



POLICY BRIEFING

KEY POINTS:

- Protecting spending on health services isn't just about protecting the NHS: local government also provides direct health services.
- Local Government services are vital services for maintaining health and wellbeing
- These cuts are unsustainable and will increasingly lead to higher costs for other services particularly the NHS.



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Preventative Spending

The Christie Commission highlighted the need for public sector reform to be both bottom up and to focus on prevention rather than cure. Involving citizens in the design of services makes it easier to get it right which alongside improving services saves money. Preventative spend means that people avoid problems rather than treating them down road. It is also the key to making huge savings particularly to budgets like health, police, criminal justice and social work. Local government is the key delivery body for preventative services. Councils also ensure local democratic input to service design and delivery through locally elected and accountable councillors, support for community councils and running community centres, libraries and other public spaces where people find out about and meet to discuss and affect local decision making.

Health

Services like refuse collection, street cleaning, dealing with fly-tipping, and environmental health directly ensure that we avoid ill health by removing the sources of disease from our communities. Living in pleasant surroundings rather than litter strewn streets is also good for mental health.

Sports centres, parks, and allotments offer free or inexpensive routes for people to keep fit, active and healthy no matter their age or ability: you can train for marathons, walk or travel in your wheel chair all for nothing in our public parks. Keeping active, getting out and about and interacting with others in our community regularly are essential for ensuring good mental and physical health. These are essential health services.

Direct services

Local government also delivers direct health and care services: free personal care for the elderly, care homes support and adaption's for people living with disabilities and chronic health conditions. These services save lives and are essential to the quality of life of many Scots. Without those lots of people would still be in hospitals, unhappy and costing a great deal more money. Housing is also a key health service. A decent safe secure affordable home is vital to both mental and physical health. While not all councils now directly deliver social housing all are responsible for licensing the private rented sector and planning housing developments.

Schools

Education one of the highest profile local government services: As well as teaching the subjects children need to pass exams and get jobs, schools deliver a range of health and relationships education. Schools are also the gateway to a range of other agencies which can support families like educational psychologists and social workers. Ensuring that children have the best possible start and make good choices about their own lives and health will not only mean they have better lives but that we can look forward to long term savings.

Milestones

Councils also provide registrars services: we register our births, marriages, citizenship and finally deaths. They also provide places for burial and cremation. It is council services that support our health and wellbeing from cradle to grave. If we don't stand up for local government, it will continue to be the focal point for cuts.

Action for Branches

Branches and members are asked to write to and visit local MSPs and councillors to highlight the impact of cuts to local government budgets on people's health and wellbeing and the cost implications for the NHS. If you require more information for your campaigns against cuts to local government **Please contact Kay Sillars 0141 342 2819.**

Further info

Combating austerity booklet: ideas to increase funding

http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/publicworks/CombatingAusterity_Sep2015.pdf

Damage Series :UNISON research on the impact of cuts on services

<http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/publicworks/damage.html>

Fighting the Cuts Toolkit:

<http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/publicworks/toolkit.html>



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