



**Special Service Group Conference  
2021**

**Decisions**

**13 June 2021**

**Virtual Event**

## 1. Unity Against Public Sector Pay Freeze

**Carried**

This Local Government Service Group Conference notes with deep concern the government's intention to impose some form of pay freeze or pay restraint on public sector workers.

While individual pay claims and campaigns remain the responsibility of the various sector committees, the Local Government Service Group Executive has a role in wider public sector pay policy as it impacts members of our service group.

We note that the government has signalled an intention to seek to create division not only between public and private sector workers but even between "deserving" public sector workers such as those NHS workers covered by pay review bodies and other public sector workers.

Our service group represents many workers who have been in the front line throughout the pandemic in social care, schools and elsewhere. More broadly we believe that all public sector workers continue to support our communities through the pandemic and will be vital to enabling the recovery from it.

We reject any attempts at division.

This conference therefore calls on the Service Group Executive to call on the National Executive Committee to launch a campaign against government attempts to restrict pay rises for public sector workers.

This Conference also calls on the Service Group Executive to request UNISON's General Secretary to ask for an emergency meeting of the public services committee of the TUC with a view to organising a cross union campaign to defeat the attack. The campaign will include production of campaign materials, social media activity and online meetings for members that stress the unity of workers. The campaign should include the following points;

- 1) How much public sector workers have lost in real terms since austerity was imposed in 2010;
- 2) There is no justification for public sector workers to pay for the Covid-19 pandemic. The government has found billions to support business. The government has shown a cavalier attitude to awarding huge contracts during the Covid-19 pandemic without proper consideration of their effectiveness, such as the contracts for test and trace to Serco and Deloitte. This shows money can be found for pay rises;
- 3) Increased taxation of the wealthy, big business and those that evade or avoid tax should be used to invest in public services, workers pay and for full income protection for any workers who cannot work because they need to self-isolate or because of lockdown restrictions;
- 4) Increased taxation must be used to increase funding for local government and to ensure the pay of workers in private contractors is also not restrained. The

point must be made that pay restraint in the public sector does not improve the pay of workers in the private sector. The distinction between private and public services is often arbitrary and should not be used to divide workers. For example the health and social care system is made up of workers across all sectors. We want pay rises for workers across all sectors;

- 5) While some NHS workers may not face the same degree of pay restraint as other public sector workers, we reject divide and rule tactics and point out that NHS workers are likely to be offered pay rises well below their aspirations. We are in favour of unity between workers in the NHS, local government, and the private and voluntary sector;
- 6) For the same reason we reject arbitrary definitions of who are frontline workers and which workers are deserving of pay rises. This includes attempts to divide workers on the basis of those who work from home and those who work in work places. The stress, strain and health and safety issues for both home workers and those in work places must be highlighted.

This conference agrees the Service Group Executive has a specific responsibility to launch a campaign on behalf of its members covered by the public sector pay freeze. Therefore in addition to the above, this conference calls on the Service Group Executive to seek agreement with all the sector bargaining committees to agree to launch an immediate break the pay freeze campaign that would:

- a) Call on members to organise local protests ( that they locally decide on) before the end of the year(in line with Covid-19 regulations) highlighting the attack;
- b) Begin a consultation with members to seek to win support for a ballot for industrial action;
- c) Approach other service groups affected through the service liaison committee for a joint campaign on the lines.

This conference also notes that local government pay restraint goes hand in glove with continued underfunding of local government services including not adequately compensating local authorities for the additional costs associated with Covid-19.

In many areas members face the prospect of both job losses and pay restraint.

- i) This conference calls on the Service Group Executive to encourage and support local government branches to organise rallies and protests, whether virtually, or physically with suitable social distancing and other Covid-19 safe measures that bring these elements together;
- ii) This conference calls on the Service Group Executive to call upon the National Executive Council to seek the maximum possible unity with other public sector trade unions (and within UNISON) including, where possible, coordinated lawful industrial action.

## 2. Food Standards Agency – Pay, Terms & Conditions

**Carried**

Conference notes that our members employed by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) work tirelessly to make sure the public eat safe and clean meat, dairy and seafood. Their pay, terms and conditions need urgent improvement to reward that commitment. Environmental health and trading standards officers also deserve a decent pay rise. During the Covid-19 pandemic, public sector workers have shown their commitment to public services and the communities they serve like never before, often at significant risk to themselves. Such local heroes are crucial to the recovery post-Covid-19, not just for the economy but also for everyone's well-being. Our members inspect restaurants and food outlets, slaughterhouses, and cutting plants to make sure the public is safe to eat out and eat in.

Conference further notes that the FSA's future regulation proposals are nothing more than an attempt to shift responsibility to the private sector and devalue the role of regulation in the food industry. UNISON, in response, has launched the Protect Our Food campaign to support the public servants working in the human food chain.

Conference calls upon the Service Group Executive to defend our members' terms and conditions and negotiate with the FSA. It also calls for the protection of the FSA, environmental health, and trading standards as an independent, local, and national government provided regulatory function by:-

- 1) Continuing to robustly negotiate for higher wages for our members through collective bargaining;
- 2) Opposing privatisation and deregulation of meat hygiene inspection, environmental health, and trading standards;
- 3) Opposing attempts to undermine the roles of our members working in food and promoting the Protect Our Food campaign;
- 4) Opposing any attempt to reduce environmental, regulation and standards in the meat, dairy, and seafood industries now we have left the European Union;
- 5) Campaigning against trade deals that lessen our high environmental, animal welfare and hygiene standards post-Covid-19;
- 6) Raising UNISON's profile in the FSA by highlighting our successes during the pandemic, including shielding for the clinically extremely and clinically vulnerable staff and those who live with someone who is shielding at home;
- 7) Raising the profile of all our members who work in food by promoting their Covid-19 stories and how they are crucial to economic recovery post-Covid19.

## **Composite A (Motions 3, 5 and 5.1) A Pay Strategy for Organising and Industrial Action in Local Government**

**Carried**

Conference recognises the efforts made by the sector committees and branches in pursuing the union's 'Pay Up Now!' campaign in recent years, even during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Covid has highlighted the need for a new approach to pay in local government. Throughout the pandemic, local government workers proved themselves to be indispensable – keeping our communities safe and providing essential services, often at the expense of their own wellbeing. The increased public recognition of the work our local government members do, has shone a light on the real problems they have with pay. Pay in local government is too low and it has fallen in real terms over the last decade. Many local government workers have gone 'above and beyond' during Covid-19, working extra hours for no extra reward, at the expense of their own safety and work-life balance.

Conference condemns the Westminster Conservative government's public sector pay freeze, announced in December 2020. Local government workers have showed throughout the pandemic that they provide vital public services, keep our communities safe and well, and they often put themselves at risk during the pandemic so as to serve the public. Their work has become more recognised by the public over the last year. It is outrageous that the government now seeks to cut their real pay. The millions of pounds given by Tory ministers to families and friends for contracts during the pandemic shows there is plenty of money available.

It is clear that without concerted political, legal and industrial campaigning from UNISON and other trade unions, public sector pay will continue to fall behind.

Conference believes that organising and pay campaigning are intrinsically linked. The larger and more active our membership is, the stronger our pay campaigns will be. And with stronger pay campaigns, we will recruit more members and identify more active reps and local leaders.

Conference notes the success of the Scottish local government committee and branches' pay campaign over 2017 and 2018 which resulted in record levels of recruitment, member engagement and improved offers. Conference also notes that despite the restrictions caused by the pandemic, the digital-based NJC pay consultation in 2020 produced a vastly improved turnout.

Conference believes that while digital balloting is no substitute for face to face engagement with members, it is a vital complement to it, and if used appropriately can help strengthen the union's recruitment and organising.

Conference affirms that industrial action conducted within the law and UNISON's rule book is an important plank of our pay campaigns, and must remain so. The Trade Union Act 2016 put in place unacceptable and stringent constraints on our members' right to take industrial action in defence of their pay, chiefly the 50% turnout threshold. But many UNISON campaigns at local level have shown that when the issue is deeply felt and the membership is organised, the threshold can be met, and

successful action can take place. This in turn increases recruitment and organisation. It is vital that we learn the lessons from these campaigns.

Conference notes and supports the democratic autonomy of the various sectors within the service group to conduct pay negotiations and make decisions around them. Conference also reaffirms the importance of the union's devolution protocol as well as the structures created within the service group to safeguard devolution within its democratic framework.

But Conference believes we need a service group wide cross-sector strategy for local government pay campaigning that brings together as many members, activists, branches, regions and sectors, to strengthen our drive for equal, fair and better pay for our members in local government, and that links pay and organising by responding to members' priorities, and organising and building campaigns around them. This strategy should:

- 1) Build on the increased public awareness, during the Covid-19 pandemic, of how indispensable local government workers are in all of our communities, and use this to highlight the problems with local government pay;
- 2) Ensure that our pay campaigning builds on the increased profile and support for local government workers among the public and politicians that has arisen from the Covid-19 pandemic, to help secure decent pay increases. The pay campaign also must be linked to a high-profile campaign to increase funding for Local Government so that pay is not pitted against services and jobs;
- 3) Further explore a broad range of digital balloting and communicating, to help increase participation and engagement in pay ballots and campaigns;
- 4) Respect democratic sector autonomy, and the union's devolution protocol and other devolution structures;
- 5) Recognise the loss in real terms pay that members have experienced since 2010;
- 6) Recognise the importance of having equality proofed pay structures;
- 7) Recognise the importance of all of the equality strands in the context of pay, for example the ethnicity pay gap;
- 8) Feature a strong focus on organising – recruiting members, getting members involved, and identifying activists;
- 9) Feature a clear industrial action strategy, working with the NEC and in full compliance with the UNISON rule book and trade union and industrial action legislation;
- 10) Develop a comprehensive process to ensure that lessons are learnt from all ballots where the turnout is high and a vote for action is achieved, so that

good practice can be applied across the service group;

- 11) Develop a more systematic process for co-ordination of local disputes, where possible;
- 12) Be linked closely to our campaign for a better funding settlement for local government in the post-pandemic world. Local government has been under-funded for a generation, and a new resource settlement from central government is needed for all aspects of local government expenditure - including pay;
- 13) Recognise and deal with the issues with pay bargaining and campaigning in fragmented and outsourced areas;
- 14) Be high profile, with a strong media and social media presence. Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to work with the sector committees, regions, self-organised groups and the Private Contractors' Forum, to develop and implement a pay campaigning strategy based on points 1) to 14) above.

#### **4. The future of the National Joint Council for England, Wales and Northern Ireland**

**Carried**

Conference notes that the National Joint Council (NJC) structure and negotiations have formed the basis of pay determination for the majority of local government workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland since 1997. More than 400,000 UNISON members are covered by sector wide NJC pay negotiations. These negotiations cover pay increases, conditions of service, and equal pay and job evaluation exercises such as the major re-structure of the pay spine in 2018.

Conference believes that the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for a new approach to pay in local government. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, local government workers proved themselves to be indispensable – keeping our communities safe and providing essential services, often at the expense of their own well-being. The increased public recognition of the work our local government members do has shone a light on the real problems they have with pay. Pay in local government is too low and it has fallen in real terms over the last decade. Many local government workers have gone 'above and beyond' during Covid-19, working extra hours for no extra reward, at the expense of their own safety and work-life balance.

Conference further believes that national or sector-wide collective bargaining remains and should remain the bedrock of our approach to pay negotiations. Trade unions are built on the principle of collectivism, and the bigger we are, the stronger we are. Conference also believes, given that local government workers covered by the NJC scheme have seen the value of their pay fall, that it is time to look seriously and critically at the successes and failures of this approach in relation to pay, conditions of service and job evaluation.

Conference also notes that despite the massive efforts of members, activists, branches, regions, the sector and the service group, in recent years we have struggled to negotiate pay increases that have kept up with the cost of living and the

savings associated with low or no pay rises has not protected jobs and services. The external factors we have faced, such as the government's austerity agenda and years and years of privatisation and outsourcing, have been huge. Faced with a Conservative government for another three years, and the funding gap caused by the government's failure to support councils adequately through the pandemic, these challenges will continue. Large parts of the local government sector will be assessing what changes are needed in a post-pandemic world, and it is vital that UNISON participates in those debates and ensure they contain a strong focus on members' pay.

