



UNISON

Disconnected

Survey of staff, working in Information and Communications Technology

November 2015

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Introduction

This survey is part of our Worth It series looking at the impact of austerity on public services and those who deliver them.

UNISON Scotland conducted a survey of members working in a range of roles in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) across the public sector in Scotland. Staff working in ICT are seldom visible to service users yet their work is essential to the delivery of our services. It is hard to think of an area of public services that does not involve these workers. The role of ICT continues to grow whether in internal and external communications via Apps, websites, texts and emails, tele-medicine, data and records management systems, finance and accounting or HR systems. While ICT is often thought of in terms of hardware its success is reliant on people and their skills in understanding how people interact with technology. This is true for all ICT but particularly in public services where services have to respond to complex and varied needs of citizens.

Our survey shows that austerity is making life very difficult for our members in this sector and those who rely on the services they provide.

Key Issues

Communications technology offers opportunities to transform the delivery of services and increases opportunities citizens to input to the design and delivery of services. Not investing properly will only lead to increased costs in the future.

- **IT strategies too focused on cutting costs rather than service improvement**
- **Budget cuts are widespread and impacting on their ability to deliver services**
- **There are clear issues with staff cuts, not just in terms of numbers but the skills mix of the workers who remain**
- **There is no cutback in demand for services so cuts have led to increased workloads**
- **Staff morale is very low and most expect things to get worse**
- **There is a real risk that staff will take up better paid opportunities elsewhere**

The Conservative Government's Austerity programme will result in a further £2 billion of cuts to Scotland's public services. Sadly the cuts that services have already endured, since the banking crisis, are having a serious impact on public bodies' ability to deliver high quality services. While the salami slicing of services doesn't have the same impact in the media as closures of single employers our research shows that the cuts are and will continue to have just as serious an impact on service delivery, workers lives and Scotland's economy. These surveys aim to capture the detailed impact of cuts on services and the workers who remain.

While ICT is often thought of in terms of hardware its success is reliant on people and their skills in understanding how people interact with technology. This is true for all ICT but particularly in public services where workers have to adapt meet the needs of citizens rather than citizens adapt themselves to the technology.

There have been many high profile, costly ICT failures in the public sector: long over runs, escalating prices, systems failures, and data loss. Much of this caused by attempts to buy "off-the-shelf" solutions lifted from the private sector.

The latest Scottish Government computer system, installed to allow staff to log in and out of work with a swipe card, collapsed almost as soon as it was up and running. The old system has had to be reinstalled. The NHS24 telecoms system launched earlier this year was two years late and £40m over budget. The Crown Office ICT project also came in for serious criticism from Audit Scotland.

However these issues are not limited to Scotland. The Government of Western Australia had to shelf its central shared service project following system failures, long delays and massive cost overruns. A joint venture between Liverpool council and BT also fell apart. The Council initially renegotiated the contract after a series of issues were raised around overcharging the council for services. The project failed in the end as BT pulled out after they were asked to make further savings.

As part of the Efficient Government Programme, in an effort to learn from these mistakes and to harness the power of ICT the Scottish Government set up a review and then developed a strategy for ICT in the public sector in Scotland. This is now known as the McClelland review.

Following on from this public bodies were asked to work to develop their own strategies following the aims of the national strategy. Delivering on these strategies will be extremely difficult without appropriate resources.

Report Summary

Staff, working in Information and Communications Technology (ICT), are seldom visible to service users yet their work is essential to the delivery of our services. There are few areas of the public sector which do not involve ICT. Even where it is not directly involved ICT is used for scheduling shift patterns and payroll for the staff who deliver the service. Ensuring that ICT is introduced and used in a way that works for the public sector requires the use of directly employed staff who understand what is required.

Public services are complex and have to respond to more varied situations (sometimes life and death) than the private sector where the systems offered are often directly lifted.

Like all sections of the public sector ICT teams have been experiencing budget cuts, staff cuts and increased workload. The survey show just how much of an impact these cuts are having.

Members responded from a range of public sector bodies. The majority (53%) working in local government, 23% in the NHS and the rest in colleges or universities, housing associations and Police Scotland.

The vast majority stated that their employer did have ICT strategies in place, in line with the Scottish Government's expectation of public sector bodies. Sadly only 23% of respondents thought that the implementation of the strategy had been "very good" or "good" with 33% stating poor or very poor. Among the issues raised were that it was too focused on cost reduction not service improvements and that external providers did not have enough understanding of the public sector.

Members said

There is more focus on reducing costs especially staff related
The 3rd party who provide the IT don't really understand the need that the Council has

Unsurprisingly given the level of cuts that the public sector is facing comments in relation to many of the questions indicated that budget cuts and reductions in staffing were taking place and seriously impacting on their services.

