



# **Scottish Labour Party Policy Forum**

## **Supporting Stronger Safer Communities**

***UNISON Scotland's response to the Scottish  
Labour Party's 1<sup>st</sup> Stage Policy Forum Document.***

***June 2005***

## **Introduction**

This paper constitutes UNISON Scotland's response to the Scottish Labour Party first stage consultation Supporting Stronger Safer Communities.

UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union representing over 150,000 members primarily working in the public sector in Scotland.

This response has been informed by a major consultation exercise *Scotland 2010*. We circulated some 10,000 copies of a consultation paper encouraging workplace discussion of the key issues in the SPF consultation papers.

## **Tackling Poverty, Inequality and Creating Opportunities**

UNISON Scotland welcomes the Executive's efforts to tackle Scotland's legacy of poverty and inequality. Progress has been made: The proportion of children living in poverty has been reduced from one third to one quarter; pensioners in poverty from one in three to one in four. We believe that more needs to be done.

UNISON Scotland agrees with the Executive that work is an effective route out of poverty for many. However those in work now make up the largest group of people living in poverty in Scotland. Work is only a route out of poverty if it is well paid and secure. For those with children, particularly lone parents the cost and availability of childcare is also significant barrier to work as a route out of poverty.

In Scotland 11% of the population has no bank account. Not only is this a barrier to getting a job it also means that those with the least financial resources pay the highest interest rates for credit. We believe that Credit Unions offer a means for people in deprived communities to access financial services, particularly affordable credit. Credit Unions are also owned and organised by communities are able to respond to and develop along side the community. Credit Unions are therefore an excellent way to provide much needed financial advice and support.

Many communities have nowhere to buy fresh fruit and vegetables and lack of transport means many people cannot travel to alternatives. Many children find it hard to try new foods and it is difficult for those on a low income to risk buying foods that may not be eaten. Access to affordable fresh fruit and vegetables in deprived communities could be improved by supporting further development of food co-operatives. Co-operatives can use their bulk purchasing power to reduce the cost of these essential foods so making their purchase less of a financial risk. Also by being based in the communities shoppers on foot can buy them.

We believe that work is not a guaranteed route out of poverty. Getting qualifications is a much better one. People aged 25 to 50 with no qualifications are around three times more likely to be low paid than those with Highers or more. Being brought up in poverty also means that you are more likely not to get these qualifications. The Executive needs to continue to target investments in education and training in deprived areas.

Disabled people in Scotland still face a wide range of barriers that limit their equal participation in the labour market and prevent full access to goods and services. We recognise that the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) is addressing discrimination and encouraging positive action but more needs to be done. The Scottish Executive should ensure that existing provisions in the DDA are complied with and to improve measures on positive action in line with the Madrid Declaration. Encourage more action on investigations into restrictions and discriminatory barriers, for example access to public buildings, taking appropriate measures to remedy situations; and to develop initiatives to change attitudes through education and service provision.

Whilst much is being done to modernise pay systems in the public sector there remains historic pay discrimination that has to be addressed and financed. The Scottish Executive should also use the various levers at its disposal to encourage equal pay in all sectors.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are still denied equality in society - too often they face discrimination and harassment instead of a fair deal. Much has been done to remedy many areas of discrimination but action for this group should be featured in all social inclusion strategies.

## **Protecting our Environment**

Scottish Labour's environment vision should be one:

- Where government at all levels, develop strategic policy and key programmes in a holistic way with sustainable development at their core.
- Where Ministers' roles are focused across government as a whole, not in narrow departmental roles.
- With strong continuous incentives, through fiscal and accountability measures, to promote sustainable policy and action by business and public corporations, equivalent to the profit motive.
- Where businesses have moved beyond corporate social responsibility and contribute to all dimensions of sustainable development.
- Where a significant contribution towards our energy needs come from renewable sources.
- With an integrated system allowing frequent and affordable public transport between our centres of population; and which recognises the particular issues of rural Scotland where mass public transport systems are ineffective and inefficient.
- With agriculture, forestry and fisheries industries which are directly related to the carrying capacity of our land, sea and inland waters; which maximise Scotland's clean and natural image; and which recognises our countryside as a national asset.
- Where we have dramatically improved citizens' quality of life through reduction of pollution and radically reduced resource use and can see an improvement in biodiversity of species across the country.

Transport is a major contributor to climate change and if the government is to fulfil its obligations under the Kyoto Treaty more needs to be done to reduce transport's impact. Road traffic and aviation are the fastest growing sources of greenhouse gases. Emissions can be reduced with the use of non-polluting technologies, such as fuel cells in motor vehicles. Flying should pay the full environmental costs of its activities. Travel habits must be changed if we want to alleviate the worst effects of air and noise pollution.

