



UNISON  
Scotland

Local  
Government  
Network

for people who care about local government

## Issue 004 – May 2013

### Pay Ballot

#### Pay offer rejected

UNISON Scotland members have rejected the pay offer from councils in a postal ballot.

Members decided that an offer of 1% simply isn't enough after suffering years of real terms pay cuts. While welcoming the principle of the Scottish Living Wage, even this aspect of the offer came with conditions and no uprating mechanism.

Local government workers for too long have been the poor relations of the public sector. Not only have they not been paid the £250 that other public sector workers (under £21,000) received, but the austerity cuts have impacted disproportionately on local government. Council workers make up 57% of the Scottish public sector workforce but have suffered 67% of the cuts.



Pay cuts also damage the local economy as our latest [briefing](#) shows. Low paid workers spend more locally and fair pay helps boost consumer confidence.

### Council Tax

#### Council Tax freeze is costing public services dear

UNISON Scotland has called for a debate over the Council Tax freeze after publishing [research](#) that shows hard-pressed Scots are facing massive increases in charges for vital local services.

We asked all the Scottish councils how their charges have changed since the Council Tax was 'frozen' in 2007. The responses reveal that people on modest incomes have to pay far more for costs like their rent, school meals for their kids, and charges for care in daycentres for their vulnerable relatives – and still services are being cut back.

The freeze disproportionately benefits the wealthy; while charges are being increased and services cut. Band H households are "saving" on average £441 per year while those in the cheapest homes (Band A) "save" £147 a year. UNISON's FOI request shows increased charging far outweighs the claimed savings. It's much fairer for everyone to pay a small amount extra in tax than have big increases in charges that bear no relation to ability to pay for services.

## PENSIONS

### **Innovative pensions fund plan for new social housing in Scotland**

UNISON Scotland has launched a proposal to use Scottish council pension funds to invest in much needed affordable social housing. The plan, supported by SFHA and Shelter could potentially unlock many millions of pounds for building new homes.

At a time of tight public finances, with £11 billion of Scottish Local Government Pension Fund (LGPS) assets currently invested overseas, it makes sense to switch investment to socially useful projects like housing. While pension funds invest in arms and tobacco companies - public sector workers would much prefer their money being used to build new homes. Download the UNISON Scotland plan [here](#).

The Public Service Pensions Act will also bring major changes to local government pension [governance](#) in Scotland. For example, the new pension boards must include employer and member representatives in equal numbers.

## HEALTH AND CARE INTEGRATION

### **Democratic accountability in care integration**

The Scottish Government has published the summary of responses to their care integration proposals (see UNISON [Briefing](#)). All evidence shows that top down reorganisation won't produce real health and care integration. The focus must be on joint outcomes –agreed with local partners and relevant to their local circumstances with proper democratic accountability.

The new Community Health and Social Care Partnerships don't meet this test. They are to be run by a single individual – the Jointly Accountable Officer, responsible for a multi million pound budget of public money. Technically accountable to both the local authority and the health board the so-called Jointly Accountable Officer will in reality be accountable to no one.

## SHARED SERVICES

### **Real collaboration needs a staffing framework**

If Government is serious about encouraging real collaboration between different public services it needs to address the staffing issues first. All too often it is an afterthought in legislative proposals leaving councils and unions to pick up the pieces.

UNISON has also urged the Scottish Government to set in place a broad staffing framework, based on best practice, to cover a range of issues when public services are reformed. These include: staff transfer, pensions, secondment, training and development, equality duties, governance and procurement. Re-inventing the wheel is not a good use of scarce resources. More on this in our evidence to [Parliament](#).

## PROCUREMENT

### **Councils can take action on procurement**

There are some positive signs that the forthcoming Procurement Bill might be a bit more adventurous than the consultation promised. Action on tax dodging and blacklisting is at least a possibility. In the meantime councils can take action on their contracts. Several have started by writing to suppliers asking them if they are paying the Scottish Living Wage, been involved in blacklisting or aggressive tax avoidance. It all helps to change the culture and use procurement to drive positive change.

## IN OTHER NEWS...

### Social risks of spending cuts

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has published a [report](#) identifying best practice in council decision making on austerity budget cuts. Equality Impact Assessments are rarely done well and don't form a core part of the decision making process. They recommend adopting a Social Risk Impact Assessment model that would cover all disadvantaged groups.

### Cuts to food safety and environmental health

UNISON Scotland [research](#) has highlighted the impact of cuts on food safety in Scotland. From meat inspection at the abattoir to checks on fast food outlets, the consumer is being put at risk. While we welcome the establishment of a Scottish Food Standards Agency, we must ensure it is driven by consumer safety, not the commercial interests of the meat industry.

### Criminal Justice social work

UNISON Scotland's [response](#) to the Scottish Government's consultation on criminal justice supports the full return of this service to local democratic accountability. Further centralisation is the wrong approach.

### Audit Scotland: Local Government Overview

Councillors should make Audit Scotland's annual [overview](#) of local government required reading. This year's report emphasises the role of councillors in good governance. They highlight weak accounting systems and under resourced internal audit. Not to mention delays in updating financial controls and standing orders. You have been warned!

### Finally....

Some good news. The latest Ipsos Mori [study](#) shows Scots are increasingly satisfied with public service delivery and are clear that services should not be privatised.

## KEY CAMPAIGNS

### Public Works

UNISON Scotland's major campaign to protect public services

### Protect our pensions

UNISON Scotland's campaign to secure fair and decent pensions for all

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UNISON's Local Government Network is for councillors and others with an interest in local government. Our regular e-newsletter, Council Connections, brings all of the latest news and information on what's happening across local government in Scotland. If you are receiving this in error, or your email address is changing, please contact UNISON Scotland's Bargaining and Campaigns team on 0141 342 2850. If you wish to unsubscribe to this email please reply to this email with 'unsubscribe' in the subject heading.

Want more information? Visit our [website](#) for comprehensive news, information and updates on what is happening across Scotland's public services or contact [Dave Watson](#).

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