



UNISON submission to HM Treasury consultation on 2020 Spending Review

Introduction

UNISON is the UK's largest union, serving more than 1.3 million members. We represent and act for members working in a range of public services and utilities, whether they're employed by private companies, public authorities or in the community and voluntary sector. We represent members, negotiate and bargain on their behalf, campaign for better working conditions and pay and for public services.

We make this submission at a time when our members, and other key workers across the UK, continue to show extraordinary bravery and commitment in the face of the COVID 19 pandemic despite the constraints that ten years of austerity placed on their ability to do their jobs.

We note that thousands of key workers died during the pandemic looking after us. In the public services nurses, care workers, cleaners and more made the ultimate sacrifice to help others.

This was all the more heart-breaking because for years before COVID-19, these public service workers and the jobs they do have been undervalued, underpaid and mainly invisible.

A disproportionate number of those who died were Black workers, highlighting in the most tragic way the impact of racial job segregation and other forms of institutional racism.

One example of that neglect was the PPE shortage that emerged when the pandemic hit.

Another is the fragmented nature of care services for elderly and disabled people – where staff frequently experience low pay insecure employment and impossible workloads.

In our NHS a shortage of nurses and other key staff means there are fewer people to look after patients.

This is the result of more than 10 years of spending cuts and austerity. The damage to all the vital services that make our communities strong and resilient, including schools, policing and local government, is plain to see in all parts of the UK.

As such we call for the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) to acknowledge the error of previous policy decisions and ensure that the same mistakes aren't made again. We can't return to under-valuing our public services and the people who provide them. To these ends this submission calls for measures to

- **Rebuild all our public services, by securing sustained long- term investment and making money available to employ and train the right number of staff that are needed to ensure our services are there when we need them.**
- **Give public sector workers a decent pay rise because the pandemic has shown how important they are. This would also help the lowest paid out of in-work poverty.**
- **Create fairer and safer workplaces where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.**
- **Build a more equal and sustainable post COVID-19 society, in which the inequalities that have become so evident during the crisis are addressed as a matter of urgency.**

1. Rebuild our public services

Across our public services, years of underinvestment are taking a heavy toll. The following summarises what's been happening in key parts of public services, where UNISON members work and see first hand the impact of cuts.

NHS

In the NHS in all parts of the UK there are serious staff shortages. Even before the pandemic, health leaders in England were saying that this was putting patient safety and care at risk. UNISON has revealed how the NHS relies on the goodwill of staff to work millions of hours unpaid overtime every week to meet the rising demand for care. At the root of this is the fact that although spending has increased, this has been at half the long run trend at a time of increasing demand. This inevitably puts pressure on all parts of the NHS and is not sustainable.

Social Care

Although there is variation in how social care is delivered across the four nations, the sector everywhere is chronically underfunded and fragmented. It has become a low wage and low status industry, where the workforce often find themselves at the sharp end of financial pressures and light touch regulation. During the pandemic some social care employers have refused to pay sick pay to self-isolating members of staff, even when they have tested positive for Covid 19. Too many care workers still have to choose between risking people's lives or going without pay.

Furthermore, the Coronavirus Act's emergency powers have suspended the obligation of Local Authorities under the Care Act 2014 to carry out detailed assessments of disabled people's care and support needs, and the duty to meet these needs. UNISON is extremely concerned that the right of many disabled people to receive the care and support they require has been overruled by this temporary legislation. Social care

needs to be properly funded so that disabled people’s right to care is not forfeited in an emergency situation.

Local government

Local authorities across the UK have been at the sharp end of spending cuts for ten years. In Scotland, England and Wales there is now a significant funding gap.

In England alone there is shortfall of just under £11bn due to Covid in this financial year (and the government has only so far given £3.7bn in funding with a lack of certainty around how much the recently announced sales, fees and charges safety net will compensate them for). Some estimates have put the funding gap figure higher than this – analysis by the LGA’s Labour Group put it at £10bn after the Government’s extra support had been accounted for.

Either way, this funding shortfall must be bridged this year, either by increased income, or cuts to expenditure. UNISON has looked into what a funding gap would actually mean in terms of cuts to service areas. Taking the £10bn funding gap figure, if applied equally across service sectors, this would be a 21% cut across the board. This would equate to the following cuts.

