



**LIFEGUARD**

**UNISON**  
*Scotland*

# **While we work you play**

**Staff in Scotland's leisure trusts speak out**

**June 2015**

# PUBLIC WORKS:

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## We work while you play

### Staff in Scotland's Leisure Trusts speak out

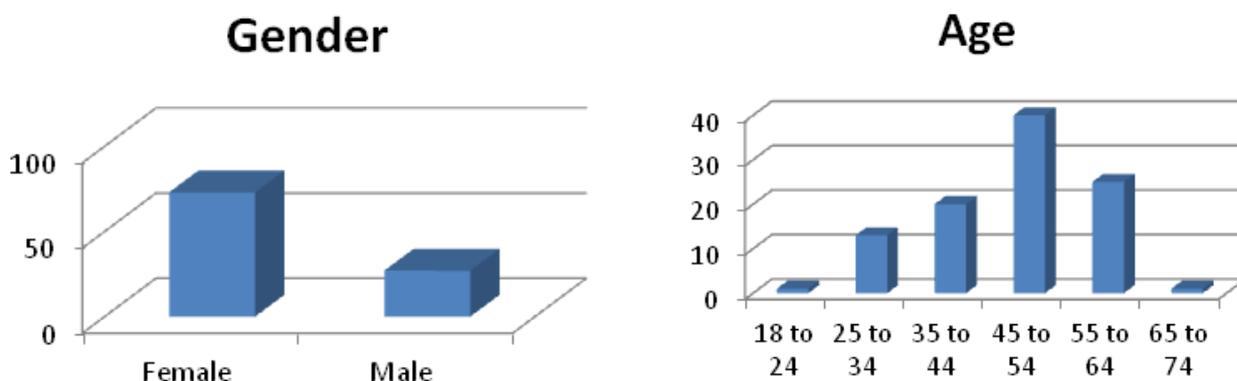
"...a local authority shall ensure that there is adequate provision of facilities for the inhabitants of their area for recreational, sporting, cultural and social activities" is the duty placed on councils by the Local Government and Planning (Scotland) Act 1982. Although culture and leisure services are amongst the most visible and high profile of services associated with local authorities they are seldom these days delivered directly by councils. Almost everywhere these are delivered directly but through Arms Length Organisations (ALEO's ) and specifically leisure trusts.

UNISON Scotland has surveyed our members working in leisure trusts about their experience of delivering culture and leisure services in this 'age of austerity'. Asking how this has impacted on their working lives and the services they deliver .

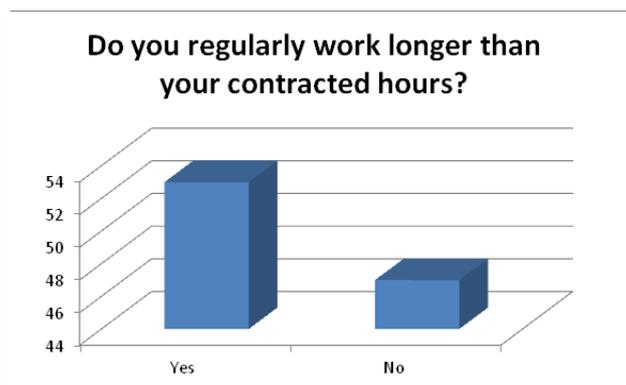
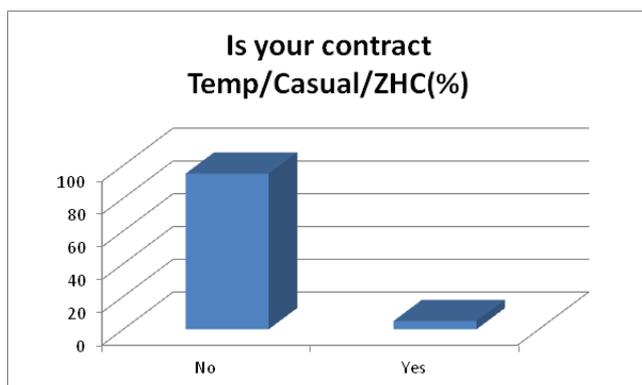
The picture painted is one in which a shrinking workforce are under increasing pressure. This while delivering highly valued services which contribute massively to the public good.

