

**UNISON**  
*Scotland*



**Poorer workers poorer services**

**Life in Con Dem **Inverness****

**May 2015**

# PUBLIC WORKS:

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## Introduction

Over the last two years UNISON Scotland has compiled a number of reports into the living standards and working lives of our members who deliver Scotland's. These have previously focussed on particular occupational groups, Hospital porters , Occupational Therapists, Housing Staff , Cleaners.

This report takes a different focus and is geographically based. For this report we have surveyed UNISON members in the Inverness Area – specifically those members residing in the Inverness, Nairn , Badenoch and Strathspey constituency which has been represented by Danny Alexander, Liberal Democrat, Chief Secretary to the treasury.

The results paint a bleak picture of declining standards – both living standards and in the quality of the services UNISON members are finding themselves able to deliver .

UNISON members are finding the standard of living under increasing pressure – at the same time as their jobs get more difficult through cuts to staffing and support. Across the constituency as a whole Some 20.7% of workers do not earn the Living Wage.

Pay in public services has stagnated in recent years either frozen or markedly below inflation. This has meant for most people in public services that wages have gone down by at least 10%. Even with the welcome application of the Scottish Living Wage in some sectors many have seen real earnings fall to less than they were a few years ago.

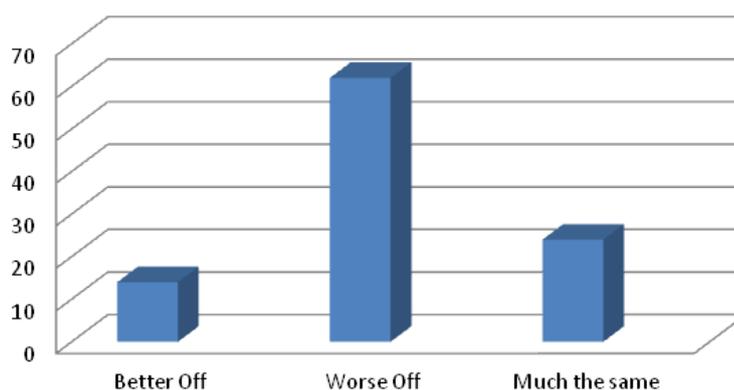
If there has been an recovery under Mr Alexander's Stewardship of the economy – It's one which is passing his constituents by as many of them find life in and out of the workplace getting harder

UNISON has outlined elsewhere our belief that for real economic recovery we will need wage led growth and investment in services. What is certain is that we need politicians in Government whose ambitions and prospectus go beyond poorer workers delivering poorer services.

### Are You Better or Worse Off?

When asked if they were better or worse off than they were four years ago, almost two thirds (62%)replied they were worse off. A mere 14% reckoned that their standard of living had improved with just a quarter (24%) saying things were much the same. This should come as little surprise, pay in public services has been one of the most obvious facets of austerity. Years of wage stagnation have taken their toll.

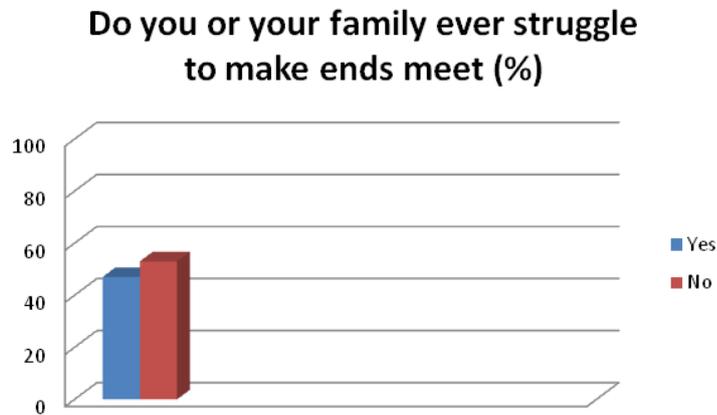
**Are you better or worse off than 4 years ago (%)?**



**Making ends meet**

It would be wrong to think that holding down wages has been a political choice which has impacted only at the margins for workers in public services. Almost half of the respondents to our survey say that they or their family have difficulties in making ends meet.