Table 1: Potential funding cuts in Local Government services after COVID 19, England

Service	2019 budget (£million)	Predicted cut to budget in (£million)
Highways and transport services	4,864	1,023
Children's Social Care services	9,105	1,915
Adult Social Care services	16,787	3,531
Public Health services	3,242	682
Housing services (excluding Housing Revenue Account)	1,680	353
Cultural services	2,128	448
Environmental services	5,172	1,088
Planning and development services	1,251	263
Central services	2,969	625
Other Services	340	71

The fact is that, after 10 years of austerity, council service sectors are already running on razor-thin budgets and therefore any cuts will not be subsumed, even in part, by “efficiencies”. Any cuts will directly hit service provision and would mostly be covered by job losses.

Quantifying the funding gap in terms of jobs or cuts across local government paints an alarming picture that we can ill afford.

Social Care

Social care takes up over half (54%) of council expenditure as of 2019.

As the table above shows, a 21% cut would be equivalent to a £3.5bn cut to adult social care – the equivalent cost of around 141,000 care worker jobs (calculated at a likely overestimate of £20,000 a year salary for a care worker and 25% employer costs on top of that). Although realistically given the enormous demand being placed on the adult social care system at the moment it is highly unlikely that the cuts would fall on this service area.

Separate to the adult social care budget, the children's social care budget is facing a cut of £1.9bn, equivalent to funding 76,000 care workers at the same rate as an adult social above OR 51,000 social workers at a £30,000 salary.

Environmental health

The £1bn gap in environmental health is equivalent to cutting 45,000 refuse collector jobs (at £19,000 + 25%). While councils have a statutory duty to provide waste collection services, the frequency of collections is not mandated. Prior to the coronavirus crisis, the majority of councils now collect bi-weekly, with some councils moving to once every three weeks in an effort to lower budgets.

Cultural services

Between 2010 and 2018-19 there was a 25% cut to library budgets (from £1bn to £750m). This cut had the following consequences:

In 2010 there were 24,000 salaried staff working in libraries – in 2019 there were only 15,300. This is a 36% cut in salaried staff. In 2010 there were 4356 library branches falling by 773 to 3583 in 2019 an 18% cut in the number of library branches.

Another 21% cut to library budgets would be a catastrophic £150m cut. While a significant proportion of the cuts were swallowed by job losses between 2010 and 2019, the functions of these jobs were, in part, covered by the increase in volunteers. Whilst the 51,000 volunteers do play an important role, the lack of qualifications and training is not sustainable.

Reasons for the funding shortfall in local government

Councils have had to deal with a collapse in income primarily because of falls in business rates and council tax payments (in large part because the chancellor announced a business rates holiday in March for the 2020/21 financial year for all retail, hospitality and leisure businesses). Business rates have increasingly made up more of the funding for councils in recent years as grant funding has been cut. Other income streams that have been very disrupted include parking fees, planning fees and income from things like leisure services.

They've had to spend a lot more money on measures like food delivery to the most vulnerable members of the community, support for social care providers, getting rough sleepers off the streets and the work they've been doing to help track and trace efforts.

As we face a major recession and the possibility of future waves of the pandemic it is vital that local councils are given enough funding to protect and support their local communities (especially if they are subject to further lock downs). Without additional resources delivery of track and trace work and effective social care will be seriously compromised. Councils should also be at the heart of getting the country out of recession through being able to provide more funding and assistance to help local businesses, to help make our communities more vibrant and healthy places to live and also so they address the damage that has been done to them as a consequence of years of austerity.

Schools

Spending per pupil has fallen in every part of the UK since 2010. Recent studies suggest that more than half of schools in England have cut the number of teaching assistants because of the cuts to funding. This leaves fewer staff to support the needs of pupils. A similar picture can be seen in Wales and Northern Ireland. Although there have been recent attempts in Scotland to recruit more classroom assistants to support pupils with additional support needs, this follows on from years of cuts.

Policing

From 2010, government funding for the police service was cut by 25%. This means that in total there are today 39,275 fewer police community support officers (PCSO), police staff and police officers working for forces in England and Wales than there were 10 years ago. Serious and violent crime has risen as a result.

Since the low point of the police cuts in 2016, the police staff workforce has increased by 6,000 employees. Over the same period, the police officer workforce has seen a much smaller increase of 1,900 officers. Officer numbers are due to rise quickly over the next few years as the government's commitment to recruit 20,000 officers to replace those cut by previous governments comes online.