### The workforce

Like other sections of the workforce in public services the majority of those working in leisure trusts are female, the demographic of the whole workforce skewing towards the older end of the age scale.



The workforce, in terms of formal contract, are more secure than some other sectors of the workforce. Only 5% of respondents said that they were employed on casual, temporary or zero hours contracts. They are however under a degree of pressure with 53% reporting that they regularly work more than their contracted hours. Within this group a majority ( 53%) report that they are regularly working 4 or more hours per week above their contracted hours with 20% saying they work an extra 8 hours or more. In this context it is perhaps unsurprising that fully 81% of those surveyed said that they would not be interested in working more hours.



### Leisure staff say

- Stay to get work finished to meet deadlines and also to deal with customers. Regularly queues when my shift finishes. This is unpaid – **receptionist**
- Often required to stay on at end of shift to handover information, complete paperwork or finish essential tasks - **facility duty manager**

## Leisure and Life

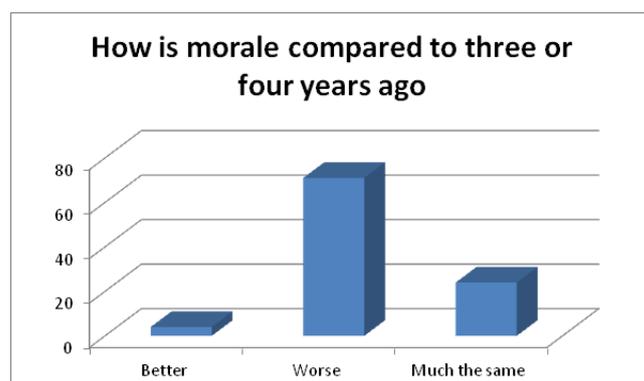
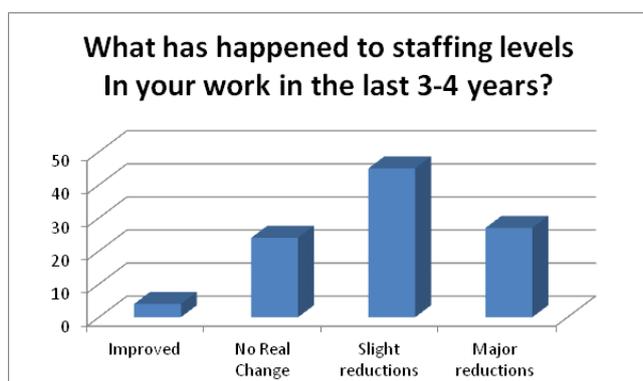
Like other sections of the workforce in public services – members working for leisure trusts have been suffering from the political choices to hold down wages but not prices. The overall drop in the value of wages amongst those working in public services has been previously outlined by UNISON Scotland in various reports. Staff in leisure trusts do not buck this trend. It may be a sign that the recent decrease in inflation is having some impact that only two thirds of staff feel that they have experienced a drop in living standards in recent years. For those that have though, the impact has often been severe. For higher grades of staff this presents itself through things like being unable to go on holiday. Lower down the scale, as the vast bulk of staff are, the tales told are familiar ones of struggling to match the risen costs of fuel and transport, of failing to reach the end of month without going into debt. Several respondents point out that despite their sharply decreasing living standards they are still expected to run their own car in order to carry out their job properly.

