



Service Group Conference 2023

Decisions

11 - 12 June 2023

ACC Liverpool

1. Bring back sector-wide bargaining in FE colleges in England

Carried

Conference knows that collective bargaining was a hard-won right by workers and that we need to constantly fight to protect this right. Collective bargaining at national level has been a feature of the education sector for many years and it is something to be proud of.

FE colleges in England have not had binding national bargaining since incorporation in 1993. Since the admission by the Westminster government that incorporation isn't working, made when colleges were returned to the public sector in November 2022, we need to seize this opportunity to lobby strongly for the next logical step – proper national pay bargaining. We have it in 6th form colleges in England and we have it in FE colleges in the devolved nations– it is the only sensible way forward.

National collective bargaining represents a sensible use of resources for unions and employers. Local pay bargaining is resource-intensive and therefore more expensive. By reintroducing national bargaining we won't have hundreds of unnecessary meetings taking place across the country all asking for the same thing, but with different outcomes. Instead, only one experienced and trained bargaining team will be required.

Fairness and equality will be achieved as national pay scales can be implemented ending the post-code lottery of support staff being paid different amounts to do the same job, all dependent on whether their pay is a priority to their own managers or otherwise.

Importantly, workers will have more influence on the national agenda. For too long employers have been complaining that they cannot give pay rises due to lack of funding. The government won't listen to individual voices complaining of funding but they will have to take notice of the sector speaking as one.

Since, 2010, pay in colleges has fallen by approximately 35% in real terms. Staff in many colleges have gone year after year with no cost-of-living award at all.

Conference therefore calls upon the local government service group to work with the further education and 6th form colleges committee to:

- 1) Develop campaign resources to draw awareness to the need for national bargaining in England;
- 2) Fund research into different salaries paid in colleges in England for similar roles;
- 3) Jointly lobby with trade union partners for national bargaining in England.

2. The PREVENT duty on colleges

Carried

Conference notes that the Prevent strategy, created in 2003 and made a statutory duty in 2015, is hailed as a tool to tackle radicalisation and extremism at an early point. Staff in colleges question how the duty is interpreted and applied in colleges due to serious concerns and weaknesses in its implementation.

One concern with the Prevent strategy is the directive to teach fundamental British values (FBVs) and what constitutes FBVs. Many of the issues labelled FBVs could be seen as universal and not exclusively British values or could potentially alienate learners who do not identify as British.

A further concern relates to the narrative around radicalisation and extremism with critics arguing that the duty overly focuses on Islam as the primary terrorist threat. Conference notes our concern with the appointment of William Shawcross, a high-profile political commentator with a history of making negative remarks about Islam, to lead an independent review into the Prevent duty. The results of the review were published on 8 February 2023. The report, fully accepted by the current Conservative government, calls for a renewed focus on Islamist extremism and criticises attempts by the programme to tackle right-wing extremism. Criticisms abound from respected groups including Hope not Hate and Amnesty International. We must protect our members, both those who are involved in the delivery of the duty and those who could find themselves targeted by misinformed learners who may have formed misguided views in the college environment.

Referrals to the programme in 2020/21 showed that the highest proportion of referrals to Prevent (51%) was for individuals with a mixed, unstable or unclear ideology, followed by those related to right-wing radicalisation (25%) and Islamist referrals (22%). The most recent figures again show more referrals for right-wing extremism over Islamic. Every day, members in FE have to deal with learners, young and old, who are at risk of harm and of being bullied. We must not stand for anything that promotes a viewpoint that could lead to our members being harmed by learners with biased views.

Personal and moral education is important and has been a function of colleges for many years. Safeguarding teams are a statutory requirement and are well aware of their duty to report dangerous behaviours to the appropriate authorities, including the police. In this context, Prevent is, at best, not needed and at worst, has huge negative impacts on the Muslim population.

Conference therefore calls upon the local government service group to work with the further education and 6th form colleges committee to:

- 1) Survey our membership in colleges on their experiences of Prevent, and develop an appropriate campaign based on members' views;
- 2) Develop further materials to challenge racism in the workplace and in our communities;

- 3) Campaign with the TUC/STUC/WTUC and trade unions to challenge Islamophobia and surveillance of Muslim communities.

Composite A (Motions 3, 6 and 9) Pay in Further Education

Carried

Despite colleges educating 1.7 million students each year, further education is all too often overlooked by the government.

Research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies has clearly shown that colleges lost out more than other education sectors during the austerity decade from 2010. Despite claims funding has increased, college spending per student in 2024 will still be approximately 5% lower than in 2010, while school sixth-form spending per student will be 22% below 2010 levels.

Conference notes that since 2010 UNISON has been fighting cuts to funding in colleges, attacks on terms and conditions, annual restructuring, job losses and falling pay. Pay is now estimated to be as much as 35% less in real terms (in some colleges) than just over a decade earlier. The culmination is what we see now – staff shortages on a never before seen scale in a sector brought to its knees by a demoralised and overworked staff.

Pay in further education has lagged behind schools for too long and has fell by around 35% since 2010. This has understandably caused a recruitment crisis in the sector. Three quarters of England's 228 colleges have reported recruitment difficulties and yet have subjected staff to successive restructures attacking terms and conditions to balance their budgets.

A UNISON survey of staff in England responsible for supporting SEND learners in early 2022 found that 4 in 5 members were aware of shortages in support staff in their organisation. This is leading to difficulties such as combining class groups and, therefore, large classes; and problems running essential services, such as kitchens and tech support; and learners with additional/special needs being left without support. UNISON members who are learning support assistants report that in some areas learners are sent home when there are not enough teachers. Some members are 'parachuted in' to support learners with volatile behaviours who they have never met – putting them at risk. Many staff also reported that they had been pulled away from their jobs to help run exams. One in four have been asked to take on work that a higher paid member of staff should do and almost one in five had been asked to take on unpaid overtime.

Our report chimes with a similar survey of human resources directors in English colleges who reported 3,293 vacancies. This suggests a vacancy rate of 5.5% - with more than half of these vacancies in support staff roles. Particularly high levels of persistent vacancies are found in learning support roles, student services and facilities and estates roles. Vacancies at this level create pressure on existing staff, have a significant impact on agency fees – money that could be better spent elsewhere - and have a negative impact on learners. Survey responses included several reports of support staff (for example, learning support assistants) moving into hospitality or warehousing as hourly pay has been increased in these areas.

In 2020 a widescale analysis of 1.5 million job adverts by the Skills Network produced a list of the top ten jobs facing the biggest shortages in the UK, and teaching assistants topped the list. Research by Hay Education in 2022 concluded that classroom-based support staff have been the most difficult to hire over the past 12 months (45%) followed by teachers (43%) and other support staff such as administration, recruitment, and office staff (24%).

Conference believes that we do not need any more research or surveys – the picture is clear. In all four nations of the UK more support staff are needed in colleges and without higher pay in the sector we will not be able to get them.

The Association of Colleges most recent recommended pay offer of 2.5% was not only far below inflation but remains a benchmark that is all too often ignored by employers – with some offering even lower. The current fragmented system serves only to entrench low pay in the sector preventing coordinated action on pay as offers are received at different times.

Conference believes the current pay bargaining system is not fit for purpose and only a return to national pay bargaining will address pay issues in the sector.

Senior leaders in colleges have not felt the same wage restraint, which is why UNISON has rightly welcomed the announcement from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) that further education institutions are to be reclassified as public sector rather than private. Colleges in England will need to follow Treasury guidance on senior pay - a move that has been long overdue.

Conference welcomes the decision that Further Education institutions have been reclassified as public sector rather than private sector, and the restrictions placed on excessive salaries for senior management.

However, conference remains concerned that Further Education remains the “poor relation” of the Education Sector, with underfunding at chronic levels. This underfunding has a direct impact upon the health and financial wellbeing of our UNISON members working in colleges. A significant proportion of members are paid below the Real Living Wage and poverty pay is endemic in the sector.

With staff facing such demoralising conditions at work, UNISON Champions in our Colleges has shone a welcome spotlight on support staff working in further education to give recognition to the hard work and dedication shown. Promoting UNISON in the workplace also recruits new members and activists to better deliver our industrial objectives and increase ballot turnout.

Conference welcomes the recent UNISON initiative of “Champion’s in Our Colleges” to highlight the important work our members do. However, the importance of effective campaigns to lift the pay levels in the sector cannot be understated.

Conference notes the recent success of Wirral UNISON in securing a commitment from Wirral Metropolitan College to be a Real Living Wage Employer; this has seen many staff receiving pay rises in excess of 15% this year. This victory was achieved

after a ballot for strike action received 96% support for a rolling programme of strike action. During the dispute membership levels increased by in excess of 50%. This has demonstrated that effective action can deliver results even when funding levels remain low.

In the Northern Region we have been able to achieve turnouts of over 50% in several ballots in the last year and local reps, together with MCT calls and digital media have been vital resources.

Conference therefore instructs the Service Group Executive to conduct a review of pay levels in the FE sector, and the impact of our pay campaigns.

Conference further instructs the Service Group Executive to launch a campaign to call for the Real Living Wage for all FE Colleges.

Conference calls on the local government service group executive to:

- 1) Develop campaigning materials that highlight funding gaps in further education establishments across the UK, similar to the work done on identifying local government and school cuts;
- 2) Campaign for national pay bargaining in colleges involving outside organisations and politicians at all levels; Lobby the Westminster Government and devolved Governments for proper national bargaining in the whole of the UK;
- 3) Jointly campaign with other stakeholders for increased funding for pay in colleges;
- 4) Continue to support branches and regions in coordinating pay negotiations and disputes
- 5) Conduct a UNISON campaign on the importance of support staff, using a variety of communications, social media and media tools to raise awareness among the public and politicians of the work our members do
- 6) Jointly work with the Self-Organised Groups to demonstrate how low pay has a disproportionate effect on workers with protected characteristics

4. Organising in Multi Academy Trusts and ending fragmentation

Carried

UNISON has consistently opposed the policy of academisation in England. We do so because we are concerned about the impact on the pay and conditions of school support staff and the lack of empirical evidence that academisation improves standards.

Conference welcomes the achievement of UNISON at all levels ensuring that many multi-academy trusts (MATs) continue to abide by national local government pay

deals but remains concerned that some employers do not follow NJC settlements or seek to water them down.

Conference notes that research conducted on behalf of the Local Government Association (LGA) in 2022 found council-maintained schools in England outperformed academies in Ofsted inspections. According to this research 92% of council-maintained schools were ranked outstanding or good by Ofsted in January 2022, compared with 85% of academies that had been graded since they converted. It also found that only 45% of academies that were an academy in August 2018 managed to improve standards from 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement' to 'good' or 'outstanding', compared with 56% of council-maintained schools.

At the same time as campaigning against academisation Conference believes UNISON must continue to prioritise organising in academies, so as to defend our members' jobs, pay, terms and conditions, recognising that in many areas of England, MATs are the dominant school employers.

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Continue to campaign against forced academisation and for all existing academy schools to be brought back into the local authority democratic family of schools;
- 2) Campaign as a first step for local authorities and communities to be given greater oversight over existing academies; including over academy admissions, special educational needs / additional learning needs, procurement policies and senior post holders' pay, and for all academies to be automatically covered by national collective bargaining for school staff;
- 3) Campaign for the law to be changed to allow for schools that are part of existing academy trust to re-join their local authority if that is the wish of parents and staff following a formal consultation;
- 4) To set a target of having a lead lay rep for every academy trust bargaining unit, and provide branches and regions with guidance and resources to help them achieve this;
- 5) Work with Labour Link and the NEC to campaign to re-establish local authority presence on school governing bodies to reinstate democratic accountability.

Composite B (Motions 5, 7 and Amendment 5.1) Early Years Funding and Private Day Nurseries

Carried

Conference notes that in December the Department for Education (DfE) announced that funding to local authorities in England for supported early years places would increase by an average of 3.4% for three and four year olds and by 4% for two year olds. However, some local authorities will only receive less than a 1% increase in funding. Typically, those authorities that are receiving the lowest increases are those

with higher rates of deprivation. Conference believes this inequality is outrageous and must be opposed.

Most early years and childcare provision is in the private and voluntary sector, with a very high proportion of staff on the national minimum wage or very close to it. Government funding must match pay levels if potential closures and job cuts are to be avoided.

This contrasts with average funding increases to local authorities of 11% in Wales and 8.2% in Scotland. But with January's RPI inflation rate standing at 13.4%, all of these so-called increases represent real terms cuts in funding for early years.

Early years settings were also excluded from the additional £2.3 billion additional funding announced for schools in England in December 2022.

Early years settings are facing a staffing crisis, with staff being unable to afford to stay in the sector despite their professional commitment to young children. The lack of funding has made many private providers unviable and many settings are simply closing their doors. This obviously puts the jobs of many UNISON local government members at risk.