This response is in line with more general data about the impact of inflation while wages have been held down. Between 2008-2014, inflation rose by 19% In the same period wages grew by only 9% (and less than that for many workers). This has clearly pushed people in to debt and severely impacted on their quality of life. For many respondents it is only the capacity to go into overdraft or use credit cards that gets them through to the end of the month. The overall picture is one where many are just getting by and significant numbers struggling to do even that. Of the part time workers we surveyed 26% said they would like to be working more hours.



**What the workers say**

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Sometimes yes. Don't ever seem to have any money left over at the end of the month. – Employment Support Worker

Just day to day living - if kids want to do school trips etc is sometimes difficult to find the money! – Police Staff

Occasionally, the bills mount up but we have to battle through – Local Govt worker

My salary only covers mortgage, electricity, gas and other household bills. Not enough to pay for food for month. No treats for children. – Pupil Support assistant

Each month we are in our overdraft, without any frivolous spending - Auxiliary  
Constantly living on the edge, always juggling money around, and living on credit cards. – NHS Manager

Can not afford to have holidays, socialise or buy anything but basic food and pay bills – Pupil Support Assistant

With little or no increases for inflation...and the ever rising costs of consumables and utilities, etc, getting through the month has definitely got harder – NHS admin worker

**The cost of living is more expensive and although I have received a raise in salary it just is not enough to make a difference. - Early Years Practitioner**

**Money doesn't seem to go very far. It feels like I'm working harder than ever but for less! – Staff Nurse**

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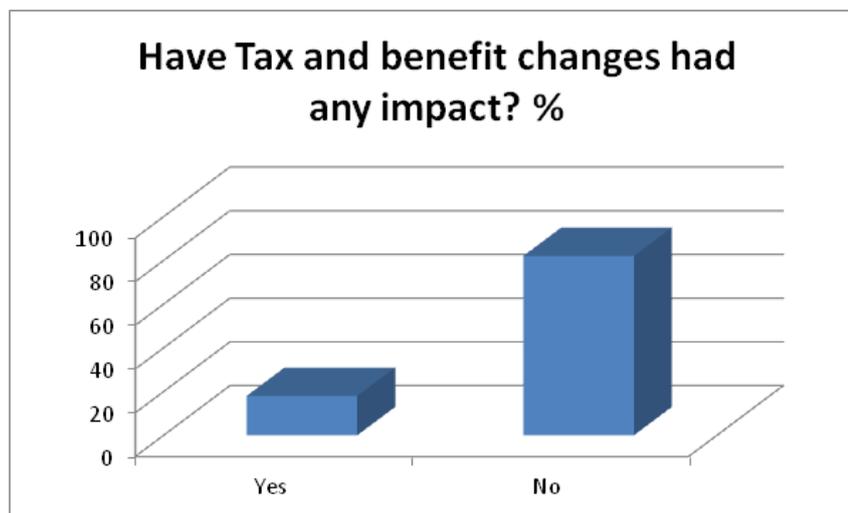
### **The cost of.... everything.**

When asked to identify particular costs which had had an impact on them responses were many and varied, with many people simply saying “everything”. Of specific costs the most frequently mentioned were the price of food and the cost of heating and lighting.

Inflation Indexes are (as the term implies) an average of prices across the economy as a whole. Inflation as it is experienced by individuals can be markedly different. This has tended to be the case for workers – particularly lower paid workers in recent years. Spending on necessities makes up a greater share of the expenditure of the low paid than it does the better off. In the ‘era of austerity the rate of inflation for these has often raced ahead of indexed inflation. Office of national statistics data shows that food has mostly been increasing in price faster than indexed inflation for the last three years, the price of electricity and gas has always been ahead of average inflation.

### **Tax and Benefit Changes**

The coalition Government has made much of its raising of income tax thresholds. This however has had little noticeable effect given the extent of standstill wages. Four out of five ( 82%) of our respondents said that the changes had no discernible effect.