But, the PCSO workforce has continued to contract with 1,217 fewer PCSOs today than there were in 2016. Most PCSO cuts took place between 2010 and 2016. The PCSO workforce is 45% smaller than it was ten years ago and numbers continue to decline.

If overall police staff numbers begin to fall again, as a result of an inadequate CSR settlement for policing, the expectation that the 20,000 police officer uplift will reverse rising crime, is very likely to be frustrated. This is because these new officers can only be effective if the team that works alongside them is also adequately resourced. Cut police staff numbers, and history shows that police officers, whom the public expect to be out on the beat tackling crime, will end up doing police staff jobs back at the station instead. This is not what the Home Secretary, or the Prime Minister, have told the public in England and Wales will happen.

So, if the CSR were to result in a flat settlement for policing, there is a big question of how the government's manifesto commitment to the 20,000 police officer uplift (which actually includes money for the 6,500 additional police staff needed to support these new officers) would be squared with the maintenance of existing police staff numbers.

Government must commit to sustained investment

To address the issues set out above and rebuild public services the CSR needs to commit to a programme of sustained investment. This should seek to ensure: (i) that our public services have the appropriate number of staff to guarantee public safety; (ii) high and consistent levels of service provision across all communities in the UK; (iii) and that the economic multipliers that result from investment in public service staffing and capital investment are fully realised and achieve value for money.

The start point should be addressing the staff shortages and cuts highlighted in this submission. In some instances this will involve specific measures, such as scrapping tuition fees for key NHS roles. We note that attracting enough new entrants into nursing, midwifery and the allied health professions is a significant challenge. Demand for services has grown over the past five years and yet, despite recent improvements, the numbers applying to study nursing in particular have still not recovered to 2016 levels, before the NHS bursary was scrapped and tuition fees introduced for healthcare students in England. Many prospective healthcare professionals have been deterred from studying at university due to the prospect of debt. The government announced in December 2019 that maintenance grants will be reintroduced for healthcare students in England from September 2020, but these are only half what students in Scotland are set to receive and tuition fees will still have to be paid. UNISON, along with other unions, is calling for tuition fees for healthcare students in England to be scrapped and maintenance grants introduced that reflect actual student need.

With the labour market and economy facing significant challenges over the spending review period, it is essential that the government recognise the economic benefits and multipliers that come from investment in public services. To secure the best value for money the government should ensure that investment is not hived off into inflated salaries of company directors and offshore tax havens as corporate profit. UNISON has long-held concerns about the policy and practice of public procurement and outsourcing in the UK. In many cases, the contracting-out of public services and public procurement has led to damaging price-based competition and a race to the bottom on pay and employment standards, the dysfunctional fragmentation of supply chains and the off-shoring of large parts of our productive capacity. The Treasury loses tax revenues through this process, which could be used to fund public services.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought this into sharp focus. Years of marketisation and outsourcing have led to a precarious, two-tier public service workforce and fragile supply chains. The dangers of a two-tier workforce are exemplified by outsourced workers being forced to choose between following government advice to isolate and being able to put food on the table. Decades of outsourcing and offshoring in the

name of cost-cutting have created fractured and unwieldy supply chains, the true cost of which has been felt not just in suppliers' ability to inflate prices, but in the stark failures to provide PPE for frontline workers, with often tragic consequences. The integrity of our public services has been weakened, putting the safety and security they offer the public at risk.

We need to put the public interest back at the heart of public service delivery. A new approach to commissioning and public procurement must make in-house provision the default, unless there is a demonstrable public interest case for other forms of provision. Where services are commissioned, this must be done in a way that promotes high service delivery and employment standards and be subject to transparency and accountability requirements.

Problems with outsourcing extend beyond the negative effects of for workers and service delivery. The pandemic has also brought to the fore grave concerns about the effectiveness of public money spent in the private sector. Arguments for privatisation and outsourcing are usually based on claims about the efficiency benefits of competition, but overwhelming evidence has emerged that suggests that, even on narrowly defined value for money criterion, outsourcing offers very poor value for money.

