


## Protecting Public Services

UNISON Scotland welcomes the debate in Parliament on Tuesday 13 January 2015 on protecting public services. As the largest public service union, we represent most public service staff groups.

Scotland's public services are living through a lost decade as a consequence of austerity economics. 'Austerity Economics Don't Add Up' is the title of UNISON Scotland's latest [report](#) on the impact austerity economics is having on Scotland's public services and the staff who deliver them.

### These are just some of the problems:

 DEBT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Public debt rising, when reducing it was claimed justification for austerity</li><li>• Low pay, low productivity</li><li>• Recovery slower than previous recessions, here and abroad</li><li>• Cost of living crisis - made worse by energy companies' profiteering</li></ul>
 HUMAN COST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Human cost for those struggling financially – including that disabled people are among those hardest hit by benefit cuts and unfair sanctions/bedroom tax</li><li>• Increasing numbers of jobs, particularly in social care, are insecure, part-time/zero hours contracts</li></ul>
 CUTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The economy needs investment not cuts</li><li>• A £120 bn tax gap – massive civil service jobs cut at HMRC, while too many big companies (e.g. Vodafone, Google and Amazon) pay little or sometimes no tax</li><li>• Low investment in research and development</li></ul>
 INEQUALITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inequality gap increasing and rising levels of in-work poverty</li><li>• High youth unemployment, risking a 'lost generation'</li><li>• Focus on short-term profits not long-term sustainability</li><li>• Risk of another financial crisis as causes not tackled properly</li></ul>
 PRESSURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Funding pressures in local government made worse by council tax freeze</li><li>• Cuts to many budgets where preventive spending would reduce future costs</li><li>• Risk of interest rate rise pushing millions into financial difficulties</li></ul>

Austerity is damaging people's lives and health, hitting low-paid women hard, causing misery, risking a lost generation of young people who can't find work, and creating greater levels of income inequality, which is bad for the economy, for those on the lowest incomes and for society in general.

It doesn't have to be like this. Decisions have been made at every level of government - local authority, Holyrood and Westminster – not to provide adequate funding for public services and to hold down public sector pay.

Cutting public services also undermines attempts to tackle inequality in Scotland and the preventative agenda highlighted again in today's report from the Finance Committee. The Scottish [Poverty Study](#) found rising deprivation and highlighted the impact of service cutbacks. The use of many services such as libraries, sports centres, museums, galleries, dentists and opticians, has declined since 1999, primarily due to reduced availability, cost or inadequacy. Professor Glen Bramley, from Heriot-Watt University, said: *"It is worrying that, in the 21st century, more than 40 per cent of households who want to use meals on wheels, evening classes, museums, youth clubs, citizens' advice or special transport cannot do so due to unavailability, unaffordability or inadequacy."*

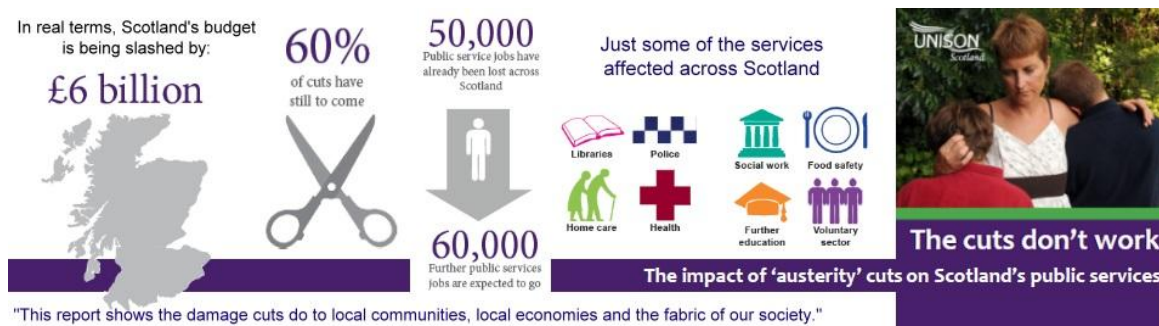
UNISON Scotland has also been undertaking a series of surveys of public service workers in different occupational groups. You can access some of these on our [Public Works](#) web page. Our surveys let staff express their concerns about our public services in their own words. While each group has specific concerns, there are some common themes:

- The impact of cuts on service delivery and in particular on the most vulnerable in our communities. [Social care](#) is a particular concern with a race to the bottom in provision.
- Corners are being cut to give the impression that services are being maintained - whether its [food sampling](#), inspections, [hospital cleaning](#) or the time elderly people are allocated for basic care.
- Core infrastructure is collapsing while staff patch and mend. Sticking plasters won't last forever.
- Preventative work is being abandoned as staff focus on the basic statutory functions.
- Moving staff around to manage one crisis after another. 'Keeping the plates spinning' is a very common comment from staff.
- Growing levels of stress and related health issues. A particular challenge for what is becoming an ageing workforce due to recruitment freezes.
- Delayering of structures results in quite junior staff having to take decisions, without adequate support from more senior and experienced staff.
- Cuts in support staff and [administration](#) results in front line staff having to spend more time on paperwork - exacerbated by outdated or inadequate IT systems.
- Increased aggression and [violence](#) from service users, frustrated by service cuts and delays.

The overwhelming forward looking response from staff is that it's bad now, but they believe it is going to get worse. This is happening at a time when public service wages have been slashed in real terms placing significant personal pressures on staff.

There is a [better way](#). What is needed is the political will to challenge the view that austerity is necessary and to put in place better policies that deliver for all our communities.

A workforce that cares, cures and educates should be celebrated as an achievement, not constantly under attack as a drain on resources. Cleaners, classroom assistants, chefs, care workers and many others, do vital jobs that support and protect us all. They are worth and deserve decent pay and conditions.



For further information contact [Dave Watson](#) Bargaining and Campaigns Team on 0141 342 2840.

This UNISON e-brief is intended for Members of the Scottish Parliament. If you have received this email in error, or if your email address is changing, please [contact us](#).



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