### Leisure staff say

- Have to be much more careful with the cost of shopping and look out for the best deals – **clerical assistant**
- The cost of living has gone up. I rent my house from the local council and struggle to pay my rent and council tax as well as gas and electric bills on top of everyday costs like transport to and from work etc. - **catering assistant**
- Just seems to be less money left after essential spend – **health & safety officer**
- Definitely, my wage has not been reflected in the rise of the cost of living. - **information assistant**
- Yes, I have been at the top of my payscale for the last few years and had no pay increases. The cost of household bills and groceries has risen and it has been difficult to balance the books. - **arts development officer**
- We use all our income on household bills and cost of living petrol etc - **receptionist**

## Working in Leisure

The picture as regards staffing is a familiar one. Trusts have maintained the no compulsory redundancy policy of local government. This is welcome, less welcome though is the similarity in failing to replace staff who take voluntary redundancy retire or are on long term sick leave. Perhaps predictably this is related by staff to increasing workloads and having to work longer than contracted hours. Respondents speak of job roles expanding or emphasis shifting – with little acknowledgement and most certainly not remuneration. Almost half (45%) report some level of cuts in staff with a further 27% saying that the staffing reductions have been major.



### Leisure staff say

- It has caused a heavier work load and a lot of extra tasks that have been carried out by other employees in the past - **outdoor instructor**
- I have been given double my usual classes to manage and run, as well as develop new programmes for children aged 3-5 years. Also, the stopping of being paid mileage has decreased the quality of the work as I can spend up to 2 hours 30 mins of my working day on buses. **early years physical activities officer**
- Early retirements meant no replacement appointments, employees that are left have to pick up the additional workload and responsibilities for the same pay. – **leisure centre manager**
- There are intermittent to permanent changes of instructor staff undertaking admin on scattered hours/days - **clerical assistant**
- Majorly affected with stress, working hours longer than the working time directive and our employers do not care. I have regularly as have my colleagues been required to do roles above our level of responsibility without training or additional pay - **operations supervisor**
- Increased stress levels - **acquatics coordinator**
- Major reductions in staff – **graphic designer**
- Staff members leaving and not being replaced. Putting pressure on existing staff members - **cultural facilities officer**

It is when it comes to morale that the impact of stagnating wages, increased demand and static or falling staff levels can be most clearly seen 71% of staff say that morale has fallen in recent years. This despite that over eighty per cent of staff feel that the work they do is valued by the public. Although that 60% do not feel valued by their employer is doubtless a factor here.

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### Leisure staff say

- People aren't as happy as they used to be. – **general assistant**
- We are undergoing our third restructure in 3 years.... All motivation has been slowly drained from us and if I could get a new job, I would - **physical activities officer**
- Morale is at an all time low in my opinion. The human element of relationships between managers and staff has been eradicated by either policy makers or senior management, it would seem to me. Maximising attendance and disingenuous 'praise' by managers who have just completed 'motivational skills' workshops is fooling no-one. - **arts and cultural assistant**

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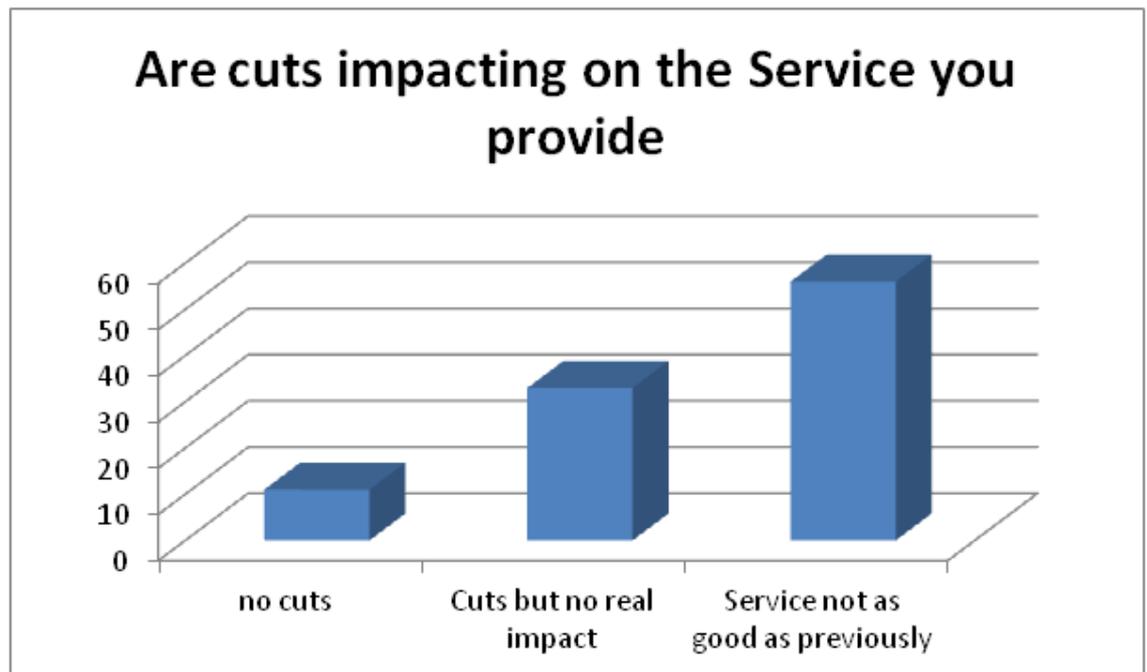
## Cuts and Services