Comments like "Too much work - not enough people." were very common. Workload pressures are increasing with most reporting that they were under pressure to meet the demands. Not only have staff numbers reduced but as is usually the case with voluntary redundancy/ not replacing leavers it is the more experienced staff that take redundancy and/or retire. This can lead to not only to specific skills shortages but also the loss of the perspective that experience of the wider workings and ethos of an organisation provides.

Concerns were also raised about the future of services. This includes purchasing equipment:

- Not enough year on year investment to keep up with changes in technology.
- And also the approach taken to decision making about what and how to use the technology
- No joined up holistic approach; piecemeal projects cause conflicts

Budget cuts, staff shortages and heavy workloads are impacting poorly on staff morale. 62% of members rated morale in their teams as negative or very negative. Only ten percent felt positive and none very positive. Lack of a pay rise or changes in pay structures leading to pay cuts have added to those feelings. Few expected it to improve as austerity leads to more cuts. The public sector will not be able to use new technology to its full potential if people leave to work in the private sector. The public sector has and will continue to struggle to compete with the private sector in terms of salaries for IT staff, if it no longer offers better working conditions then this will only get worse. The public sector needs to be able to recruit and retain high quality staff to deliver high quality services.

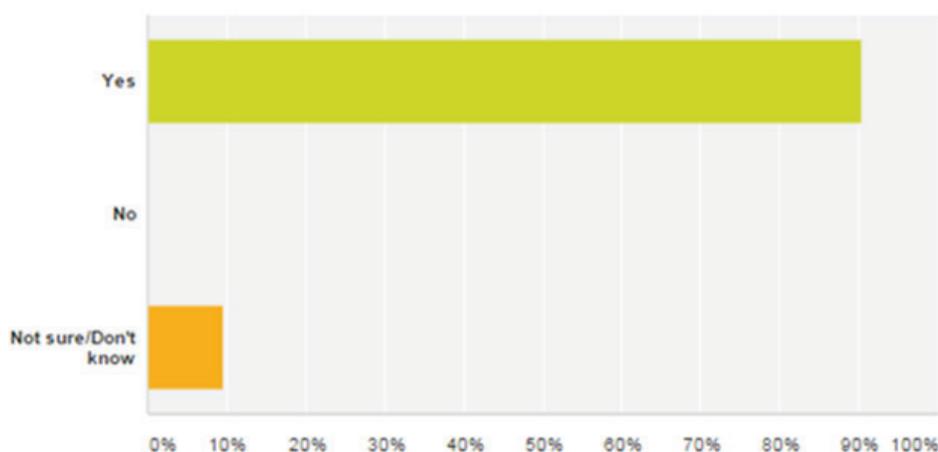
Information and Communications Technology, used properly, should play a crucial role in delivering efficient modern public services. There is a real risk to our services if we do not invest in these opportunities. This goes beyond spending on hardware: the public sector needs to recruit and retain high quality staff to be able to drive the change needed. This will not happen if the sector is not an attractive place for ICT professionals to work.

Survey detail

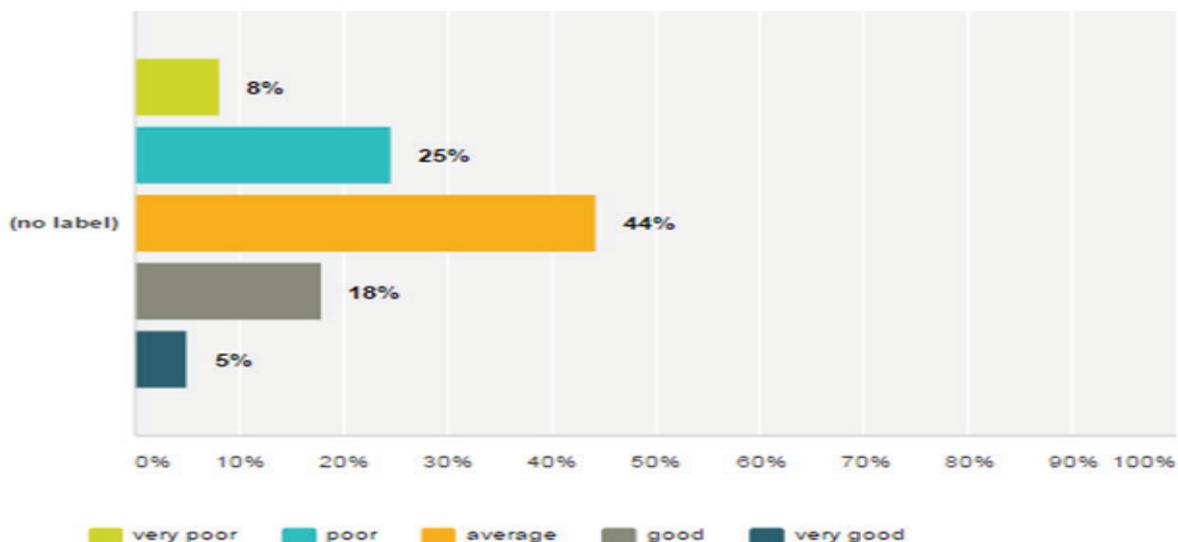
Staff, working in Information and Communications Technology (ICT), are seldom visible to service users yet their work is essential to the delivery of our services. There are few areas of the public sector which do not involve ICT. Even where it is not directly involved ICT is used for scheduling shift patterns and payroll for the staff who deliver the service. Like all sections of the public sector ICT staff have been experiencing budget cuts, staff cuts and increased workload. UNISON Scotland has therefore conducted a survey of members working in a range of roles in ICT across the public sector in Scotland to find out more detail on the impact of cuts on our members and the service they deliver.