The NHS's heavily privatised and fragmented procurement system led the UK to [spend more on PPE](#) during the crisis than any EU country – accounting for 30% of all EU-UK spending on PPE. 73% of the UK's PPE contracts when through without any competition, according to the [Financial Times](#), which also found that the DHSC issued 137 contracts worth a total of £1.9bn, none of which were subject to competition. Operation of parts of England's underperforming test and trace system have been outsourced to Serco, whose Chief Executive was subsequently revealed to be seeking to use the contract to "[cement the position of the private sector](#)" in our NHS. Concerns about value for money are compounded by revelations that many of the contracts awarded without a competitive process went to companies with ties to those involved in awarding them. For example, the Mirror [identified 13 companies](#) with links to the Conservative Party that have between them won almost £500m in contracts without due competitive process. The privatisation of NHS Logistics (now NHS Supply Chain run by Unipart) by the 2005 to 2010 Government was an expensive mistake and inefficient.

In this context, simply providing more funding without improving the effectiveness of and transparency around how that money is spent risks doing little to alleviate austerity. Unless private sector involvement in public service provision is halted and reversed, a big chunk of any new money will end up paying the six-figure salaries of company directors or being channelled to offshore tax havens as corporate profit. Improving public services – not making them more lucrative for private companies – must be the goal that underpins spending decisions in the CSR.

Investment in the devolved nations

Scotland

Amongst the more general concerns about UK wide austerity being imposed there are several Scottish specifics. The model for economic recovery based largely on infrastructure spending and training which the UK Government appear to be adopting conflicts with the Scottish Government's professed commitment to Community Wealth Building. A model which we believe offers more sustainability as it anchors investment in local communities.

The Government's intent in the Internal Market Bill is to increase its capacity to spend in a number of areas which are currently devolved, and to remove powers from the Scottish Government to provide aid to firms for the purposes of job creation. We are very concerned that the assumption of these powers by the UK Government will be seen as an opportunity to cut the block grant which provides much of the Scottish Government's funding. This goes against both the principle and practice of devolution. We urge the government not to pursue such a course.

Wales

UNISON notes that Welsh Government block grant for day-to-day spending, despite a small increase between 2016-17 and 2017-18, has fallen by more 5% in real terms since 2009-10. We share the Welsh Government's disappointment that the Chancellor's Summer Economic Update had little to say on funding for public services as they continue to respond to the crisis. Robust health, social care, and local government services will be critical to the recovery and the UK Government needs to commit the additional funding our public services require to deliver what is needed. Without additional funding and the budget flexibilities that the Welsh government has called for, the response and recovery from the Covid-19 crisis will be hampered. Too frequently, UK Government funding announcements are presented as new, when in fact no additional funding is generated for the devolved administrations. The CSR needs to address this shortcoming.

Northern Ireland

Pre- Covid UNISON was concerned that the Northern Ireland budget faced a shortfall of around £600m. It was far from clear how the commitments under the New Decade New Approach Agreement were going to be met. Whilst reference was made to £2 billion having been committed to Northern Ireland to support the implementation of this agreement, £1 billion of that figure was earmarked as a result of Barnett consequentials, with no clear timescale as to when such funding would flow to Northern Ireland and over how many years. There is a general consensus that this level of funding is not sufficient to meet the commitments made under this agreement, with the NI Affairs Committee recommending that the Government set out a long-term financial plan for its implementation.

A one-year budget in advance of the CSR was set in March 2020 in the hope that the subsequent allocation would improve the financial picture and allow the Executive to implement a multi-year resource budget for public services in 2021. This budget itself identified that the NI block grant in real terms is £360 million lower than pre-austerity levels when comparing like for like spending. With Covid, there have been additional resources flowing from Westminster, but it is not yet clear how this has improved the overall public spending picture, if at all.

It is essential that the CSR at least restores public spending in Northern Ireland to the levels it was at pre-austerity and provides the resources necessary for the reforms needed for workers in health, social care, education and the community and voluntary sector.

Investment in HE/FE and skills

UNISON also represents members working in HE and FE across the UK. Needless to say, the union see support for these sectors as a central component in any programme of investment. What's more, it's clear that such investment is crucial to the UK's economic recovery. We note in particular that the UK has a historic skills deficit which will only get worse unless we can reinvigorate our FE sector and provide a better route for the 50% of young people who choose not to go to university - and who were already left behind before the economic shock of the pandemic.

