

Raising Our Voices Against Cuts in Social Care Spending



UNISON is deeply concerned that major cuts in social care spending are being portrayed as inevitable, with few raising their voices to highlight the drastic consequences for the most vulnerable people.

The Association of Directors of Social Work (ADSW) has warned that things like free personal care are no longer affordable. Pessimism is now pervading social care in the face of warnings of soon-to-be slashed budgets.

Many voices, from ADSW to CoSLA, from the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition UK Government to media appointed commentators, are now telling us that jobs need to be cut, services need to be reduced, expectations need to be lowered and families will need to do more to care for their sick, disabled, young and elderly relatives.

All of this because the 'nation' has to pay back the debt built up to bail out the excesses of private sector bankers and investors who were allowed to make obscene levels of profit and pay themselves massive bonuses in the good days. Now all of us, apparently, are in it together and need to save them in the bad days. Despite the fact none of us caused the financial crisis. At the same time, the 'nation' continues to commit billions to foreign wars and replacing Trident missiles and seems intent on tossing millions of workers on the scrapheap to survive on unemployment benefits.

While it is expected that social work managers will explain the difficult decisions they face when budgets are cut, those who wish to lead the sector need to be vociferous in explaining the very real consequences of such decisions. They should be standing up for quality services and warning what is currently at stake if deep cuts are made.

UNISON members are fully aware of the consequences of decisions already taken and we fear what the future holds for the service users and carers we work with. We know that:

- *Social workers and occupational therapists are regularly told to re-assess packages of care to see how they can be reduced.*
- *Home carers working for councils tell how they are now doing in 25 minutes what was previously assessed as an hour of support.*
- *Our home care members in the private sector struggle on wage rates barely above the Minimum Wage, with no guaranteed hours of work. They are constantly on the look-out for better paid employment, so the lack of continuity of the service provision gets worse.*
- *Our members in the voluntary sector are told by their managers that their terms and conditions will be cut so they can 'compete' against other providers for contracts to provide care.*
- *And we listen to social work managers emphasising that the personalisation of services will save money.*

All this comes before the huge cuts in social work budgets that ADSW and others predict. Accepting the inevitability of this means that:

We are telling families that their 79 year old frail mother will not get a tuck down service and it will be a different home carer who calls each morning.

We are saying to children that they will need to vacate their bedroom to make way for Granny. Mum will need to look after her as she can't get the support she needs to live independently in the community.

Lone parent families will be told that they have to do without access to professional advice and support as family centres and nurseries are no longer available.

The shopping centres of every town in Scotland will host groups of disabled people window shopping, because the day centres have been closed down in the name of 'independent living' while, at the same time, saving money for hard-pressed councils.

Every social work service user will see less of the under-pressure, over-worked professional social worker. A greater amount of that worker's precious time will be spent on assessing not the user's needs, but their bank balance, to enable the council to charge as much as they can for the support that might be provided.

Social work leaders need to challenge the neo-liberal consensus that these cuts are inevitable. They need to challenge the politicians, experts and media commentators to recognise that the social impact of their policies will have devastating consequences on families, communities and the economy.

They need to raise their voices beyond saying, 'the options are to cut this or cut that'. They need to argue and fight for the services that our service users rely on.

UNISON members will be raising our voices loud and clear in defence of these essential public services.

Stephen Smellie
Chair, UNISON Scotland's Social Work Issues Group

www.unison-scotland.org.uk/socialwork

UNISON represents thousands of social workers and social care workers in Scotland employed by local authorities, voluntary and private sector organisations. These members support thousands of vulnerable people, from the very young to the very old.

UNISON Scotland's Public Works campaign is the Scottish arm of our UK-wide Million Voices campaign. Both highlight the impact on public services of the cuts already under way and those being planned for the future.

www.unison-scotland.org.uk/publicworks

www.unison.org.uk/million