Conference recognises that our members working in the privately run early years (under 5's) day nursery settings are often working in hostile working environments, with low staffing levels, high stress levels, low pay and poor terms and conditions.

Conference notes that according to the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA), nurseries across the UK are being forced to close at an alarming rate due to recruitment and retention problems.

OFSTED data has shown that the number of childcare providers had dropped by 5,400 in the year to the end of August 2022, with closures in 110 local authorities.

Conference notes the government's latest proposal on Family Hubs does not even come close to making up the loss of over 1,300 Sure Start Children's Centres since 2010. It represents a cynical attempt to repackage Sure Start after it was mercilessly undermined for over a decade by underfunding.

Conference believes a long-term investment strategy that provides high-quality, universal and affordable early years provision is essential to allow children to reach their potential.

Conference also notes that a survey carried out by the Early Years Alliance found there are growing staff shortages in the Early Years sector. The Early Years Alliance found that 84 per cent of settings are finding it 'difficult' to recruit the right staff, 60 per cent are finding it 'very difficult' and 24 per cent are finding it 'quite difficult'. More than a third of people who answered the survey said they are actively considering leaving the sector.

Conference believes that the current Early Years Funding Formula is not sufficient and is responsible for poor pay and terms and conditions in the sector which in turn leads to difficulties with recruitment and retention of staff.

Generally UNISON density is low across the sector with most employers not recognising a Trade Union.

Conference believes this must change and therefore conference resolves to request that the Service Group Executive:

- 1) Develop a campaigning and organising strategy, which could be used by branches and regions, to aid in organising, recruitment and to help win trade union recognition in the private early years day nursery sector. Use of BSOF should also be promoted as part of this strategy;
- 2) Develop a model pay claim for the private early years day nursery sector;
- 3) Work through UNISON's structures and Labour link to seek to lobby relevant politicians in relation to the inadequacy of the Early Years Funding Formula;
- 4) Work through UNISON's structures to explore the possibility of jointly campaigning on the issue of Early Years funding with other relevant trade unions and where appropriate other established organisations which campaign on this issue of Early Years Funding.

This conference also calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- a) Campaign for substantial emergency additional funding to support the early years sector, working with the devolved nations;
- b) Continue to raise support for the campaign amongst the public by putting across the damaging impact of underfunded childcare on caregivers and wider society;
- c) Campaign for the development of a long-term strategy to improve the pay and conditions of early years staff, including within the private sector;
- d) Support branches and regions to develop a recruitment and organising strategy for early years staff with an emphasis on pay and conditions;
- e) Campaign for a £15 an hour minimum wage for the early years and childcare workforce;
- f) Work with the Living Wage Foundation and living wage accredited councils to discuss how funded early years places in the private and voluntary sectors can move towards paying the Foundation Living Wage;
- g) To work with branches and regions to recruit and retain members and organise activists in the private and voluntary sectors;

- h) Work with politicians at all levels, including councillors, metro mayors, MPs, AMs, MSPs on this issue;
- i) Work with Labour Link to campaign for Labour Party policy on early years to be based on high quality services, better funding, insourcing, improved pay and conditions, career progression and the principle of universality.

8. Schools Funding & Finance Training

Carried

Conference notes that school members make up around a third of the branch membership in many areas, but they remain difficult to organise. Conference also welcomes the various organising projects, some funded by the Branch Support and Organising Fund (BSOF), that are being developed around some branches and regions that aim to raise our collective power in those workplaces.

Conference also notes the serious financial challenges facing schools and the impact this has on UNISON members working in schools in the form of redundancies and cuts to working hours.

Conference believes despite government announcements to the contrary that schools are considerably underfunded there continues to be a lack of investment in education. Many schools struggle to afford some of the basic day to day provisions and have to rely on parental contributions or, in some circumstances, staff purchasing items using their own money.

Conference notes the excellent training on local government finances recently provided by the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) for UNISON activists within the local government service group.

Conference believes that similar training, specifically focusing on schools funding, budgets and finances would be of huge benefit to UNISON activists within the local government service group to enable them to better understand school finances and also to help challenge decisions taken by schools which result in cuts to support staff jobs. Such training could also be offered to the BSOF projects organising in schools.

Conference therefore instructs the Local Government Service Group Executive to work with the National Schools Committee to provide such training on local government finances and specifically school finances and funding.

12. Taking the organising lead in Further Education

Carried

National pay negotiations with The Association of Colleges (AoC) continue to fall considerably short of the mark. With 1% and 2% pay 'recommendations' over the past few years, we are failing to deliver the pay awards our members need. As a consequence more and more branches are tagging on to the tailcoats of UCU and NEU local pay claims, departing from the AoC recommendation. With restricted facility time and limited branch resources, branches often allow to UCU/ NEU to lead on local negotiations. The problem being that UCU and NEU are not interested in

low-paid member subs and are there to negotiate for academic lecturers not our support staff.

Support staff play an important role in the education of pupils yet many are facing a period of uncertainty and low pay as the cost of living crisis takes hold. The UNISON Further Education 'Keep In Touch' survey consistently highlights pay, terms and conditions as the number one concern for our members.

UNISON are the largest trade union in the public sector, in all other areas of local government it's UNISON who take the lead and others follow. Why are we allowing UCU and NEU take the lead on pay in further education?

A comprehensive organising strategy is required that brings UNISON national and regions together on local pay claims and disputes in Further Education. UNISON must take the lead on this and coordinate their efforts in to a local response that delivers tangible results for our members. Conference believes that this fragmentation between national and region on local pay claims in further education is counter-productive. With more branches pursuing local pay claims in further education the allocation of UNISON's time and resources on supporting the national negotiations creates an imbalance. We must put an equal amount of time and effort in to both. Conference notes where AoC recommendations are followed in Further Education we must continue to support this, but where employers have departed we must take advantage and campaign hard for better.

Conference notes this situation presents a number of challenges, but also ample recruitment and organising opportunities. In seeking to strengthen our ability to organise in further education, conference calls on the local government service group to:

- 1) Develop a coordinated overarching response to local pay claims and negotiations;
- 2) Develop a campaign plan with regions that equals the effort invested in national negotiations;
- 3) Establish a new and vibrant organising plan for further education that can be delivered across the regions and appeals to our membership;
- 4) Invest more time and effort in to assisting regions and branches in identifying and supporting local campaigns and disputes;
- 5) Take a lead in local pay claims and campaigns.

13. Using school forums as an organising tool

Carried

Conference notes that the continued fragmentation of the school system, together with the geographical spread of schools, provides organising challenges for UNISON.

The use of school forums to bring together activists from across schools in branches is well established as best practice to develop collective responses to the common issues we face.

The ability to hold these virtually has also assisted in making attendance accessible to those with caring commitments or those who are unable to travel. Face-to-face meetings in schools are also vital.

South Tyneside Local Government branch plays an active part in working with school reps, contacts and members. We regularly attend school visits, where we meet our members and discuss their concerns, issues and worries.

We have also established some positive relationships with school leaders, and, it is through these relationships that we were able to use some school facilities to host cluster meetings. All school support staff were invited to attend.

More recently, we have raised that there is a lack of Continuous Professional Development for our members in schools. There is little or no training or learning opportunities for our members, and this is impacting on their daily working; no sharing of good practice, a general feeling of exploitation through hours of unpaid overtime and teaching on the cheap.

Having a regional schools forum supported by local branch school forums develops a network of activists that can mentor and support each other as it is easy for an individual rep to feel overwhelmed within their own school. It is also a great way of encouraging interested members to become more involved in their union.

Within the Northern Region, the first school support staff seminar since Covid was held in February to help develop capacity of reps across the schools in our region. Through the discussions on the day, it was clear there are significant concerns from our members on violence in schools and the work UNISON had done on this was well received.

Conference believes the production of UNISON guidance and model policy on issues such as this, and other issues facing support staff, has been invaluable to support the work of our school forums.

Conference calls on the local government service group to:

- 1) Continue to support the use of local and regional school forums as best practice;
- 2) Continue to provide guidance on key issues facing school to assist learning and development within our activist base;
- 3) Assist in the development of agendas for school forums in terms of subject matter and potential guest speakers.

14. Fighting for the future of local government

Carried

The last thirteen years of austerity have decimated local government budgets, meaning councils are struggling to provide the services that the communities they represent need and are failing to give local government workers the job security and pay rises they need and deserve.

Rather than responding to the crisis facing local government by increasing funding, the Chancellor chose to freeze funding in cash terms, while inflation continues to push up prices and demand for services. Furthermore, much of this funding requires councils to increase council taxes on residents already struggling to make ends meet.

Research by UNISON shows that UK councils face a collective funding gap of £3.145billion across all councils in 2023/4. This means that councils will need to cut more services, as well as using dwindling reserves and borrowing to make up the difference unless more funding is forthcoming. This is only going to get worse – the cumulative funding gap for 2023/4 and 2024/25 rises to over £5bn. The research conducted by UNISON found that 86% of councils in England, Wales and Scotland have a predicted budget gap.

The responsibility for the funding gap lies squarely with the Westminster government. The Westminster government controls how much is sent to local authorities in England, while in Scotland and Wales both the Westminster government and devolved governments take responsibility for distributing dwindling local government budgets.

Local authorities are left to try and raise some of the shortfall themselves through local taxation – but local tax varying powers are unfair and inadequate. Council tax bands in England are still based on property values in April 1991 and reform is long overdue. While the Welsh government took the positive step of undertaking a review of council tax, the governments in Westminster and Holyrood have kicked the issue into the long grass. Additionally, business rates punish physical shops and businesses while allowing online companies to profit.

As well as seeing their budgets squeezed, councils across the country are facing huge reorganisation as new devolution deals and combined authorities change the face of regional and local government in England, and Holyrood pursues a centralising agenda in Scotland. UNISON Scotland has undertaken important work with the Jimmy Reid Foundation on countering Scottish government centralisation of local government.

In Autumn 2022 of a new wave of devolution deals in Suffolk, Cornwall, Norfolk, and the Northeast were announced, following the conclusion of talks with council leaders in August 2022 in North Yorkshire and the East Midlands. Over half of England will soon have a directly elected mayor, while the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill seeks to expand the devolution framework and enable the creation of County Combined Authorities in England through new devolution deals.

Power shouldn't be hoarded in Westminster or devolved governments, but it is important to engage in debates on English devolution to ensure that these deals deliver for everyone, and that local government staff do not lose out. It is also important to continue making the case that not only should Westminster increase local government funding to devolved nations, but that devolved governments in Holyrood and Cardiff Bay should be held to account on how they choose to distribute funding and power to councils.

It's also critical that the local government workforce is involved in developing plans. Conference believes that the local government service group's campaigning in this area should be based on the following principles:

- 1) Full consultation with local government workers and the public on any devolution deals, so they are not imposed on an area;
- 2) Devolution deals should not result in any job losses, erosion of terms and conditions for staff, outsourcing of services or reduction in collective bargaining rights. Regional and city-level devolution should give greater union representation on regional bodies including regional pay negotiations;
- 3) Devolution deals should include a predictable, secure and sufficient funding stream based on need and above-inflation pay rises for workers;
- 4) Devolution deals should not be at the financial expense of the provision of public services in the region or in other regions not included in the deal, and should not impose any preconditions over the implementation of public services;
- 5) Devolution deals should form part of an equitable constitutional settlement – meaning there should not be a 'race to the bottom' on local/ regional taxes or regulations and funding should be allocated based on need not as part of a reductive competition for inward investment between places.

Conference calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to develop resources to support branches, regions and activists to apply these principles in any local discussions on devolution deals.

Conference also calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to develop forward-looking proposals on local government funding to support pay campaigns including:

- a) Working with the TUC, the WTUC, the STUC and ICTU, Labour Link and other like-minded organisations to develop progressive alternative models of local taxation, campaign for regressive taxes such as council tax and business rates to be scrapped in favour of fairer alternatives, and make the case for greater redistribution from the centre based on community and workforce needs;
- b) Commissioning analysis into the funding needs for local government to deliver in these areas on top of delivering good quality statutory services, and to

enable UNISON to lobby for a credible, forward-looking and needs-based funding settlement that is greater than 2010 levels;

- c) Writing to ministers setting out UNISON's principles for English devolution and asking for trade unions and the local government workforce to be represented in any devolution negotiations.

15. Cuts and funding

Carried as Amended by 15.1, 15.2

Conference believes that, due to years of under-funding and cuts from the Westminster government, local government across the UK is in grave danger. Extensive UNISON research from last autumn revealed that councils across the UK were facing a funding shortfall of £3.2bn in 2023/24 and a cumulative funding gap of £5.3bn for 2024/25. A small but growing number of councils have effectively declared bankruptcy with more councils having to plug their financial gaps by relying on the one-off use of reserves. We need to see massive re-investment in local government from the centre, along with a new, positive vision for local government which recognises the fantastic work local government staff do and roots local public services in an ethos of democracy, equality and public ownership.

