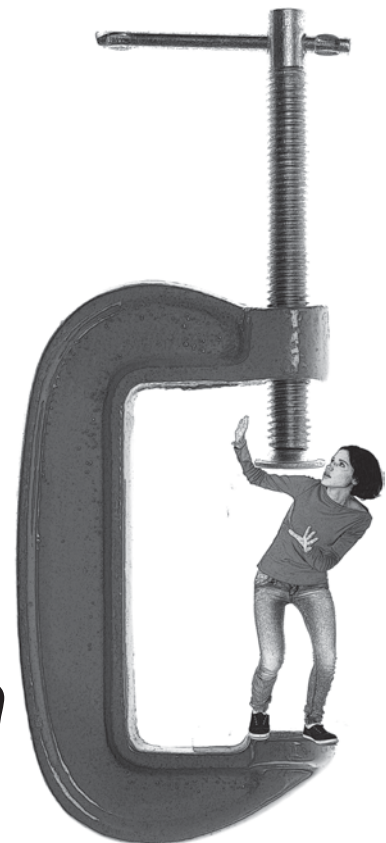


Counting the cost
how cuts are shrinking
women's lives

**THE
DAMAGE**



WARNING: DISMANTLING
COUNCIL SERVICES WILL
SERIOUSLY DAMAGE OUR LIVES
AND OUR COMMUNITIES



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Introduction

Local councils work at the heart of our communities. We use their services to make the practical parts of our lives run smoothly and we turn to them for support when we need help.

Women from all walks of life are more likely to use public services and use them more intensively to meet their needs. Women are paid less, and because they live longer, are more likely to be poor in later life than men. Women are more likely to be lone parents or primary carers for children, older and disabled people.

Part-time hours, flexible working opportunities and reasonable pay and conditions made councils key local employers for women in the post-war period as the welfare state developed. That trend has continued, with women now over three quarters of local government employees.

The coalition government's public spending cuts have had a devastating impact on local services and communities. Between 2010/11 and 2015/16, government grants to councils will have been slashed by £11.3bn¹.

Women are being hit by the impact of the cuts on both sides. As workers in local government, they are struggling with low pay, increasingly heavy workloads and the constant threat of further redundancies. Cuts to services mean that there is less help available for women, forcing many to go without the support they need.

Cuts to welfare, housing and childcare support and social care have already squeezed what women can afford. Cuts to other services like leisure centres and street lighting hold women

back even more, making it more difficult to get to work, feel like a part of their community or feel safe travelling at night.

UNISON has analysed 334 Freedom of Information (FOI) responses from councils across the UK and surveyed 7,554 women about their experiences of cuts, the majority of whom were UNISON members working in local government. What we found shows that cutbacks across council services have caused women's lives to shrink.

Key findings

- 60% of women thought that local services had got worse over the past year.
- Over 60% of women who use local leisure centres, parks facilities and open spaces said that services had got worse, and many were worried about their own or their family's safety when using them.
- £82m has been cut from children's centre budgets in the past three years and 285 children's centres have merged or closed since 2010.
- In 2010 there were 2,885 council-funded community centres – now there are only 2,726 – a loss of 159 centres in four years.
- 13% of funding has been cut from leisure centre budgets.
- As a result of the cuts, over a third of women felt more cut off from their community, 28% felt more cut off from finding a job and 12% felt more cut off from their families.
- As a result of council cuts, a third of women said that they were using local

¹ Government Spending Review 2010 and Spending Review 2013



services less or had stopped going altogether, because of rising costs, shorter opening hours and poor facilities.

- Over one million street lights are now switched off or dimmed for a set period overnight across Great Britain.
- 85% of women said that too little street lighting would affect how safe they felt at night and 70% said it would affect how often they travelled.

Work

Women's employment in local government fell by over 250,000 since 2010². Many of our survey respondents were facing redundancy and 28% said that the cuts had left them feeling more cut off from finding a job. Job cuts are a tragedy for councils in the long term, as they lose staff with valuable knowledge and experience.

“ I am about to take voluntary redundancy after 16 years with the Council. My job is the only one of its kind in the authority and is a specialist post - they are needing me to advise them on how to do it differently. ”

Underemployment and low pay

Underemployment is a problem hidden in plain sight within local councils. There has been a 74% increase in women's underemployment³ and our survey found that some women are working multiple jobs on precarious contracts to make up lost hours.

