

**UNISON Local Government Service Group
Conference 2017**

Composite booklet

To be read in conjunction with Conference Documents

**18 - 19 June 2017
Brighton**

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Composite A

Workplace mental health in local government

(Motions 14 and 19, Amendment 14.1)

Conference believes that mental ill-health among the local government workforce is a huge and growing concern.

A culture of long hours working, bullying, harassment and abuse is commonplace among local authority staff, with three quarters reporting consequent rising stress levels and declining morale.

Meanwhile growing levels of sickness absence, with no cover due to cuts in the workforce, growing employer demands and poverty wages, together with the constant threat of job losses and redundancy, create a climate of fear and anxiety for our members.

This is confirmed by a 2015 Guardian survey which shed light on how working in local government impacts on mental and physical wellbeing, with hundreds of employees attributing symptoms of anxiety, depression, sleeplessness, high blood pressure, recurrent infections or irritability to their working environment. Some 38% of local government respondents had sought medical advice or counselling to address work-related stress, while 65% had spoken to a manager about stress.

For women staff, these problems are exacerbated by low pay, the disproportionate burden of caring responsibilities and vulnerability caused by the loss of services to support women, including those who are victims of domestic abuse. It is well documented that when household income is under strain, domestic abuse increases, with women primarily the victims.

UNISON's 2016 equality survey made clear the extent of the problem, and also the fact that workplace mental ill-health is a particular problem for women, Black, LGBT and disabled members.

In the survey, 25% of UNISON members in local government said they had experienced a mental health issue mainly triggered by work in the last year. This figure rose to 30% among women members in local government, 36% among Black members, 41% among LGBT members and a massive 53% among disabled members.

22% said they had sought medical advice, counselling or specialist support to help deal with stress at work. This figure was 26% among women, 33% among Black workers, 37% among LGBT workers and 51% among disabled members.

17% had had to take time off from work in the last year due to ill-health caused by stress at work. Again the figures were higher among members covered by the self-organised groups (SOGs): 21% among women, 26% among Black members, 28% among LGBT members and 37% among disabled members.

In UNISON's survey, more than half of UNISON members in local government described their overall level of stress in their job as more stressful than 12 months previously.

Conference also notes with great concern the increasing mental ill-health conditions experienced by service users, for example among young people in further education. Increased mental ill-health also has an impact on the workforce - increasing workloads and hence causing stress.

Conference recognises that mental health and mental ill-health are poorly understood and that mental ill-health carries a negative stigma. It further recognises that the union can play a vital role in raising awareness and changing attitudes, both amongst our members and with our employers. We also need to ensure that our guidance to local government branches and local representatives addresses supporting and representing members with long term or permanent mental health conditions as well as members with stress-related ill health. Our approach also needs to reflect the fact that it is the working environment, including prejudice, discrimination and inequality, that is the primary cause of workplace stress-related ill health. It is therefore the working environment that needs changing, not the person.

It is clear that the massive cuts in local government funding, the loss of jobs, the permanent sense of job insecurity, the increased workloads for those still in work, cuts in terms and conditions, and the fall in real terms pay have combined to make local government a very stressful place to work in. Government cuts have led to unprecedented pressure and stress for local government workers. Whilst politicians fail to manage their constituents' expectations of what can be achieved in the current economic climate, it is staff who are left to face the frustration and anger of the public, with devastating impact on our members' mental health.

Mental ill-health can have devastating consequences for members and their families. Conference believes that more must be done to support all staff who are experiencing mental health issues. Employers have a responsibility to take all possible steps to support local government workers experiencing mental ill-health. This includes promoting a positive and supportive workplace culture, with appropriate training for managers and staff; and provision of employee advice helplines, mental health support, flexible working arrangements, and other innovative measures to assist staff.

It is also a growing problem for public service delivery, due to the time off local government workers need to take when they are unwell.