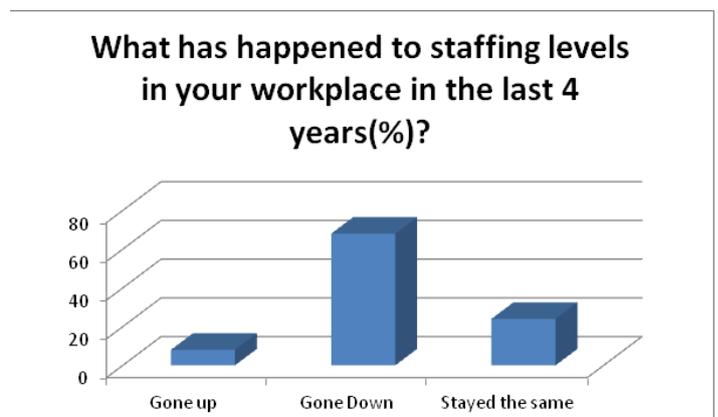
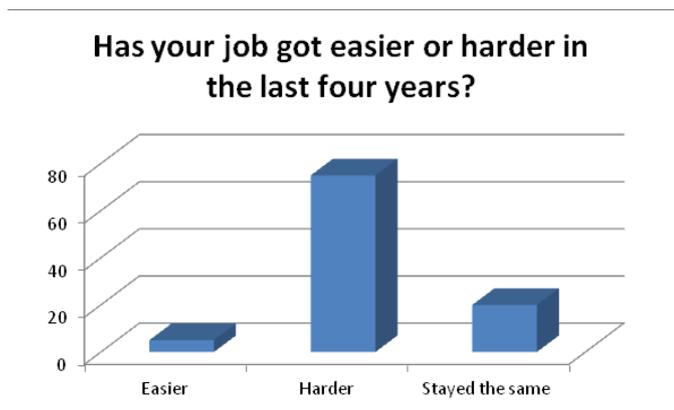
### **Earning Less .... but working Harder**

The overwhelming majority of respondents were clear that the quality of their working life has deteriorated in the last four years. Three quarters (75%) reckon their job has become harder with a mere 5% registering an improvement. At the same time as the value of their wages is going down, their work is getting harder.

This manifested itself in a number of ways but all were directly or indirectly related to cuts. The starkest, and most frequently reported, cause of extra workload is as a result of losing colleagues.

This was through redundancy, or in many cases as staff left, they are not replaced and remaining colleagues having to increase their workload to compensate. There were also reports of failure to cover for staff on long term sick leave. ^8% of respondents said staffing levels in their workplace had gone down.

Another method of compensating for fewer staff is to not simply increase the amount of work expected, but to broaden the range of duties, making people either work above their grade , or pass tasks previously carried out by management down to lower paid staff. None of this is conducive to sustaining morale which is routinely described as poor ( or terrible) whichever sector is being discussed.



**What the workers say**

2:1 with Consultants rather than 1:1 causing more workload and poor quality of service – medical secretary.

Not replacing staff due to financial costs. (ridiculous) – NHS admin officer

Vacant posts are being scrapped. My job used to be done by two people. – Senior library asst.

Staffing levels have increased but so have patient numbers. Client group is very challenging and staffing numbers inadequate. - Staff nurse

Certainly less staff - but more Police officers doing staff jobs, despite House’s protestations. A lot of good quality, experienced staff forced out in the first few months and now it appears Police Scotland are having to recruit staff again to fill the posts they cut too quickly and without planning. – Police Staff

Less people to do work, expected to pick up other people’s work at same salary – NHS Clerical staff.