Alternative, convenient forms of travel, such as buses, light rail, river and water based transport and cycling and walking should be encouraged. Greener travel alternatives, such as increased school transport and effective workplace travel plans, can reduce road congestion. Measures need to be adopted to improve the safety of children cycling or walking to school, while employers should use incentives to encourage reduced car use for travel to work. With increased access to information technology, home working can also be a practical alternative to travel to work. Alleviating the school run and the road rush to work will help to tackle health and environment problems, such as obesity and air pollution.

Energy policy has a key environment role. UNISON Scotland supports the development of a Scottish Energy Strategy the key elements of which include:

- A balanced electricity generation policy from a number of sources to ensure security of supply. In Scotland because of our dependence on nuclear generation this must include some nuclear power subject to resolving waste management issues.
- Government support for clean coal technologies as well as renewables.
- Promotion of energy efficiency and a co-ordinated drive to eliminate fuel poverty.

We need a planned energy policy that provides safe, secure and sustainable generation, which contributes to the economic future of Scotland and eliminates fuel poverty.

Local environmental health services play an important role in protecting our environment. The Executive should work with local authorities to develop local Environmental Health Action Plans that deliver to their communities the key policies established by a Scottish Environmental Health Action Plan. In conjunction with SEPA local authorities have an important role to play in delivering community based environmental protection services and enforcing legislation to deal with pollution control. This function together with SEPA requires realistic funding levels.

We also need to recognise the links between disadvantaged communities and the environmental problems they face. There are links between social deprivation and some indicators of poor environmental quality in Scotland. These include air pollution, poor river water quality, and distance from industrial sites. We broadly welcome the introduction of Strategic Environmental Assessments although these will require funding to turn into positive action.

## **Improving Scotland's Housing**

UNISON Scotland supports the proposals for a Housing Standard to reflect standards of quality, comfort, energy efficiency, affordability, accessibility and security.

We believe that accessibility should be included as a key element. Whilst we recognise it is going to be difficult to meet accessibility requirements in certain instances, we feel that it is important that the Housing Standards should incorporate accessibility requirements given the accessibility needs of the elderly, families and disabled people. The Executive should aim to make as much social housing as accessible as possible. This includes ending discrimination against lesbian and gay partners under homelessness provisions.

We believe an affordability element should be included in the Housing Standard. Affordability is key to social housing. If rent levels are set too high people on the lowest incomes have difficulties in meeting payments and become dependent on housing benefits. There needs to be a larger programme of affordable housing to buy, particularly for key workers who may be forced out of the communities they support.

We welcome proposals to apply the prudential borrowing regime to council housing. We believe this will add some flexibility, but does not offer solutions to councils burdened with substantial housing debt. We believe that the debt burden from local councils should be removed, this would let them invest in their existing stock and move to increase housing in their own communities. This would be cheaper and quicker than large-scale stock transfer.

We are opposed to housing stock transfers for a number of reasons including the implications for staff, loss of democratic accountability, and the costs of transfer as well as a reduced choice for tenants. A more effective alternative is direct investment using investment allowances, creating a level playing field between the different options.

UNISON Scotland is strongly opposed to any extension of the right to buy to existing housing association tenants. We believe that an extension of the policy will have the consequence of reducing the amount of social housing available for rent. This will have a particular impact on rural communities and on certain inner city areas. It will result in less choice and less diversity of tenure.

In the new single tenancy the provision for a core right to repair is welcome and the requirement on all landlords to provide and maintain properties in a state which is wind and water tight is supported. We believe that this is no more than tenants should have at present and we would wish to see this supported by a tenants' right to take landlords to court if they fail to deliver this basic need.

We support expanding choice to buy or rent. This should also include options for social and local authority housing and not just from the private sector.

## **Fuel Poverty**

Fuel poverty has been more than halved since 1996. The Scottish Executive has played an important role in that success. However, 13% of households remain in fuel poverty and that is likely to rise as fuel prices increase.

We support the Executive's programme of central heating for pensioners and other vulnerable households and the warm deal. 87% of households receiving measures through these schemes have been taken out of fuel poverty. This compliments the investment programmes initiated by local authorities and housing associations in their own housing stock. Some 51,000 local authority dwellings will benefit from window replacement, central heating or insulation improvements. Local authorities have a key role in preparing local fuel poverty strategies and require support and funding.