In HE UNISON is extremely concerned that the government hasn't gone far enough to support universities through this difficult time. We don't think that asking universities to take out more loans is a suitable or sufficient way forward, nor will an advance on some funding streams be enough to cope with a potential reduction in international student income and the post Brexit 14% drop in EU research income .

As such we call for an unambiguous commitment from government that it will provide the necessary funding to support a huge expansion of learning and skills opportunities to boost job prospects – and provide the backing to secure the future of our universities.

We welcome pledges to increase skills investment on some fronts, including increased capital spending of £1.8 billion to upgrade our college estate over the current parliament and an additional £600 million per annum on a new National Skills Fund from next year. But these two specific spending commitments were made before the pandemic hit and were openly aimed at repairing the damage done by years of cuts to our further education and skills sector. For example, an analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies^[2] published last December calculated that the promised additional investment on the National Skills Fund would only reverse about one fifth of the cuts to total spending on adult education and skills since 2010. And while the increased spending for skills programmes set out by the Chancellor in July was a good start, it said next to nothing about adult retraining and largely focused on financial incentives for employers to recruit more apprentices and trainees.

We agree with the TUC's calls for a significant skills boost on three fronts to address the impact of Covid-19, as follows:

1. A job guarantee programme targeted initially on young people with a flexible training component, including the option for commencing a proper apprenticeship.
2. An 'education and training guarantee' for all school leavers and other young people that would support access to an apprenticeship, a place at college or university, and other education and training options.
3. A new right to retrain for everybody, backed up by funding and personal lifelong learning accounts.

2. Give public sector workers a decent pay rise

Public sector workers have earned a pay rise. They have put their health and even their lives at risk to keep essential services going during the pandemic, with many managing longer hours and larger workloads under conditions of extreme stress. These efforts came off the back of a decade-long pay squeeze that has left public sector workers, including those on the frontline of fighting Covid-19, still being paid less today than they were a decade ago. In real terms (that is after adjusting for inflation), average public sector pay is significantly lower today than it was in 2010. The following table demonstrates how much different groups of workers in public service occupations have lost in real terms.

	Actual 2009 pay	Actual 2020 pay	2020 pay if rose by inflation	Cash decline in value	% decline in value
Hospital porter (at top of band 2)	16333	19337	22376	3039	14%
Healthcare assistant (at top of band 3)	18157	21142	24875	3733	15%
Medical secretary (at top of band 4)	21318	24157	29206	5049	17%
Nurse (at top of band 5)	26839	30615	36769	6154	17%
Paramedic (at top of band 6)	33436	37890	45807	7917	17%
Admin officer	19621	22183	26881	4698	17%
Cleaner	12145	19698	16639	-3059	-18%
Environmental Health Officer	30011	33782	41115	7333	18%
Higher Level Teaching Assistant	21519	24491	29481	4990	17%
Housing officer	25472	28672	34897	6225	18%
Librarian	25472	28672	34897	6225	18%
Nursery nurse	17802	22627	24389	1762	7%
Refuse Collector	15725	19312	21543	2231	10%

School Administration Assistant	15725	19312	21543	2231	10%
Social worker - experienced	30851	34278	42266	7988	19%
Social worker - newly qualified	25472	28672	34897	6225	18%
Trading standards officer	30011	33782	41115	7333	18%

The pay rise announced in July for some public sector workers did not go nearly far enough in giving public sector workers their due. It came with no new funding, leaving departments forced to find the money from their already over-stretched budgets. And it was immediately followed by Treasury warnings that it will be a one off to be followed by further pay restraint in the near future.

The CSR must reward workers for the huge sacrifices they have made by awarding them fair pay rises that restore what they have lost through ten years of cuts and slow growth.

In addition to the CSR making financial provision for decent negotiated pay increases over the three-year spending review period, UNISON is calling for the following immediate measures:

- a minimum £2,000 uplift on all Agenda for Change pay points to be paid to all NHS staff before the end of the year. This would take the NHS pay floor back above the real Living Wage and would provide a much-needed boost to local economies. There is strong public support for the value placed on NHS staff to be reflected in a pay rise, with 69% supporting an early pay rise for NHS staff according to recent [opinion polling](#) for UNISON. Funding also needs to be provided to ensure that contracted out members of the NHS team get a commensurate pay rise. And funding needs to be built in to sustain significant pay rises for subsequent pay years covered by the CSR period.
- Care workers to receive at least the real living wage, with full pay if they're off sick. It is a scandal that the value of the work undertaken by care workers is not reflected in their pay. We note that the Scottish government has committed to paying at least the Scottish Living Wage to all adult social care workers and that this includes sick pay when staff are ill or self-isolating. This commitment needs to be matched and delivered across the UK.