The financial crisis is a huge threat to our members' jobs and pay as well as the services they provide, and we must continue to campaign for better and fairer funding for the sector. Local government funding should return to 2010 levels. Conference believes that this level of funding is affordable by the government, and we must promote this reality among our membership.

Producing publicity both for our members and to use in campaigns that highlights that the money is there is an important part of this campaign. There are now more billionaires in the UK than ever before, and they have more money between them than ever before. Fat Cat Friday, the day that the FTSE 100 CEOs 'earn' more than the average annual salary came a day early in 2023, on Thursday 5 Jan. We aren't all in this together.

Conference condemns the Westminster government for failing to adjust and increase council funding this year to keep up with soaring energy costs and spiralling inflation rates despite repeated requests from UNISON and the wider local government sector.

Conference also condemns the repeated failure of the Scottish government to adequately fund local councils compared to other parts of the public sector in Scotland. Recent analysis from the Audit Commission showed that revenue funding from Scottish government to local government between 2013/14 and 2021/22 increased by 6.1 per cent (in real terms) whereas Scottish government revenue funding to other parts of the Scottish government budget increased by a significantly higher figure of 27.2 per cent over the same period.

Conference notes that despite council funding in Wales increasing by 7.9% on average, this is not enough to cover the significant funding gaps that Welsh councils

will be facing. The Welsh Local Government Association have indicated that this funding increase will only cover around half the funding gap.

Conferences welcomes UNISON's continuing campaign on local government funding over the last year, including: our council cuts website, showing the individual funding shortfalls that all top tier councils across Scotland, Cymru/Wales and England face; and thousands of emails sent by UNISON members to national politicians across the UK calling for more funding alongside our widespread lobbying work. Our ongoing Local Service Champions work has helps to increase awareness of the positive work carried out by council workers and has been used to further highlight the need for more funding.

In addition, Conference notes that the majority of local government spending on public health in England comes through a direct annual grant from the Department of Health and Social Care. It recognises that the years of public health grant cuts have had a direct impact on frontline public health prevention and treatment 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.

England's public health grant allocation for 2023-24, announced in March, is effectively another real terms cut, as it does not include any provision for covering the cost of the NHS pay award to those NHS staff working on programmes and initiatives funded by the Public Health Grant.

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Continue to campaign strongly for proper recognition of local government services, 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 significantly increased to deliver on this investment;
- 2) Continue to campaign for the Westminster government to restore public health funding to the level it was in 2013 when public health transferred to local government, highlighting the impact that the years of public health grant cuts have had on frontline public health and prevention services;
- 3) Generate a range of political activity in parliaments across the UK calling for more funding for council services, working with Labour Link, including organising local and national actions around key events such as Budget days;
- 4) Raise awareness about the importance and contribution of local government workers to our society through a series of high-profile campaign actions (for example the Local Service Champions campaign) and provide opportunities for UNISON members and members of the public to lobby for more council funding;

- 5) Conduct a further Freedom of Information request and use the data to update the Council Cuts website to illustrate the scale of the funding gap faced by councils across the UK and encourage people to lobby national politicians for more council funding;
- 6) Produce a summary report of all of the cuts local government has experienced since 2010;
- 7) Continue to provide high quality local government finance training to help branches across the UK to understand, interrogate and influence their local council's budgetary process;
- 8) Explore building on the successful work carried out by the UNISON Cymru/Wales and explore holding local government finance briefings for national politicians across the UK;
- 9) Encourage branches and regions to organise campaigns opposed to cuts in funding that identify the additional money needed to close any funding deficit and seek to gain support of local councillors to campaign for these amounts from national governments;
- 10) Continue to campaign for outsourced services to be brought in-house, supporting branch campaigns, sharing good practice and training activists and organisers;
- 11) Seek to work with the national self-organised committees, National Young Members Forum and National Retired Members Committee to help to build support for these campaigns and encourage participation in them;
- 12) Make sure that the issue of local government funding is central to pay campaigns, making it clear that all pay settlements should be fully-funded by central government.

16. The cost-of-living crisis and local government workers

Carried

Conference notes that local government workers not only see the cost-of-living crisis first-hand as part of their jobs, but many are suffering directly at the hands of the government's economic incompetence and political decision to prioritise the wealthiest in society rather than protecting those who need help the most. UNISON research shows since 2009 local government staff are thousands of pounds out of pocket. Qualified residential care workers employed by local authorities are £6,177 a year worse off, refuse and recycling collectors £3,506 worse off and teaching assistants £4,813 worse off.

In practical terms, this means every household with a local government worker in it has been tightening its belt for the past twelve years – long before this crisis hit. Inequality was already hitting record highs by 2020, before the pandemic shook our economy – as a result of stagnating pay and inflation. These households have already taken every step they can to reduce their costs and make ends meet. A

Trussell Trust report in 2014 says that “People on low incomes have traded down and down again to the cheapest food products; after which they simply have to buy less food.” Eight years later, there is little left to cut for the lowest income households and middle-income families are now struggling to make ends meet too. Research from the New Economics Foundation last year showed that 21.4 million people will now be living in households below the threshold needed for a decent standard of living – or nearly one in three households in the UK.

Conference believes the cost-of-living crisis is a low pay crisis – wages are insufficient to live on. All wages are failing to keep pace with inflation, but this is especially the case in the public sector – and public sector wages are something that the government has direct control over.

Conference calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Increase pressure on central government through UNISON’s campaign for a fairer funding settlement for local government;
- 2) Maintain a high profile media campaign to ensure the public understand the need for properly funded services and decent pay for local government workers;
- 3) Work with the NJC Committee and Labour Link to ensure all avenues to lobby the LGA are followed;
- 4) Produce campaigning materials on the cost-of-living impact on local government workers to support UNISON’s campaign.

17. Local government funding – a national crisis

Carried

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) have published as part of their “Save Our Services” bulletins a projected funding gap of £1 billion for 2023/24.

Scottish local government branches are already engaged in discussions with employers about cuts to jobs, cuts to terms and conditions and we note that some councils looking at wholesale restructuring with many reporting they are unable to provide some statutory functions.

According to research undertaken by UNISON last autumn councils across England were facing a collective funding gap of £2.4bn for the financial year 2023/24 and a cumulative funding gap of £4.08bn for 2024/25. At the same point, councils in Wales were facing collective funding gaps of £200m for 2023/24 and a cumulative funding gap of at least £307m for 2024/25. However, due to soaring energy costs and inflation these stark figures are likely to under-represent the true scale of the financial challenge faced by local councils.

Public services in Northern Ireland have also experienced significant funding cuts.

Reductions in funding, during the period of austerity, have resulted in financial pressures which have impacted negatively on the quality and delivery of local public services resulting in cuts to jobs and services.

Recruitment of additional council, government and agency staff is needed to ensure that registration, regulation and collection of revenues is undertaken to identify where loopholes, avoidance and coverage has allowed some to escape making their fair contribution.

The Service Group Executive is asked to adopt the following recommendations to campaign for local government to be better resourced:

- 1) A national coordinated campaign, calling for funding levels that Councils need to deliver services and ensure good pay and working conditions for their workforce;
- 2) Campaign to ensure that fair-work underpins any reviews of income streams and/or taxation. Making reliefs, subsidies and tenders dependent on good practices at the local level should raise revenues indirectly for Council budgets;
- 3) Consider how municipalisation of buses, energy and other public services could be appropriately pursued. Local government should lead the way in the Green Economy by creating green jobs that put de-carbonisation at its core;
- 4) Explore how local authority debts and PFI/PPP contracts can be taken over by the Treasury, saving local government many billions in interest charges each year and so releasing tax revenues for investment in local economies and communities;
- 5) Consider establishing a wide network of academics, stakeholders and interested parties in order to improve research and policy creation on better resourcing of local service provision;
- 6) Campaign for an end to any ring-fencing of local government funding by central governments.

18. Food Standards Agency – pay, terms and conditions

Carried

Conference notes that our members employed in England, Wales and Northern Ireland by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) work tirelessly to ensure the public eats safe and clean meat, dairy and seafood. Their pay, terms and conditions need urgent improvement to reward that commitment.

Conference also notes the contributions FSA members and those employed as contractors working for Eville & Jones make towards protecting the UK from unsafe and unclean meat.

Conference calls upon the Service Group Executive to continue to defend our members' terms and conditions by:

- 1) Negotiating for higher wages for our members through collective bargaining;
- 2) Promoting opportunities for our members to learn new skills and support their roles within the FSA;
- 3) Organising in new areas of the FSA to maintain membership, recruit in non-traditional roles, and encourage more members to become active in the union;
- 4) Opposing privatisation and deregulation of meat hygiene inspection;
- 5) Opposing attempts to undermine the roles of our members working in food and promoting the Protect Our Food Campaign;
- 6) Raising the role of FSA members in the media through innovative new communication methods, e.g. animations, to inform and educate the public on what our members do in protecting the UK food chain.

19. Equal pensions for surviving spouses and civil partners

Carried

Conference notes that:

- 1) The Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) pays pensions to widows of male scheme members in respect of contributions since 1972 or, in some cases, 1978;
- 2) As a result of a Supreme Court decision in 2017, the Walker case, LGPS members' surviving same-sex spouses and civil partners, irrespective of gender, are now treated the same as widows of male LGPS members; but,
- 3) Widowers of female LGPS members continue to be paid pensions only in respect of contributions since 1988.

Conference understands that an employment tribunal case in 2020, the Goodwin case, and a subsequent ministerial statement have affected the unequal treatment of such widowers but is concerned LGPS appears slow to amend its regulations and funds slow to alert their members to any new entitlement and any action they need to take.

Conference instructs the Local Government Service Group Executive, collaborating with the National Executive Council and others as need be, to:

- a) Seek to secure equal treatment of surviving spouses and civil partners in LGPS; and,

- b) Seek to ensure advice is issued to UNISON members on their entitlement and how to claim it.

21. Pay campaigning in local government

Carried

Conference notes that UNISON members in local government are experiencing an ongoing cost of living crisis.

Despite the 2022 NJC and SJC pay settlements being higher than previous years' settlements in monetary terms, they were still below inflation. Other sectors within the service group have also balloted for action in response to sub-inflation pay offers.

Low pay in local government has become structural. Pay at the bottom end is often near the government's National Living Wage, and employers agree that this has led to a crisis in recruitment and retention. The professional status of local government workers has become devalued as a result of uncompetitive wages, a lack of political understanding of the work our members do, and the fact that the Conservative government do not care about local government workers.

Many local government branches continue to have to deal with a variety of problems relating to equality, job evaluation and pay and grading.

Conference believes that while the sectors within the service group have autonomy over the content of pay claims and the ensuing campaigns, there is a need for a service group wide strategy that brings the sectors together with some common broad objectives.

Conference notes the support given to a £15 an hour minimum wage within UNISON and the TUC, and believes this should form a part of our pay strategy.

Conference believes it is important that pay claims are submitted in good time before pay settlement dates, to ensure that we have time to campaign, consult, and pursue a potential industrial action strategy, in line with all legislation and the UNISON rule book, and still ensure that members receive the final pay increase on the settlement date.

Conference further believes that whenever any sector within the local government service group is balloting for or taking industrial action, supporting that work must be the service group's top priority. Pay campaigns must be backed up by a range of resources which inspire members to vote and get involved, and which make clear the importance of voting with reference to legislation around thresholds.

It is also vital that we learn the lessons from consultations and industrial action ballots where we have passed the 50% turnout threshold, either locally or nationally. The 'Organising to Win' composite passed at Local Government Conference in 2022 tasked the Service Group Executive with learning and sharing these lessons, and this work must continue.

Conference also believes that equal pay, low pay and equality must be central to our pay campaigning and negotiating strategy. We must negotiate to ensure that employers work with us to:

- 1) Conduct a full equality impact assessment on any changes to pay and grading structures;
- 2) Review all job evaluation outcomes and conventions;
- 3) Provide ongoing training on job evaluation;
- 4) Make staff aware that they have a right to a new evaluation if job demands change;
- 5) Review workforce composition to monitor whether there are larger numbers of staff with protected characteristics in lower grades, and to take steps to remove any inequalities;
- 6) Conduct annual surveys of pay rates by gender, ethnicity, age and other protected characteristics to establish progress in eliminating pay gaps, and to ensure that the organisation's pay rates do not fall below pay for comparable jobs in other councils and the locality.