Members responded from a range of public sector bodies. The majority (53%) working in local government, 23% in the NHS and the rest in colleges or universities, housing associations and Police Scotland.

In line with the Scottish Government's aspirations the overwhelming majority of respondents said their employer had an ICT strategy, the rest did not know or were not sure.



Sadly only five percent of respondents thought that the implementation of the strategy had been very good, 44% thought it average, 33% poor or very poor and 18% good.



When prompted for further comments the key issues raised were:

- **the implementation was too slow**
- **that the focus was too heavily on cost reduction rather than improving/modernising service delivery**
- **There were also concerns that external providers had little understanding of the public sector and that the decisions are driven by management teams with too little expertise in IT**

Comments include:

Trying to do too much at once with too little budget and doing whatever is done in the West regardless of whether this is best practice.

There is more focus on reducing costs especially staff related. Experienced staff are leaving to find better paid work and not being replaced. There has been significant increase in the number of short term contractors brought in to work on new projects. Full time staff watch on the sidelines as temporary contracts collect large wages for little work and usually zero responsibilities.

The 3rd party who provide the IT don't really understand the need that the Council has

Taking too long to implement

Management and directors are not qualified for their posts.

Expert staff recommendations are ignored in favour of costs and poor quality solutions are deployed

One size doesn't fit all

Some areas are poor i.e. purchasing expensive hardware, software and services. Network changes are performed by five external companies, in the past it was two and was a better more efficient service, the network is no longer reliable!

Nothing is going ahead, two years of waiting for printer contract and so on

Strategy is too focussed a word. There seem to be goals without any real moves to get there. IT users have low regard for IT staff and IT staff deal arrogantly with IT users.

Poor project management and lack of departmental communication.

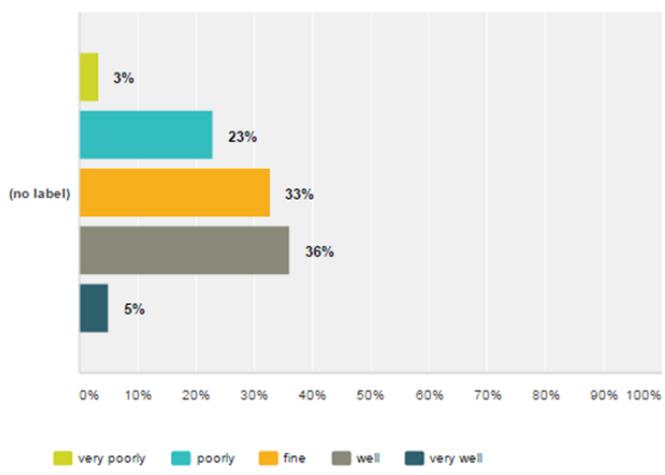
I believe that the strategy for IT has been overworked by an upper management team who have little understanding of IT and don't listen to those managers who do have a good knowledge of our IT system and structure.

the strategy is very ambitious and additional staff are employed to oversee the management of the strategy, but no extra ICT technical staff ever seem to be recruited to actually do the technical implementation.

Modern technology is rapidly evolving and offers a range of opportunities to improve public service delivery. This goes beyond the transformation caused by the first wave of ICT with personal computers, email and electronic record keeping. Technology offers new ways of delivering services and engaging with service users in the design and delivery of services. Access to better and live data can also lead to rapid responses to incidents preventing problems building up; for example change traffic light timings and adding diversions routes to e-road signs due to accidents. The public sector is facing huge risks if it does not take the opportunities that ICT offers.

When asked “How well do you think ICT is used by your employer?”

- **3% say very poor**
- **23% poorly**
- **33% say fine**
- **36% well**
- **5% very well**



There are therefore mixed views. The concerns raised include lack of understanding across organisations of the value of ICT, impact of budget constraints and staffing levels on what can be done and in general how plans are implemented.