The government claims that pay restraint is necessary on the grounds of fairness to make sure that public sector pay doesn't outstrip pay in the private sector. But it isn't a zero-sum game. On the contrary, with the private sector facing its biggest crisis of demand in decades, more public spending is exactly what is needed. When public sector workers are paid more, they have more to spend, which means business have more customers and the economy does better across every part of the UK. The same is true when more people are employed in the public sector.

3. Create fairer and safer workplaces.

Good quality jobs in fair and decent workplaces are key to a sustained and successful economic recovery. Every pound the government dedicates to supporting work, either in specific Covid related measures or in terms of investment in public sector employment, should be focused on creating and sustaining decent jobs. This requires a concerted effort to create secure work, boost wages, improve enforcement, ensure timely access to workplace justice, allow a proper role for trade unions in the workplace and provide access to decent pensions.

The coronavirus outbreak has revealed the fragility of the UK labour market. Many zero hours contract workers in hotels, pubs and cafes saw work – and pay - dry up overnight. This also impacted on UNISON members in catering and cleaning jobs. Rather than risk not being allocated future shifts, large numbers of low-paid care workers on insecure contracts went to work without the protective kit they felt they needed. Others felt they had to go to work even though they were unwell or knew they had been exposed to the virus, unable to afford to self-isolate.

Those in insecure work often miss out on key workplace rights such as:

- the right to return to the same job after maternity, adoption, paternity or shared parental leave
- the right to request flexible working
- the right to protection from unfair dismissal or statutory redundancy pay

Many insecure workers miss out on key social security rights such as statutory sick pay (with devastating consequences in the current context), full maternity pay and paternity pay.

Many employers fail to invest in staff they feel they have little obligation to, making it harder for these workers to progress. As the OECD has demonstrated, non-standard employment often means that you receive little training and development. Sometimes insecurity can have major health and safety effects, as we saw in the care sector at the start of the pandemic.

Improving job quality is not something that can wait until the economy has picked up again. Decent jobs mean good wages but they are also about security, skills development and achieving a balance between working and private life. Decent jobs with fair pay also protect against pension poverty.

We should learn lessons from the recovery from the 2008 financial crisis, which was characterised by poor productivity and low wage growth. The coronavirus revealed the fragility of those jobs as many disappeared overnight.

The OECD points out that countries with policies and institutions that promote job quality, job quantity and greater inclusiveness perform better than countries where the focus of policy is predominantly on enhancing (or preserving) market flexibility.

Government must use its promised employment bill to tackle insecure work by legislating for:

- the effective abolition of zero hours contracts by giving workers the right to a contract that reflects their regular hours, at least four weeks' notice of shifts and compensation for cancelled shifts
- penalties for employers who mislead people about their employment status and protections for the genuinely self-employed
- workers to have the right to challenge their parent employer over minimum wage, sick pay and holiday pay abuses
- genuine two-way flexibility by giving workers a default right to work flexibly from the first day in the job, and all jobs to be advertised as flexible.

These changes will have a positive impact on women who represent over 50% of the UK workforce. Women are more likely to be in lower paid, insecure jobs and vulnerable to cuts in their hours or redundancy wherever they work - in the public or private sector. Caring responsibilities are also unequal - women are more likely to care for children and elderly/sick relatives than men.

The Coronavirus lockdown restrictions have highlighted the double jeopardy for women of uncertainty in their jobs and if they need to access care services for children or elderly/sick relatives, it is not available at the times when they need it most and it is unaffordable.

Government must invest in affordable accessible childcare. UNISON is also calling for day one rights to flexible working and 10 days carers leave.

Coronavirus has also highlighted the inequitable treatment of pregnant workers. Too many pregnant women have been made to take sick pay or unpaid leave instead of receiving their usual pay and working from home if possible. There is an increasing risk of new mothers returning from maternity leave finding themselves under threat of redundancy. UNISON supports a change to the law to extend protection from redundancy to six months from the date a new mother returns from maternity leave.