This conference calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to:

- a) Establish a model local government service group procedure for the timing of consultations on pay claims and the submission of claims, so that sectors can ensure that, as far as possible, claims are submitted a specific (to be determined) time before the settlement date, to ensure there is sufficient time for consultations and ballots before settlement dates; and to argue for the adoption of the same processes by the other recognised trade unions in relevant sectors;
- b) Encourage the sector committees within the local government service group to include the call for a £15 an hour minimum wage in consultations with members on the contents of pay claims, and to include this target in model pay claims;
- c) Continue to conduct reviews of local and sector-wide consultations and industrial action ballots, learning lessons where the 50% turnout threshold is met and developing guidance based on sharing those lessons;
- d) Research a variety of local government roles with equivalent roles in the rest of the public sector and in the private and voluntary sectors, to establish benchmark rates which reflect the professional status of local government workers, and to produce bargaining advice based on this research;
- e) Work with regions and branches to promote the role of pay contacts as a key part of improving member engagement and activism in pay campaigns conducted by the sectors within the local government service group, with a

target of having a pay contact in every workplace;

- f) Encourage sectors to continue to offer branches a wide range of inspiring campaign resources and materials, including offering a starter 'action box' of key materials;
- g) Review the local government service group's priorities and guidance on job evaluation and pay and grading, revise if necessary, and circulate to branches, regions, nations and sectors;
- h) Carry out a freedom of information request to ascertain the extent of the use of market supplements, ask sectors to take the results into account in pay negotiations, and consider how to address any equalities implications;
- i) Work with Learning and Organising Services to ensure that training on equality issues for members and activists continues to be a key priority.

Composite C (Motions 22, 25 and Amendment 22.1) Securing the Legacy and Making 2023 the Year of Black Workers

Carried

Conference notes that UNISON has declared 2023 the Year of Black Workers (YofBW2023).

This conference notes that whilst 2023 is the Year of Black Workers, and its focus of 'Establishing legacy to generate change', this year in and of itself is not the change we seek, it is merely the opportunity to generate change.

Black Workers up and down our society often find themselves in low-paid, insecure work, with poor terms and conditions. Despite the Westminster government denying that Institutional Racism exists in our society, we know that it does.

Our campaign to get employers to reduce the ethnicity pay gap, urgently addressing the cost-of-living crisis, and understanding how Black workers power the UK's economy, will all be central to our campaign activities.

Black workers have an important role to play in challenging racism, injustices and eliminating discrimination, fighting in-work poverty and achieving equal pay. Their experiences and voices must be heard in local government campaigns.

In 2017, an independent review undertaken by Baroness McGregor-Smith found that:

- 1) In terms of opportunities for progression, 29% of Black Caribbean employees reported feeling that they have been overlooked for promotion because of their ethnicity;
- 2) In terms of top management positions, the Black and Black British group did particularly poorly over the period between 2007 and 2012, with the number of

Black/Black British people in top management positions decreasing by 42%;

- 3) 30% of those from a Black background reported experiencing or witnessing racial harassment or bullying from management in the last five years.

With UNISON having an estimated 185,000 Black members, it is imperative that we build upon our long history of achievements in tackling inequities in our society by taking concrete action to enable Black members to take the next step in our journey towards justice.

Conference strongly believes that it is the duty of all trade unionists to fight racism. The YofBW2023 provides everyone in the local government service group the opportunity to celebrate our union's long history of achievements, to take forward UNISON's vital work on race equality, to have those uncomfortable conversations and to come up with practical steps for change and focus our minds on challenging racism in the workplace.

YofBW2023 can also be used to highlight the experiences of our Black members, focus on building our organising work to increase meaningful participation of Black activists, particularly young Black activists, who can provide a voice for others in the workplace.

UNISON is far more than just another trade union; UNISON is an organisation that seeks to improve the lives of its members and wider society by challenging the status quo and seeking to generate change.

With this being the case, this conference calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to:

- a) Work with the National Black Members Committee to release statements endorsing the YofBW2023 and build support for branches to make the YofBW2023 a priority part of their work plan and agenda;
- b) Provide regular materials to branches and regions that both highlight inequalities, and also the campaigns against racism inside and outside the workplace that we can learn from, for example where Black workers have organised and taken action against low pay or to come back in-house, or have joined local and national campaigns against racism and inequality;
- c) Work with the National Black Members Committee and other Self-Organised Groups to understand the number of Black members in the service group, and work to encourage those that do not have their ethnicity recorded in their membership data to update this;
- d) Work with the National Black Members Committee and other Self-Organised Groups to analyse and interpret the data captured from (point b), to create and implement a strategic plan to work towards ensuring that Black members are represented proportionately within the structures of the service group from branch to executive levels;

- e) Work with the National Black Members Committee to develop an action plan for supporting Black members to become active within the union and their workplaces;
- f) Provide the necessary support, training, and opportunity for Black members to become involved in marking the Year of Black Workers 2023;
- g) Work with the National Black Members Committee and branches to capture ethnicity pay gap data from employers, and support branches to work with those employers to develop a strategy to reduce the pay gap, with the long-term aim of eradicating it in its entirety;
- h) Work with the National Black Members Committee and UNISON's Learning and Organising Service to develop a training and development plan to ensure that all activists within the service group receive training in 'Defining Black' and the 'Race Discrimination Protocol';
- i) Promote UNISON's mentoring scheme and encourage newer and less experienced Black and particularly young Black members/activists to come forward and take part in the scheme. Work with regions to raise awareness amongst Black activists about training on mentoring that can be delivered in the branch and region;
- j) Work with branches and the National Black Members Committee to collect the data around the number of race/equality cases within the service group, analyse the data to identify any commonalities between the cases and work to develop toolkits to tackle these issues;
- k) Support branches within the service group to negotiate with employers to get them to sign UNISON's Race at Work Charter;
- l) Work with local government employers to identify and share good practices that are currently in place which support the recruitment, retention, and progression of Black people in local government workplaces and careers.

Furthermore, this conference believes that by taking these steps, UNISON will be able to work towards its mission of 'establishing legacy to generate change', but more importantly, these steps will support branches, the service group and UNISON as a whole to be able to meet the needs of our Black members, and improve our ability to lead the way in the journey towards the more equitable and just society we all want, need and deserve.

24. Building trans equality in local government

Carried

Conference recalls that the motion "Trans Equality – Louder and Prouder!" adopted by the 2022 Local Government Conference acknowledged the toxic debate ignited by the United Kingdom government's consultation on reforming the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) and recognised the need for our union, including the local

government service group, to become more visible and more vocal – louder and prouder - in supporting and promoting Trans equality.

Conference notes that attacks on trans rights have escalated further in the past year, with horrendous attacks from sections of the media, politicians and transphobic groups. The tactics being used, particularly the vilification of trans women, by those campaigning to roll back the existing rights of Trans people are almost identical to the tactics seen around the time of Section 28, when gay men were portrayed as sexual predators and a danger to children to spread fear and mistrust.

These attacks have included the spreading of false information on what the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill, which seeks to amend the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) 2004, would mean.

Conference recognises that the Bill would not impact on the operation of the Equality Act or single-sex spaces. There is nothing in the Bill that makes any difference to the rights or ability of anybody to go into any protected single-sex space in Scotland or anywhere else. All a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) entitles anyone to is birth, marriage (if relevant) and, eventually, death certificates in their acquired gender. A GRC is not needed to change your name, NHS record, passport or driving licence.

Targeting a minority, and spreading false information to provoke hatred and distrust by preying on people's fears, are classic far right recruitment tactics.

Conference therefore welcomes the 'Trans Equality is UNISON business' campaign, launched in July 2022, and the work done in the service group so far towards making all our workplaces trans inclusive, and workplaces where Trans members feel safe to disclose their gender identity. It also welcomes the success of the Trans ally training being rolled out across the union. It recognises, however, that this work needs to continue and be built on in the coming year.

Conference therefore calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to work with the National LGBT+ Committee and other parts of the union as appropriate to:

- 1) Continue working to increase the strength and visibility of UNISON's work to promote Trans equality in the service group;
- 2) Continue to encourage the negotiation of inclusive language in local government agreements and policies, and to raise awareness of the vital importance of including equality and LGBT+ workers rights in collective bargaining negotiations, promoting the UNISON resources available to support this work;
- 3) Urge branches to promote the fact sheet 'Why pronouns are important' to members and to ask employers to adopt a policy that allows all staff to have their preferred pronouns on name badges, ID cards and email signatures;

- 4) Continue to encourage LGBT+ members in the service group to get involved in the LGBT+ group;
- 5) Continue to promote the UNISON fact sheet 'How to be a Trans ally' and encourage branch officers and members in local government to undertake trans ally training;
- 6) Encourage members in the service group who have been on the Trans ally training to join the Trans ally network being set up by the National LGBT+ Committee;
- 7) Promote UNISON materials, such as the factsheet on reform of the Gender Reform Act, to help branches and members in the service group to counter the myths and disinformation being spread by those campaigning to roll back the existing rights of trans people.

27. Fighting cuts to local services and protecting disabled workers' jobs **Carried**

Conference notes that local government services have been cut to the bone by a decade of austerity and this has had an adverse impact on our members' jobs, pay, terms and conditions. This is particularly the case for our disabled members who have often been first in line when job cuts are on the agenda. Disabled workers are also more likely to rely on local government services for support, including in the workplace. However, we now face a new threat of austerity and a real terms cut in pay due to the cost of living crisis inflicted on us by the reckless decisions of this Conservative government. And disabled workers are once again first in the firing line.

Conference notes that there is no "waste" remaining in local government. A real terms cut in central government funding and the impact of rising inflation on council budgets inevitably means more job losses and an end to vital local services. We must resist any job cuts in local government, but conference is deeply concerned that decisions on which jobs to cut disproportionately impact on our disabled members.

In recent years local government employers have increasingly focused on reducing sickness absence, with most employers now using "triggers" to instigate formal sickness proceedings. Unless this is coupled with a robust disability leave policy and an agreement that disability related sickness is recorded separately and treated differently to non-disability related sickness absence, disabled workers are likely to find themselves unfairly facing sickness absence proceedings. In many cases this can lead to the member losing their job through capability or enforced medical retirement.

Where the employer is looking for cuts, disabled workers who are being hauled up on sickness absence can find that it is their post which is identified to go.

Conference reiterates that disability leave can be an example of a reasonable adjustment under the Equality Act 2010 and has been confirmed by case law. Local government employers need to accept this and to agree disability leave policies so

that our disabled members in local government are not being unfairly penalised when it comes to restructures and job cuts.

Labour's Equality Act 2010 originally included stronger protections where the employer was restructuring as there was a greater focus on equality impact assessments. The Conservative government weakened the Equality Act, removing its teeth. However, equality assessments are still an important tool in fighting discrimination when it comes to reorganisations. Local government employers have a duty to have due regard to equality impacts but this is impossible if they aren't carrying out equality assessments.

Conference further notes that in many cases restructures in local government leave the remaining staff with more work, less pay or both. This can lead to burn out and an exacerbation of existing impairments. Some changes to job descriptions and the working environment can also disadvantage disabled workers, for example compulsory home working to save money can have a detrimental effect on some of our disabled members' mental health.

Conference believes that it is vital to protect local government workers and services from any return to Conservative austerity in a cost of living crisis. We must do all we can to protect jobs, pay, terms and conditions and make sure that our disabled members are not discriminated against by cuts and restructures.

Conference therefore calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to work with the National Disabled Members' Committee, to:

- 1) Promote UNISON's guide to negotiating on sickness absence policies;
- 2) Develop and circulate a guide to using equality assessments to fighting unfair and discriminatory job cuts in local government workplaces;
- 3) Seek to raise the need for an agreed employer policy on disability leave through national negotiating structures;
- 4) Work through Labour Link to lobby for the return of statutory equality impact assessments in local government.

31. Campaigning for better pay and preparing for industrial action **Carried as Amended by 31.1**

Conference notes the successful pay campaigns run by UNISON Scotland in recent years. Conference notes that these campaigns have seen numerous consultative ballots being conducted, two statutory industrial action ballots taking place (with the number of branches meeting the required turnout thresholds increasing from the first to the second) and the first successful prosecution of industrial action in local government in over a decade.

Conference notes that as well as delivering better pay for members the impact of these campaigns on the union's organisational strength has been significant, with 15,717 new local government members joining UNISON in Scotland in 2022 alone; a

net increase of 7020 members across the year; an increase in activists being trained and better membership data.

Conference notes that whilst these campaigns have faced many challenges, they have succeeded, in part, because activity has been built up over time; education amongst activists of what is needed to win has improved; members have been given opportunities to engage throughout and the union's public profile has increased.

Whilst it is recognised that the use of social media can be a positive way to communicate and interact with members. This conference condemns any online abuse, false allegations and attacks on negotiators.

Conference calls on the SGE to review the reasons behind this success and share the lessons that can be learned to local government branches across the whole of the UK.

32. Menopause awareness and support in local government

Carried as Amended by 32.1, 32.2

Conference notes that as a union of one million women, women will always be at the heart of UNISON.

Conference also notes that UNISON has proudly campaigned for many years to remove what many campaigners and activists call the last great workplace taboo.