Conference believes that it is important that we review our practices and experiences, to learn from mistakes and build on successes, so as to make best use of the union's resources and do the best for our members.

Conference therefore calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive, working with the NJC Committee, regions and branches, to conduct a review of the National Joint Council and how it functions, including its relationship with and autonomy within the Local Government Service Group Executive, assessing all of its benefits, costs and drawbacks for members, and to report back to Local Government Conference on an interim basis in 2022 and in full in 2023.

**6. For Fair Public Sector Funding And Against a Public Sector Pay Freeze  
Fell**

**9. For Fair Public Sector Funding And Against a Public Sector Pay Freeze  
Carried**

This Conference notes that during a time of international pandemic, once more local government workers rose to the occasion alongside other key workers in the NHS, care, transport and retail to keep essential services running and to support lockdown policies that were the front line in reducing infections and allowing time for a vaccine to be developed. We are therefore appalled that the Conservative government has announced that the reward for this vital and lifesaving service will be yet another local government pay freeze.

This is not only an insult to all our members who worked tirelessly and selflessly on the frontline, and in support, but also demonstrates that the Tories are still wedded to the internationally discredited idea of austerity that has done so much damage to this country over the last ten years. This austerity hollowed out the very services that were so vitally needed once the pandemic struck and our members were caught between the decade of economic vandalism that had been done to the public sector from previous Conservative led and ConDem coalition governments and the mismanagement of the health crisis from the incompetent leadership of the current government.

This conference agrees that UNISON should continue to oppose pay 'offers' which in reality continue to result in further cuts in real living standards for our members and call on the union to campaign for action at every level of UNISON to provide the fair and equitable remuneration that our members deserve. This can only be fully achieved when the public sector gets the funding that is so desperately need in order

to have a fair and equitable recovery from the pandemic and the damage done by the current government's mishandling of it.

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Build a national campaign to fight against any pay freeze or derisory pay offer that is below our National Joint Council (NJC) demands, alongside calling for the funding from national government to fund it;
- 2) Reject any return to austerity as a part of the post-Covid-19 settlement;
- 3) Campaign for investment in local services that will provide safe, secure, well-paid jobs while providing the best outcomes for residents;
- 4) Campaign with others for this investment to be part of a just, green settlement, not just a return to business as usual.

## **10. Work Related Stress in Local Government**

**Carried**

Conference notes the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) definition that 'Work-related stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work', recognises that stress is closely related to excessive anxiety and depression, that 600,000 workers suffer from these conditions due to work and, as a result, 17.9 million working days were lost due to work-related stress, depression or anxiety in 2019/20.

Conference further notes that work-related stress is a major cause of occupational ill health which can cause severe physical and psychological problems in workers affected.

Conference agrees that work related stress should be treated in the same way as other work place hazards, that it should be subject to the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and should therefore be risk assessed to ensure that stress factors are removed or proper controls put in place to reduce them as far as possible.

Conference recognises that as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the workplace for many thousands of our local government members is now home and that while the areas that lead to work related stress may not have changed, the impact on staff is more likely to go unnoticed and unaddressed.

Conference also notes with concern, the reports from across branches indicating an increased interest from councils to sell off or decommission workplaces with, in some instances, little thought for the workforce who may not all be suited to a life of working from home.

In addition to this, conference is also concerned by research from the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development which identifies that long term absence due to stress is more likely in the public sector (71% compared to 45% in private sector

services and 33% in manufacturing organisations), that stress is caused by excess workload, poor management and organisational change.

Conference is further concerned by research from the HSE which identified stress, depression or anxiety as more prevalent in public service industries, such as education; health and social care; and public administration and defence with the main causal factors being workload pressures, including tight deadlines, too much responsibility and a lack of managerial support.

Conference notes a survey by the mental health charity Mind which found that public sector workers are less likely than private sector counterparts to feel supported when they disclose mental health problems. Half (49%) of public sector employees in the survey said that they felt supported whereas the proportion in the private sector was 61%. If undiagnosed, excess stress can lead to more complex issues resulting in greater harm to workers and more time off work.

Conference is also concerned that cuts to social care, reduced levels of staffing and increased outsourcing, have left staff demoralised, have reduced the opportunities for staff privacy at their break time, created issues around access to a staff room or other private space, all of which have further contributed to rising levels of work place stress.

Conference notes that since 2010, hundreds of thousands of jobs have been lost from local government due to the Westminster government's austerity agenda. These cuts have caused vastly increased workloads for those still in work, leading to immense stress. Conference further notes that UNISON research has shown that Black members, women members, disabled members and LGBT+ members are particularly likely to suffer from workplace stress.

Conference therefore calls on the Local Government Service Executive Committee:

- 1) To campaign for local authorities and private companies providing local government services to recognise their responsibility to identify excess stress as a workplace and working from home hazard and to support workers experiencing excess stress with free measures such as mindfulness classes or counselling sessions in work time;
- 2) To develop a strategy to support local government branches through discussions with employers on the closure of workplaces in favour of widespread enforced home working;
- 3) To campaign against employers who seek to make workers more 'resilient' in the face of excess workplace stress rather than tackle the underlying causes; and;
- 4) To develop a communications campaign that will encourage workers to speak out when they are experiencing excess work-related stress.

## 11. Covid-19 hasn't killed sexual harassment at work – it's just moved online

Carried

Conference is clear - sexual harassment isn't just a problem for celebrities. It happens in ordinary workplaces everywhere. This includes local government. Anybody can experience sexual harassment. However, TUC research shows that half of women have been sexually harassed at work. Two thirds of LGBT+ people have experienced it too. Four out of five people don't feel able to report it to their employer.

Conference is concerned that online sexual harassment has become more prevalent and that the requirement for so many workers to work at home because of Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, means sexual harassment, far from reducing due to the widespread closure of workplaces, has just moved on-line. Research shows that on-line sexual harassment can be more pernicious and difficult to deal with.

UNISON's survey of 47,000 women members in February 2021 found that 77% of women working in local government were working from home during the pandemic. Conference notes that the charity Rights of Women surveyed women during the pandemic and found 15% of women who have experienced sexual harassment reported an increase in on-line harassment while working from home. Nearly one in three women who have reported sexual harassment to their employer said that the process had been negatively impacted by the pandemic.

The survey report highlighted examples of online harassment including male managers telling women to attend video calls wearing more make-up and "sexier" clothing and stated that the move to working from home has also given harassers new tools to indulge in "less favourable treatment and victimisation".

Conference congratulates the National Women's Committee for their work in 2020 to fight sexual harassment through:

- 1) UNISON's #ustoo campaign;
- 2) Our call for a change to the law to make it mandatory for employers to evidence that they are proactively taking steps to stop sexual harassment taking place;
- 3) New bargaining guidance to ensure zero tolerance of sexual harassment in the workplace.

However, conference also notes the need to refresh and update the campaign and UNISON's own guidance in light of the increase in on-line abuse and to take account of new ways of working due to the pandemic, particularly video-conferencing.

Conference calls on the service group executive to:

- a) Work with the National Women's Committee to build the campaign for zero tolerance of sexual harassment in local government workplaces particularly on-line abuse;
- b) Encourage local government employers to support UNISON's campaign for changes to the law to make it mandatory for employers to evidence that they are taking steps to stop sexual harassment taking place and to address third party sexual harassment;
- c) Work with Labour Link to call for the changes to the law in b) above.

**12. Health & Safety and safety reps in local government after Covid – an opportunity to recruit and organise women workers**

**Carried**

Conference notes Caroline Criado Perez's recent book "Invisible Women" which set out how men's dominance of the design industry has a major impact on women's health and safety.

For women working in local government and schools, the experience of working during the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted this impact.

Some examples include:

- 1) 71% of women wear protective work clothing for their council jobs that isn't designed for women's bodies. As working during the pandemic showed to devastating effect, ill-fitting PPE can be dangerous, can lead to injury and even death as it simply isn't doing what it's designed for;
- 2) Tools used in local authority roles are usually designed for men, often making them more difficult for women to use. They are often heavy and cumbersome to hold;
- 3) The average smartphone – 5.5 inches long – is too big for most women's hands, and it doesn't often fit in our pockets.;
- 4) Many women are exposed to hazardous substances in their work in schools for example - and at home, for example when cleaning. The risk assessment effect of this exposure is based on men but women have different hormones and immune systems together with thinner skin and therefore exposure to these chemicals affects women differently. Women also have a lower threshold to the level of toxins they can be exposed to before they are absorbed by the body. Despite women undertaking a disproportionate amount of domestic and workplace cleaning tasks, the majority of cleaning products are tested on men.

Conference notes that health and safety issues and particularly those affecting women, provide a significant organising and recruitment opportunity in the post-pandemic world of work.

Conference asks the Service Group Executive to:

- a) Work with the National Women's and National Health and Safety Committees to build a campaign for:
  - i) Testing and risk assessments to be individual;
  - ii) Employers to avoid suppliers who do not provide PPE that fits everyone;
- b) Work with LAOS to ensure that health and safety training recognises and raises awareness of the need for personally tailored risk assessments and testing;
- c) Work with regions to encourage women working in local government and schools to become safety reps.

### **13. Reduction in the Working Week – Campaigning Across the Sectors**

**Carried**

Conference notes that workplace stress is a massive and growing concern in local government. As the Local Government Association states: "Research shows that work is the biggest cause of stress in people's lives, more so than debt or financial problems. Stress can stop people performing at their best and lead to physical illness and absence."

The austerity agenda imposed by successive Conservative and Liberal Democrat governments since 2010 has had a huge impact on the workloads and mental health of local government workers. Hundreds of thousands of jobs have been lost, and those left in work have experienced huge increases in workloads, at a time when demand for services from the most vulnerable people in society has sky-rocketed. We have seen huge increases in workplace stress and other sickness.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a massive impact on stress at work, with many workers being asked to work in situations they are not comfortable with, for example while they are clinically vulnerable, in confined workplaces where social distancing hasn't been possible, or in areas where behaviour by members of the public can cause difficulties. And while some local government staff have been able to work at home, for many this has meant increased hours, a blurring of the lines between work and family, and a deteriorating work-life balance.

Workplace stress in local government is particularly acute among disabled members, Black members, LGBT+ members and women members, all of whom are more likely to suffer from stress.

Conference believes that in order for this situation to improve, we need an end to austerity and renewed investment in public services. But the situation could be mitigated if our members' work-life balance were improved.

UNISON members in local government have helped keep local services going by working over and above their hours, with increasing stress and mental health problems. The NJC Committee's proposal for a reduced working week as part of the 2020 pay claim won broad support from our membership. While the ability to work from home has been welcome for many members during the pandemic, it can also lead to a blurring of the boundaries between 'work' and 'life'.

Conference believes that we need a broader campaign for a reduced working week across the sectors and employers covered by the service group, including private contractors and schools.

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to launch a campaign for a reduced working week across local government, schools and associated employers, including:

- 1) Political lobbying and influencing, with practical ways for members to get involved;
- 2) Advice for the sectors, regions and branches to help them negotiate and campaign on this issue;
- 3) Electronic, social media and physical materials to promote support for the campaign to help the union recruit and organise around the issue;
- 4) A strong emphasis on the equalities issues relating to working hours.

#### **15. Standing Up to Violence, Harassment and Abuse of Local Government Staff**

**Carried**

Conference recognises that UNISON members in local government are dedicated to improving the quality of life for the communities they work in, as shown by their incredible work during the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite this, many of our members are subject to an alarming increase in violence, abuse and harassment at work.

After years of cuts to local government services and drastic reductions in staffing levels, instances of aggression and intimidating and threatening behaviour are increasing sharply - with the most recent data showing a 25% increase in recorded violent incidents against local government workers in the UK since 2015.

In addition to physical injuries caused by violence, many victims suffer from mental health issues following an attack such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The risk of violence, harassment and abuse is also higher for women, Black, disabled and LGBT+ members.

UNISON has conducted branch surveys and freedom of information requests which show that this problem is only getting worse and that many local government staff do not feel their employer is doing enough to tackle it.