Comments include

Not enough year on year investment to keep up with changes in technology.

ICT has reached all services. The use of laptops is excessive, it would be cheaper to use desktop PCs. For the price of one laptop, two desktops could be deployed!

ICT can always be used better, but time, budgetary and workload constraints often have an impact on its effective implementation

There is a lack of awareness of the importance of ICT as a corporate, strategic resource. This has been confirmed by the recent decision to restructure, placing IT into a division of Corporate Services called Customer Services and IT (which includes Revenues, Customer Services, Corporate Debt and Welfare Reform and IT). This is apparently because our future focus is to be on delivering Channel Shift (moving more services to online provision) and Customer Services ties in with this. Desirable (and high profile) though online provision is, it isn't a particularly demanding project of work and take-up is very slow. The idea that the focus of the whole service should be on this is totally misguided.

No joined up holistic approach; piecemeal projects cause conflicts

ICT is not recognized properly as department which should provide great service and improving everyones

everyday work. its rather patching broken old obsolete technology. Lack of training for years

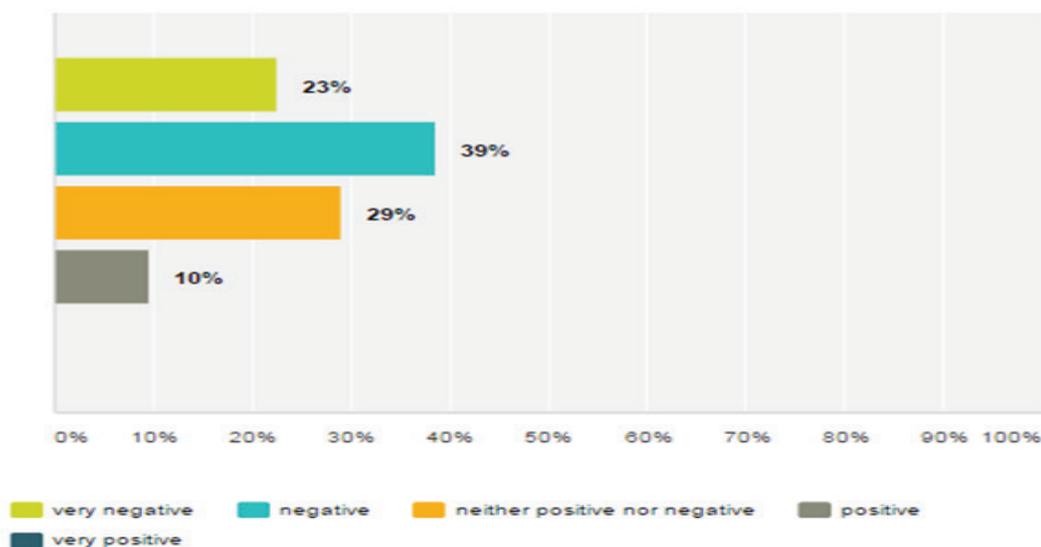
They just don't know how good it is. Ref potential outsourcing of a VERY good IT service and staff Too disjointed. Internally within IT, also IT can't veto purchases when there are other "in use" or existing or cheaper products available. Depts get mostly what they want.

Our organisation use what IT resources they have very well, and we have implemented some new technologies but some new technologies seem to be forced upon us due to upper management believing that this is the way forward and not necessarily for the benefit of the organisation.

Staff Morale

Members are continually feeding back to us that they are under enormous pressure to deliver a quality service despite the cuts. Things are no different in ICT departments. Unsurprisingly therefore 62% of members rated morale in their teams as negative or very negative. Only ten percent felt positive and none very positive. The rest described morale as neither positive nor negative. This is very concerning as low morale impacts on performance. There will be serious consequences to future use of this technology on if people leave to work in the private sector.

The public sector has and will continue to struggle to compete with the private sector in terms of salaries for IT staff, if it no longer offers better working conditions then this will only get worse. The public sector needs to be able to recruit and retain high quality staff to deliver high quality services.



Reasons given for low morale focus, not unexpectedly, on budget cuts, heavy workloads and staff shortages. All of these are clearly interlinked where budget cuts lead to staff cuts which increase the workload for those who remain. Lack of a pay rise or changes in pay structures leading to pay cuts have added to those feelings.

Comments include

Morale is low because workload is very very high. Too much work - not enough people.

The team is overstretched trying to juggle more and more tasks whilst trying to keep costs down.

Short of staff and still waiting to hear about another restructure. We will no doubt all be applying for our jobs for less money. Feel like you are on a shaky nail for at least 5 years now.

The organisation is currently undertaking staff reductions in an attempt to cut costs. This is being done against a background of increased workload for those staff still in post who have seen after large cuts in their pay due to previous job evaluation exercises and minimal pay awards in recent years.