“ [I am] employed on a zero hours contract and employed part time and self-employed. ”

“ I have 3 part-time jobs and am paid to work 33 hours per week but work at least 10 hours more per week unpaid every week. ”

² Public austerity measures hitting women hardest, *The Guardian*

³ Women, part time work and underemployment, *TUC*

Almost two thirds of low-paid workers are women⁴. Women are stuck at the bottom end of local government pay scales and the problem is getting worse after a three-year pay freeze, followed by two below-inflation pay offers and cuts. Job losses, low pay and underemployment mean that women have little chance to progress at work.

“ There’s no room for initiative or creativity from the staff at the bottom end of the pay scale. ”

Stress

Stress has reached a frightening level because of the cuts. Increasing costs of food, travel and childcare mean that 61% of families are short of money each week and 16% of parents are being treated for a stress-related illness because of money worries⁵. 86% of women working in local government had seen an increase in workload and stress in the past year⁶. Stress has a negative effect on women’s job performance, personal life and health, with some women leaving local government because of it.

“ Handed in my notice from a council job due to the stress of cuts and the impact this was having on my health. ”

Supported bus services

Cuts to supported bus services affect women disproportionately, because they use bus services more than men do. Many women depend on buses to get to work.

But 70% of councils are cutting bus funding, with a £19m cut in the past year alone⁷, and the cost of using the bus goes up each year. These cuts make it more difficult for women to get to work and restrict their employment options.

“ I don’t have a car so cuts to local transport means that it restricts where I can work and when. I had to give up a part-time job because of this. ”

The combined impact of cuts at work lock women into a trap of stress, low pay and increasing costs.

4 Beyond the Bottom Line, *Resolution Foundation*

5 Families in Crisis: 70% living on the edge, *Netmums*

6 Pay Matters 2013, *UNISON*

7 Buses in Crisis, *Campaign for Better Transport*



Community

Council services help to bind people together within their communities. As women use local services more than men, they are the first to see the impact of cuts. Our survey found that:

- 60% of women thought services had got worse over the past year.
- 71% of women said that pavement repair had got worse.
- 40% of women said that street cleanliness had got worse.

“ I feel ashamed of my street; the pavements and roads are a disgrace and there is an awful lot of litter. ”

Many women highlighted safety concerns about pavements and roads, giving examples of falls or accidents.

“ Pavement repair is worse, have fallen twice in the last few months on uneven and broken pavements. ”

Cuts to a range of services that councils provide are making daily life more difficult for women:

Children’s Centres

Cuts are chipping away at the vital support that children’s centres provide to women with children under five who live in deprived areas. Our research found that:

- Over £82m has been cut from children’s centre budgets in the past three years.
- 285 children’s centres have merged or closed since 2010.
- 60% of women who use children’s centres said that there were fewer types of support available.

Demand for support is increasing every year, while cuts to funding force centres to try and meet demand with fewer staff and services. As some centres also provide childcare, cuts impact on working mothers who rely on this service to stay in their jobs. Some women also said cuts had an impact on chances for their children to develop and mix with others.

“ Niece relies on Children’s Centre for childcare so she can work - now likely to close - worried she will have to leave work as private childcare is too expensive. ”

“ Opportunities to get out and about and socialise with toddler is difficult and restricted. We should be... exploring and meeting people in lots of situations to build her confidence and knowledge. ”

Supported bus services

Buses are a lifeline for many women, especially those working in low paid jobs who can’t afford other modes of transport. Women of all ages use buses more than rail services and 82% of eligible older women have a concessionary bus pass, compared to 74% of men⁸. Our survey found that:

- Nearly 40% of women travelled by bus to go shopping or use other public services, like visiting the library or health services.
- Almost a third of women said their last local bus service was before midnight.
- 12% of women do not have a local bus service that is available after 7pm.
- Over half of women said they would walk if there were no buses.
- 4% of women said they could not travel if buses weren’t available.

⁸ National Travel Survey 2012

“ Can’t afford taxis, can’t cycle, no car and I would have to get transport to the train station. I am completely reliant on buses. ”

Bus cuts hit older and disabled women particularly hard – especially those living in rural areas – because they are more likely to rely on public transport to travel.

“ My mother is 81, lives on her own and doesn’t drive. The bus service which is her lifeline to get out and about and stop her becoming house bound and depressed has been severely cut. ”

“ My disabled daughter cannot drive and needs good public transport to access her work, social life and get into the countryside and has been very distressed by cuts to bus services. ”

Bus fares are due to rise by 24% in 2014⁹. Rising costs of bus travel were highlighted as an important problem in the survey, with many women struggling to afford the increases.

