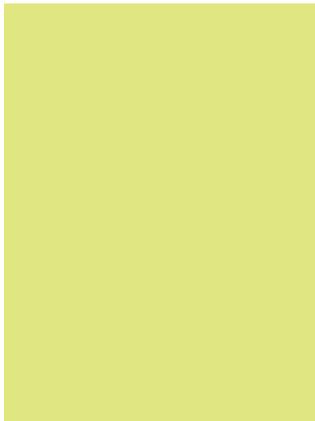
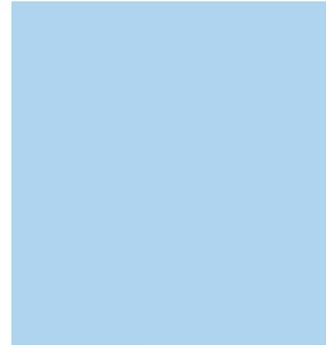


revitalising our local services

UNISON's manifesto
for Scotland's
local authority elections



We've been
revitalising
our public
services



you value them ...
so vote for them.



Introduction

High quality public services are central to the quality of life of Scotland's citizens and its economy. UNISON believes that Scottish public services should be based on the principles of Democracy, Fairness, Excellence, Partnership and Investment. Using these principles Scottish local government can become a model, combining economic strength with fairness and social cohesion.

As we approach the 2007 elections UNISON is taking the opportunity to lay out our key priorities for the future of local government in Scotland

Democracy

Democracy is the defining difference between public and private services. Democratic control makes services responsive to the needs of users - not markets. Democracy requires that people have the opportunity to participate in and influence the policy making process: a say in developing desired outcomes and the means to achieve them.

The growth of quangos and hiving off services means Scotland runs the risk of allowing a patchwork of unaccountable bodies to evolve leading to a loss of democratic accountability and strategic direction. Solutions should be developed in communities and not imposed on them from the centre.

Decision making at the appropriate level leads to more responsive services for users. We must consider devolving powers down from the Scottish Parliament and quangos to local government. The number of quangos needs to be reduced. Local government is well placed to carry out many of their roles. UNISON believes that the remaining public bodies should, as far as possible, be directly elected - not rely on increasingly stretched councillors to provide a veneer of democracy. Where this is not practical, organisations should be an amalgam of elected representatives, appointed laypersons, and professionals with a statutory duty to engage with service users and the public.

Local authorities must have increased say in their finances. Currently 80% of local government funding comes centrally, only 20% is set locally. Allowing councils to resume control of business rates would boost local democracy. This change achieves a funding balance closer to 50:50, and would make local government more responsible to all taxpayers for their decisions.

A fair, locally set, property tax is the best way to fund services. Local income taxes are easy for the wealthy to avoid; a house cannot be moved to a tax shelter. A nationally set local income tax would penalise working couples on average incomes and sever the link between councils and local people.

Local government workers should not be banned from sitting as local councillors and fully participating in their communities. Councillors in many walks of life, including private contractors, must declare conflicts of interest and remove themselves from certain decisions and committees. Council workers could easily do the same.

Fairness

Fairness in the delivery of services and at work is a crucial part of achieving a fair society. If local government is to continue to attract high calibre staff then it must be a model employer. The public sector plays a key role in setting best practice for other sectors.

The modern comprehensive principle that every child should have a genuinely equal chance of the best education in their local school is the foundation of a fair society.

Early years and childcare services support working families to balance work and family life and give children an excellent start. Improving qualifications, career prospects and rewards for early years and childcare workers will improve the quality of provision and recruit and retain high calibre staff. We should aim to provide free, full-time childcare and early years learning for all in the public sector.

The valuable contribution of school support staff should be enhanced by improving qualifications, career pathways and personal development together with the appropriate pay and conditions. This will contribute to improving educational standards in our schools.

Local authorities must drive up performance with regard to their Race Equality Duty. Race Equality Impact Assessments must be more of a priority.



Thirty years after the implementation of the Equal Pay Act women in local government are still waiting for equal pay. It must become a priority for local councils to use the extra money provided by the Scottish Executive to implement Single Status and address past pay discrimination. Under the new Gender Equality Duty more work needs to be done on occupational segregation and promoting best practice through procurement.

Local authority workers paid into their pension schemes expecting fairness and a decent retirement. The new LGPS must ensure that this pension promise is kept. The scheme is a vital recruitment and retention tool for the public sector.

In preparing for an ageing population, local government must play an important part in realising the potential of Scotland's older people and support them in the lives they want to lead. Services need to plan for, and respond to, the diverse needs of this growing segment of the population.

Local government must ensure that public sector procurement takes into account more than price. Good employment conditions and local, sustainable, and environmentally friendly procurement options are all acceptable *best value* concerns.