Very little investment in training. Temporary contracts used where full time would make far more sense.

Despite the pressures they are forced to work under, I work hard to keep my team motivated
Abysmal communication and personal development and support.

They are outsourcing of a VERY good IT service and staff. Unbelievable that they are considering outsourcing a team which has created pioneering work and system implementation to an external company.

No one believe that anything will change, lack of communication with management leading to even harder situation due to new pay structures and people losing all their allowances

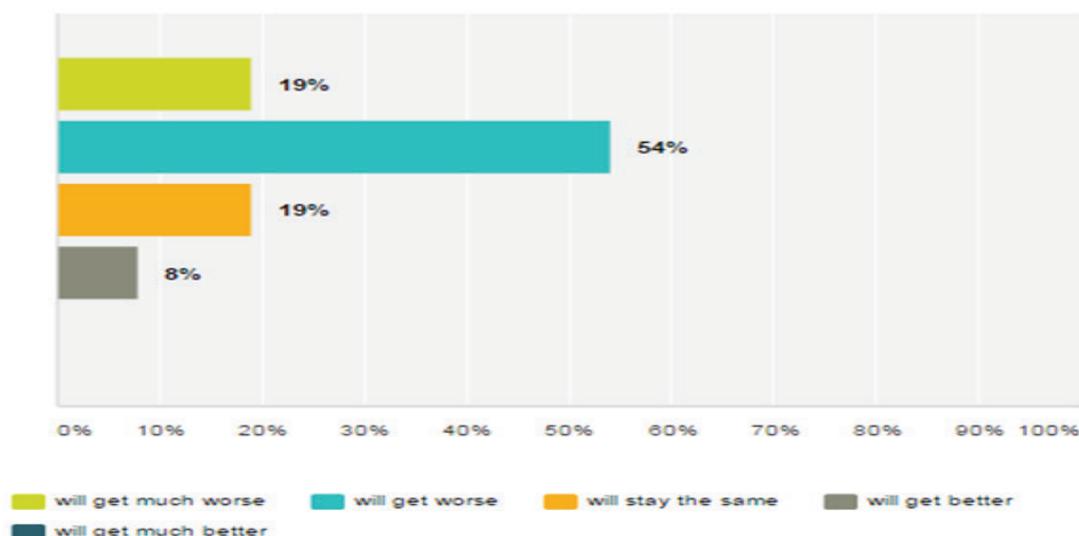
The lack of funding and constant degrading of staff numbers have left up feeling unappreciated and somewhat overworked, the staff count has dropped considerably but the workload has risen, the lack of a payrise over the last few years also contributes to negative feelings.

Great Team but pending Service Review is having a negative effect on morale. Managers dont match to the enthusiasm of the workers. Some fellow staff seem to get off doing very little while others are constantly juggling their workloads.

Few staff are expecting this to improve in the next few years:

73% expect that it will get worse, 19% that it will stay the same and only 8% feel it will get better. Just like the previous question the comments in response to this question focus on continuing budget cuts and how this will further impact on staffing levels. Another key concern is the impact of worrying about job cuts: increasing stress and generally being de-motivating.

In ICT, and across the public sector, as older staff retire then they are either not replaced or replaced by staff employed on lower grades. Increasingly the staff who remain (the newer, younger, cheaper staff) are taking on work well above their pay grade. Not knowing what's going on or being involved in the process is also a problem. Knowing what's going on: no matter how bad the news, is less stressful than not knowing.



Comments from members include

We all know that our jobs are on the line, however we are never told what's happening.

Staff losses, lack of funding, poor upper management will equate to poorer morale in our team.

Unsure but may have to do more work with less staff. There is dwindling resource and increasing demands, so i can see the situation only getting worse.

There is a circle of decline - particularly in development - as every vacancy at officer level is taken as a saving. This reduces capacity and gives further argument for managers to say we have to put work out to the private sector. Also, new starts are being taken on as assistants, although they carrying out all the duties of officers who are currently on grades 2+ higher. There is concern that this will ultimately be used to downgrade officer posts.

As above - the ongoing war on the public sector, continual budget cuts and the ideology of austerity is guaranteed to make worklife worse.

The drive to cut costs mainly from ICT staff reductions whilst back filling with police officers can not be sustained. Contractors being brought in on high day rates (compared to full time staff) hurts staff morale and damages the organisation.

We are facing a termination of 10 year contract and everyone is worried about how we will be affected.