“ I can no longer afford to travel by public transport, and am forced to walk everywhere rather than pay high fees and go without food later in the month... bus fare increases really make the difference. ”

Community centres

Community centres are the bedrocks of their local communities. They provide a public space for people across different parts of a community to meet, learn and share their experiences. When cuts are made to community centres they have a significant impact. Our research found that:

- Since 2010, £14.8m has been taken from community centre budgets, a 16% cut overall.
- In 2010 there were 2,885 council-funded community centres – now there are only 2,726 – a loss of 159 in four years.
- Over half of women who use community centres said that they felt more cut off from their community because of cuts.

“ The community centre my son attended closed down. This was a great loss as it helped him through a difficult time in our lives. ”

Community centres often provide space for specialist services for marginalised groups, including Black, disabled, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) and older women, so they are particularly affected by these cuts. Recent UNISON research found that LGBT people felt more marginalised and isolated as specialist support disappeared¹⁰.

“ Lack of Caribbean [community] Centre means am out of touch with other black ethnic people and everyone is fragmented. ”

Parks, open spaces and leisure centres

Local parks and leisure centres are essential for women’s health and wellbeing. Analysis of the survey and FOI responses shows that:

- 87% of women said that they use local parks and open spaces.
- 71% of women use local leisure centres.
- Local authorities have cut 13% of funding from leisure centre budgets since 2010.
- Parks and open spaces budgets have lost £41.8m since 2010.

⁹ Bus services after the Spending Review, *Transport Committee*

¹⁰ Implications of austerity for LGBT people and services, *UNISON*



- Over 60% of women who use local leisure centre and parks facilities said that services had got worse, and many were worried about their own or their family's safety when using them.

“ Don't bother going to the swimming baths anymore. Dirty and not enough staff to run pool. ”

“ Don't use local playground very often as equipment so old my children can't use it all and it's damaged – it poses a health and safety risk to my youngest child. ”

Museums and libraries

Local museums educate us about local history and connect us to our communities. Libraries are a vital cultural resource, providing books, music, films, and the internet either very cheaply or for free. Our analysis found that:

- Councils have cut 13% from museum budgets since 2010.
- Almost a fifth of library budgets have been cut since 2010.
- 59% of women who use library services said that opening hours had got shorter.
- Over two thirds of women who use their local museum said that there were fewer staff.

Less access makes it more difficult to use these services. It reduces enjoyment of local museums and prevents women from using libraries for work and leisure, either for themselves or their families.

“ No longer able to afford to go to museums etc because the free services are due to close/existing services charge a fee. ”

“ Reduced access to the library has had an impact on the way I interact with my children (we used to do our homework there)... I got a sense of how they are doing in school and get to help them with anything they are struggling with in a focused way that doesn't happen at home. ”

The overall impact of cuts to community facilities on women's participation in their communities is stark. As a result of council cuts, a third of women felt more cut off from their community and 12% felt more cut off from their families.

“ As I work for the council and my salary has been cut in half, I can't afford to go out, to meet up with other people or take part in local events or travel on public transport – resulting in being more cut off generally. ”

Almost a third of women said that they were using some local services less or had stopped going altogether, because of rising costs, shorter opening hours and poor facilities. Some women were concerned and frustrated that this would create a vicious circle of cuts.

“ The council argues that not enough people use these facilities, but how can they when they do not cater to the likes of people like me... There is massive demand for services but I think policy makers are manipulating the services to enable them to 'justify' cuts. ”

Safety

Despite falling overall crime levels, public perception and fear of crime is still high and women are more likely to feel consistently insecure when travelling after dark than men. Fear of crime is more likely to affect women's behaviour and is linked to negative impacts on physical and mental health¹¹.

As the main providers of local street lighting, councils have a part to play in easing local fear of crime, by providing an environment where women feel safer. Our research found that:

- To keep up with sharply rising energy costs, councils have had to increase their street lighting budgets by 9% since 2010. This is a cut in real terms, so there is actually less street lighting and councils are still looking for cuts.
- Over one million street lights are now switched off or dimmed for a set period each night across Great Britain, usually from midnight to 5 or 6am.
- Since 2010, the number of street lights on part-night lighting has increased by over 485,000 and the number of lights dimmed overnight has increased by over 555,000.
- Only 43 councils had conducted equality impact assessments on changes to street lighting policy since 2010.
- Almost a third of women surveyed said that street lighting in their area had got worse.