In some local government services, the problem is particularly severe - a recent survey of library workers across the UK found that 85% of members reported an increase in violence and abuse towards the workforce and 92% reported an increase in difficult or challenging service users. Conference believes that the increase in violence at work is linked to both austerity and an increased climate of hate.

Conference believes that:

- 1) Violence, abuse and harassment are not part of the job. While some staff do work in extremely challenging situations, working closely with some very vulnerable people, all staff have a right to work free from fear and to feel secure that they are working in a safe, non-threatening environment;
- 2) Employers must do more to recognise that verbal abuse is also a form of workplace violence. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines work-related violence as: "Any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work"
- 3) Steps should be taken to better protect lone workers who are at greater risk in their jobs than other workers;
- 4) Employers should regularly conduct risk assessments to ensure that risks from work carried out alone are eliminated, reduced or minimised.

Conference calls upon the Local Government Service Group Executive to:

- a) Raise awareness of the issue of violence, harassment and abuse in local government services, including services commissioned by local government;
- b) Promote UNISON's End Violence at Work Charter widely, with a campaign calling on all local government and associated employers to sign up to the charter and put in place the charter's recommended prevention measures, monitoring processes, support for victims, safeguards and training;
- c) Campaign for employers to include signing UNISON's End Violence at Work Charter when commissioning services to outside contractors, building on successful campaigns in other parts of the public sector;
- d) Continue to call for a reversal of central government cuts to local authority funding to ensure staffing levels are sufficient to ensure a safe working environment.

## 16. LGBT+ workers health and well being

Carried

Conference notes that local government used to be an equality trail-blazer in terms and conditions for staff and also in the quality, accessibility and inclusivity of local government service delivery. This, coupled with a strong public service ethos, has contributed over the years to high numbers of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender plus (LGBT+) workers, along with other equality groups, working within local government services.

Conference welcomes the increased recognition that mental health is a serious workplace issue for local government staff. It also has a strong equalities dimension.

Even without the impact of the pandemic, people vulnerable to discrimination face worse levels of mental ill health. In the wider community, around 1 in 4 people are affected by mental ill health. But in the LGBT+ community these figures can be as high as 70%, with trans people – and in particular young trans people – significantly over-represented (41% having attempted to end their lives). Many LGBT+ people will avoid healthcare settings they do not feel safe in, and are far more likely to access LGBT+ specific services for support with their mental health.

In the pandemic, calls to LGBT+ help lines have increased dramatically.

The pandemic has physically removed LGBT+ workers from LGBT+ support groups in and outside of the workplace, limiting their ability to seek help. For some, their own homes have been unsafe with LGBT+ workers, particularly young workers, having been forced to stay in hostile environments with unsupportive family.

Galop, the LGBT anti-violence charity, found an escalation in the number of reports they received about hate crime and hate speech. Some of this violence and abuse was perpetrated by people who blamed the LGBT+ community for the pandemic, and often included references to the AIDS epidemic and Covid-19 as a 'punishment from God'.

Conference recognises the importance of ensuring that local government employers have policies and procedures that help to protect the mental health of staff in general and provide support to workers experiencing mental health problems, and welcomes the UNISON "Bargaining on mental health policies" guide for branches.

It also recognises the importance of occupational health services, employee health and wellbeing programmes and employee assistance programmes being fully LGBT+ inclusive.

Conference therefore calls on the local government service group executive, in liaison with the national LGBT+ committee and other parts of the union as appropriate, to:

- a) Seek to ensure that workforce health and wellbeing is on the bargaining agenda with all local government employers;

- b) Urge employers to acknowledge the impact of discrimination on mental health and include a strong equality dimension in mental health initiatives and strategies;
- c) Promote the UNISON 'Bargaining on mental health policies' guide to branches;
- d) Gather and publicise examples from branches organising in the service group of good practice in occupational health services, employee health and wellbeing programmes and employee assistance programmes;
- e) Call on employers to acknowledge the importance of specialist support services, such as LGBT+ support services, and publicise them to staff, where these exist;
- f) Signpost information and support on LGBT+ mental health to local government branches, stewards, equality co-ordinators and LGBT+ officers.

## **17. The Challenges and Opportunities for an Ageing Workforce in Local Government**

**Carried**

Conference notes that older people make up a growing proportion of the population, and so make an increasing contribution to society. They are our members, volunteers, taxpayers and carers. They have also been the most at risk during the Covid-19 pandemic, sometimes risking their own health to deliver urgent public services.

Over recent decades there has been a significant increase in the number of older workers, with over 50s now making up nearly a third (31%) of the entire UK workforce. By 2022 the number of people in the workforce aged 50 to state pension age will have risen to 13.8 million and the number aged 16-49 will have reduced by 700,000. Poor pension provision has meant that an increasing number of pension-age people are staying in work longer.

It's clear that as society ages, so too does the workforce. Older workers can bring institutional knowledge and perspective, social maturity and stability, and can pass on critical knowledge or business relationships to younger workers. An Age UK study showed that older workers are as productive and willing to work as flexibly as their younger counterparts and far from the scare stories that older workers crowd out younger workers. Contrary to popular myth, the evidence shows that keeping older people in work improves employment prospects for younger generations and has in some cases even increased their wages.

While age brings experience, it can also bring several challenges, and many people worry about their ability to work later in life. Many older workers report feeling undervalued and not respected by managers and their co-workers.

Conference notes with concern that outdated stereotypes, unconscious bias and age discrimination all contribute to preventing older people from staying in or returning to

work. And all of this means is that age is one of the major challenges that hinders successful job search. Other challenges include low skills, lack of confidence, inadequate up to date qualifications, long-term health conditions, disabilities and the difficulty of combining work with caring.

UNISON's victory in forcing the government to withdraw its unjustified exit payment cap and associated changes to exit payments is to be welcomed, but the government's proposals in this area demonstrate that we must be wary of future similar attacks on older workers and the future pensions of all of our members.

Around half of older workers leave the labour market prematurely - often because of a lack of support from their employer. In a survey of 500 UK employers it found that just one in five employers (20%) have faced challenges with managing age-diversity at work. Only a third (33%) of employers said they provide support, training or guidance for managers on managing age diversity.

It is not unreasonable, and in some instances, it is a legal requirement, for employers to support older workers by offering altered working arrangements and/or development opportunities. According to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), employers need to consider carrying out risk assessments routinely, not just when an employee reaches a certain age; making adjustments on the basis of individual and business needs, not age; modifying tasks to help people stay in work longer; and allowing staff to change work hours and content: and assessing the activities involved in jobs and modifying workplace design if necessary. Adjustments to workplace design should take account of all genders and their differing requirements as they grow older.

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the fact that older workers often need a different approach from employers. Older people were more likely than younger people to be affected by Covid-19 and yet without its older workers, local government would have been completely unable to provide the vital services it did throughout the pandemic, supporting our communities and keeping us safe.

This highlights the importance of working with local government employers to ensure they adopt and improve policy and practice, tackle age bias and create an age-friendly workplace culture to ensure that people can work for as long as they want to. Age friendly policies such as flexible working, phased retirement, family care leave and even gap breaks can facilitate a new type of retirement, where people cut down rather than suddenly stop working, where health and wellbeing policies take account of older workers' needs (including support for women through the menopause) and where employers enable staff to combine work with caring responsibilities. Without all of this, more and more of our members will face worse working lives as they age.

Conference calls upon the Local Government Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Raise awareness amongst local government branches about the challenges and opportunities for our members working longer and what the legal responsibilities are on employers;

- 2) Ask local government branches to provide examples of existing age friendly policies and practices on supporting older workers in their workplaces;
- 3) Produce and promote guidance for local government branches to use when representing and negotiating on behalf of older members and include other useful information and UNISON resources;
- 4) Work with regions, branches and members of the service group sector committees to ensure that local government employers meet their responsibilities in supporting the older workers in a fair and non-discriminatory manner;
- 5) Work with the NEC and other service groups to continue to campaign to safeguard and improve equality and employment rights for older workers.

**18. The impact of Covid-19 on Black workers in local government**

**Fell**

**19. Accessing reasonable adjustments during Covid-19**

**Carried**

Conference notes that a UNISON survey of disabled members working from home during Covid-19, including local government workers, found that 53% did not receive any reasonable adjustments from their employer to help them to overcome the barriers they faced as a disabled person working from home.

Only 5% had help from Access to Work, the flagship government scheme which helps identify and fund adjustments. 41% did not know about Access to Work and 23% did not think Access to Work could help with working from home.

As a result of these findings, UNISON wrote to the chancellor in July 2020 asking for increased investment in Access to Work and for its extension to cover equipment required for homeworking. UNISON followed this up with meetings with civil servants. Conference welcomes the subsequent announcement by government in August 2020 that Access to Work would receive further investment and be extended to include home working.

However, there is still far too little awareness of Access to Work by both staff and employers covered by the local government service group, as was highlighted by the experience of our members during Covid-19.

Many local government workers struggled to get the adjustments they needed at home. Some had to use ironing boards instead of adjustable desks, had to buy their own monitors and head sets, were unable to access virtual meetings and thus isolated from the rest of their colleagues, or had to manage the pain caused by unsuitable dining room chairs.

'Long Covid' has also affected disabled workers who are being chased through punitive sickness absence procedures by their employers. Some previously non-disabled workers may now be covered by the Equality Act 2010 which gives a right

to reasonable adjustments to people whose symptoms have a significant impact on normal daily activities and have lasted or are likely to last 12 months or more. However, conference does not have confidence that all local government managers will accept this duty.

Conference believes that one way to ensure employers take seriously their responsibility to provide reasonable adjustments is to agree an 'Accessibility Passport' system. This allows adjustments to be agreed once without the need for stewards to argue the case every time the worker gets a new manager or changes teams.

Some local government employers have implemented a passport system for reasonable adjustments. However others do not have a passport system and staff struggled during Covid-19 to get the adjustments they needed for home working.

UNISON has produced a Reasonable Adjustments Bargaining Guide which includes a template passport that can be adopted by local government employers. Key to UNISON's bargaining guide is that the employer should respond to requests for adjustments within a specified timescale and should also agree a timetable for implementing adjustments, overcoming the twin issues of our members receiving no response to their request or waiting years for agreed adjustments to be put in place. The guide also includes frequently asked questions that can help local government employers understand the benefits of a passport system.

Conference further notes that UNISON has also published a Quick Guide to Access to Work which can be shared with local government members.

Conference therefore calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Raise the inconsistency of access to reasonable adjustments during Covid-19 with the employers on national and sector-wide levels, seeking ways to ensure there is a more joined up approach in future;
- 2) Publicise the government's Access to Work scheme to members and branches in local government, using the UNISON guide;
- 3) Seek to negotiate with employers both nationally and locally via regions and branches, to discount sickness absence "triggers" for workers with 'Long COVID' and to work towards clear acknowledgement by the employers of the right to reasonable adjustments where the Equality Act applies;
- 4) Circulate UNISON's Reasonable Adjustments and Accessibility Passport Bargaining Guide to regions and branches and encourage them to include achieving an accessibility passport agreement with the employer as part of their local bargaining agenda;
- 5) Encourage branches to share successfully negotiated passport agreements and best practise on reasonable adjustments agreed during COVID-19 with UNISON's bargaining support unit so that other branches can learn from them.

## **20. Homeworking as a reasonable adjustment in post-COVID local government workplaces**

**Carried**

Conference notes that many disabled staff in local government have previously requested to work from home as a reasonable adjustment and been refused. However Covid-19 has sparked a revolution in home working and as a union we need to build on the positives for disabled workers whilst also guarding against any detrimental impact.

UNISON's National Disabled Members Committee carried out a survey of disabled members at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in June 2020. 5,000 disabled members responded, including members working in the local government service group. The survey found:

- 1) 50% of disabled members were working from home, compared to just 5% before the pandemic;
- 2) 73% said they were more productive or as productive compared to being in the workplace;
- 3) Many reported having to take less time off sick;
- 4) The reasons for increased productivity and reduced sickness absence included being better able to manage their pain at home, able to take short breaks or work a more flexible day with later start and finish times, and not having to make a long commute that impacted on their impairments;
- 5) 54% of disabled workers said they wanted to continue to work from home after Covid-19;
- 6) However 37% said their employer was likely to refuse to allow them to continue to work from home.