Staff shortages and high turnover detract from service delivery and need to be tackled. The 21st Century Social Work Review needs to be fully implemented to ensure high calibre staff are recruited and retained in the sector. All staff in these teams need to be better managed, supported, equipped and empowered in their working lives

UNISON welcomed the Emergency Workers Act, but many public service workers continue to be assaulted at work. Protection should be extended to all public service workers, and sentencing should recognise assaults on service providers as an aggravating factor. Employers must also take practical measures to minimise the risk of violence to staff.

Excellence

The recent doubling of spending on education, health, transport and social services has enabled the public sector to recover from the years of neglect. Local government needs to look forward and aim to set the standards for best practice in service delivery. Complex services “fair to all” and “personal to each of us” cannot be delivered by central mandate. There must be space for local innovation with broad standards set to disseminate best practice. This also requires transparency and an element of risk taking. The current “blame culture” stifles innovation.

Efficiency is essential in delivering excellent services but in order to measure efficiency gains we need suitable performance measures and benchmarks. Traditional cost accounting methods are not entirely suitable for public services. Targets should be based on outputs, inputs, outcomes and process measures. Scotland must avoid the development of a costly scrutiny industry, where measuring and scrutinising takes resources away from service delivery.

Scotland is taking the UK lead in providing healthy school lunches. Setting high nutritional standards and providing free school meals would be an innovative way of improving Scotland's health.

The bond between our careers service and our schools needs to be strengthened to ensure that careers advice is an integral part of the school while retaining the service's independence and a strong commitment to an all-age careers service. While there is a case for a national strategic direction for the careers service, delivery should be through regional groupings of local authorities.

Partnership

Partnership is the cornerstone of Scottish public service reform. Co-operation rather than competition continues to offer the best route forward. Partnerships typically operate as self-organising, inter-agency networks (Public Service Networks). They have different degrees of autonomy from their parental bodies and the Scottish Executive. Examples include Joint Future and the Criminal Justice Authorities. Partnerships create and benefit from joined-up working.

The current Efficient Government Initiative's push towards shared services has many risks which must be addressed. Artificial separation of 'front office' and 'back office' functions deskills and demoralises those who perform key support functions, and undermines moves to joined-up services. Proposals



can be driven by unrealistic expectations of savings and common systems, encouraged by consultants who collect huge fees at the taxpayers' expense.

Partnership with the voluntary sector to deliver services must be based on full cost recovery. The voluntary sector should not be a cheap option; it also requires resources, investment and skilled management to deliver services.

Local government must be at the heart of community planning, this will enable agencies to work together with the community plan and deliver better services. It should not be used as a vehicle to outsource essential services and lessen democratic accountability.

Investment

Sustained long-term investment is essential if we are to revitalise Scotland's public services. This must include the revenue to run day-to-day services and the capital to rebuild the infrastructure. Long-term funding allows for strategic planning and development.

The drive to rebuild our ageing infrastructure has involved the extensive use of Public Private Partnerships and the Private Finance Initiative (PPP/PFI). Billions of pounds of public money have been wasted. Some alternatives require amendments to Treasury rules, but progress could be made within Scotland by providing capital grants which give public authorities a real choice between funding sources: a 'level playing field'. The Executive has made progress by giving local authorities prudential borrowing powers. But these are limited if grants are only available to councils who use PFI.

Conventional borrowing remains the most cost-effective and flexible method of financing public services. It retains accountability and enables public authorities to engage in genuine consultation with service users without the smokescreen of commercial confidentiality. Other claimed alternatives to PPP, such as 'not-for-profit trusts' are still PPP schemes with a different form of company structure. In the main this is simply window dressing.

The transfer of public assets promises access to extra money: e.g. housing stock to housing associations and cultural and leisure facilities to leisure trusts. Leisure trusts are simply a tax dodge. Local government should not use legitimate incentives for charities as vehicles for outsourcing or to avoid public accountability. Desperately needed housing investment should be awarded on a level playing field between councils and other providers.

Conclusion

Scotland has begun the process of developing its own public service model. The next steps will be decided in these elections. UNISON believes that people should be treated as partners who have a real say in shaping our public services - citizens not consumers exploited for private profit.

Specifically we need a new concordat between local government and the Scottish Executive that recognises the vital role that local government plays in the democratic life of Scotland.

The principles we believe support this vision are:

Democracy - accountability - the meaningful involvement of users and staff - not markets, will provide the services the public want.

Fairness - essential to build a fairer society both in delivering services and as a model employer.

Excellence - should be the aim of all Scotland's public services. We should be the country others look to, to see what can be achieved.

Partnership - creating the joined up working essential to meet the complex challenges Scotland faces without costly and disruptive reorganisation.

Investment - essential not only to overcome past shortages but to fund ongoing innovation.