Many women said that they felt less safe and went out less at night:

“ The street lighting after 12 is a joke. I am scared to walk back from the station at this time. It puts me off going out when in the past it would not worry me as much. ”

When we asked women what the impact of further switch offs at night would be, the response was overwhelming:

- 85% percent of women said that too little street lighting would affect how safe they felt at night.
- 70% said it would affect how often they travelled at night.

“ I would go out less. Sometimes I work late and get home at midnight. I would avoid doing this. I would feel like I was under curfew. ”

As well as fears that less street lighting would lead to more crime, many women said that they are concerned about other safety issues, linking the poor maintenance of pavements and limited street lighting to an increase in falls and accidents.

“ lack of lighting on some roads have made driving more difficult. ”

“ street lighting service is now shocking in the area where I live... People have fallen because of the state of the pavements and lack of lighting. ”

¹¹ Public health and fear of crime: a prospective cohort study, *London School of Economics*



Conclusion

The scale of the cuts to a range of vital services has resulted in fewer staff, higher costs and less access for the people who rely on them most. As a result women have become more cut off from their communities, find it more difficult to get to or find work and use services less often. Cuts to street lighting mean that increasing concerns about personal safety at night – from crime or from injury – are affecting how women behave.

All of these cuts and their consequences create daily obstacles for women. They are huge barriers, holding women back from creating better lives for themselves or their families.

The coalition government has presided over a serious decline in quality of life for women and nowhere is this more starkly revealed than in local government, where the cuts they have imposed on councils are shrinking women's lives and job opportunities.

UNISON is calling for:

- **An annual national audit of the impact of local spending decisions on women**, which would support local authorities to identify key services and avoid making cuts that disproportionately affect women across equalities groups. Equality Impact Assessments should play a key role in how local authorities make their decisions.
- Local government to **restore women's spending power by improving pay and conditions**. Paying women a decent wage would boost local economies and create additional revenue and benefit savings for the Treasury. This money should be recycled to local government to increase local service provision and help kick-start a sustainable recovery.

UNISON wants to see:

- **Fair pay for women in local government** through a change in policy from the UK government on pay restraint and cuts.
- **A commitment from councils to restore lost earning power and implement the Living Wage** as the lowest pay rate for their own and contracted out staff.
- **Effective collective bargaining systems**, covering pay, training and equalities.
- Councils must also be held to account to ensure that they **maintain equal-pay proofed pay structures** and don't use outsourcing to escape their responsibilities for equal pay.
- **Annual equal pay audits.**
- **A new system of needs-based funding for local government, backed by greater resources and stronger powers** so that councils can meet local need and protect the quality of life of women – in their workplaces and in their communities. This should explore the long-term options for

either replacing or improving the Council Tax and Business Rates system. Short-term measures to increase funding for local authorities could include:

- Generating additional funding specifically for social care by **removing VAT exemption from private health care treatments** to raise £2billion¹ and freeing up an additional £1billion in savings from requiring the use of the most cost effective medicines in the NHS².
 - Levying an **Empty Property Tax** on long-term empty dwellings which could raise £2.22billion³.
 - The introduction of **derelict property and brownfield land taxes**⁴.
- New sources of funding for local services through a fairer tax system with a 50% tax on bankers' bonuses above £25,000, a 'Robin Hood' tax – or rather, a **Maid Marian tax** – on financial transactions, and measures to tackle tax avoidance and evasion, which could earn as much as £90 billion a year in revenue.

Endnotes

1 If we want more funding for the NHS putting VAT on private health care would raise £2 billion, *Tax Research UK, 12 February 2014*

2 Getting better value from the NHS drug budget, *British Medical Journal, 22 September 2010*

3 A Socially Just Path to Economic Recovery, *TUC, November 2009*; (figures updated using Department for Communities and Local Government "Local authority Council Taxbase 2013: England – Table 1 and "Council Tax levels set by local authorities in England: 2013-14 (revised))

4 Place-shaping: a shared ambition for the future of local government, *Lyons Inquiry into Local Government, March 2007*

THE DAMAGE



WARNING: DISMANTLING COUNCIL SERVICES WILL SERIOUSLY DAMAGE OUR LIVES AND OUR COMMUNITIES

This UNISON report is one in a series of studies looking at some of the vital services provided by councils. In it we explore the long-term damage to the public and to the economy caused by ongoing austerity cuts.



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