Conference notes that there have been some examples of best practice in the local government service group, with many disabled staff given the tools and resources they need to work from home during the pandemic and a growing realisation from many employers that they need to allow more staff to work from home in a post-pandemic world.

Many local government employers have also ensured that staff have the same adjustments at home as they have at work – or have provided additional adjustments required for home working.

Nonetheless, there remain local government employers who are reluctant to allow home working in the future for disabled workers who need it as a reasonable adjustment. There are also employers who failed to transfer existing adjustments from the workplace or provide additional reasonable adjustments for staff working from home.

UNISON has a number of tools local government branches and stewards can use in arguing for homeworking as a reasonable adjustment including:

- a) Our homeworking guide
- b) Our two new 'Stewards Guides' to representing disabled workers and representing deaf workers

However conference believes that in the post-pandemic world we need to negotiate with local government employers at a national level for a much stronger right to working from home for disabled workers who want it, and for the adjustments these staff require to make this a success.

Nonetheless, we must also protect disabled workers who want to return to the workplace from being forced to work from home in order to save the employer money or allow the employer to avoid ensuring accessible workplaces. Home working should be a choice for disabled workers, not a requirement.

The impact of home working on isolation and mental health also needs to be tackled and local government employers need to put additional safeguards in place to address virtual bullying and harassment.

Conference therefore calls on the local government service group executive to work with the National Disabled Members' Committee to seek to:

- i) Negotiate with national employers to produce stronger guidance on agreeing homeworking as a reasonable adjustment for disabled workers who want it, and on ensuring reasonable adjustments are provided for disabled home workers;
- ii) Agree safeguards against disabled workers being forced to work from home against their will if this is not their preference;
- iii) Achieve strengthened advice on supporting staff mental health whilst working from home and measures to tackle virtual bullying and harassment;
- iv) Publicise UNISON's Homeworking Guide to regions and branches;
- v) Circulate the two new 'Stewards Guides' to representing disabled and Deaf workers to regions and branches.

## **21. LGBT+ inclusive policies in Local Government**

**Carried**

Conference acknowledges that even before Covid-19, equality was increasingly being seen as a luxury in many local government workplaces, with many employers barely abiding by the law. We must live up to our proud history and negotiate for LGBT+ equality to be included in all local government policies, practices and agreements.

Conference recognises that local government service group rules, language and practices that are inclusive of our LGBT+ members are vital to achieving our equality objectives. Likewise, in our negotiations, it is vital that we demand employers consider the impact of policies and practices on LGBT+ workers.

Conference welcomes the new guidance “Improving Trans Equality in Local Government Workplaces” circulated to branches in January, and the success of some local government branches in using the UNISON trans equality guide and model policy to negotiate agreements. It notes that trans staff experience disproportionate levels of harassment and discrimination. A 2017 TUC report showed that 48% of trans workers had experienced bullying and harassment, compared to a third of non-trans workers.

Conference also notes there is still a significant lack of knowledge and information about trans equality among many local government employer HR departments and leads. While there has been a welcome increase in local government branches being consulted on draft trans equality policies, many of these include mistakes in law, outdated language, ignore non-binary identities and are far from best practice.

In addition, Conference notes with concern that:

- 1) A number of groups that have campaigned against the proposed reform of the Gender Recognition Act and are seeking to roll back the existing rights of trans people have encouraged their supporters to lobby local authorities to replace ‘gender’ in their equality policies with ‘sex’ and claim that a number have agreed to do so.
- 2) According to a 2019 TUC report, nearly seven in ten LGBT+ people reported being sexually harassed at work, yet two thirds didn’t report it to their employer. One in four of those who didn’t report it said it was because they were afraid of being ‘outed’ at work.

Conference recognises that the many barriers to challenging discriminatory behaviour often stem from a lack of information, education, support and firm policies in workplaces, and that it is essential that there are workplace allies for all LGBT+ identities. It welcomes the development of a new UNISON LGBT+ Allies training programme, aimed at giving non-LGBT+ members the opportunity to explore what it means to be an ally and to identify ways of creating an inclusive working environment for everyone.

Conference calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive, in liaison with the National LGBT+ Committee, to keep LGBT+ equality centre stage in bargaining and:

- a) Continue to encourage the negotiation of inclusive language in local government agreements and policies, and of inclusive practices and procedures, across our local government workplaces;

- b) Urge all branches to use the UNISON trans equality guide and model policy, along with the updated LGBT+ bargaining factsheets and guide to non-binary inclusion, to review employer policies and agreements with employers with a view to achieving best practice;
- c) Urge branches where employers have no trans equality policy to seek to negotiate the adoption of UNISON's model policy;
- d) Ask the sector committees to raise trans equality with employers and employer bodies and seek reviews of relevant equality guidance, in line with UNISON best practice;
- e) Urge branches with employers outside NJC or other national arrangements to check any trans equality policies against the model policy and negotiate for necessary improvements;
- f) Continue to gather and publicise good practice examples from branches organising in the service group of inclusive employer policies and practices;
- g) Circulate advice to branches on using the Public Sector Equality Duty;
- h) Promote the guide to being to be a good trans ally, and the new LGBT+ ally training programme, across the local government service group.

## **22. The Future of Youth Services**

**Carried**

Conference notes that youth services play crucial positive and preventative roles across the UK, and the work youth workers and youth support workers do provides huge value to the lives of young people. Youth services help young people into employment, training or education; they help with potential mental health issues; and they help prevent alcohol or substance abuse, crime and anti-social behaviour.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, youth workers have demonstrated how vital they are, continuing to provide services to vulnerable young people in often challenging circumstances. The importance of the role was finally given some recognition when youth workers were given key worker status earlier this year, something they had been calling for since the start of the pandemic.

Conference notes that since 2010, youth services have suffered huge cuts. Research published by UNISON in 2019 revealed that since 2010, 940 youth centres had been cut. We know from previous UNISON research that between 2010 and 2019, £400m was cut from youth service spending, and 4,500 youth work jobs were lost between 2012 and 2019. A generation of young people are already suffering as a result.

The Conservative government is to blame for these cuts, and we now need a strong campaign to force them to give us back our youth services. Along with the lost jobs and youth centres, there are significant obstacles to reintroducing youth services. Many local authorities have re-structured and no longer employ specialist youth

workers, and some universities have stopped providing the JNC youth work qualification. Retiring youth workers are therefore not being replaced. The youth work workforce needs to be re-built.

Conference believes that the future of youth services must lie in universal, open access services. Within this, specialist provision and access should be ensured for particular groups – for example girls and young women, young LGBT+ people, young Black men and women, and young disabled people. These services should be provided within a universal service and monitoring of uptake will be essential.

Major reinvestment will be needed to reintroduce and reinvigorate youth services.

Any local partnership delivery bodies that are created must be properly representative, with strong voices for trade unions and young people.

It is vital that the JNC youth work professional qualification is protected, respected and valued by employers. Further and broader pathways to that qualification should be developed, including apprenticeships, to ensure that people from all walks of life can become qualified youth workers.

This conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Continue to campaign for youth services to be re-built, based on reinvestment, universal services and promoting the youth work professional qualification;
- 2) Continue to campaign for services that have strong focus on the needs of young people covered by the equalities groups;
- 3) Submit a Freedom of Information request to local authorities to establish the current situation in terms of numbers of youth workers, levels of qualifications and how many remain employed on JNC terms and conditions.

## **24. Traveller Communities**

**Carried**

Conference notes that while local authorities are required to address the housing and development needs of Gypsies and Travellers, they are under no legal duty to provide sites for Gypsies and Travellers. This is true for councils across all four nations of the UK. In England, it has been the case since the Caravan Sites Act of 1968 was effectively repealed by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Conference further notes that as a result of this, local government workers specifically are forced into impossible positions, having to carry out work related to evictions. Members do not want to be in this position but they are left with little choice.

Conference also notes the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill 2021, for England and Wales. The Bill introduces a new criminal offence of residing on land without consent in or with a vehicle and will change trespass from a civil to a criminal

offence. Conference believes that the measures outlined in the Bill will further compound the inequalities experienced by Travellers, needlessly pushing people into the criminal justice system. The powers will disproportionately affect specific minority and ethnic communities and are likely to be in conflict with equality and human rights legislation.

Conference believes that any debate about the future of local government, and the local communities it serves, must include a joined-up approach to providing sites for Gypsies and Travellers, encompassing central government, national governments and local authorities. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted how essential local government is in protecting and looking after our communities, and as the sector builds on this, traveller communities must receive equal treatment and consideration.

Conference affirms that discrimination against Gypsies and Travellers is racism. Gypsies and Travellers are subject to massive amounts of discrimination and prejudice. While the Equality Act 2010 (covering Great Britain) does not define race, case law has established that Gypsies and Travellers are covered by the protected characteristic of race for the Act.

Conference condemns all racism and is clear that we must campaign against discrimination and prejudice aimed at Gypsies and Travellers. Conference condemns the suggestion, made by the Home Secretary Priti Patel, that Travellers' homes could be confiscated if they are suspected of trespassing with "intent to reside".

Conference notes the UNISON Scotland booklet 'Make a Difference!', designed to help members fulfil their obligations in relation to English Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Scottish Gypsy Travellers, Roma and Welsh Kale. Conference welcomes the joint commitment made by UNISON Scotland, the STUC and others to tackling issues concerning Gypsy Travellers and in particular Scottish Gypsy Travellers, and Roma. Conference welcomes the Scottish Government's 2019 action plan to "improve Gypsy/Traveller lives" and reduce inequality.

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Work with the NEC to campaign for the restoration of the 1968 Act, or equivalent legislation to introduce a duty for relevant local authorities to provide economically, socially and environmentally sustainable sites for Travellers and Gypsies;
- 2) Provide guidance and support for members who are forced to carry out work connected with evictions;
- 3) Work with the NEC and the National Black Members' Committee to raise awareness of racism against Travellers and Gypsies and to campaign against it, drawing on the work previously done by UNISON Scotland;
- 4) Work with the NEC to campaign against the sections of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill relating to Travellers, and to explore with the Local Government Association and the Welsh Local Government Association a joint

campaign for an approach to encampments that focuses on negotiations and provision of amenities rather than an enforcement approach;

- 5) Lobby councils that have responsibility for housing to seek to ensure that they address the housing and development needs of Gypsies and Travellers through Housing Needs Assessments and Local Plans;
- 6) Lobby central government on the need for a joined-up approach to the provision of housing and sites for Gypsies and Travellers.

## **25. The Future of Local Government**

**Carried as Amended: 25.1, 25.2**

Local councils across the UK have suffered huge funding cuts over the last decade. We have seen significant changes to the funding mechanism for local government, the functions councils carry out and thanks to devolution the actual make-up of local government. Throughout this time UNISON has sought to stop these cuts and highlighted the resulting impacts on the public and staff. The Local Government Service Group has compiled a comprehensive dataset of the range of services that have been lost since 2010 as well as the impact that these cuts have had on our members and the wider

Conference recognises that these cuts have affected different groups of local government members in different ways, with disproportionate impact on members of disadvantaged groups. Conference recalls that research conducted for UNISON by Natcen Social Research in 2013 and 2016 on the impact on LGBT+ people and services showed that many specialist services for LGBT+ people had closed due to a lack of funding. Specialist services have continued to disappear, with the few services that remain largely being run by charities.

The Covid-19 pandemic has deepened the financial crisis councils are facing at a time when demand for the vital services they provide has skyrocketed. Due to extra expenditure and lost income, local government across the UK has to deal with a funding gap running into the billions of pounds, which the governments across the UK have consistently failed to close. Yet while politicians talk hypocritically of concern for the most vulnerable many local authorities have not even been provided with adequate funding to meet additional Covid costs and cuts to front line services continue.