Conference further notes that the demography of UNISONs membership in social care and schools/education is older and primarily female.

In Cymru Wales, UNISON is working with the WLGA and our sister NJC unions to place all-Wales menopause awareness and support at the top of the Joint Council for Wales agenda.

To help deliver and underpin this work, our Cymru Wales Local Government Committee will be surveying our entire local government membership in Wales in one of the largest ever surveys of its kind, to understand the true picture of menopause awareness and support.

And at local authority level, Cymru Wales branches have been hosting seminars and conferences as well as being keynote speakers at external conferences to influence employers to really make menopause awareness and support matter.

We believe that every employer should have a formal menopause policy and welcome the new BS 30416 UK standard for menstrual health and menopause in the workplace. In addition, we note that a Pregnancy Loss Policy, like the one recently launched in Renfrewshire Scotland Region, further supports our women workers. This policy covers all pregnancy loss, miscarriage, stillbirth, ectopic and molar pregnancy, neonatal and embryo transfer loss and abortion and termination of pregnancy.

Our experience to date has been that menopause policies are a great place to start if an employer has none in place, utilising UNISON's guidance for branches: The menopause is a workplace issue: guidance and model policy, available online, where possible.

Conference acknowledges the need to ensure that, as reflected in the UNISON guidance, policies include the recognition that menopausal symptoms can impact on trans and non-binary people experiencing the menopause.

Equally, our experience has also been that some employers rely on stating that they have such a policy without evidencing how it is used or how it supports employees.

Conference therefore calls upon the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Continue putting women at the heart of UNISON;
- 2) To note that despite the rise in awareness, menopause is still the last workplace taboo and because of poor healthcare support is still holding too many women back and forcing people at the height of their careers to consider leaving the workforce or reducing their hours;
- 3) To promote our call for every local government employer to have a formal menopause policy;
- 4) To continue to promote the UNISON guidance widely within the service group;
- 5) To promote our call for Local Government UNISON branches to not only lobby their local government employer about a formal policy, but to actively promote menopause support and awareness, including symptoms, to our entire and diverse membership as a business-as-usual organising campaign;
- 6) To consider placing menopause leave on the national NJC bargaining agenda via appropriate structures.

33. Promoting the Anti Racism Charter in the public sector

Carried

With the de-funding of public sector bodies, from a government which has little interest in the welfare needs of its citizens. It is no surprise that amongst those facing the most targeted hostile barriers are our Black members.

The Tory anti-immigrant agenda has fuelled increased hatred and attacks on our Black communities across the country. Which has then fed into an increase of work placed racist discrimination, where Black members face the brunt of decisions which disproportionately penalise.

Local government has long been the domain which has seen initiatives and progress in challenging all forms of discrimination.

More women are employed in the public sector, and it pays them better than the private sector. The public sector also has more transparent recruitment policies and has a long history of promotion of its equality and diversity through its values and traditions.

Despite this. It is not immune to racist behaviour being present in its workforce or the actions that it takes. The public sector still perpetrates practices which lead to discriminatory outcomes.

This motion calls on Local Government Conference to take its place at the forefront of combatting racial discrimination.

The Anti Racism Charter, launched on the United Nations Day for Elimination of Racism in March 2022, was completed by the Black members in Eastern Region. It has been widely taken onboard by many employers in Eastern region, local authorities, NHS trusts, clinical commissioning groups, police forces, a public law firm, and Further Education establishments have all signed the charter and pledged to adopt and deliver on its pledge.

The charter contains a clear list of actions for employers to work on that will address issues of institutionalised racism. Once an employer signs the charter, the branch is provided additional support on how to ensure that the employer delivers on their commitments.

Conference we know that:

- 1) Authorities and other public sector bodies across our service groups Black members are facing job losses, impaired access to training, discrimination, bullying and restricted career development;
- 2) Through our case work, for too long these employers have made public commitments to tackle race discrimination but have failed to convert words into action;
- 3) The best way to deliver race equality in public services is for Black workers to join UNISON and then lead the union's negotiations with the employer;
- 4) Black members self-organisation exists to create space and opportunities to identify their own priority issues and they remain the best ways to deliver progress.

The work done by Eastern Black members needs to be more widely applauded. It now needs to be promoted far and wide. Across all of our regions and the devolved nations of our union. To begin to achieve this aim and see the public sector deliver for our Black members:

We ask the Local Government SGE to:

- a) Circulate the Anti Racism Charter to all regional committees asking that they promote the charter to their branches;
- b) Use all communication channels at their disposal, encouraging Black members to become active in their union;
- c) Write to all branch secretaries and remind them that Black members should always be involved – if not lead – negotiating and bargaining on race equality issues and on all other issues where a Black member is deemed part of the senior negotiating team;
- d) Send the charter to the General Secretary and National Executive Council and request consideration of how it can promote and supported across the union.

Composite D (Motions 34, 35 and Amendments 34.1 and 35.1) Pay Campaigning and Beating Industrial Action Thresholds

Carried

This conference notes that:

- 1) This Tory government is once again seeking to make public sector workers pay for the latest economic crisis by restricting public sector pay even further when the cost of living continues to rise;
- 2) Prior to the latest cost of living crisis, pay across local government had fallen in real terms by 25% since 2010; We now have 'Pay Free Fridays' where compared to 2010, we work a day a week for free, and now they're coming for our Thursdays too;
- 3) The pay crisis across local government means there is already a crisis in recruitment and retention of staff across many staff groups, resulting in greater pressures on remaining staff;
- 4) UNISON research has shown that the government receives around 50% of the cost of NJC local government pay awards back, through increased direct and indirect tax revenues and reduced spending on benefits and tax credits.

This conference believes that:

- a) Imposing further real terms cuts in pay across local government and school support staff can only exacerbate the staffing crisis caused by underpay and overwork;
- b) The current increase in inflation has largely been caused by an inflationary profit drive, most notably among energy companies;

- c) It's not just energy companies that are profiting though. Last year, Nat West bank recorded profits of £5.1bn and paid the CEO £5.25m. After the Tories ended the cap, city bonuses now average more than the annual pay of our teaching assistant members. The rich are getting richer at our expense;
- d) It is a political choice to restrict local government pay further and such a choice will not resolve the inflationary pressures created by profit-led inflation;
- e) Over the last year, we have seen a massive increase in workers beating the ballot threshold and taking strike action over pay, from the RMT, CWU, NEU, UCU, Aslef, TSSA, PCS, RCN and BMA. Some of our members in Health and Higher Education have also taken strike action, and Local Government members are balloting. This has been an inspiration, and has forced the Tories to improve pay offers;
- f) This government will only be forced to give decent pay awards to local government workers if unions can demonstrate they can beat the ballot thresholds and call lawful industrial action, if necessary;
- g) Each branch and region need to beat the ballot thresholds if UNISON is going to be as strong as possible to win better pay;
- h) Each branch and region need to prioritise achieving the required turnout during any ballot period as their number 1 priority;
- i) A political leverage campaign can enhance the impact and success of any industrial action.

Conference notes the successful pay campaigns run by UNISON Scotland in recent years. Conference notes that these campaigns have seen numerous consultative ballots being conducted, two statutory industrial action ballots taking place (with the number of branches meeting the required turnout thresholds increasing from the first to the second) and the first successful prosecution of industrial action in local government in over a decade.

Conference notes that as well as delivering better pay for members the impact of these campaigns on the union's organisational strength has been significant, with 15,717 new local government members joining UNISON in Scotland in 2022 alone; a net increase of 7020 members across the year; an increase in activists being trained and better membership data.

Conference notes that whilst these campaigns have faced many challenges, they have succeeded, in part, because activity has been built up over time; education amongst activists of what is needed to win has improved; members have been given opportunities to engage throughout and the union's public profile has increased.

Whilst it is recognised that the use of social media can be a positive way to communicate and interact with members. This conference condemns any online abuse, false allegations and attacks on negotiators.

Conference calls on the SGE to review the reasons behind this success and share the lessons that can be learned to local government branches across the whole of the UK.

This conference also resolves to request that the Local Government Service Group Executive works with the NJC Committee to:

- i) Seek to ensure best practice on beating ballot thresholds, from across UNISON and the wider trade union movement, is shared with branches and regions;
- ii) Seek to ensure each branch and region devise a plan of action to beat the ballot thresholds for employers under NJC pay, terms and conditions;
- iii) Seek to ensure any industrial action across sectors in UNISON is coordinated wherever possible;
- iv) Seek to ensure any industrial action over pay is coordinated, where possible, with other parts of the public sector and other unions fighting for better pay;
- v) Seek to ensure a political leverage campaign is devised;
- vi) Survey all appropriate branches to quantify how many are ballot and strike ready and identify gaps in resources, reporting back in full to the Local Government Service Group Executive and then to Local Government Conference in 2024.

38. Improving facility time for local government activists

Carried

Conference recognises that adequate facility time, with backfill, to undertake both union duties and union activities is vital to effectively organise and represent members in councils and schools at local, regional and national levels.

Conference notes that facility time has come under persistent attack since 2010, due to a combination of factors. Some local government employers are simply anti-union and so have cut facility time, while others have reduced facility time due to funding cuts.

The problem of accessing adequate facility time is particularly acute in schools, care settings and in fragmented and outsource employers.

Conference welcomes the research, bargaining guides and model agreements UNISON has produced to support branches in negotiating time off for their activists to fulfil their roles.

Conference also recognises that some members may find it harder take up activist roles and to achieve adequate facility time. This includes women, young workers, disabled workers, Black workers, part-time workers, LGBT+ workers, shift workers and others.

Conference notes that UNISON is committed to ensuring that our activist base is as representative of the membership as possible and that everyone, regardless of protected characteristic and/or working pattern, is able to get active in the union.

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

- 1) Ask local government branches for case studies to show how they have supported a diverse range of activists to access and take up union facility time, with a particular focus on improving access to facility time for activists with protected characteristics;
- 2) Promote and circulate UNISON guidance on bargaining for time off for trade union activists;
- 3) Work with the UNISON Equalities Unit, Self-Organised Groups and National Young Members' Forum to provide appropriate additional advice to enable branches to recognise and support branches in dealing with the challenges facing workers who may identify as being in the groups listed above so that they too can access union facility time.

39. Empowering our reps in the fight against outsourcing

Carried

Outsourcing and privatisation of local government services has almost zero benefit to the way that they are run but it can often have a disastrous effect on the quality of the services being provided. It also comes with a higher risk of workers receiving poorer wages and terrible terms and conditions, whilst lining the pockets of private company shareholders.

Conference notes that some councils are currently in a position where most of their services are delivered in-house and that this is a positive position to be in.

Conference also notes that if we are to see this model become the norm for every local authority, we need our reps trained around the benefits of keeping public services in-house. We need training which is accessible to any UNISON local government rep, and we need it to provide support on how to counteract arguments made by local authorities seeking to out-source or privatise services.

We recognise that reps must be empowered and feel confident to be able to tackle this vital issue at its core and that UNISON training delivered around the issue would benefit branches, members and ultimately those receiving public services.

If we truly believe that public services should be run for people, not for profit and we need to level up in the fight against outsourcing.

Conference calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Develop and roll-out training for Local Government branches, with evidence-based research, around the issue of outsourcing and how branches can

negotiate around securing in-house services;

- 2) Seek to ensure that the 'Branch Guide to securing in-house services' guide remains up-to-date and relevant to the current climate and promote the to all Local Government branches.

40. Care workers

Carried

Conference commends the work carried out by local government service group members working in care across the UK despite the many continued challenges and pressures that they face.

Conference recognises that despite the differences in the delivery of social care throughout the UK, UNISON's own National Care Service campaign represents a clear vision for the service that should be aspired to by all the nations. Conference believes that improved funding and consistent terms and conditions for care workers must ultimately be allied to insourcing of the service to bring about better standards of care for older people and disabled people.

Conference notes that the Covid pandemic starkly illustrated how a fragmented care system, in which local government commissions care services from thousands of private and non-profit care providers, largely employing care workers on terrible terms and conditions, leads to terrible outcomes for both care workers and the people they care for.

Conference recognises that the journey towards securing the widespread insourcing of care services back to local authorities will not be a quick one and applauds interim efforts being made to ensure that care employers are accountable for their treatment of their workers and are forced to abide by sectoral standards. Conference welcomes significant insourcing work being undertaken at a UK-wide level and within regions such as the North West that will potentially have positive results for local government care services.

Conference welcomes the research that is underpinning the National Care Service campaign which provides a clear template for improving social care and how it is being used to positively influence the approach of the Labour Party.

Conference supports the work of the Welsh government in seeking to establish its own National Care Service and welcomes the work of UNISON Cymru/Wales in helping to shape it.