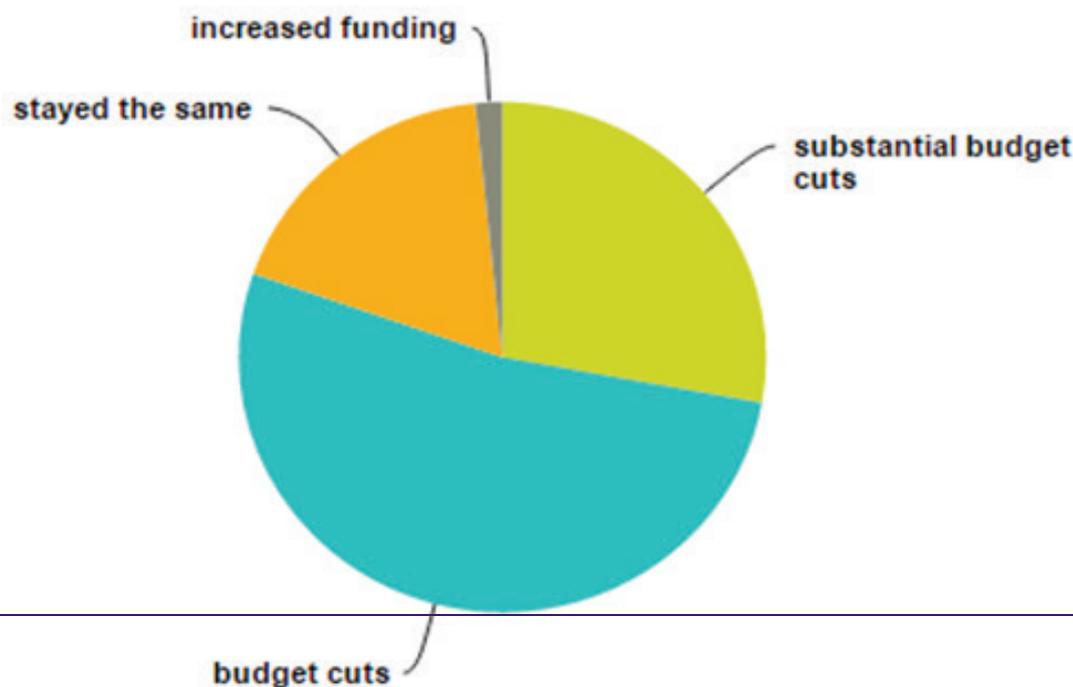
It will stay the same unless management changes.

ICT Management seem to 'fly below the radar' with regard to satisfying organisation wide HR policies. I, for example, have never received an annual appraisal or one to one after 27 months of employment.

There is too much Silo working. Infrastructure and support teams can't meet user expectations.

Budget Cuts

Despite the strategic importance of ICT to the public sector when asked more specifically about budgets only twenty percent of respondents reported that budgets had stayed the same or increased.



80% reported cuts or substantial budget cuts, 18% that the budget had stayed the same and 2% an increase. At a strategic level there still seems to be little understanding of how much people now use and expect to use their devices to interact with public services or what opportunities this technology offers for both service delivery and design. Increasingly even those on low incomes are able to get online via smart phones rather than the more expensive route of fixed broadband and a computer. Not investing properly in ICT is extremely short sighted.

Comments from members include

Staff reductions within IT accounted for one half of the entire budget savings figure for Corporate Services (Finance, Admin, Revenues, Legal, HR etc) last year (around £600,000). The other half was covered under VER.

Staff leaving and not being replaced even though management and directors say we are under staffed. three quarters of a million pounds of cuts in IT Services department alone for fiscal year 2015-2016

Staff costs and revenue costs have to be cut to meet targets. This in addition to now having to pay VAT. Only in recent months with the appointment of a new CIO and director has the budget increased.

Budgets have been mainly reflective of recurring maintenance charges over the recent years with small allowances for hardware / software purchases within a periodic replacement programme.

Staff losses in some sections. Voluntary redundancy, supernumerary pools etc

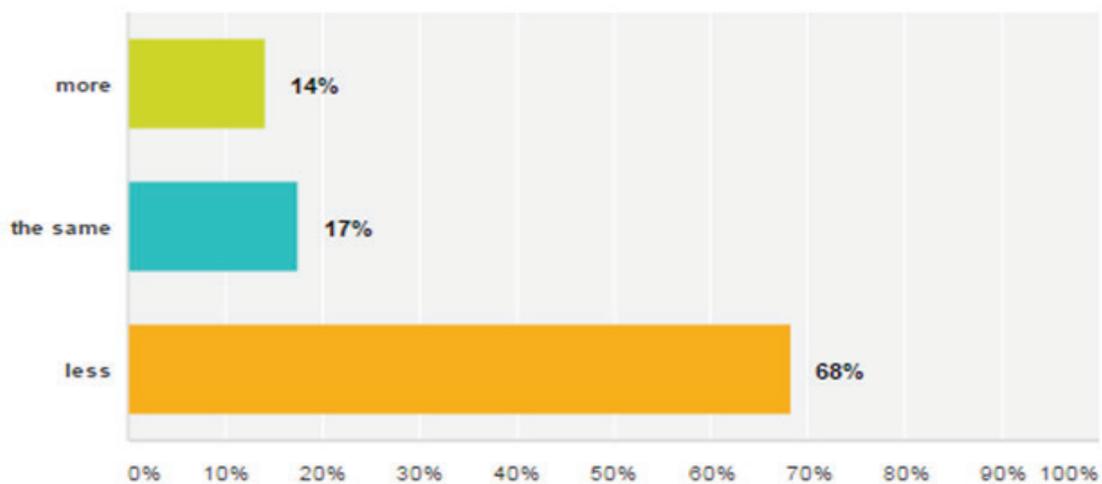
Budgets reduced due to efficiency savings which means that staff cuts have not happened but now have to increase productivity without surplus resource.