We welcome every bit of resistance to those cuts by our members, other trade unionists and community campaigns even during the difficulties of organising in the pandemic. These campaigns have not only managed to limit the damage to many services, but they have given voice to those most affected by them. The Local Government Service Group, working with the devolved nations, has developed a wide-ranging campaign for more local government funding, including enabling members to lobby politicians, a dedicated website, campaign videos, major social media profile, media campaigning and training.

However, as well as campaigning against cuts, the time has come for UNISON to set out a new bold vision for how local government should operate and be funded across

the UK. UNISON Scotland, in tandem with the Jimmy Reid Foundation, has begun to explore alternative ways in which councils could be funded more fairly. And through their social partnership and fair work agenda UNISON Cymru/Wales have set out a positive vision where workers are fairly rewarded, heard and represented, secure and able to progress in a healthy, inclusive setting. These initiatives should be incorporated into UNISON's new vision of local government.

Conference believes this vision should include a definition of 'fair work' in line with the principle of decent work as developed by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and incorporated in the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) between the EU and the UK. The TCA commits the UK "to promote, through its laws and practices, the ILO Decent Work Agenda as set out in the 2008 ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (the "ILO Decent Work Agenda") and in accordance with relevant ILO Conventions, and other international commitments...". It also commits the UK to "respecting, promoting and effectively implementing the internationally recognised core labour standards, as defined in the fundamental ILO Conventions". These include the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining.

Through the wider devolution agenda we have seen significant changes to how local government operates throughout the UK, such as through directly elected mayors and combined authorities. Rather than simply reacting to these changes, UNISON, as the main trade union for local government workers, drawing upon members' experiences, should set out a proactive view of how we believe local government should operate, be funded, provide services, and ensure local democracy. This should have human rights, equality and addressing inequalities at its heart, and include services being publicly provided and services that have been outsourced or privatised being brought back in house.

Conference calls upon the Local Government Service Group Executive (SGE) to:

- 1) Continue to campaign strongly for proper recognition of local government services, highlighting the vital role local government played throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, including calling for the investment needed to provide services and safeguard jobs, an end to the austerity politics which cause cuts to services, job and pay, and for local government funding to be restored to 2010 levels;
- 2) Ensure the campaign is co-ordinated with the devolved nations, to ensure a joined-up approach;
- 3) Work through the SGE's Service Delivery Working Group, UNISON regions, the self organised groups and other relevant bodies within UNISON to develop a positive vision for the future of local government, drawing on the experience and expertise of our members, and working with outside bodies when appropriate;

- 4) Replicate the excellent work in Cymru/Wales where UNISON local government activists together with councillors explored the future of local government funding;
- 5) Work with the NEC, UNISON regions and national and regional TUCs to explore the creation of Fair Work Commissions in nations, regions or combined authority areas;
- 6) Working with UNISON's devolved nations, educate MPs, MSPs, MSs, MLAs and London Assembly members on the work in Cymru/Wales with a simple request to invite them to support setting-up a Fair Work Commission in their nations, regions or combined authority areas;
- 7) Working with UNISON Scotland, call upon the Scottish government to enhance the Fair Work Framework in Scotland by assessing and reviewing the progress of the Fair Work Convention which ends in 2025;
- 8) Work with UNISON Northern Ireland and the re-instituted Northern Irish Assembly to help develop a positive vision for local government services;
- 9) Work with the NEC and UNISON's English regions to ensure that the vision incorporates and reflects the changing regional make-up of local government structures throughout England;
- 10) Work with Labour Link to support councillors campaigning against cuts, including those who wish to explore lawful no cuts budgets;
- 11) To continue to support all our members resisting cuts to services, including supporting industrial action where appropriate;
- 12) To continue to develop alliances with other unions, service users, and appropriate campaigns and organisations to resist cuts and call for adequate funding of local government.

## **26. Local Government and Climate Breakdown**

**Carried as Amended: 26.1**

Conference recognises that:

- 1) The impacts of the climate emergency are already evident and have profoundly altered human and natural systems;
- 2) In the UK, we are witnessing more frequent and extreme weather events. In 2019, our communities experienced flooding and also summer heatwaves that resulted in nearly 900 excess deaths. There were more UK wildfires in the previous year than for any year on record across Cornwall, Dorset, Derbyshire, Northern Ireland, the Peak District, Rotherham, the Scottish Highlands, Wiltshire and Wales. Further flooding was experienced in 2021;

- 3) The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has established that for the world to avoid catastrophic climate breakdown, emissions must be slashed worldwide by 45% in the next ten years;
- 4) Over 300 UK councils have declared a climate emergency but have no access to long-term funding from central government to help drive the action needed to protect our communities, our members and their families;
- 5) Local government is on the frontline of the climate emergency, needing to reduce local emissions and those from its own operations. Our members play a fundamental role in mitigating climate change and adapting infrastructure to climate change. This covers areas like land use, planning, transport, waste, purchasing and commissioning goods, pollution control, energy use and production, public health, social care, education and civil contingencies. As local government begins the process of emerging from Covid-19 and reviewing how services are structured and provided, it is vital that local government services are 'built back' greener, taking advantage of the opportunities the green agenda presents;
- 6) UNISON members across local government, including those in the Fire and Rescue Service, face massive increases in workload, pressure and stress along with future changes to workplace practices and procedures as temperatures rise. They have a right to be consulted on environmental issues that affect them;
- 7) Large corporations have been a major contributor towards the climate emergency and have a huge responsibility to mitigate it. Many of these companies provide local government services through outsourcing;
- 8) Politicians across the political spectrum have been too slow to act on climate breakdown. Despite the 2019 warning that we only had twelve years left to prevent irreversible damage because of climate breakdown, the government refuses to commit to ensuring the UK is net zero on carbon emissions by 2030. 2050 is too late. We must act now to prevent catastrophic climate change.
- 9) Climate change affects lower paid workers disproportionately;

Conference applauds the school children on strike in 2019, UNISON's National Young Members Forum and those UNISON members and branches who supported climate strikes, protests, and UNISON Green Week. Conference also applauds UNISON Scotland for leading the way in campaigning and organising on workplace climate issues.

Conference also congratulates branches like UNISON Stockport who have negotiated facilities agreements for environment reps and training for staff. Such steps are crucial if reps are to successfully carry out their role, attend meetings with management, undertake workplace environmental audits and negotiate for a just transition to a net-zero-carbon working environment.

This November, world leaders will gather in Glasgow for the next global climate summit and UNISON will continue to advocate for strong action on the climate emergency.

Recovery from the pandemic provides a unique opportunity to take urgent action and invest in a greener and fairer deal for local government – one that creates jobs, new skills and protects our health and the planet’s natural resources. The climate emergency must be treated with the same urgency as Covid-19.

Conference therefore calls upon the Local Government Service Group Executive to:

- a) Raise awareness that the climate emergency is a trade union issue that needs to be formally recognised as part of a modern, negotiating and bargaining agenda;
- b) Encourage all branches to appoint an environment rep;
- c) Organise and promote regional and local events to raise awareness of the climate emergency among members, and learning events for existing and new reps;
- d) Encourage branches to campaign for their employers to declare a climate emergency and draft action plans to ensure net zero emissions by 2030;
- e) Work with those local authorities that have declared a climate emergency, to enable members to attend the 26th Conference of the Parties UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26) in Glasgow;
- f) Continue to campaign for a reversal of cuts to funding from central government for local government services, vital in building resilience to the climate breakdown.

## **28. Covid Legacy**

**Carried**

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted what’s best about local government and its workforce. Always there ready to support our communities 365 days of the year, especially during times of national crisis.

It’s the same workforce who have had endure over ten years of austerity, cuts to pay and terms & conditions, but when called upon had to adapt to a totally new and unfamiliar environment – infection and transmission control, homeworking, health & safety implementation/monitoring, Registrars dealing with the bereaved in a scale never seen, operating in temporary mortuaries etc.

It was our workforce who ran the hubs that allowed all key workers to keep the country moving and working. Our waste workers, environment/trading standards, social care (caring for our vulnerable), social work staff, housing, cemeteries and crematoria workers, schools and early years’ workers etc.. (far too many to mention) all pulling together to ensure the safety, health and wellbeing of our communities.

We say “were not going back to normal” and what we mean is the way our members were treated before. Employers need to know that they cannot simply keep arrangements in place in an attempt to save money through asset disposal etc; any new changes will require consultation and negotiation.

It is without doubt that many of our members' mental health will have been impacted, domestic violence will have risen increasing the workload for our colleagues in social work and supporting services.

Our children in early years and schools have continued to be supported digitally and face-to-face despite the many risks involved.

It is clear that we are no longer the “poor relation” of public services but now the “distant relative” and forgotten about.

We call upon the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Carry out a consultation with all regions on - what's worked, what hasn't and lessons learned through the pandemic;
- 2) Create a Charter for a Covid-19 Legacy designed for all of our local government areas;
- 3) Consult widely on the impact the pandemic has had on our members;
- 4) Consider what steps need to be taken to address the impact on our members' mental health/wellbeing;
- 5) Create a plan/guidance to ensure that our members are not negatively impacted by Covid-19.

## **29. Developing and expanding social partnership and fair work in Wales and across the UK**

**Carried**

UNISON Cymru/Wales supports the principle of a “Fair Work Nation”. As the largest trade union in Wales, we speak on behalf of around 100,000 members and their families and work with 49 affiliated unions through the Wales TUC.

We strongly support the aims of Welsh government's Draft Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Bill which aims to strengthen social partnership arrangements by putting them on a statutory footing. Wales faces severe long term economic and public service challenges which have been significantly worsened by the UK government's austerity agenda and Covid-19 pandemic. Despite unemployment levels in Wales falling back to pre-financial crisis levels of below 5% there has been no corresponding rise in pay. Instead there has been a decline in real terms pay since 2008. In many low-paid sectors casualised employment, low hours and zero hours contracts have become the norm.

In this context, UNISON Cymru/Wales supports the Welsh government's strengthening of social dialogue and social partnership as an essential democratic and constitutional function. By underpinning, enhancing and consolidating our social partnership the Welsh Government is setting an example for the whole of the UK on how to deliver a more equal society.

Partnership is crucial to maintaining and building employment in Wales and the UK as a whole.

A Welsh government committed to making Wales a Fair Work Nation must take responsibility for ensuring that every policy, financial and legislative lever at its disposal are fully utilised in enforcing the delivery of Fair Work outcomes and that it provides suitable resource to that delivery.

There needs to be a fundamental shift in the perception and treatment of workers' rights, the democratic representative role of unions and the legitimacy of tripartite social partnership. The proposed social partnership and public procurement legislation is an opportunity to ensure that, wherever decisions are made about working people's lives, that their democratic trade unions are active participants.

The definition of Welsh social partnership is that it is:

- 1) Tripartite: Consisting of government, trade unions and public and private sector employers;
- 2) Representative: Involving organisations providing the collective voice of workers and employers;
- 3) Accountable: Able to speak on behalf of their sectors/members by being fully accountable to them.

On the basis that the Welsh government's proposals meet that definition, UNISON fully supports this initiative which includes the creation of a new Social Partnership Council.

Social Partnership Council's role should be to:

- a) Reach agreements on workforce issues within the devolved public sector for the purpose of improving public services;
- b) Reach agreements on what is expected of organisations and businesses receiving public support in so far as workforce issues are concerned;
- c) Consider generally how social partnership and Fair Work can improve efficiency and effectiveness so as to achieve a prosperous Wales and improve people's well-being;
- d) Consider how government policy, expenditure and legislation can best contribute to a prosperous Wales and improve people's well-being.

UNISON is calling for a clear statement of intent saying:

The expected outcomes of a Social Partnership approach are to prioritise delivery of long term social and economic equality for Wales; and, through grants and procurement processes we will:

- i) Significantly increase collective bargaining coverage
- ii) Increase trade union access to and presence in workplaces

Which will:

- A) Address in-work poverty;
- B) Reduce gender pay gap;
- C) Ensure ethical standards of employment.

The development of this social partnership and fair work agenda will provides the positive potential to progress a common NJC grading structure and terms and conditions in all 22 local authorities within Wales.

At present the 22 local authorities in Wales manage 22 different versions job evaluation processes, giving 22 different grading profiles and differing terms and conditions.