Conference also supports the work of UNISON Scotland in leading and marshalling opposition to the Scottish government's own National Care Service which would see local councils stripped of any legal responsibility for social care, in favour of quangos which will administer a system still based on a market in care where for-profit services predominate. It seeks to duplicate the ethos of the NHS in name only by failing to embrace the idea of public ownership and provision of care.

Conference also notes the continued scandal of sleep-in pay rates for care workers and the failure of the Westminster government to bring forward legislation that would ensure all hours workers are present for sleep-in shifts are treated as working time, and paid accordingly.

Conference therefore calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Campaign and build support for a national care service and to bring all care services back in-house;
- 2) Campaign for and lobby governments and social care employers to employ staff on terms and conditions directly equivalent to pay rates for comparable roles in the public sector;
- 3) Continue to campaign for local authorities to sign UNISON's Ethical and Residential Care Charters, and support branches to monitor employers to ensure those with accreditation continue to adhere to all elements of the charters;
- 4) Continue to ensure that social care remains a priority campaign issue within the local government service group and as part of the union's new joined up approach to the issue, and ensure UNISON is equipped at all levels to effectively recruit and organise across social care;
- 5) Continue to highlight the scandal of sleep-in pay rates across the UK and to raise the matter with the UK government, Low Pay Commission and HMRC;
- 6) Campaign for more funding to be given to councils across the UK in order to help fund the delivery of better-quality care services and better terms and conditions for care workers;
- 7) Promote examples of UNISON branches and regions which have managed to return care services back in-house and put pressure on all other councils to do the same;
- 8) Re-circulate UNISON's 'Bargaining for Insourcing' guide, in particular drawing branches' attention to Appendix 3, the model 'Insourcing First' motion.

41. Adult social care

Carried

Conference notes that the adult social care system in England continues to face an existential crisis and that the UK government's proposed 'reforms' have done little to address this. Its white paper on the future of adult social care in England fell well short of anything transformative – doing nothing to tackle the marketised nature of adult social care – a system based on a fragmented, competition-driven provider market – and nothing to deal with high levels of unmet need and a fragile provider market.

And it said nothing meaningful about improving pay and conditions for care workers or about addressing the very high vacancy rates in the care sector. Unsurprisingly, vacancy rates have continued to rise, reaching 13 percent for care workers in England in December 2022, as reported by Skills for Care.

The outsourcing and privatisation of social care has led to deteriorating services and the widespread exploitation of workers through low pay, zero hours contracts and attacks on our members' pay, terms and conditions while generating huge profits for hedge funds and shareholders.

Conference welcomes the UNISON campaign for a National Care Service that brings about consistent standards of care and consistent terms and conditions for the workforce. It also welcomes the continued work undertaken by the Local Government Service Group Executive (in collaboration with other UNISON structures) to promote UNISON's Ethical Care and Residential Care Charters. It recognises that the charters include important provisions relating to employment conditions, equality and service delivery.

As acknowledged in the motion 'LGBT+ workers and Adult Social Care' adopted at 2022 Local Government Conference, there is roughly a fifty/fifty split in the numbers of adults receiving social care between those who are retired and those of working age. There will be a significant number of LGBT+ people who are, or will be, users of adult social care. Some will be disabled and/or retired LGBT+ UNISON local government service group members.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that LGBT+ workers are – and have always been - well represented amongst social care workers. However, they are often invisible. This may be an individual choice, or it may be a survival strategy. A workforce where LGBT+ workers are unable to be out at work is not likely to be one where workers can confidently meet the specific needs of LGBT+ service users, or even be aware that they have specific needs. This underlines the importance of negotiating robust best practice agreements on LGBT+ equality with employers, recognising and valuing diversity, alongside union organising and individual advice and representation.

Further, conference recognises that human rights based approaches to the delivery of public services, including social care, are fundamental to ensuring that LGBT+ people receive services that are free from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. The adoption of human rights based approaches can also improve the working conditions of LGBT+ workers. It therefore notes with concern that the UK Conservative government appears intent on either repealing the Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA) or even withdrawing from the European Convention of Human Rights (the Convention) which was incorporated into UK law by the HRA.

Conference calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Continue to encourage branches in the service group to use the UNISON LGBT+ bargaining factsheets to review employer policies and agreements with employers with a view to achieving best practice on LGBT+ equality;

- 2) Seek to work with the national self-organised committees, retired members committee and national young members forum to promote the Ethical and Residential Care Charters;
- 3) Work in conjunction with the National LGBT + Committee and other parts of the union as appropriate to promote good practice on supporting LGBT+ workers and LGBT+ service users in social care settings to bodies responsible for the delivery and regulation of social care;
- 4) Continue to campaign against the privatisation of social care and for services to be brought back in house;
- 5) Continue to support the UNISON campaign for a National Care Service.

42. Council provided care

Carried as Amended by 42.1

Conference notes the campaigns for a National Care Service in each of the 4 nations and UNISON's support, in principle, for such a proposal.

However, conference notes that the duty to provide social care currently sits with local government in Scotland, Wales and England. Any proposals for a National Care Service should respect and build upon this local government duty rather than attacking it.

Conference notes that social care is essentially a community-based service, supporting and providing care to people living in their own homes or close to their community. Local government is the most appropriate place to co-ordinate care and link it with other community based services such as housing, primary health care, leisure and voluntary organisations.

Conference recognises the need for change in the social care sector. The current system of care provision does not value staff or service users. It has created a low paid workforce and fails to recognise the skills required for the high-quality social care that our most vulnerable citizens deserve. The current system across the UK enables and promotes a market approach which has seen for-profit companies take over many care services, driving down pay and conditions and directing profits to shareholders, many of whom do not even live in the UK. Often, when these companies fail, councils have to pick up the services with taxpayers' money and the failure to provide quality social care services causes delays in people being discharged from hospital.

Conference believes that a local government based care system built on ethical standards, on a not-for-profit basis, is essential to cater for the needs of our citizens and to ensure the best possible terms and conditions for social care staff.

In Scotland, UNISON has opposed the current National Care Service (Scotland) Bill, in part, because it is an attack on local government and the local government social care and social work staff.

If passed the Bill in its current form will enable services to be taken out of the democratic control of councils and placed in the hands of care boards – quangos responsible only to ministers. It will also enable all social work services to be removed from council control to be the responsibility of care boards which will not deliver services directly but procure them – from public, third sector and private providers. In total, 75,000 workers could be transferred out of councils.

The moves will devastate local government, removing over a third of the workforce and having knock on effect to services elsewhere in councils that currently support the social care and social work services, such as HR and payroll. It threatens the pension entitlements of the council social care and social work members. UNISON has a policy of protecting local government and the services they provide. The Scottish government's proposal flies in the face of all we have collectively fought for.

This has highlighted the need for us to articulate what we believe a care service should look like. We commend the UNISON Cymru Wales commissioned APSE report where, if the proposals contained in it were implemented, would mean a care service that is based on council provided services and the insourcing of private sector care provision.

Conference calls on the SGE to:

- 1) Continue to campaign for local government to retain the duty to provide social care services;
- 2) Develop proposals that would see an end to the domination of social care by the for-profit sector and greater insourcing of services and their staff, so that social care is publicly delivered as well as publicly controlled;
- 3) Support the campaign to have the current NCS (Scotland) Bill withdrawn and learn lessons in the other nations from the Scottish experience.

43. Caring for our carers

Carried

Conference notes that many local government branches currently support care workers both employed directly by local government employers but also those employed by private companies contracted by local government employers to deliver care for elderly, disabled people - both adult and children.

Approximately 80% of the social care workforce are women. Only a small percentage of those are in qualified social work positions whilst the majority work both in care homes and out in the community. Many of the women working in the social care workforce are also in receipt of benefits and have also been impacted by the welfare reforms of the past few years.

There is a significant number of challenges for care workers, issues with how flexible they are expected to be in their working hours, no security of set hours contracts, significantly worse terms and conditions (if they are not NJC employees) amongst many more.

Branches sometimes find it difficult to engage and organise care workers with some working for agencies, in small homes or even being made to be self-employed. However, these are the very workers, in the main women, who need our union support the most.

Conference notes and applauds the successes that branches have where they organise and win for these workers. We congratulate Haringey Branch on their tribunal win where workers saw an average pay-out of £10,000 from their employers.

Conference also notes the work done to set up the Ethical Care Charter and applauds those branches who got their councils to sign up to it.

However, there is still more to be done to make caring a secure employment option and to ensure that members get the recognition and support that they deserve across all nations in the UK.

Care itself is also facing a staffing crisis, low wages and the workforce numbers falling. Conference believes it is right that UNISON calls for insourcing all care provision which should lead to better terms, conditions and wages for all care staff. Therefore conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Continue to ensure that social care remains a priority campaign issue within the service group and as part of the union's new joined up approach to the issue;
- 2) Continue to campaign for more funding to be given to councils across the UK in order to help fund the delivery of better quality care services and better terms and conditions for care workers;
- 3) Promote examples of UNISON branches and regions who have managed to return care services back in-house and put pressure on all other councils to do the same;
- 4) Develop guidance for branches, and regions, on negotiating on behalf of care workers, particularly those in the private sector;
- 5) Develop a fact sheet that branches can use for recruitment for care workers tailored to the needs of those working in care;
- 6) Develop guidance on recruiting activists from amongst social care employers and giving them ongoing support.

Emergency Motion 1 Education Cuts in Northern Ireland

Carried

Conference is aware of the escalating levels of cuts in education in Northern Ireland. UNISON members are facing the severe impact of an imposed budget by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. More than 70 million pounds has been

slashed from immediate spending. This follows on from a previous demand that £200 million in savings be reached in the last quarter of 2022.

Conference notes the hard facts are that:

- 1) Holiday hunger payments are axed;
- 2) Extended school programmes withdrawn;
- 3) 25% of the budget for youth services deleted;
- 4) Special needs budget cut by 15%;
- 5) Shared education projects funding cut by 50%;
- 6) Schools estate capital and maintenance programme cut by 50%.

The impact on UNISON members' families will be severe. The impact on members' terms and conditions and job security will worsen as these cuts are rolled out.

Conference acknowledges the call from all trade unions that the power sharing devolved government be restored without further delay.

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to support our members' resistance to these cuts in the coming months.

Conference further calls on the Service Group Executive to send a message of solidarity from this conference to our UNISON members in local government and education in Northern Ireland.

MOTIONS NOT REACHED

10. Bargaining for implementation of free school meals

UNISON Northern Ireland Local Government and Education branches are fully committed to UNISON's free school meals campaign. Our region launched the first campaign which secured support from the Education Authority and teaching unions. This has been followed by securing an agreement from the Department of Education to review current provision and consider extension of access. Funding allocation will be a central part of this review.

However, the political stalemate in Northern Ireland at the time of writing curtails how we can progress this campaign. Devolved government has collapsed, there is no Minister in place and the Northern Ireland budget is essentially controlled by Westminster via the Northern Ireland office and the NI Secretary of State.

In this environment our bargaining team is steadfastly defending and protecting provision of school meals directly by our members in the catering services. We have

hundreds and hundreds of members in school kitchen and workplace catering services and are seeking at the bargaining table to protect and promote the provision of free schools and extend access where we can by securing school based agreements.

We call on the Local Government Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Use our whole union bargaining resources to build momentum for this campaign and raise this demand in every school where appropriate and where we are organised;
- 2) Build alliances with the bargaining teams in the teaching unions to secure the necessary additional funding;
- 3) Support the Northern Ireland's region efforts to maintain and extend our school meals service.

11. The cost of living crisis in Northern Ireland is biting hard

An end of year report in 2022 on the state of our economy commented that:

The labour market in Northern Ireland in 2022 finds itself sandwiched between two crises. The pandemic had the potential to lead to significant losses in employment and income, but government measures largely protected against the worst impacts. While there has been a reduction in the active labour force, this can be seen as a part of a long run trend in NI and not a pandemic induced shift as may be the case in Great Britain. The crisis that will confront the economy in the latter half of 2022 and the months that follow is of a different nature. It represents a significant threat to the wages and the living standards that they can obtain.

Just as the effects of the pandemic began to ease, our economy was faced with another crisis of completely different origins, the war in Ukraine being one significant factor. The price levels in most European economies had begun to increase gradually. The scale of the increases in 2022 has been of a different order. The energy price increases have led to substantial increases in the rate of inflation and are also beginning to seep into the price dynamic of goods across the economy.

It is worth noting that (median) weekly earnings in Northern Ireland have fallen behind inflation 4 times in the last 10 years.

Hard bargaining at the NJC negotiations table produced a result which gave some comfort to our members on NJC pay terms and conditions. However our members in Northern Ireland also need a good outcome to the long outstanding pay and grading review of how NJC pay framework has been applied to our education members.