Conference calls on the service group executive:

- 1) To campaign for improved support for all workers experiencing mental health issues, including using all means possible to make employers aware of the impact of cuts on their staffs' mental health
- 2) In conjunction with UNISON's health and safety unit, to review what UNISON guidance exists on mental health, provide guidance to branches on negotiating policies to support workers with mental health issues, and update it if necessary;
- 3) To work with the SOGs to review what specific guidance exists, and is necessary, for members of the different SOGs on mental ill-health;
- 4) To encourage branches to raise with their employers the need for occupational health services that deal appropriately with mental health issues and for employee assistance or counselling services to offer services that are appropriate for the diversity of our members;

- 5) To promote UNISON's guidance among branches, regions, SOGs and employers, emphasising the importance of the issue and highlighting the need to make this an organising issue;
- 6) To call on all of the sector committees within the service group to raise mental ill-health with employers and employers' sides, pushing for better and more comprehensive policies, procedures and joint guidance, including covering equalities issues;
- 7) To ensure that the service group's 'Save Our Local Services' anti-cuts campaign highlights stress at work and other mental health issues as key impacts of the cuts, ensuring that elected politicians are aware of the problem and are pushed to take action;
- 8) To promote World Mental Health Day on 10 October 2017, encouraging branches and regions to engage in relevant activities.

14 Local Government Service Group Executive

14.1 National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Committee

19 National Women's Committee

Composite B

Schools and MATs – developing our strategy

(Motions 25 and 43)

Conference acknowledges the large numbers of UNISON local government members who work in schools. Conference recognises the good work carried out by UNISON in promoting the value of these members with Stars in their Schools.

UNISON has opposed the introduction of academies into education and has campaigned against them across the Country. There has however been an increase in the number of academies and there is also the development of Multi-Trust Academies (MATs). Conference recognises the increasing difficulties LG branches face with individual and collective representation of schools members as a result of the growth of academies and MATs. As part of the union's negotiating and bargaining agenda priority has been given to seeking trade union recognition in both academies and MATs.

MATs often cross county branch boundaries and UNISON regional boundaries, resulting in schools members - who work for the same employer - being spread across a multitude of branches. This presents a huge challenge to UNISON's ability to effectively consult members on collective bargaining issues, whether these issues are policy changes or pay and condition changes.

Conference notes with concern that many academies and MATs are proposing to outsource many services that have traditionally been provided by local authorities such as catering, cleaning and human resources. The implications for members is significant particularly in terms of attacks on terms and conditions.

Conference calls on the local government service group executive to:

- 1) Work with regions and branches to develop a national strategy for collective bargaining and effective communication with members employed in MATs;
- 2) Ensure that school members in Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) are engaged with their UNISON MAT forum and seek to set up a MAT school forum if they don't exist;
- 3) Support branches to draw up model negotiation documents to assist activists who are undertaking negotiations in academies and MATs;
- 4) Encourage UNISON schools reps to take up training on negotiation skills and TUPE, particularly in these schools threatening to introduce local bargaining;
- 5) Work with branches and local reps to provide full support for branches and school based reps in campaigning against outsourcing / privatisation of school based services.

Composite C

Local government and the cuts

(Motions 28, 29 and 30, Amendment 29.1)

Conference notes:

- 1) The major changes taking place in the role of local government;
- 2) That central government funding for local government has been in steep decline since the beginning of the Conservative – Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010, and that local government has taken the brunt of the policies of public sector ‘austerity’ since that time;
- 3) That the central government spending forecasts for local government look bleak, with the stated intention of removing the Revenue Support Grant for local government to councils in England entirely, and that these budget cuts to English authorities will have knock on effects on the available budgets for local government in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland;
- 4) The legislation that, in England, will end contributions from the national taxpayer through the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) from 2020/21 and the consequent loss of more than £9.4bn in revenue support grant since the start of this parliament;
- 5) That the 2015/16 surplus on the main non-domestic rate account in England (the Government’s share) stood at £1.9bn and is expected to be over £4.2bn in 2016/17 rising by £2.4bn, £1.8bn and £1.7bn in the subsequent three years;
- 6) That in contrast £4.6bn has been cut from social care budgets in England since 2010 and social care and children’s service budget pressures are driving cuts in those and other local government services;
- 7) That the UNISON proposal to invest the £2.4bn growth in the 2017/18 government’s business rates surplus in England, in social care, illustrated how using these surpluses could address specific expenditure needs as well as relieving the impact of budget pressures elsewhere;
- 8) The Local Government Finance Bill 2017, which threatens the future sustainability of local government in England, as potential income growth will not keep pace with budget pressures in many local authorities with the consequent implications for the range of services that local authorities will be able to provide and the number of staff they employ;
- 9) In Wales, the 2017/18 local government finance settlement is the precursor to more adverse settlements during the rest of this Parliament;

10) In Scotland, settlements continue to follow a sustained downward path of resource availability. The February Local Government Budget revealed a £225m cut in local government revenue allocations, in real terms.