Budget never existed and broken equipment is barely replaced, staff complains that they have no printers to print because printer breaks and never got replaced

We have had small cuts to the budget but we can still function as a department but only just.
Further 30% reduction in ICT budget next year.

Staff Cuts

Responses to the questions earlier in our survey indicated that staff numbers were being cut and that this was impacting of service delivery and staff morale. When asked specifically about staff cuts 68% of respondents indicated that they now had less staff in their teams.



Members indicated that so far most job losses have been through non-replacement of leavers rather than redundancy. While this is clearly preferable to redundancy it is not an easy or painless option. There is no strategic overview, staff levels and skills mixes in the team are not planned. It all depends on who retires or gets a new job.

The remaining workers are clearly under pressure because of heavy workloads and while some members feel their teams have too many managers we also see teams where lack of senior staff leaves junior staff trying to cover work that was previously done by the senior staff on much higher wages.

Comments from members include

Some management posts back-filled but every officer vacancy taken as a saving.

2 staff members have left and not been replaced. Plus they are thinking of replacing them with people who are not qualified for the posts.

Leaving members not replaced

Our ICT is going through restructure process at the moment, existing staff will be matched into new roles base on the new job profiles, staff may have opportunity apply for posts in new structure, reduction of staff is also possible.

Staff who leave have not been replaced. Positions are cut leading to one person doing the role of two.

More project managers than workers

Significant cuts have been made already with further cuts planned. Severely under staffed and has been from before i joined. However it has increased in management and not the lower staff employees leave and are not replaced, putting the burden on those remaining much reduced, too much work, not enough staff, stress levels high

Staff that leave through VR or ER aren't replaced but rather remaining staff have to take on their former workload.

Staff losses in some sections.

The employee count reduced by over half in a year due to the threat of our jobs

People leaving because of outsourcing threat and major drop in morale due to being told in March that we were providing a terrible service. Which is now being proved otherwise. Please stop this rot.

Same people employed but more management position created which did not help at all

Recent decision to remove late shift with rota and rely on an 'On-Call' rota for this 24/7 emergency service.

People not being replaced when they leave, no longer bringing in contractors for short projects etc due to the salary cuts and regrading people cant afford to stay, therefore they are moving to positions out-with, where their skills are acknowledged. At the moment over 40% have left.

Apparently still 1/4 more to be cut 6 staff gone, 4 of which were team leaders. Restructure / streamlining wasn't a bad thing but resources aren't where needed, and teams are under resourced. There's too much work, and it's more technical and time consuming than it was say 10-20 years ago.

We have lost more technical IT staff in recent years (approx 17 out of 60) and due to restructures we have gained more administrative members of the team creating more bureaucracy rather than working as a technical department

We have more projects but less staff on the ground. We do not need project managers but field support. This is the area being cut the most. Network deployment solutions do not work. Our users need a face to support their needs.

As mentioned will be a reduction in staff next year following the service review. Not getting replaced as outsourcing is taking place decimated

Opportunities for ICT to improve services

UNISON believes that those who actually deliver services are best placed to design services. We asked members working in ICT what opportunities they believe ICT offers to improve service delivery in their organisation. While some mention the opportunities offered by shared services they point out that the off-the-shelf solutions being promoted by the big corporate shared services companies do not work for organisations as complex as those which deliver public services. There have been many high profile, costly ICT failures in the public sector: long over runs, escalating prices, systems failures, and data loss. Much of this is caused by attempts to buy "off-the-shelf" solutions lifted from the private sector.

The latest Scottish Government computer system, installed to allow staff to log in and out of work with a swipe card, collapsed almost as soon as it was up and running. The old system has had to be reinstalled. The NHS24 telecoms system launched earlier this year was two years late and £40m over budget. The Crown Office ICT project also came in for serious criticism from Audit Scotland. However these issues are not limited to Scotland. The Government of Western Australia had to shelve its central shared service project following system failures, long delays and massive cost overruns. A joint venture between Liverpool council and BT also fell apart. The Council initially renegotiated the contract after a series of issues were raised around overcharging the council for services. The project failed in the end as BT pulled out after they were asked to make further savings.