Of the three main factors affecting fuel poverty, one (energy efficiency of the home) is a

matter devolved to the Scottish Parliament and the other two (domestic fuel price and disposable household income) are matters reserved to the UK Government. Further actions include:

- need continuation of current grant schemes for heating, insulation and other energy efficiency measures but with wider eligibility, more measures, more funding and full grants for the over 60s
- need mechanisms, tools and indicators including the use of current scheme databases to identify the fuel poor and therefore to analyse, map, prioritise and plan future initiatives
- government, fuel companies (under their social obligations) and other agencies need to address the problem of people moving in/out of fuel poverty as circumstances change, whether personal or economic
- need homes to be as energy efficient as possible ie 'fuel poverty proof'
- more funding to carry out income maximisation assessments is essential and all energy efficiency schemes should include benefits checks, energy advice and information on the Priority Services Register and Fuel Direct
- funding is required for fuel switching e.g. from electricity to gas, wood pellets, solar water heating or a modern electric unit etc
- need funding for more measures for hard to treat properties eg small scale renewables, although not at the expense of existing measures
- need better communication with private landlords eg through registration schemes and give them incentives or set requirements for improving the energy efficiency of their properties
- need better coordination between social and environmental policies and avoidance of schemes competing to deliver broadly the same measures to the same client groups
- raise the general public awareness of schemes to tackle fuel poverty
- create a single point of access for the public to the Scottish Warm Homes Grant. The grant should continue and be expanded when it comes to an end in March 2006. Expansion should include those who have a system that cannot be repaired and raising the average grant level to £4000.

## **Planning and Regenerating our Communities**

The key reform to the planning process is establishing a properly resourced and supported planning service in every local authority. Staffing levels have remained largely unchanged for a decade despite a 20% increase in applications and other pressures on the system.

Development plans need to be properly linked into the community planning system with a greater emphasis on the participation and involvement of the community at an early stage. The community needs feedback to demonstrate how their views impact on the process. Business and other public bodies also need to engage earlier in the system. All too often business relies on using their financial clout to influence the process at public inquiries. National and regional forums should be established to oversee the development of policies that include all the key stakeholders and address cross boundary issues.

Public authorities can support regeneration in their communities through procurement, employability and training. This requires deliberative involvement of communities in projects. The role of Scottish Enterprise needs to be reviewed.

## Tackling Crime

It is evident that private prisons are not working. The quality and design of new prisons and also the quality of service, that has resulted in such negative publicity. The range and types of crimes, which can be dealt with by district courts, should be reviewed to allow a quicker processing of cases.

Other options, where appropriate, include:

- Developing alternatives to prison based on community service with opportunities in youth and community work.
- Volunteering with victims of crime.
- Supported living and employment opportunities
- Assessing the usefulness of tagging and distributing the evaluations of the pilot programmes.

We believe that Victim Support services should be better funded and supported and where good practice has been established, this should be rolled out as soon as possible.

96% of prosecutions in Scotland are dealt with in non-jury courts – Sheriff and District Courts. The administration of Scotland’s summary courts is at present split between thirty of Scotland’s thirty-two local authorities (responsible for district courts) and the Scottish Court Service (SCS – responsible for all sheriff courts). The Executive published their plans to reform non-jury courts in Scotland in their document *Smarter Justice – Safer Communities*. We have reservations over the Executive’s proposals in that they may have the effect of weakening local justice. Transferring local authority functions to government agencies and quangos is rarely a formula for good governance.

We support The Executives proposals in ‘*Supporting Safer, Stronger Communities – Scotland’s Criminal Justice Plan*’, which set out proposals to reform the criminal justice system in Scotland. The Management of Offenders (Scotland) Bill 2005 included proposals to tackle re-offending set out in the Criminal Justice Plan. We support the key proposals for improving the way criminal justice services work together to address re-offending, which include:

- Establishing a national advisory body for offender management, which will be chaired by the Minister, with members drawn from across criminal justice services and will develop a national strategy to reduce re-offending and take on responsibility for monitoring Scottish Prison Service performance on offender management.
- Placing a statutory duty on SPS and local authorities to work together to reduce re-offending and ensure they form effective local area partnerships to deliver integrated services for offenders in prison and the community
- Bringing local councils together into new Community Justice Authorities (CJAs) to ensure criminal justice social work services are as joined-up as possible. These CJAs will in future receive the community component of criminal justice funding and be responsible for ensuring this is used effectively across the CJAs area.

Whilst less prevalent in Scotland than measures taken in England, the fight against crime should maintain the balance between effective powers for the enforcement authorities and civil liberties.

There is justifiable concern that our rape laws are not properly protecting victims. The recommendations of the current review should be given careful consideration. On domestic violence the Scottish Executive's campaigns have been widely welcomed. This needs to be developed into policies with every employer and public authority recognising their role in addressing this issue.

The Emergency Workers Act and Executive safety campaigns have been an important step forward in protecting workers from assault and abuse at work. However, the legislation only protects a limited number of workers and needs to be reviewed regularly to extend coverage to other groups of workers who serve the community.

Racist attacks remain a blight on Scotland's image at home and abroad. The full implementation of the Lawrence report by every public authority remains a priority together with effective police action.