This is a ludicrous and makes recruitment and retention of staff problematic with local government workers continuously migrating around the 22 local authorities.

The NHS in Wales has shown a different approach can work, operating an all Wales agenda for change policy with every Health Trust in Wales operating one job evaluation scheme, one set of terms and conditions and identical posts in all Trusts.

In the light of the above developments conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- I) Work with the Cymru/Wales region to review the additional resources which will be required to positively engage with the developing Welsh government social partnership and fair work agenda;
- II) Review the potential of the Social Partnership and Public procurement (Wales) Bill and the Fair Work programme in Wales and how this could be developed across the nations and regions of the UK;
- III) Support and work with the UNISON Cymru/Wales Local Government committee in maximising the positive potential of these developments to develop a strategy to create common NJC grading structure and terms and conditions within Wales;

- IV) To look at how a strategy for a common NJC grading structure in Wales could be rolled out across nations and regions of the UK, taking due note of the wishes and objectives set by the respective devolved nations and regions within UNISON;
- V) Share information on the development the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Bill and Wales Fair Work Programme with all nations and regions' Local Government Committees;
- VI) To work with the Labour Link committee in developing and advancing these strategies.

### **Composite B (Motions 30 and 31) Local Government Funding and Fighting Cuts**

**Carried**

Conference notes that since 2010, local government has experienced a decade of austerity. The post-Brexit political situation merely heightened the constitutional debate in a “disunited kingdom” of growing civic nationalism and regionalisation, the unsettled will for political change and the growing plurality of politics, which will have long-lasting implications for government and governance.

Meanwhile, the Covid-19 pandemic is the single greatest challenge the country has faced since the second world war. Despite promises from successive governments, council funding remains a significant challenge that has not been addressed. The Local Government Association warned that councils face an estimated financial challenge of over £10billion due to Covid-19. Local authorities have had to contend with implementing national support schemes at short notice, increased demand for support to vulnerable residents and reduced collection of council tax and business rates as the pandemic took hold.

This conference believes that the funding crisis in local government, caused by the austerity policies of the Conservative government, has reached a critical level. In towns and cities across the country vital services have been closed and cut back – with no end in sight.

Conference applauds UNISON’s work into what the £10bn funding gap would mean in terms of cuts to service areas – how if applied equally across all services, it would mean £1.9bn slashed from children’s social care spending, £1.1bn from environmental services and £3.5bn from adult social care – an area already in crisis before the coronavirus outbreak. A reduction of that magnitude could lead to the loss of 51,000 children’s social workers, 141,000 adult care workers, and almost 46,000 refuse collectors.

Councils in the North East have a funding shortfall of at least £54.7m between them, with the worst hit in the region being Sunderland (£12.3m), followed by Newcastle upon Tyne (£10.2m) and Gateshead (£6m).

UNISON believes our members working in local authorities and the politicians elected to represent our communities are determined to play their part in stopping

the spread of Covid-19. However, they do so with one hand tied behind their back as the government fails to honour the commitment made by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick MP, when he said councils would be funded to do “whatever it takes” to support their communities.

The grim reality of the Spending Review is a real term pay cut for millions who work across public services, with the added risk of job cuts further down the line. The Tories’ pay policy means about £520 less for a nursery nurse, £659 less for a social worker and £510 less a year for a local government admin officer.

When restrictions are lifted, and the crisis is over things cannot return to how they were beforehand. Conference believes government’s levelling up agenda will be fatally undermined unless local communities are provided with good quality local services and funding for all the associated support councils provide. Getting us on the road to recovery will require a fully staffed, properly paid public service workforce – as well as measures to revive the private sector and get people back to work.

The government’s delayed Fair Funding Review will also potentially shift resources away from the north east to more affluent parts of the country and is a further cause for concern. Analysis commissioned by the Local Government Association in 2020 showed £350m a year would be moved from councils in deprived areas with Tory-controlled shire councils gaining £300m.

This includes now Tory-held seats such as Sedgefield and Bishop Auckland, which will feel the impact of the £10million loss that Durham County Council would suffer under the current plans.

This Conference recognises that there were a wide range of reasons as to why Labour lost the 2019 general election. We believe that one factor may have been the role played by Labour councils in implementing austerity-driven cuts.

This conference notes with disappointment that it is not only Tory-controlled local authorities, but also those with Labour majorities, that are carrying out cuts. Often our union is the last line of defence for workers in local government services and for those who use council services.

We believe that councils, particularly Labour councils where UNISON may have some influence, should do everything within their power and within the law to avoid making cuts, whilst promoting their actions in the community and building a local campaign. They should also link up with others to develop a national strategy to fight the cuts.

This conference believes that UNISON must be seen to actively oppose austerity-driven cuts to services – through public campaigning, lobbying, petitions and through supporting our members who work in these services – whoever is running the council.

This conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Campaign for the government to fund the Covid-19 related shortfall in council budgets and honour its pledge to financially compensate councils during the pandemic;
- 2) Continue to campaign for government to commit to a long-term future financial settlement that creates stability for local government services, addresses regional inequalities and ensures services for most vulnerable are funded – including an answer to the funding of adult social care services;
- 3) Continue to campaign to bring more local government services back in-house and oppose further privatisation.
- 4) Call on all councils to look at what options they have to generate resources and avoid making cuts – including the use of reserves, capitalising eligible general fund expenditure and using prudential borrowing to generate revenue (such as in those councils which have borrowed to invest in property, using the returns in rents etc. to supplement their revenue budgets);
- 5) Support those councils who take up this option, in developing local campaigns in defence of local authority services;
- 6) Support and promote efforts to link up those councils across the countries of the UK;
- 7) Promote this position at all levels of the union, including within the Labour Link.

### **33. Adult Education Needs Investment**

**Carried**

This conference knows the importance of lifelong learning. Education does not end once we hit 18, in fact learning has barely begun. Further education colleges, at the heart of their local community, are the key to ensuring that adults have opportunities to learn and develop throughout their lives.

The UK faces many challenges in the coming years due to the pandemic will face more as new technologies, new industries and new ways of working continue to emerge.

Yet adult education is in a worse state than we have seen for many years. In January 2020 the Learning and Work Institute released data showing that the number of adult learners has plummeted by nearly 4 million since 2010. Reversing this will be the key to boosting productivity and enabling people to adapt to the huge economic changes brought by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The 'skills for jobs white paper, published in January 2021 announces that FE colleges will become focused on providing for the needs of skills needs of local business. But lifelong learning is not just important to the local economy; adults who

take part in learning are likely to have better health, physical and mental and wellbeing and to be more active in their local communities.

In addition to the decline, the Learning and Work Institute survey shows deep inequalities in accessing learning. Adults who are unemployed or work in lower paid, lower skills jobs are half as likely to take part in learning as those in professional occupations. Adults who left school at 16 are half as likely to take part in learning as those who left at 21. In the past many of those adults had a second chance to develop their learning through courses funded through Union Learn. Now this anti-trade union, anti-workers rights government in Westminster is planning to take this funding away.

As we move towards a post-pandemic world we need to invest in people. We have seen first-hand the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on the incomes and the mental wellbeing of those with lower level of skills. We cannot allow these inequities to become embedded.

This conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Promote the importance of adult learning with our partners;
- 2) Campaign to promote adult learning using examples of successful people who engaged with learning as an adult;
- 3) Work with politicians locally and nationally to raise the profile of adult learning;
- 4) Work with the equalities team to promote awareness of the importance of adult learning;
- 5) Influence the National Retraining Scheme through the TUC;
- 6) Promote the offer from UNISON's Learning and Organisation Services team to support UNISON members in their learning;
- 7) Engage with campaigns to save UnionLearn funding.

#### **34. Reduce agency working in Further Education Colleges**

**Carried**

Conference notes the increasing reliance on agency workers in Further Education colleges in the UK and calls for this situation to be reversed as a matter of urgency.

A Freedom of Information request conducted by UNISON in 2018 revealed the extent to which some colleges are relying on expensive agency workers. Of the 163 colleges which provided data in response to the FOI, 24 had spent over £1 million on agency staff, 7 had spent over £2 million and the worst offender declared a spend of £3.6 million.

Based on staffing numbers each college reports 48 colleges spent over £1000 per staff member (excluding casuals) on agency staff. 12 of these colleges spent over £3000 per staff member and at the most extreme, two colleges were spending over £7000 per staff member on agency staff.

All this at a time when support staff have been targeted for redundancies as colleges seek to reduce costs across the sector. We now see the issue arising of colleges contemplating a more permanent move to online learning to save more costs in the sector.

The further education sector had seen funding cut by over 30% in the past decade and staffing numbers have been slashed as a result. It is neither desirable nor sustainable for the sector to be spending vast sums on hiring workers through agencies.

A permanent employment contract has many benefits for the individual. They will have certainty of employment and income and access to career progression. Staff want to feel part of a team and a permanent contract of employment, as opposed to insecure agency working, will help to improve the mental health of college workers.

Never have these issues been brought into such sharp regard relief as during the Covid-19 pandemic. Agency workers have faced real hardships, with a loss of income as campuses closed to all but the most vulnerable and little recourse to government employment support schemes.

This conference wants to see any temporary employees given a permanent contract of employment after no more than two years, in line with the legal entitlement to terms and conditions that any worker receives after two years with the same employer.

This conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Conduct a nationwide Freedom of Information request to find out the current extent of agency spend in colleges in the UK;
- 2) Publicise the results of the FOI through media outlets and campaign work;
- 3) Develop an organising campaign for agency workers in FE;
- 4) Work with external stakeholders and other unions to promote the reduction in the use of agency staff;
- 5) Work with the National Union of Students to campaign on raising awareness of the strong relationships that learners develop with support staff.

### **35. Facility Time in Schools**

**Carried**

Conference notes that many branches are struggling to represent members in schools, particularly in those schools which have become academies. Both local

authorities and the academy chains are putting restrictions on local authority employed staff representing members employed in academies.

This has resulted in many reps using their own time to represent members, sometimes even using their annual leave to do this.

The pandemic has also led many schools to restrict access to visitors to schools, including trade union reps. We must ensure that schools are not able to maintain this as a pretext for restricting access to schools when the health crisis is over.

Conference recognises the need to organise our members in schools effectively and to ensure that stewards in schools are able to participate fully in union activities.

The pandemic has also seen branches increase the use of technology as a means of communicating with their members. Facility agreements in schools may need to be updated to ensure that they include continued access to video conferencing technology for trade union purposes.

We need to ensure that all stand alone academies and Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) are covered by and have a functioning trade union facilities agreement that provides sufficient facility time for school based reps.

Conference notes that the Service Group Executive (SGE) has recently undertaken a survey of facility time in local authorities. The results of this survey can be used to develop a strategy to improve facility time arrangements in schools.

Conference calls on the SGE to:

- 1) Provide guidance to branches on negotiating adequate facility time in schools;
- 2) Re-circulate the model recognition agreements for academies;
- 3) Encourage regions to ensure that arrangements are in place to represent all members working in schools;
- 4) Work with the other education unions to ensure that all academies are covered by a relevant facilities agreement.

### **36. Education Support Staff and the Need for Comprehensive State Education**

**Carried as Amended: 36.1**

UNISON believes in integrated free comprehensive education, which provides lifelong learning for all across the UK. Everyone should have access to an education system that best fits their own unique talents and abilities.

Diversity is a strength and should be celebrated. UNISON will continue to fight for equity and equality of opportunity for people to have the resources and funding needed to realise their potential. However, the pandemic is only likely to have

increased the unequal access to quality education and has further embedded disadvantage.

In recent decades we have seen the comprehensive system weakened as funding cuts hit education across the UK. In addition the dogma of the 'market' has undermined equality and co-operation, particularly (though not exclusively) in England.

Education support staff have been at the forefront of change, which has hit jobs, pay and significantly increased workloads. UNISON members in the Local Government Service Group are central to education and we call on the government to end the low pay, low status culture, which support staff endure.

Matters have been made worse - to different degrees in different countries - by moves to business style governance; centralised structures; the reduction in democratic accountability; weakened staff and public engagement; academies; and student fees. These policies have wasted billions of pounds and have not delivered the improved education outcomes promised, nor made the lives of disadvantaged or SEND students easier.

