

FOR PUBLIC SERVICES AND A BETTER SCOTLAND



Every day we all use the services provided by local government. Many people don't even notice them: we take them for granted. The council elections on 3 May will bring a much-needed focus on the importance of local government and the essential services it provides.

**PUBLIC
WORKS:**

UNISON Scotland
Local Government
Summary Manifesto
May 2012

RADICAL REFORM

This election should be about how local government can meet the needs of people during the economic crisis and lead the way forward to a fairer Scotland.

Sadly, the same tired old solutions are still being promoted: privatisation, shared services and increased centralisation of services.

Local government has to make a radical, democratic change - by involving users and staff directly in service design.

Devolution should not just be about moving power from Westminster to Holyrood. Decisions should be made in local communities - through consultation with public service users and staff.

VALUE FOR MONEY

Public services offer great value for money. But they must be paid for.

The ongoing council tax freeze deprives local authorities of much needed revenue. It provides a real terms tax cut for the wealthiest homeowners at the expense of vital services.

This is unfair and should not continue. But simply unfreezing the council tax is no solution.

It is unfair for ordinary workers - who face wage freezes and rising living costs - to pay for a crisis which was not of their making. Local government needs a fair local property tax.

This is achievable with a wider range of top and bottom bands, and changing the multiplier rate between bands to make the system fairer.

Councils should gain the power to set different rates for second homes. Regular and frequent revaluations would match wealth with bills. And Council Tax Benefit should be made more accessible and fairer for those in work.

INVESTMENT & EQUALITY

Local government has a crucial role in reducing inequality to help create the fairer and better Scotland we want. Councils can support communities through this crisis - and lead the way out of crisis through investment in those communities.

Councils should not waste money on discredited PPP schemes. Instead they can make use of borrowing powers to invest - and explore alternatives like Tax Increment Financing and bond issues.

INTEGRATED SERVICES

Councils should generally deliver services with directly employed workers and facilities, to ensure the integrated, cost-effective and universal services the public need.

Arms-length bodies have done little to improve services - but they have weakened democratic scrutiny, accountability and control. Any body which receives public money should be subject to Freedom of Information laws.

We cannot afford to waste more on costly schemes such as the Clyde Valley IT and Edinburgh Council privatisation projects.

We will work with councils on how best to improve services and make efficiency savings - based on evidence of what works from the perspective of service users - rather than creating 'public service factories' far removed from delivery.



The cuts are hurting. But they're not working. You can't cut your way to better services. And you can't privatise or outsource your way to better services.

EDUCATION

Our commitment to the modern comprehensive principle is rooted in our belief in a decent society. Every child should have an equal chance of the best education in their local school. Investment in the whole team of professional, technical and administrative staff, not just teachers and lecturers will ensure that education in Scotland achieves a high standard.

- Schools should remain under the control of local authorities to ensure the best balance between local democratic control and economies of scale.

HOUSING

Housing has a crucial role to play in improving the health and wellbeing of Scottish people. And council housing is the key in the provision of affordable homes.

- Building new homes and improving current housing will boost the economy by creating high quality jobs.
- Investment is required to upgrade and green current housing stock so we can meet our duties under the Climate Change Act - and to improve people's lives.
- Local authorities must have access to the same amount of funding as housing associations for building new homes.

CLIMATE CHANGE



Climate change is one of the biggest challenges we face. To deliver on the ambitious targets in Scotland's historic Climate Change Act will require a concerted effort throughout society.

- The new climate change duties mean local authorities can lead by example in areas like energy efficiency, procurement (including food), transport and workplace policies.
- Councils should negotiate green workplace agreements with recognised trade unions.



Cartoon by Boyle: Cuts hurt...

- Early years are vital. Appropriate resources are needed to deliver on the principles in *Getting it Right for Every Child* and the Early Intervention Strategy.
- The Additional Support for Learning Act is welcome - but for it to work schools require extra investment.
- A national set of terms and conditions is the best way to protect staff and the services they deliver.

CARE SERVICES

Despite the rhetoric about listening to users, care service models continue to be designed and imposed from above. Meanwhile private providers queue up to see what profits can be made - often disastrously as the crisis created by Southern Cross showed. This top down approach can not bring about flexible and responsive services focused on meeting the needs of service users.