Any pay improvements advocated in this review have to be funded by the Department of Education. With the collapse of our devolved government and no minister there is at time of writing no prospect of a direct offer from the Education Authority on this issue. UNISON members will thus consider pursuing a trade

dispute and a campaign of industrial action. This will unfold against a current demand from the Northern Ireland office (essentially managing on behalf of the Westminster government) that the Education Authority cuts its budget by £120 million pounds. A demand that so far has been resisted.

Conference calls of the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Support the region's resistance to education budget cuts that impact on our members;
- 2) Support the region's bargaining strategy to secure a positive outcome to the pay and grading review in education.

20. Campaigning for accredited Living Wage status in local government employers

Since 2010, NJC staff have lost a quarter of the value of their pay against the cost-of-living and this strain is felt most acutely by the low-paid.

Conference recognises that whilst, by itself, the Living Wage does not offer a long-term solution to a UK labour market characterised by low pay, it does represent a stepping stone towards UNISON's wider goal of achieving minimum pay rates of £15 an hour.

Recently the Living Wage increased to £10.90 outside of London, which is higher than NJC scale points 1 – 3 (from 1st April 2023, SCP1 will be deleted). Increasing the number of local government employers obtaining accredited Living Wage status would not only benefit these employees but other third-party contractors.

In the Northern Region, two out of twelve councils are now Living Wage employers (Sunderland and Newcastle). This has been a positive development and more needs to be done to successfully negotiate an increase in uptake by council and school leaders.

Conference welcomes UNISON's recent efforts to lobby Church of England leaders to debate the cost-of-living crisis and raise the issue of catering staff, cleaners and caretakers being paid less than the Living Wage in church schools. UNISON analysis of the Living Wage Foundation's website suggests fewer than 50 Catholic and Church of England school employers are accredited for paying the Living Wage, this is despite the church's commitment in 2012 that all their institutions would pay at least the Living Wage and they would work with UNISON to produce step-by-step action plans.

This positive initiative can be expanded to all Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) to promote the benefits of Living Wage accreditation on staff retention and morale.

As part of this work, the Northern Region are targeting specific Multi Academy Trusts to organise around this issue and grow our presence in the workplace.

Conference calls on the local government service group to:

- 1) Refresh Living Wage campaign materials targeted at members within councils, MATs and further education;
- 2) Support branches and regions to build this campaign and engage members across the sector to increase the number of employers with accreditation;
- 3) Collate a database of accredited Living Wage employers across local government so a central register can be maintained and expanded;
- 4) Continue to lobby church schools to adopt the Living Wage as promised in 2012.

23. The challenges and opportunities of an ageing workforce in local government revisited

Conference notes that the issues raised in the motion “The Challenges and Opportunities for an Ageing Workforce in Local Government” that was debated and carried at the 2021 Local Government Service Group Conference are still very relevant to older workers in local government.

Conference welcomes the work done so far by the Local Government Service Group Executive, sectors, regions and branches on representing, and negotiating on behalf of, the union’s older workers in local government workplaces and welcomes the reaffirmation of this work.

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, service users, volunteers, taxpayers and carers.

Conference notes with concern that outdated stereotypes, unconscious bias and age discrimination can all contribute to preventing older people from staying in or returning to work. Age discrimination is one of the major factors that hinders successful job selection and appointment. Other potential factors include low skills, lack of confidence, inadequate up to date qualifications, long-term health conditions, disabilities and the difficulty of combining work with caring responsibilities.

The pandemic has reversed progress on the employment of older people. The challenges around employment already faced by older workers have been exacerbated by the pandemic and have pushed many out of the workforce for good, many years before they reach state pension age. The number of people aged 50 to 64 who are not engaged with the labour market in any way - that is, they are neither working nor looking for work - has risen by 228,000 since the start of the pandemic, and the employment rate in this group has fallen by 1.8 percent. After decades of narrowing, the employment rate gap between older and younger workers is now wider than it was two years ago.

These trends are entirely at odds with the government’s ambitions to extend working lives, raise the state pension age, boost productivity and level-up the UK. But they

reflect the reality that many individuals feel shut out, undervalued, and financially disadvantaged by an ageist labour market.

There needs to be focused programmes which support older workers who wish to stay in or go back into the labour market. Employers struggling to fill vacancies should look to the principles of age-friendly employment to recruit and retain this valuable workforce. There need to be targeted, individualised back-to-work support for over 50s to address the particular challenges that this group faces in the labour market, including ageism and the creation of workplaces that support longer working lives.

Almost one third (30 percent) of workers over the age of 45 no longer have enough income to cover basic living costs, with 1 in 10 older workers having no choice but to come out of retirement and return to work to make ends meet, according to research from Working Wise. Their report revealed the impact of the "ever-growing" cost-of-living crisis on older workers, with a huge 46 percent of older workers having to change their retirement plans to fund growing bills. In addition to the 10 percent of workers who have come out of retirement, the survey found that 26 percent of those who have retired said they may need to return or could be tempted back. A report "Decades of Change" predicted that the cost of a "comfortable retirement" would increase by 150 percent in 2050, and that by 2056 the state pension age would rise to 70 years old.

In a period when the state pension age has risen to 66, 67 and 68 and employment rates among those approaching retirement have fallen to their lowest levels since 2016, it is shocking that the UK state pension is one of the worst in Europe. The state pension provides just 58% of previous earnings from work - below the OECD average of 69.1% and the EU average of 70.8%. Those who rely on the state pension, as the main or only source of income, face a bleak financial future. Research demonstrates the huge challenges facing the government's levelling up ambitions to reduce inequalities across England as well as its stated commitment to increase healthy life expectancy by five years.

It is vital that we work with local government employers to ensure that 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. This work should sit alongside our campaign to oppose increases in the state pension age and ensure that everyone can retire with a decent pension. Age friendly policies such as flexible working, phased retirement, family care leave and even employment breaks can facilitate a new type of retirement, where employees reduce 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, many of our members will face worse working lives as they age.

Conference therefore calls upon the Local Government Service Group Executive to reaffirm its commitment to continue this important work and:

- 1) Ask local government branches to provide examples of existing age friendly policies and practices that support older workers in their workplaces;
- 2) Promote UNISON guidance and other useful resources for local government branches to use when representing, negotiating on behalf of and providing support for older workers;
- 3) Work with UNISON's Pension Unit to raise awareness of the pension rights of older workers in local government;
- 4) Work with UNISON's Learning and Organising Service's (LAOS) to promote appropriate training and resources to help older workers who are UNISON members;
- 5) Support appropriate campaigns run by other UNISON Service Groups, UNISON self-organised groups and external organisations to safeguard and improve equality and employment rights for older workers.

26. Casual work has no place in local government

The continued use of casual work in local government and the insidious nature of casualisation is of great concern to conference. In the UK, there has been a significant increase in casual work use in the last 20 years, evident from the rise in workers on zero-hour contracts from 156,000 workers in 2002 to 1,045,000 workers in 2022. Conference notes that casual work is regularly being used in local government, in areas such as library and leisure services, with one Yorkshire council having 745 people (headcount) on casual agreements in 2022, a figure which was equivalent to over 28% of that council's total staff count. Casual work is harmful to the local government services in which its use is widespread, the workers engaged in it, and the unions representing the interests of those workers. As this attack is on multiple fronts, putting an end to casual work is an issue of great consequence for this conference.

Conference notes that the casual work used in local government often comes in various guises, be it zero-hour contracts, casual worker agreements or similar precarious work arrangements. Not only does it occur as direct local government employment, but also as indirect employment through the opaquing practice of outsourcing. What links these forms of casual work are job and financial insecurity and withholding employment rights by classing casual workers as 'workers' rather than 'employees', a de facto division of the working class into those worthy and unworthy of employment rights. Conference believes this threatens to undermine the employment rights of us all.

Conference further notes that the insecurity experienced by local government casual workers came into stark view during the lockdowns of the Covid pandemic when casual staff suddenly lost their means of earning an income and many were excluded from the Coronavirus Job Retention (furlough) Scheme.

Conference believes that when seen through the lens of the "continuum of exploitation", the casual work arrangements used in local government services are a

step away from decent work and significantly only a step in the other direction from accidental non-compliance to labour law. The significance of this is that without the need to abide by policies and procedures set up to protect employees from illegal practices, accidental non-compliance to anti-discrimination law is inevitable, for example, when the allocation and withholding of work left to individual managers' partiality without any requirement for transparency.

Conference notes that the casualisation of local government workforces presents challenges to our ability to organise as a union, weakening our collective power. Conference believes casual workers are less likely to join UNISON than workers on decent contracts. Plus, the activism of casual workers may be hindered by a lack of access to facility time and other precarity-related factors. Furthermore, casual work promotes competition between workers for shifts, thus weakening unity among workers.

Conference is aware that the harmful effects of casual work are numerous and extend far beyond those mentioned above. Conference welcomes research on the impact on workers of casual work and its detrimental health effects and calls for further research.

Conference believes that all lower-paid local government workers are potentially at risk of casualisation if the trend is not reversed. All local government workers should be entitled to all employment rights and protection from the harmful effects of precarious work. To this end, conference calls for local government employers to commit to the decasualisation of the workforce and a move back to decent work contracts.

Conference, therefore, instructs the Local Government Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Survey local government branches and workers to establish the exact extent to which casual work is being used in local government and the impact on workers and services;
- 2) Campaign to end the use of casual work in local government. The demands of this campaign include:
 - a) A commitment from local government employers to decasualise their workforce and cease outsourcing to employers with casualised workforces within a set period;
 - b) Negotiated policies during the decasualisation process to protect casual workers from discrimination and financial losses by regulating the allocation and withholding of casual work in a transparent and non-discriminatory way and compensating for short notice cancellations;
 - c) The inclusion of relevant casual workers in calculations of gender and ethnicity pay gaps;

- d) Legislation to restrict the use of casual work in local government services and employers outsourced by local government services.
- 3) Issue branch and regional guidance on how best to negotiate with local government employers to ensure decent contracts are used instead of casual work arrangements;
- 4) Issue branch and regional guidance on incorporating the need for decasualisation in all negotiations and, during the decasualisation process, negotiate for casual workers to be given the same employment rights as employees;
- 5) Issue branch guidance on recruiting casual workers to UNISON and supporting their activism;
- 6) Call on Labour Link to raise this issue within the Labour Party and for them to enjoin all Labour councillors to oppose the use of casual work in local government.

28. Time to listen to disabled local government workers – reasonable adjustments NOW!

Conference notes that UNISON undertook a survey of disabled members in October 2022.

Overall, a staggering 72% of disabled members working in local government who said they needed reasonable adjustments in their job reported that they had not received some or all of the adjustments they needed. Many said that their employer never even bothered to respond to their request for adjustments.

Even where adjustments were agreed, 23% of disabled members working in local government waited a year or more for the adjustments to be delivered.

The survey found that most of the adjustments that were delivered by local government employers involved adaptable equipment such as chairs and keyboards, home working, flexible working and assistive technology such as speech to text. The most common adjustments which weren't agreed included changes to sickness absence triggers and disability leave, highlighting the impact of unfair sickness absence procedures on disabled workers. In fact, disability leave was almost unheard of amongst disabled local government employees with only 22% reporting that their employer allowed paid disability leave. Unsurprisingly, 61% said they sometimes felt pressured to come to work even though they were sick for disability related reasons.

The survey also found that 60% of disabled members in local government were now working from home more than they did before Covid. They told us that working from home was a benefit to them as a disabled person as they had better control of their physical environment. It allowed them more breaks so they could better manage the impacts of being disabled, they could manage their pain better, there were fewer distractions and easier access to the bathroom.

However, the survey found that almost 20% of these disabled members in local government had been turned down for home working. The biggest reason given for why they were turned down was because the employer wanted to see “bums on seats” (68% of respondents). Other common reasons included the employer’s unwillingness to duplicate reasonable adjustments at home and in the workplace, and it just wasn’t their “policy”.

62% of those staff told their job couldn’t be done from home disagreed, stating their job could be done from home if the employer was willing to make reasonable adjustments.

Conference further notes that UNISON is a founding member of the ground-breaking Disability Employment Charter which is a list of nine demands of government. One of these demands is for a new legal deadline for employer responses to reasonable adjustment requests within two weeks. At present there is no legally enforceable deadline and this leads to our disabled members in local government being ignored by employers or not getting a reply to reasonable adjustment requests.

The charter also calls for a stronger right to disability leave, which could address the issue of local government employers claiming this is not an enforceable right under the Equality Act 2010 even though it is an example of a reasonable adjustment in the Equality and Human Rights Commission statutory code of practice that provides guidance to the Equality Act, and is supported by case law.

The charter also calls for a default right to flexible working in all jobs which would allow disabled workers to access the homeworking and flexible working they should be entitled to through the Equality Act.

Conference applauds the work already undertaken by the local government service group to promote the Disability Employment Charter. Branches have been sent a template letter to chief executives and to council leaders, which can be used to encourage local councils to sign up to the charter. However more needs to be done in this area.