In England government moves to a 'hard' national funding formula will allocate money directly to schools. This will remove the chance for local authorities to direct some of the schools funding to areas of greatest need within their boundaries and could lead to further job losses.

Only 389 maintained nursery schools remain open in England with the majority in the most disadvantaged areas of the country. They provide high quality Early Years education and vital specialist support services. Many of the Sure Start Centres that had a huge positive impact, especially for the most disadvantaged children, have been closed or cut in the austerity years, and cuts continue.

During lockdown, maintained nursery schools were ineligible for Government financial support to cover COVID-19 costs, unlike other sector schools.

The threat of further cuts related to census-based funding was used by the government to seek to force nurseries and Early Years to fully open at the height of the most dangerous period of the pandemic.

UNISON believes that a vital part education recovery following the pandemic is the need for re-invigorated comprehensive education systems across the UK - where appropriate run by a National Education Service(s) - supported by a well-trained and well-paid workforce.

Conference calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to campaign:

- 1) For all age comprehensive education with embedded equal opportunities and an end to the loophole that allows wealthy parents to buy advantage, working with the NEC as appropriate;

- 2) For long term funding plans for education across all UK countries, based on:
  - a) A stable and well-paid workforce in the future;
  - b) The same level of funding per child in early years and post-16 students as schools;
  - c) A huge investment in early years to allow access to high quality, affordable publicly provided early years, nursery education and integrated children's centres;
  - d) Increased funding for children and young people with SEND, to enable an educational and social environment which allows them to thrive
- 3) Against funding cuts to education; working with sister unions, communities, parents and other progressive education campaigning organisation;
- 4) For the establishment of new School Support Staff Negotiating Bodies, as appropriate/necessary for the UK nations;
- 5) For proper collective bargaining in Further Education colleges in England to deliver improvements in pay, grading and terms and conditions;
- 6) For a return to full term contracts for school staff in line with teachers, with equitable treatment for staff on term-time only contracts in the interim;
- 7) For guaranteed paid professional development for education support staff with set time to do it;
- 8) For national pay scales for staff allied to schools, such as careers professionals;
- 9) For academies and free schools to become maintained schools, working with their local authorities, and against forced academisation, producing new campaign materials and resources;
- 10) For safe workplaces, based on regular risk assessments agreed with branches and health and safety representatives;
- 11) To secure a future for maintained nursery schools; for a reversal of the cuts to Sure Start and Early Years Centres; and for national funding for quality Early Years Education with qualified staff whose pay and conditions reflects the important role they play;
- 12) To support members in all schools. Early Years and related settings resisting funding cuts, including where appropriate with industrial action.

Conference instructs the Local Government Service Group Executive to work with the NJC committee to investigate the possibility of a national trade dispute, within the rules of the union and relevant legislation, to seek to secure an adequate funding

formula for all schools that will protect education and therefore the jobs of school workers, if possible co-ordinated with other relevant unions.

### **Composite C (Motions 38, 40 and 41, Amendments 41.1) Social Care**

**Carried**

Conference acknowledges the importance of responding to the devastating impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the social care sector and welcomes wholeheartedly the campaign to deliver a national care service.

Conference notes that the coronavirus pandemic has had tragic consequences for thousands of people in the UK and particularly in adult social care. The virus has taken a heavy toll on many of those needing the most support, and also underpaid and undervalued social care staff.

Conference notes with concern that cuts to local authority budgets are impacting on the salaries of our members in the social care sector. Many private and independent employers are engaging in a race to the bottom on terms and conditions of employment. Some employers are even claiming that the annual rise in the National Minimum Wage is a 'pay offer' to care staff rather than a legal requirement for all employers to increase salaries for the lowest paid.

This is a highly skilled but low paid sector. Perpetuating low pay has a disproportionate impact on women, Black workers and their families that may also be suffering socioeconomic deprivation.

There is evidence that, in some cases, the terms offered by commissioners are so low that responsible employers will no longer tender for contracts as they cannot provide a service for the price offered. Those employers who do tender for these contracts cannot possibly reward staff fairly for their complex range of skills, dedication and compassion. This entrenches inequality and means our fantastic care workers are receiving less than the real living wage.

For far too long our social care workforce has been grossly underpaid and all too often subjected to zero hours contracts and derisory conditions of employment. Training and development opportunities are often no more than is required to meet minimum statutory requirements and personal development and career progression routes are limited. Conference notes the Supreme Court sleep-in appeal decision is a further blow for social care staff and signifies a desperate need for reform.

Conference believes the pandemic further exposed the serious problems with the existing system – including substantial underfunding, the predominance of the profit before people motive, poor employment practices and disjointed service delivery. In particular, lack of full sick pay meant that some staff had to attend work rather than self-isolate as they couldn't afford to live on a Statutory Sick Pay rate that is almost the worst in Europe.

The pandemic has also exposed the difficulties local authorities have to address service delivery issues in previously privatised areas. Councils have been actively

involved in assisting private care providers with infection and staffing issues to the extent of preparing to deploy their own staff to cover high sickness levels.

Whether care is directly provided by local authorities or commissioned by them, Conference recognises that local government as a whole and individual councils have a key role to play in achieving the interim and long term aims as set out in the Care after Covid: A UNISON vision for social care document.

Conference believes that immediate actions are required to support the sector and social care staff including:

- 1) A real living wage, as an absolute minimum;
- 2) A standard employment contract for care work – including sick pay, contracted hours and pay for all hours on duty, including ‘sleep ins’ and travel time;
- 3) Significant, emergency government funding;
- 4) Upgrading of the Care Certificate with professional registration standardised across the UK.

Conference is encouraged by growing consensus that substantial reform is needed for the sector and welcomes UNISON’s Care after Covid: A UNISON vision for social care and the actions highlighted to secure a national care service.

Conference understands that this will be achieved through efforts at all levels and sectors within the union, but that local government branches will play a significant part in this. Conference therefore calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- a) Continue to campaign and lobby for adequate funding for the social care sector, to ensure that care services are commissioned fairly and efficiently, and for employers to sign up to the UNISON Ethical Care Charter and to pay at least the real living wage to their staff;
- b) Continue to campaign strongly in support of the campaign to deliver a National Care Service;
- c) Produce and promote branch guidance for local government branches to use to maximise their efforts to campaign and organise around and ultimately deliver on the campaign;
- d) Establish a working group to determine what training, resources and campaign materials branch activists might require, to enable them to implement the strategy with full member engagement;
- e) Continue to campaign for a real living wage, a standard employment contract and registration with professional development opportunities for our under-valued care workforce;

- f) Campaign and lobby for jobs and services in the social care sector to come back in-house where they have been privatised as this will be the best way to guarantee an improvement in pay and conditions for workers;
- g) Lobby the Government to take the immediate actions above and those outlined in UNISON's Care after Covid vision;
- h) Through Labour Link, work with Labour MP's and Labour policy making structures to embed UNISON's Care after Covid vision within Labour Party policy.

## **MOTIONS NOT REACHED**

### **39. Social Care**

Conference recognises the critical role played by our members working in social care during the pandemic and the pressures placed on them to continue providing care to the most vulnerable people in the community. The scandal of a lack of PPE, Statutory Sick Pay whilst isolating and delays to introducing testing has all contributed to the numbers of positive cases and deaths amongst the workforce and the service users.

The pandemic exposed fully what we knew all along, that the social care system across the UK is broken. The continuing scandal of low pay, poor training and lack of equipment whilst at the same time private companies extract profits, and in some cases off-shoring these, has been brought to the attention of the general public. This must give UNISON the platform to campaign and fight for a better social care system for the future.

Conference welcomes the huge number of new members in social care who joined UNISON during the pandemic and recognises the tremendous effort of branches, staff and the union as a whole in supporting these members and winning victories in relation to PPE, sick pay and testing.

Conference notes the successes in the devolved nations in gaining recognition for the social care workforce and the modest payments made to them and proposals to develop 'National Care Services' in Scotland and Wales. Conference also notes the failure of the UK government to take any meaningful action to support social care and their lack of plans for the future.

As we move through and out of the pandemic it is essential that we build a social care sector that provides the standards of care consistently for service users and their carers and families and values the work of the social care staff. Such a vision is essential for the fair and just society that we want to build for the future.

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to ensure that social care is a priority in our campaigning and in particular calls for:

- 1) The ending of private profiteering within social care and for the creation of National Care Services in each nation of the UK based on a not-for-profit model with significant in-housing of services to councils and national frameworks for the provision of PPE and other necessary equipment;
- 2) The establishment of sectoral bargaining to address issues of pay and conditions with an expressed aim to raise pay and conditions to an equivalence to local government terms.

### **39.1**

After 'The establishment of sectoral bargaining', insert 'for social care workers not employed by local authorities,'

And before 'an equivalence to local government terms' insert 'at least'.

## **42. Facility agreement arrangements within local government**

Background:

On the 4th May 2016, the UK Government passed the Trade Union Act 2016. This Act imposed stringent new strike ballot thresholds in public services and sought to monitor and restrict the activities of trade unions in supporting the workforce. Wales immediately overturned the Act insofar as it affects the devolved nation's public sector.

While the Trade Union Act 2016 now provided the legitimacy to attack trade union facility time, facilities time had been systematically attacked by politicians and groups hostile to trade unions for many years prior to this. Facility time in the public sector has often been misrepresented as 'tax payer funding of trade unions' and described by the Tax Payers Alliance as a 'scandalous subsidy'. What the Tax Payers Alliance failed to mention was the fact that for every £1 spent on trade union facility time between £3 and £9 is saved - a return on investment which most investors would rate highly, and which most FTSE250 companies would struggle to match.

Recent TUC research found that trade union representatives with facility time contribute the following to the UK economy:

- 1) Workplace representatives mean 13,000 to 25,000 fewer dismissals each year across the UK, creating a benefit of £107m to £213m for employers;
- 2) 17,000 to 34,000 fewer voluntary 'exits', worth a saving of £72m to £143m to employers;
- 3) 3,600 to 7,300 fewer employment tribunal cases, worth £22m to £43m to business and exchequer;

- 4) 8,000 to 13,000 fewer injuries, equivalent to 161,000 to 241,000 fewer working days lost;
- 5) 3,000 to 8,000 fewer cases of work-related illness equivalent to 125,000 to 375,000 fewer working days lost. Benefits range from £45m to £207m to society.

Unfortunately, right-wing political campaigns and media interest in facility time has exacerbated this 'one-sided' view, and has chosen to focus only on the 'costs' of facility time without balancing this with potential benefits, and failed to identify the alternative view that facility time could save money by supporting good workplace relations.

Despite the obvious benefits of trade union facility time, being able to access facility time remains the single most pressing issue affecting trade union representatives on a day-to-day basis, with many reporting that facility time is inadequate, employers being reluctant to allow facility time or that they find themselves under attack from employers who are looking to reduce established facility time agreements.

In addition to the difficulties outlined above, many branches are also experiencing challenges around the increasing number of services which are 'outsourced' e.g. contracting out of services from public authorities to other private or voluntary sector providers. Concentration of the availability of facility time within the public sector has meant that in the past it had been possible to agree an amount of facility time with a single employer, however, outsourcing means that representatives now have to deal with multiple new employers, sometimes on many different sites, in which their members are based. This work is often done 'under the radar' or outside of existing facility time agreements, and often in a representatives own time.

In order to address the sustained attack on trade union facility time and the growing strain upon branches to deal with multiple employers within current facility time arrangements, conference calls upon the Local Government Service Group to:

- a) Reassert the statutory basis for facility time in workplaces where unions are recognised and stress the importance of trade union representation for 'fairness and justice' in employment;
- b) Wherever possible, counteract misleading and one-sided information about facility time that only emphasise costs without discussing possible benefits and ideas of fairness and justice;
- c) Develop a UNISON local government strategy which supports representatives in securing adequate facility time and provides definitions of 'ratios of members to stewards' to assist with local negotiation;
- d) Develop a strategic approach in partnership with branches in respect of maintaining and supporting facility time in the context of outsourcing;

- e) Collate information on the different levels of facility time across the local government service group in order to provide a benchmark or rule of thumb, again to assist with employer negotiations; and
- f) Campaign to ensure that released and/or seconded representatives are not placed in a position of detriment and that their employment and career development opportunities are protected.