Evidence continues to mount that members' pay, terms and conditions are being eroded, living standards are falling, below inflation pay settlements, and careers are restricted or ended. This is despite many being low paid, working unsocial hours. Our members deserve better as they provide essential preventative high quality services to communities.

The Office of National Statistics show that employment in UK local government in September 2016 stood at 2.18 million and that 'This is the lowest recorded level since comparable records began in March 1999.'

Local government is under attack across the UK with over 500,000 job losses (40,000 in Scotland) and services slashed or totally eradicated.

While some of this employment loss is due to academisation and the reclassification of Further Education (FE) from the public to the private sector, the scale of redundancies, non-filling of vacancies and re-organisation continues unabated with the consequent loss of jobs, vital skills and experience. This has impacted particularly on women members, who represent 61% and 88% respectively of the full and part time local government workforce in England and Wales, and Black workers and those from ethnic minorities.

Budget cuts have had a massive negative effect upon our members working in local government including compulsory redundancies, halts on recruitment, increased workloads and stress at work, to name just a few of the most obvious impacts.

Conference condemns the draconian cuts to local government, schools and FE funding throughout the UK. As the ongoing crisis in social care demonstrates, cutting local government services creates costs elsewhere and affects the quality of other public services. As funding and therefore services are cut it will lead to a decline in living standards and the health of the nation.

These further budget reductions will result in further critical damage to local services, the continued loss of discretionary services, increases in charges, substantial further job losses and further attacks on the terms and conditions of UNISON members with the consequential detrimental effect on local economies.

We must use every available resource to campaign, take action and work with political parties and communities to defend these essential services before they become extinct.

Conference notes the expansion of in-sourcing within both the private and public sectors and UNISON's proud record of fighting to retain and improve in-house services through service improvement plans developed jointly with employers, thus improving service quality whilst protecting employment and the pay, terms and conditions of members and the success in bringing services back in-house.

However, conference recognises that further cuts will be accompanied by a renewed threat to direct service, as private sector consultants mount new initiatives to encourage privatisation, local authority trading companies or to adopt the consultant led 'Future Model' with the accompanying replacement of job evaluation with job level assessment schemes and the linking of attitudes and behaviours to pay.

Conference notes the trading and charging powers that currently exist and the scope to use those powers, and generate revenue without the need to privatise or establish local authority trading companies.

Conference therefore recognises:

- a) The diminishing funding for local government therefore poses a very real and obvious threat to our members' jobs, terms and conditions, and welfare, and threatens the very future of a sustainable local government sector in some areas;
- b) The importance of relentlessly focusing for the remainder of this parliament on the overall level of resources available to and needed by local authorities, the recognition of those needs, the importance of addressing the issue of equalisation, how best to use the growing surpluses on central government's main non-domestic rating account, and retaining an element of central funding within a future local government finance system that is fully accountable to parliament in England and the devolved nations;
- c) The importance of income generation by local authorities in this context and calls on the service group executive to extend the work with the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) to provide support and guidance to branches to promote income generation, using existing powers, through trading and providing new paid for services both to the private sector and to individuals.

In Scotland a campaign co-ordinated by the Scottish local government committee has been launched for a fairer deal. Members took part in a day of activity calling for "NO COMPULSORY REDUNDANCIES". Although we received a good response from elected council members, the Scottish government, like Westminster, continued with its hard line cuts for councils and threats of sanctions which flies in the face of local democracy and decision making.