Some feel that too few senior managers are fully aware of how much ICT is part of people's lives now. Respondents state that better contact with service users and other staff would enable in-house staff to make effective use of the opportunities offered.

Comments from members include

A key question is shared services. If authorities had climbed out of their silos and seriously considered joint working on provision of core IT Services (Infrastructure and Software applications/systems) we could have developed huge efficiencies both in the cost of delivery and in the efficient working of the front-line services they were supporting. Instead, we are drifting towards authorities paying repeatedly for the same "refried-beans" systems from private vendors who are not interested in improving public services. We know this because our dedicated members often spend time plugging the gaps in support for 3rd party systems - ironically making the failings of these providers - because we are committed to ensuring continuity for the services we support.

Pretty poor ICT is much more prevalent in ordinary people's everyday lives now than when IT was first introduced into the workplace, so people are far more conversant with what IT can deliver and have more hands-on experience; most staff members will use personal ICT devices extensively in their daily lives. I do not believe there has ever been any serious attempt to channel this considerable local and personal knowledge into any kind of workspace solution

Better integration with business units and actual power to recommend and enforce change. Managers that actually care about the service and have the power to influence it. Fewer highly paid senior managers would not reduce service levels.

There are always many opportunities for improvement, it is always dependent on the the mind set of current management as to how this is implemented.

Don't get a chance, all discussed and sorted at manager level then us lower levels have to mop up the mess. Involved in discussions and decisions but not able to make decisions on operational requirements. ICT is integral to delivering Services, digitising transactions and agile working

Mobile & remote working. Opportunities are massive if clinicians can be persuaded to use the systems as they should.

A fundamental understanding of service users needs. Unfortunately this type of conversation and interaction has not been happening as well as it should have been in my council resulting in breakdown of trust between business and ict. Basically the technical people and their managers have provided a great service but are being tarnished by the inefficient and unprofessional and downright uselessness of people responsible for interaction with the business.

We make the right noises to do this, but little is followed through with. Staff resources generally don't have time to do the actual work to improve things as we're busy doing existing work.

Organisation uses no in-house development - all bought in third party software at great cost. None at all as we will be outsourced soon.

Our customers need ICT to make their job easier to do. We have so much hoops to jump through that we sometimes make it harder.

Very little. ICT strategy is decided by people who generally know nothing about ICT. Service delivery and technical design are much of the time done in-house, but as mentioned above sometimes it is outsourced as well.

Year on year investment will mean faster, more efficient service delivery but this will need to be underpinned by cultural change.

There was a general feeling that the private sector is the first choice for ICT solutions rather than developing in-house ICT teams and programmes. Respondents also used the final open comments section of the survey to highlight the problems with staff shortages and skills mixes mentioned by others earlier in the report.

In terms of IT Procurement, there is a real need to stress the importance of looking at the 2nd "Shared Provision" option in the McClelland Report. All too often this is simply skipped over and the external solution is assumed. This is having a disastrous consequence on the costs and effectiveness of public sector ICT provision in Scotland.

We need more staff, and have purposely had our wages lowered to below the average in our college. ICT staff cuts seem to me to be counterproductive, as in-house ICT staff are in the best position to deliver a meaningful improvement in service

Not well run and totally without ambition or direction. No path to progress. We are overly centralised, iso-

lated, and undemocratic.

It will suffer immeasurably when the, what looks like inevitable, outsourcing happens soon. Ict should be seen as one of the most important and fundamental pillars of the council's business and nurtured and invested in accordingly, including its current staff who actually care.

Without the personnel, ICT are being crucified and there is nothing at this moment that can be done to rectify the situation, as budgets have been cut drastically.
Shambles which will only get worse before it gets better

Generally we do very well delivering an excellent service. If the staff weren't knocking their pan in on an almost daily basis, nothing would get completed.
sad

This used to be a vibrant section with staff members feeling appreciated and full of worth to the organisation, this has dramatically dwindled over the last few years due to staff and budget cuts and management not willing to listen to our professional opinions.

We have a great plan for ICT across learning but not enough manager who understand the technical issues. This leads to delays in decisions!

Staff are stretched to the limit. Too many middle managers. Not enough 1st & 2nd line staff. Too much work, not enough people.

Conclusion

As we gather information from our members about the impact of budget cuts on their ability to do their jobs, we see just how severe the situation is becoming.

Staff working in ICT are seldom visible to service users but their work is essential. Services cannot operate without them. Like their colleagues in our earlier surveys they are struggling to meet demand due to staff shortages and lack of resources.

Demand shows no signs of falling. We cannot pretend that the cuts are not hurting.

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