People leaving or retiring not been replaced, workload increasing – Refuse Loader

Have to incorporate the workload of colleagues who have left and not been replaced – Police Staff

There are currently less of us employed here, with a lot more to do than before. We are stretched as a work force.- Technical Services Officer

Little understanding from top as to what's happening at ward level. Little thanks much harassment. – Staff Nurse

Less of us employed but heavier workload. – Pupil Support Assistant

The demand for services has gone up markedly and even more significantly, more people with complex needs are being managed at home rather than care home which increases our work load greatly. - Occupational Therapist

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### Cuts and Quality

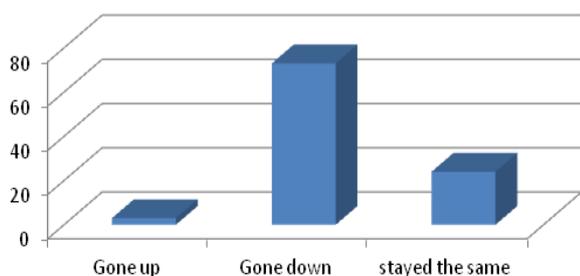
The cuts that have been placed on public services in recent years have not gone unnoticed by staff.

73% of survey respondents believe that their service has experienced budget cuts in recent years. 24% reckon their budget has been kept the same with only 3% being in the fortunate position of improved funding.

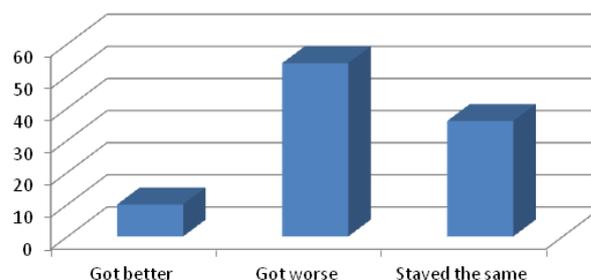
This of course hasn't just taken a toll on the staff. Staff also believe it has had an effect on the services they deliver.

A majority of (54%) believe the quality of services they provide has decreased in recent years. Just over a third (36%) reckoned things were much the same with only 10% suggesting that there had been any improvement. This view was held across the board regardless of sector, even in supposedly protected services like the NHS.

**How has funding changed for the service you deliver in the last 3-4 years?%**



**Has the service your department provides...(%)**



### **What the workers say**

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Deliberate cutting back of staff who are already drowning in paperwork – Registered Nurse

At basic levels we dont have enough cleaners - the buildings are dirty, not enough office staff means we can't answer queries on time and have to fob people off which we hate! Staff morale is v low - Further education Admin staff

We are expected to cover much more with less.- Employment support worker

Investment has been very low and many of the schemes very wasteful without providing the improvement in service - Customers services advisor Local government

Feel unable to deliver safe and quality care due to increased workload and lack of staff. – Staff nurse

Management have no clear understanding of the needs of the service and want to push cuts through without even considering any of the workforce Finance worker, local Government.

Got better in some respects - faster decisions; pre-application advice but question whether quantity not quality is driving it. – Local Govt planning Staff

We are stretched as workers so not able to offer the best service – Social Worker

As a result of not being able to replace aging equipment adequately, the service we provide has deteriorated – Technical services officer

Equipment and furniture not replaced as too costly. Due to delayed discharges managers seem to blame staff for not having quick turn around on patients discharges. – Staff nurse

Due to constant cuts I feel we can no longer offer a high class service to our patients – Medical Secretary

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## **Conclusion**

There is no question that the workforce across public services are doing more with less. Doing more work and receiving less reward for it. It was the financial crisis that caused the deficit – not the other way round, yet it's the workers in the Highlands – and those who rely on the work that they do who are paying the price. If there is, as the Con Dem Government claim a recovery going on – its effects are not being felt by these voters.

The Coalition Government, and as not just a Cabinet, but a Treasury Minister Danny Alexander, who have made the choice about how this crisis is tackled. They've made choices that have seen the wealth of the richest spiral while workers in public services struggle.

It is clear that austerity economics isn't working. In Inverness any more than anywhere else. We need investment in services and wage led growth in our economy and politicians who set their sights higher than poorer workers and poorer services.

For further information contact  
UNISON Scotland's Bargaining and Campaigns team on 0141 342 2811