Conference believes:

- i) That UNISON, as the largest trade union in local government, has to lead the fight against cuts to local government funding and campaign vigorously, and with determination, for a return of fair funding for local government;
- ii) That the campaign against cuts to local government budgets and for fair funding for local government has to be the primary focus of the service group executive in the coming year;
- iii) that a coordinated political strategy that seeks to unite communities, elected politicians, voluntary sector organisations, trade unions and citizens is essential to the fight for our services. Our strategy must place responsibility for these cuts at the door of the UK government and create a climate that results in cross party demands for more resources. Conference welcomes the contribution that the public services champions initiative has made to begin to change public perceptions.

Conference also believes that UNISON's anti-cuts campaigning must be used to recruit, organise and mobilise members, and welcomes the work of branches, regions, and the service group's Save Our Local Services (SOS) campaign.

Conference calls upon the local government service group executive to:

- A) Continue to raise the profile of local government services and demonstrate that government and local government are simply 'papering over the cracks', using the

SOS campaign and other vehicles, ensuring that branches and regions are supported in recruiting, organising and mobilising members around our anti-cuts work and the focus on UK-level decisions;

- B) Co-ordinate an effective campaign strategy that brings together the work of all local government branches and gives support and resources to all branches fighting the effects of cuts locally;
- C) Co-ordinate the individual campaigns of local government branches against the impacts of cuts in their areas, by publicising those campaigns to all local government branches and highlighting actions that other branches can take in solidarity with those campaigns (petitions, co-ordinating demonstrations and sharing experience, etc);
- D) Convene a meeting of all local government sectors across the UK to establish a campaign/industrial strategy to fight the cuts and improve our members' pay and conditions;
- E) Engage with and confront politicians at all levels, including councillors, MPs, AMs, MSPs, and call on them to speak out about the damage that is being done, the gaps that are developing and the financial costs of this;
- F) Ensure resources are available by establishing a national local government anti-cuts campaign fund – which should take into account the requirements set out in the Devolution Protocol;
- G) Campaign for recognition of the need for increased resources and campaign for the provision of resources needed by local government and schools, for the issue of equalisation to be properly addressed and for a sustainable future local government finance system that retains an element of central funding or which directs to local government a share of a revenue stream generated by one or more national taxes (e.g. VAT or income tax);
- H) Ensure regions and branches are fully supported in their decisions on fighting the cuts;
- I) Continue to work with regions and branches to raise awareness of income generation and the expansion of trading to offset the loss of income from central government grants;
- J) Develop guidance on income generation and the expansion of trading, build relationships with and promote a constructive dialogue with national and regional employer groupings, councillors and senior local government officers and work with UNISON's Labour Link to promote this initiative;
- K) Call for a "Day of Activity" targeted at UK parliaments/assemblies and specific key decision makers;
- L) Ask the TUC and their counterparts in the devolved nations to work with the Service Group Executive to organise a mass lobby of all UK MPs prior to the autumn budget statement being finalised. The lobby should aim to include representatives from all local government branches meeting their MPs on the funding of local public services in Westminster on the same day;

- M) Seek the co-operation of our sister unions, who also represent local government workers, with the mass lobby, and encourage their participation in it;
- N) Seek the co-operation of the employers' associations (The LGA, WLGA, COSLA, NILGA, and SLGP) with the mass lobby and encourage their support and participation with it;
- O) Seek the participation of council leaders, council cabinet members, and individual councillors with the mass lobby, and encourage branches to arrange for joint lobbying of MPs with councillors in a co-ordinated way, whereby councillors would be requested to join trade unionists in meeting their MPs on the day of the mass lobby;
- P) Seek the participation of local citizens groups who are campaigning against the impacts of local government funding cuts in their areas with the mass lobby, and to help co-ordinate their involvement in the lobby;
- Q) Establish a national petition on fair funding for local government and to publicise the petition amongst all UNISON members, all UK councillors, and community groups who are campaigning against the direct impacts of local government funding cuts. To seek publicity for this petition also through national and local media;
- R) Explore the possibility of lawful UK-wide industrial action, in line with UNISON rules and relevant legislation;
- S) Where possible and within the law, work with councils that are avoiding making cuts, supporting them in defending services.

28	Local Government Service Group Executive
29	Ceredigion County Branch
29.1	Local Government Service Group Executive
30	UNISON Renfrewshire