Conference believes that UNISON’s survey of disabled members underlines the need to negotiate a step change in the provision of reasonable adjustments and disability leave, along with a more equitable approach to allowing home working for those disabled local government staff who want it.

Conference therefore calls on the Service Group Executive, working with the National Disabled Members Committee, to:

- 1) Promote UNISON’s guidance on negotiating home and hybrid working;
- 2) Circulate UNISON’s bargaining guides on Disability Leave and Reasonable Adjustment Policies and Passports to branches, encouraging them to negotiate locally for these policies;

- 3) Continue to encourage branches to lobby their local council employer to sign up to the Disability Employment Charter.

29. Employment of Trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people in Local Government

In recent years, many local authorities have developed fantastic policies for staff who identify as transgender, non-binary or gender diverse and because of this, many more transgender people are finding themselves more able and comfortable to seek employment within local authorities.

This advancement is potentially under threat because it has been brought to our attention that there are local authorities out there who are putting out recruitment advertising stating that they are particularly looking for applications from LGB people. There is no mention about transgender plus people.

When challenged by the branch, this local authority HR team expressed that trans people are already represented in the workplace therefore it wasn't necessary to include the T on the job advert. We find this to be an excuse and a mask for transphobia.

The use of the term LGB in this instance isolates a trans person who may have considered applying for a position. It shows that the organisation is less welcoming to trans, non-binary and gender diverse people as it is to others.

It is not good enough for some local authorities, to preach diversity and inclusivity, when their actions indicate otherwise.

We ask the Local Government Service Group Executive to encourage branches to:

- 1) Raise the issue of employment for trans, non-binary and gender diverse people, when negotiating policy with local authorities;
- 2) Roll-out the UNISON Trans Ally training, developed by the National LGBT+ Committee;
- 3) Bring Trans Awareness training to employers' attention;
- 4) Provide support, where needed, for their Trans, non-binary, and gender diverse members;
- 5) Where possible, provide monitoring of trans, non-binary and gender diverse recruitment

30. Harassment – it's not part of the job

Conference notes the findings of the 2018 Trades Union Congress (TUC) report into third-party harassment of young workers titled "Not part of the job", the 2016 TUC report into sexual harassment at work titled "Still just a bit of banter?", TUC research into experiences of sexual harassment of Black workers (2017), young workers

(2017), LGBT+ workers (2019) and disabled women workers (2021), and of the TUC Anti-Racism Taskforce's 2022 report into racism at work, all of which found deeply disturbing levels of harassment, abuse and violence towards workers.

According to the "Not part of the job" report, nearly 1 in 5 workers aged 18-34 had been subjected to some form of harassment, abuse or violence at work. 36% of this was perpetrated by a third party, such as a service user, business associate or external staff member. 70% of those who experienced third-party verbal abuse, 63% of those who experienced third-party bullying, 57% of those who experienced third-party sexual harassment, and half of those who experienced physical assault or violence from third parties had been subjected to these behaviours three or more times. The TUC found in 2017 that 37% of Black women workers who experienced sexual harassment said this was also racial, and in 2022 that 41% of all Black workers surveyed had experienced racist behaviour at work. These are just a few of many worrying statistics.

Conference agrees that these findings, and many more workers' experiences, constitute a mountain of evidence showing real and serious safety issues which are worsened by a widespread lack of support or protection for workers. Conference agrees that these issues are pressing ones for local government workers, in particular those working unsociable hours or working alone, and that our employers must prioritise action to protect workers.

Conference notes the work done by the National Women's Committee on tackling sexual harassment at work and by the National Black Members' Committee on addressing racism in the workplace. In addition, conference notes that useful training and campaign materials are already available from the TUC.

Conference calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to work with appropriate sections of the union to:

- 1) Promote existing model policies and other relevant materials around harassment, abuse, violence and safeguarding at work across the service group;
- 2) Ask the National Executive Council to develop model policies where relevant ones do not currently exist, and promote these;
- 3) Provide information to local government branches on negotiating adequate safety measures for lone workers, commuters and those working unsociable hours;
- 4) Promote awareness and understanding across the local government sector of issues around harassment, abuse and violence, with a particular focus on combatting sexual harassment and racism;
- 5) Promote and facilitate training within branches around safety issues and means of proactively addressing them both at work and in the union;

- 6) Share the guidance and campaigning materials from UNISON's National Women's Committee on tackling sexual harassment in the workplace;
- 7) Work with the National Young Members Forum to promote UNISON's work tackling harassment and safety at work to young members in the Local Government Service Group and to young workers in local government.

36. Recruiting and organising young workers in local government workplaces revisited

Conference notes that Composite C Recruiting and Organising Young Members and Activists (Motion 43, amendment 43.1 and motion 45) was debated and carried at Local Government Service Group Conference in 2022.

Conference welcomes the work done so far by the Local Government Service Group Executive to recruit and organise young workers, including developing guidance on mentoring for young Black activists.

Conference recognises that young workers can make a real difference in local government branches by campaigning on the issues that affect them directly. Insecure/precarious work, zero hours contracts, training, discrimination, workplace rights, pay and conditions, mental health concerns, and bullying and harassment remain key issues experienced by young workers.

Conference believes that to grow our union, we should focus on encouraging recruitment, organisation, and meaningful participation of young people who can provide a powerful voice for other young members in local government workplaces. We should support them in gaining the opportunity to develop their skills and the knowledge necessary to participate in all levels of the union.

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

- 1) Work with the National Young Members Forum (NYMF) to develop a strategy to increase the numbers of young members and activists across the local government sector; to promote UNISON membership among young local government workers, making clear UNISON's current definition of young members, and encourage members to become active and support campaigns on the issues that are important to them;
- 2) Encourage local government branches and regions to use UNISON's resources to recruit, organise, and increase meaningful participation of young people, particularly young Black, disabled and LGBT+ members who remain under-represented in UNISON and in local government. This work should include promoting the NYMF's report "Getting Active in UNISON" to local government branches who want to develop a plan to increase activity by young members;

- 3) Survey branches across the sector to identify both challenges and success stories in developing young activists;
- 4) Encourage and support local government branches to develop mentoring and buddying schemes to support new young activists, including promoting UNISON's Learning and Organising Service's (LAOS) resources on mentoring and their own guidance on mentoring young Black activists;
- 5) Promote the new LGBT+ young member network widely within the service group and encourage young members to participate;
- 6) Work with the self-organised groups and the National Young Members Forum to promote existing learning resources on activist development, mentoring and buddying mentoring schemes across the service group, regions and branches, ensuring we ask young members what forms of engagement work best for them;
- 7) Ensure that regions and branches continue to use and develop young activists once they no longer qualify as young members;
- 8) Continue to promote the UNISON trans ally training widely within the service group and encourage young members to participate;
- 9) Work with regions, branches, and members of the service group sector committees to promote UNISON's Young Workers' Charter and encourage local government employers to sign up to the charter;
- 10) Ensure that regions and sectors, in bargaining with national local government employers, promote the five priorities as set out in UNISON's Young Workers Charter;
- 11) Continue to monitor apprenticeship schemes within local government workplaces, recruit and organise apprentices in our branches and continue to push to get employers to sign up to the UNISON Apprenticeship Charter;
- 12) Encourage local government branches and regions to use UNISON's resources to recruit, organise, and increase meaningful participation of social work students and promote UNISON's Social Work Manifesto which sets out how we see the profession now and how we see it evolving in the years ahead.

37. Building a successful strategy for lobbying locally and nationally

UNISON members working to deliver local government services and working in schools face significant challenges. Services have been devastated by twelve years of hostile Westminster governments that made real terms cuts in public service funding and pay, as well as reducing the real terms funding available to the devolved administrations. Staff working to deliver these services are having to work harder than ever before, are facing greater need from service users and are working for inadequate rates of pay.

In local government and schools UNISON members also face the challenges of dealing with the outsourcing of services, reorganisations, cuts to terms and conditions and, in some cases, cuts to jobs and/or pensions.

As a service group we need to make our campaigns as strong and effective as possible to protect jobs and improve pay, terms and conditions and pensions. Our campaign strategies need to incorporate lobbying of political decision makers. This includes lobbying of MPs in the Westminster government, MSPs, MSs and MLAs in the devolved nations, members of combined authorities and councillors in county, metropolitan, borough, unitary and district councils. We need to make sure that we are getting our message across as clearly and powerfully as possible in the interest of our members and the public services that they provide.

Conference believes that it is more important than ever before for activists at branch, regional and national levels to feel confident about taking their campaigns to politicians and winning their support. Public support for our members is high and we must be in a position to build on this in our work with politicians. Conference recognises that there are particular and different challenges for political lobbying and campaigning in the devolved nations.

Conference further notes that activists need to be confident in making sure that campaign messaging is effective, and that the most appropriate campaign platforms are employed. This includes understanding how to use social media campaigns, email campaigns, politicians' surgery meetings and more to good effect.

Conference calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Work with Learning and Organising Services (LAOS) to review UNISON's campaigning courses for UNISON activists to ensure that they cover political lobbying skills, as well as making clear the different political structures in the devolved nations;
- 2) Work with UNISON's Labour Link and policy teams to identify and share the most effective ways of lobbying politicians, recognising the different approaches required across the political spectrum;
- 3) Produce a leaflet and digital resources for branches setting out the key points for effective lobbying.

44. Protecting our social workers

Conference notes that with over 40,000 members; UNISON is the largest trade union for social workers.

It is also one of the fastest changing professions, changes in legislation, IT systems, local criteria and initiatives, are amongst the few ways which influence how social workers work.

Keeping pace with developments and change, rising demands and pressures, not experienced by many other professions has consequences.

Fuelled by high caseloads and staff shortages, the result has been a 'burnt out' of our social worker workforce,

UNISON's survey from 2022, which was heard at this conference last year highlighted the issues:

- 1) 93% reported staff shortages;
- 2) 90% reported unmanageable workloads;
- 3) 78% had experienced increasing stress levels;
- 4) 77% worried about their own mental health;
- 5) 70% reported that morale had decreased in their team;
- 6) 49% reported less likely to stay in their profession;

WWCSC and Social Work England report:

- a) That over a quarter of social workers faced racism in their workplace;
- b) 10% of respondents considering leaving their organisation because of racism;
- c) 8% considering leaving social work entirely

These statistics make horrifying reading, but can you imagine working in these conditions?

The problems social workers face are well known, documented by many Serious Case Reviews and other reports.

Last year UNISON General Secretary Christina McAnea said: "Unacceptable levels of pressure on social work teams will end up costing lives. The safety of vulnerable children, adults and their families must be paramount and that can only be achieved with a strong and valued workforce".

2023 saw the government pledge to tackle 'excessive' workload pressures. It said the Department for Education would set up a national workload action group to identify solutions to 'unnecessary' pressures on practitioners. These proposals were set out in 'Stable Homes, Built on Love'. The DfE's list of ambitions were acknowledged to be difficult to achieve by retention problems, a 19% of children's social worker posts lay vacant and Ofsted has warned that increasing staff shortages were making an already challenging job 'unsustainable' for some.

Conference recognises UNISON social worker manifesto for social workers, but it is pitched at central government. We need campaigns and organising at a local level.

UNISON must lead that process and campaign in the following areas:

- i) Pay and remuneration;
- ii) Reduce caseloads to manageable levels;
- iii) Increased support for newly qualified Social Workers, up to year 5;
- iv) Promote best practice for case recording and address how this burden can be decreased;
- v) Recruitment of social workers into our union;
- vi) Address racism and discrimination in the service;
- vii) Develop an anti-racism campaign that sees racism taken seriously in the service.

We call on the Local Government Service Group to work with the NEC to:

- A) Set up a working group;
- B) Develop a new high profile organising campaign that resonates with social workers that can be rolled out in regions and branches to tackle the issues above on a local level;
- C) Support regions in establishing social worker committees and networks;
- D) Develop an anti-racism campaign like the 'Race for Equality' campaign in the NHS for social workers.

44.1

After 'these statistics make horrifying reading, but can you imagine working in these conditions?', add a new paragraph:

"UNISON's survey revealed a disturbing level of abuse and harassment towards younger and less experienced social workers. Social media is leading to more identification of social workers and abuse of them, with employers not always responding to this appropriately. UNISON's violence at work charter is directly relevant to social workers."

In the paragraph beginning 'UNISON must lead that process and campaign in the following areas:', insert new points viii, ix and x:

- viii) Seek employer commitment to end violence at work for social workers and sign up of UNISON's violence at work charter;

- ix) Encourage social workers into steward/Health and Safety roles as a key component in any recruitment and organising campaign. Accompanied by demands on employers to support social work stewards through paid release from duties and most importantly a commensurate caseload reduction;
- x) Provide an annual peer Continuing Professional Development (CPD) event for stewards/lay officers on full time release who are also registered social workers to assist them to meet CPD professional registration renewal requirement.