### **23. Use of private consultants in local government**

Our Local Government Service Group Conference meets at a time when we are seeing the continued growth in the use of private consultants by local authorities throughout the UK. The Coronavirus pandemic has highlighted this so clearly, enough is enough. This is money which should be spent on services for those communities and not being spent acquiring the services of private consultants. Our members are best placed to know where services need to be, as they work in them and use them. Any service re-design should be carried out in-house. We need to call a stop to the gravy train. A study is needed to highlight the amount of money which has been taken out of local government budgets to fund private consultants.

This conference calls upon the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) a study into the use of private consultants in local government.

### **7. Post Covid – end local government austerity; smash the pay freeze!**

- 1) Conference notes with deep concern the government's imposition of a pay freeze for local government workers;
- 2) We note the thousands of public sector workers who are paid even worse terms and conditions because they have been outsourced;
- 3) We note the way the Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the stark socio-economic inequalities across our society. The horrific disproportionate rate of death from Covid-19 in Britain can be laid at the door of the brutal effects of 10 years of austerity which have impoverished workers and our NHS;
- 4) We believe that the pay freeze is a kick in the teeth for workers who have been in the front line throughout the pandemic. All public sector workers continue to support our communities through the pandemic and will be vital to the recovery from it. We reject any attempts at divide and rule;
- 5) We do not believe that local government workers should have to pay for the Covid-19 pandemic. The government has found billions to support business during the pandemic and has awarded huge contracts to private companies without considering their effectiveness, such as the contracts for the failed test and trace system awarded to Serco and Deloitte;
- 6) Conference believes that a decent pay rise for all public sector workers working either directly for local government or on local government

outsourced contracts can be paid for through increasing taxation of the wealthy and big business and by serious action to stop tax evasion and avoidance by the super-rich;

- 7) We call on this service group and its executive to do all it can to mobilise our members in a vibrant campaign to reverse the pay freeze and to win better terms and conditions for all outsourced local government workers. This includes promoting such campaigns which are taking place; holding national and regional members' meetings online (or in person where possible) to pull activists together and enthuse members and activists and encouraging a lively social media campaign.

## **8. Pay**

UNISON Northern Ireland fully supports the pay claim submitted by the NJC. There can be no acceptance of a pay freeze or a poor pay offer.

Local government and education staff have worked hard on the front line during this pandemic.

We will not accept the insult of a pay freeze.

Now more than ever the spending power of our members should be increased to ensure the economies across the UK are restarted and bolstered against poverty and further decline.

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to ensure UNISON bargains and campaigns to win a decent pay rise.

## **14. Stress and safety among housing workers**

Conference notes that even prior to Covid-19, the UK housing crisis was getting worse - not better. The pandemic followed a decade of austerity, changes to welfare reform and an ineffective, counterproductive approach to social housing from the government.

UNISON members working in council housing departments and Arms Length Management Organisations continue to be on the frontlines of the housing crisis - managing an ever-decreasing supply of social housing resources and an ever-growing client group of high-needs, highly vulnerable people.

Covid-19 exacerbated the housing crisis – pushing more people into rent or mortgage arrears and requiring councils to find housing for all rough sleepers. The pandemic demonstrated in stark terms just how woeful the provision of social housing has become in the UK.

Social housing providers continued to operate during the pandemic - with staff carrying out visits to tenants' homes. However, a survey of members working in council housing services (conducted during the second national lockdown in November 2020) found that 71% did not feel comfortable working in/visiting tenants'

homes. 54% were not confident their employer would ensure all visits would be carried out in a Covid-secure manner.

Ongoing UNISON research shows how cuts to local government services have impacted staff. A 2018 survey asked over 600 UNISON members working in housing how things had changed since 2015. More than 80% said that the quality of housing services delivered to the public had fallen, and around 70% said this was due to a lack of social housing and changes to welfare and benefits (including Universal Credit). The rise in homelessness and lack of frontline staff were also cited as factors.

Conference further notes that this perfect storm of job losses, lack of social housing, welfare/benefits changes and a rise in homelessness has created one of the most high-stress environments in local government – with only 24% of housing workers describing their workload as manageable, and 58% saying they regularly work over their contracted hours just to get the job done.

All of this has played out against a backdrop of local government workers losing around 22% of their pay in real terms pay since 2010 - with around a third of housing workers now saying they have to ask family or friends for financial support or use credit cards to pay bills/make ends meet.

A staggering 45% of housing workers are thinking about leaving their job for something less stressful. Unless the levels of stress and hardship among housing workers are recognised and dealt with, we will see the loss of some of the longest-serving and most experienced staff in their profession. Staff whose dedication to helping the poorest and most vulnerable in our community has kept them doing a difficult and important job in challenging times.

Conference calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Work with UNISON's Health and Safety Unit to develop housing-worker specific guidance on stress for employers;
- 2) Launch a campaign to raise awareness among politicians, the media and the public about stress among housing workers and its negative impact on both workers and service users;
- 3) Use UNISON's Local Government Housing Forum and Housing Seminar to encourage debate and sharing of ideas and good practice around tackling stress;
- 4) Undertake further research into the impacts of lone-working and the increased risk of violence at work among housing workers

## 14.1

Add a new point 5) "Encourage branches and regions to continue to campaign for more government investment in council housing, and for an end to some of the underlying causes of stress for housing workers. This would include extending the

stay on evictions and ending Universal Credit, both of which have increased pressure on housing officers.

Add new point 6) “Encourage branches and regions to continue to work with Defend Council Housing and other organisations in line with UNISON’s aims and policies such as Homes For All for properly funded, secure council housing.”

## **27. Public health**

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought the widening inequalities that exist in the delivery of public health services across the United Kingdom into even sharper focus. It has highlighted the financial struggles, health risks and poor housing conditions many families face on a day to day basis. The situation has been made far worse by the declining funding for public health jobs and services.

The evidence is compelling. Obesity rates are among the worst in western Europe. There has been a deterioration in the population’s mental health. Mental health services are difficult to access. There has been an increase in premature deaths because of social and economic deprivation.

Improvements in life expectancy have slowed dramatically. Public Health England’s Health Profile for England 2018 reported that people in the least deprived parts of England live, on average, 19 more years in good health than people in the most deprived areas of the country. Current estimates suggest that 4.1 million children in the UK are living in poverty. This represents about 30% of children. The Resolution Foundation predicts that, without other measures, there will be a further 6% increase over the next 5 years. The Nuffield Trust found that 11% of young people aged 15 to 19 are living in severe material deprivation, the fourth highest rate in Europe and worsening over time.

UNISON members working in public health and associated roles play a crucial role in improving public health in our communities. But the Health Foundation, an independent charity, states that over the past decade, the ability of councils to maintain and improve the health of their residents has been jeopardised by substantial cuts to local services and investments. It has estimated that, as a minimum, £1.2bn is need to restore public health funding to its 2015 levels with a further £2.6bn per annum to level up public health across the country, The Kings Fund research has found the public health grant from central government is 22% lower in real terms in 2020/2021 compared to 2015/16. Research by the Institute for Public Policy Research has highlighted the public health inequalities - while England has seen, on average, a cut of £13.20 per person, this increased to £23.24 per person in the North East and by £16.70 per person in the Midlands. It also found that these areas saw the highest mortality rates during the first wave of Covid-19.

UNISON research has shown that environmental health services have been cut to the bone, leading to great non-compliance with the law and the attendant consequences of that. Preventative work has been greatly reduced because of cuts in central government funding. Freedom of Information data showed there was a 59.92% reduction per head of population in the budget for environmental health between 2009 and 2019. The Chair of the Local Government Association’s

Community Wellbeing Board has stated that “Further reductions to the public health budget reinforces the view that central government sees prevention services as nice-to-do but ultimately non-essential.”

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive:

- 1) To launch a high-profile campaign for the Westminster government to restore public health funding to the level it was set in 2013 when public health transferred to local government;
- 2) To highlight the crucial roles played by local government employees in public health and environmental health, and campaign for lost posts to be restored;
- 3) To work with regions and branches to recruit and organise public health workers, making them a central part of the service group’s recruitment and organising strategy and its Local Service Champions campaign;
- 4) To campaign for an approach to public health based on joint work between central and local government, responding to local communities’ needs, addressing health inequality, and with prevention at its heart.

## **27.1**

After existing 4th paragraph, insert new paragraphs as follows:

“The public health grant allocation for 2021-22 amounted to a 24% cut per capita compared to 2015-16 budgets, according to the Health Foundation. Despite the pandemic, the grants to 31 local authorities (including Wakefield, Doncaster, Peterborough, and Rochdale) have been cut, and the grants to a further 69 authorities have been frozen.

Conference recognises that the years of public health grant cuts have had a direct impact on frontline public health and prevention services, including sexual and reproductive health, health visiting and school nursing, tackling obesity, substance misuse, and HIV prevention and support. These services are disproportionately relied on by people – including LGBT+ and Black people - who experience gross health inequalities.”

After existing 5th paragraph, insert new paragraph as follows:

“In addition, conference notes the decision to abolish Public Health England (PHE) and the setting up of the new UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) in April 2021 to lead on health protection and security activity across the UK. It notes that many of PHE’s functions are to be transferred to the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), where a new Office for Health Promotion is being established, and some will be transferred to NHS England. The new arrangements, and how they will be connected across the whole system at national, devolved nation, regional and local levels, is not yet clear but it is evident that there will be a number of public health workforce issues that will need to be addressed”

At the end of point 1), delete 'government' and insert:

“, highlighting the impact that the years of public health grant cuts have had on frontline public health and prevention services;”

Add new point 3 as follows, and renumber remaining action points:

“3. To provide guidance to branches on public health workforce issues arising from the transfer of PHE functions to the UKHSA, the DHSC and NHS England;”

### **32. Fighting local authority cuts**

This conference notes that the funding crisis in local government, caused by more than a decade of austerity from the Conservative government, had already reached a critical level prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. In towns and cities across the country vital services were closed and cut back. This left local councils across the country trying to combat the pandemic on shoestring budgets and inadequate resources. Current government policies offer no solution and promise yet more austerity, as the Tories aim to make the majority of working people pay for the crisis.

This conference notes with disappointment that it was not only Tory-controlled local authorities, but also those with Labour majorities, that carried out cuts and continue to do so. Often our union has been the last line of defence for workers in those local government services and for those who use council services.

We believe that councils, particularly Labour councils where UNISON may have some influence, should do everything within their power and within the law to avoid making cuts and to reverse the cuts already made, whilst promoting their actions in the community and building a local campaign. They should also link up with others to develop a national strategy to fight the cuts.

This conference believes that UNISON must be seen to actively oppose austerity-driven cuts to services – through public campaigning, lobbying, petitions and through supporting our members who work in these services – whoever is running the council.

This conference calls upon the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Call on all councils to look at what options they have to generate resources and avoid making cuts – including the use of reserves, capitalising eligible general fund expenditure and using prudential borrowing to generate revenue (such as in those councils which have borrowed to invest in property, using the returns in rents etc. to supplement their revenue budgets);
- 2) Support those councils who take up this option, in developing local campaigns in defence of local authority services and for a post-pandemic local recovery;
- 3) Support and promote efforts to link up those councils across the countries of the UK;

- 4) Promote this position at all levels of the union, including within the Labour Link.

### **37. Child poverty**

Child poverty is growing right across all parts of the UK. UNISON in Northern Ireland has become acutely aware of how more and more children are going hungry each day. More than 120,000 live in poverty. The Covid-19 pandemic has clearly confirmed how important the provision of school meals is to many families coping with the twin problems of unemployment and low pay.

From the start of the pandemic in March 2020 our branch leaders and activists have bargained for the protection and retention of school meals during school closures and restrictions.

Conferences notes the decision of our UNISON members in Northern Ireland to campaign that schools meal provision should be extended to include all children in school settings.

Conference notes and welcomes the growing support of teaching unions in Northern Ireland for the UNISON campaign.

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to support this campaign.