- Councils need a coherent strategy for care services to reverse cuts in funding, boost staffing levels and cut service charges.
- Users and staff should be directly involved in the design of care services.
- Privatisation should be halted and full cost recovery introduced for the voluntary sector.
- Procurement policies must ensure that social care provision is comprehensive.
- Personalisation - direct payments should be at a level to ensure decent pay, holidays and training for care staff.
- Registration - care services and staff should be fully regulated.



SOCIAL WORK

Social work staff are expected to perform miracles by helping people to change their lives. But increasing levels of unemployment, homelessness and poverty place ever greater demands on services and staff are constantly overstretched. At the same time budgets are being cut, leading to real fears about the sustainability of service provision.

- Social work needs additional resources to meet challenges of increased demand.
- Staffing levels should be appropriate to meet the needs of communities and should be monitored by the inspection process.
- Guidelines must be based on need not budgets and should take account of safety issues.
- All employers should introduce effective workload management systems.

Helping People Change Their Lives, UNISON's manifesto for improving the way social workers carry out their duties in Scotland should inform good practice.



LEISURE TRUSTS AND LIBRARIES

As the recession hits family incomes, people have cut back on books and private gym memberships and are relying increasingly on public provision for leisure and libraries.

Some councils have shifted parks, museums, leisure centres and libraries into leisure trusts, claiming it would be easier to find other sources of income and protect them from cuts. There is little evidence this is the case. Across Scotland, whether in trusts or not, we see cuts to opening hours, jobs and services - cuts which directly hurt the public, schools and colleges.

Meanwhile museums and libraries attempt to cover for shortfalls by introducing volunteers - but proper services in this field require proper levels of staffing by skilled, trained and qualified professionals.

- Leisure and library services should return to direct democratic local authority control.
- Libraries, museums and parks should be available for free leisure and recreation.
- Volunteering should not replace reliable, trained, skilled and accountable staff.

**PUBLIC
WORKS:**

A BETTER SCOTLAND

Tackling poverty and inequality to make Scotland fairer is the key to overcoming the serious challenges we face. A growing body of evidence tells us that fairer, more equal societies perform better on indicators such as crime, health and education. Local government has a crucial role in reducing inequality to help create the fairer and better Scotland we want to live in.

We want real improvement - not the failed dogma of privatisation and outsourcing. When they've been subjected to democratic scrutiny, experience shows they've fallen apart - like Edinburgh's costly privatisation project.

Centrally driven initiatives cannot provide the answers to the complex needs of our diverse communities. **People need to have a real say in how services are delivered in their communities.** Only full involvement of users and staff in service design and delivery will guarantee that.

Through the principles of Democracy, Fairness, Excellence, Partnership and Investment, local government can support our communities through this crisis - and lead the way out of the crisis through investment in those communities.



Cartoon by Boyle: Public works

Local government has to make a radical democratic change - by involving users and staff directly in service design.

UNISON'S FIVE PRINCIPLES FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

- **DEMOCRACY:** Accountability and the meaningful involvement of users and staff - rather than the market - 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 - in order to see what can be achieved
- **PARTNERSHIP:** Creating the joined up working needed to meet the complex challenges Scotland faces without costly and disruptive reorganisation
- **INVESTMENT:** Essential to support communities in this economic crisis and lead the way out through growth and employment

FAIR TREATMENT

Public services can only be as good as the workers who deliver them. Fair treatment and remuneration including pensions are essential to motivating any workforce. We expect our members to be respected and rewarded with fair pay and conditions. This should at the very minimum mean a Living Wage of at least £7.20 per hour for every person who works delivering public services.

UNISON Scotland is concerned that below inflation pay will widen the gender pay gap. Equal pay has been challenging for local government. Low paid public service workers are still pursuing tens of thousands of equality claims. More action is needed to address this issue, including use of capitalisation where appropriate.

Local authorities should build equality duties and the Living Wage into their employment practices and their procurement policies.



Public Works is UNISON Scotland's campaign for public services
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