Fire and rehire

There can be no place in a civilised economy for fire and rehire S188 notices. The experiences of UNISON's members working for Tower Hamlets council and Sandwell Leisure Trust demonstrate this is currently a significant problem in public services and more widely. British Gas staff have recently found themselves experiencing the same situation, with our members and the wider workforce receiving a letter serving notice of the company's fire and rehire plans.

The law in its present form unfortunately allows the dismissal and re-engagement of employees on inferior terms and without compensation and this needs changing in Parliament to prevent such practices (see also ASDA, British Airways) becoming the norm and reducing the standard of employment for all workers throughout the UK. Currently a Private Members Bill (132) seeking to revoke this law, has been tabled by

Gavin Newlands MP. HMT see a rise in the in-work state benefits bill when conditions are driven down.

Although out with the terms of the CSR in the strictest sense, HMT should use its wider influence across government to address this injustice and help deliver the fairer labour market that we need to see – and which will ultimately aid a quicker and more durable recovery for the public finances.

Disabled workers

For years disabled workers have been saying that they could often do their job better and with less pain if they could work from home. Although this right to work from home as a reasonable adjustment existed theoretically under the Equality Act 2010, disabled workers frequently encounter employers who state that home working is “not our policy” or just wouldn’t be possible.

Covid 19 has shown very much that it is possible. A UNISON survey found that half of disabled workers worked from home every day during the pandemic and 73% said they were as productive or more productive. 54% would like to continue to work from home after COVID – likely to reduce their need for sick leave and help to address the disability employment and pay gaps - but many expect to be turned down by their employer.

Of course, not everyone wants to work from home. But disabled workers who want to work from home should have a new right to do so.

4. Build a more equal and sustainable post COVID-19 society

The pandemic has thrown the inequalities that so disfigure our society into sharp relief. These need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

UNISON note that it is the least well off, women, ethnic minorities, disabled people, young and older people and those living in the most deprived neighbourhoods who have suffered most during the pandemic. For many people, these factors interplay with cumulative effect.

Spending decisions taken now will determine whether these inequalities become further entrenched or meaningful progress can be made.

Covid-19 has also highlighted the impact of a decade of cuts to the services which the most disadvantaged groups rely on, including mental health and community support services.

UNISON’s recommendations in this submission, including investment in public services and better pay for public sector workers and measures to create fairer and safer workplaces will help build a better recovery for all.

Fortunately the government has, in the shape of the public sector equality duty (PSED), a tool to ensure that it can, in addition to its stated commitment to “ build back better, build back greener, build back faster”, also build back fairer.

The duty was specifically introduced to ensure that proper consideration was given to the impact of decisions, including spending decisions, on people from groups protected by the Equality Act. The PSED is not intended to restrain Government from making decisions but rather to ensure that public spending is targeted where it will have the most impact on promoting equality and eliminating discrimination. In order to ensure compliance with the duty, government must not consider spending decisions in different departments in isolation. Although it is important to look at the potential impact of individual measures, it is essential that their interaction is properly understood and that the cumulative impact is considered.

As EHRC highlighted in their investigation into compliance with PSED in the 2010 spending review, understanding the cumulative impact on protected groups “should be a pre-requisite of any policy making process.” The Commission recommended that it should be taken into account in future Spending Reviews. Government would also benefit from close attention to the wider recommendations made by the equalities regulator, in particular need for:

- Greater transparency, including clear HM Treasury guidance on data and analytical requirements for the whole of government.
- A single point of government responsible for monitoring and assessing the cumulative impact of future Spending Reviews and budgets.
- Independent and authoritative equality analysis of public spending policies.

In terms of sustainability UNISON calls for a just transition to a net zero-economy. This will require specific funding at different levels: local, regional and national. Industrial, transport and public sector policy is crucial to achieving both a just transition for workers and meeting the net zero target.

At the UK level, the government needs a co-ordinated strategy which includes the following elements:

- An integrated energy policy with a long-term plan for how to reach net zero
- A mass investment in insulation and energy efficient homes led by local authorities
- Public service organisations being funded to meet targets ahead of 2050;
- Investment to support these priorities, with a clear focus on good jobs
- An integrated skills policy
- A Just Transition commission to ensure that workers’ voice is central to guiding these policies.