## **Access to the Law**

Criminal and civil aid needs to be improved to support individuals to deal with legal action in addition extending law centre networks. Whilst we support raising small claims limits, personal injury cases should remain a private jurisdiction to the Court of Session. This would mirror the position in England where the small claims limit is £5000 except in relation to personal injury cases where the limit is £1000.

## **Policing and Protecting our Communities**

The role of Police Staff is becoming increasingly valuable to the Police Force due to increasing demands put on Police Officers. Police support staff are employed in a wide range of tasks including: administrative support, care and custody of prisoners, several branches of forensics and technical services for intelligence gathering. They are increasingly taking on operational policing roles, freeing up police officers to concentrate on the job of tackling serious crime

UNISON welcomes the expansion of police staff roles that free up the time of police officers. However, this expansion requires:

- more strategic funding for the civilianisation of police roles;
- a Justice Department template for force level workforce modernisation;
- consultation with trade unions over force staffing levels;
- a "high potential" development scheme for police staff;
- a fair share of police training for police staff;
- a common job evaluation scheme for all police staff to help ensure consistency in pay and grading across forces;
- a national review of community wardens to provide guidance on deployment ,risk assessment, powers and equipment. These posts also require long term funding.

It is also high time that police staff were properly recognised and rewarded for the valuable part they play in the law enforcement team.

In principle, we support the national delivery of common services although we have concerns how this would affect the terms and conditions of employment of Police Staff.

We recognise that marches and parades can and do effect the communities that they pass through. We fully support actions that give communities a say in the decision-making progress. We wholeheartedly support actions around the routing and frequency of marches that seek to or do intimidate the communities that they pass through such as sectarian marches and those of Far Right Organisations. However we believe that any changes in the arrangement for the authorisation of marches and parades must not restrict legitimate political protest or protests during trade disputes.

UNISON Scotland is concerned with the approach of the Scottish Executive to the Scottish Fire Service. There appears to be a cost cutting agenda based on flawed research - such as in the proposals to cut fire control rooms, while there is a further danger of private sector involvement both in the financing of equipment via PFI and the possible use of private fire fighting companies. The Fire Service is an essential public service that should not be subjected to the vagaries of the private market.

## **Serious Crime**

The Scottish Executive should set out its policy regarding potential decriminalisation of specific drugs. There is a supply and demand element to drug trade. This requires a joined up approach. The newly formed Scottish Drugs Enforcement Agency is one method of dealing with the problem.

## **Combating Anti-Social Behaviour**

UNISON Scotland recognises the wide scale public concern over anti-social behaviour within our communities and agrees with the Executive that every person in Scotland deserves the right to live in peace and safety and the right to live in a community that is clean and well looked after.

We believe that The Executive could demonstrate it's commitment to supporting children and families and to reducing youth crime and anti-social behaviour by increasing base funding for children's services, including the provision of greater resources to serve Children's Hearings. We also believe that the Executive could take more effective action to help address staff recruitment and retention difficulties in many areas of children's services.

We believe that local authorities and police have a duty to deal with anti-social behaviour. We also believe that tackling anti-social behaviour cannot be the responsibility of these two agencies alone. It requires collective effort by local authorities, social services, schools, the police, environmental health officers, businesses, but more importantly, those who live within the effected communities themselves.

Community Safety Partnerships have been awarded funding for Community Wardens for a 3-year period. The monitoring process involved an outcome agreement based on local

needs and joint working arrangements. UNISON Scotland has concerns over giving Community Wardens the power to issue Fixed Penalty Fines for incidences of environmental nuisance. We believe that by doing so the role and acceptance of wardens in the community may be compromised.

## **Social Work**

Social work staffs care daily for the vulnerable members of society and empower many of these people to change their lives for the better. However, these staff also suffer from poor pay and conditions, often work long hours and struggle to achieve results with limited resources. They are frequently the subject of abuse and violence at work and are the scapegoat when things go wrong - but rarely praised for the daily achievements.

Social work is in crisis and the problems are far wider than the shortage of qualified social workers. Social work assistants have to cover the gaps and residential services are dependent on excessive overtime to maintain safe staffing ratios. Morale is low and resources stretched.

UNISON welcomes the establishment of the National Task Force and other initiatives to address these issues. This work needs support and resources from the Scottish Executive to ensure that all social care staff (public and voluntary sector) receive a wage that reflects the true value of their work. There should be a consistent approach to inquiries with a focus on lessons learned rather than a blame-based approach. More staff need to be trained with an emphasis on supporting current unqualified staff rather than simply 'fast-tracking' graduates. We need work based routes to learning available to the whole workforce. That is why Executive support for Learning at Work initiatives in this field have been so important and should be expanded together with resources to back fill vacancies.

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