A clear majority of the respondents to our survey (56%) say that cuts have impacted on the service they provide with a further 33% saying that they have noticed cuts but these haven't impacted on the service. (Although there were many comments suggesting either that this was only a matter of time, or that this wouldn't be the case if further cuts were applied. )

The impact is reported as showing in a variety of ways. Facilities open for fewer hours, fewer activities being run, or less outreach and community work. Reductions in staff numbers mean that classes either don't run or numbers are restricted. That this can be a short term gain long/ term pain decision is pointed out by many staff. If activities don't run revenue isn't brought in. Neither is it simply a case of people not being able to use services because they are withdrawn. Examples are given of clubs abandoning their pursuit after they could no longer meet increased or newly introduced charges.

Certainly it is the case that, many charges have outpaced inflation in recent years ( and increases in earnings even more so). A 2013 report by Audit Scotland points out that one of the purposes of charging is the raising of revenue for the Council. In the context of a seemingly permanent freeze in Council Tax councils have looked increasingly to charging regimes to make up the difference. Sport Scotland conduct an annual survey of charging in leisure trusts. In the latest report (2013/14) of the 19 categories examined charges had increased by more than inflation in 10.

Taking three popular activities ( five a side football, swimming and badminton) and looking back a little further, using Sport Scotland figures it is clear that prices have tended to ride faster than inflation. This has happened at a time when staff wages have been all but stagnant and numbers have been falling. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that charges are being used as a replacement for a funding deficit.



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#### Leisure staff say

- Our centre has lost two clubs in the last 4yrs that were good income for us. Two days a week we don't open to the public till 3:30pm. We have recently introduced 4hrs of public swimming on a Sunday that we've never had before. Due to the increase of prices customers are not using our centre as often as they would like to - **duty manager**
  - We don't have enough staff to open all outlets causing a severe impact on customer service, resulting in lower revenue which results in loss of jobs or jobs not being done. This is the same across the trust and not just my facility. - **catering assistant**
  - Pensioners bowling league folded as they couldn't afford let – **hall keeper**
  - The facilities are in need of refurbishment and because of this managers have to increase our cleaning workload to make the area presentable which takes our attention away from the pool - **lifeguard**
  - I have been in post for many years now and have taken time to build up relationships with parents as well as the children. They love the classes and value the work put into them, but are feeling the pinch for the now annual price increases. £3.80 for a 45 minute activity class in a sports centre compared to £2.80 only 3 years ago. - **early years physical activities supervisor**
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## Conclusion

The experience of workers in leisure trusts is of finding themselves under pressure and working harder. Meanwhile they find themselves getting poorer and the quality of the services they provide declining. That this story is an increasingly familiar one should not blind us to its basic unfairness, nor to the way it acts against the public good.

**Culture and leisure services are a flagship of municipal and local pride – utilities and facilities that add much to the quality of life (and potentially the economy) of any given area. It is not just that there is a statutory duty to provide these services, they must be provided adequately.**

The testimony related above suggests that this commitment is coming under considerable pressure, not least for those who deliver the services. The experience of working whilst others play is becoming less and rewarding in every sense. This is not a situation anyone should be content to allow to continue.

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

