

SAVE OUR

**UNISON
CAMPAIGNING
AGAINST
LOCAL CUTS**

SERVICES



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Introduction

Years of cuts have completely changed the face of local services. The 'austerity' policy, implemented by central government from 2010, drastically reduced funding levels that local councils received. On top of this, rising inflation and the cost of living crisis have pushed many local councils to the brink.

Central government spending cuts have forced councils to delete thousands of jobs and close or make it harder to access services. Many have chosen to privatise services and reduce costs by cutting workers' pay and conditions. We are faced with a significant threat of job and service losses over and above what has been experienced over the last decade.

More and more councils are facing effective bankruptcy. This guide will help you and your branch to plan your campaign if your council is in crisis.

Determined campaigning can help to prevent this or at least reduce the impact and severity of cuts. In the preceding years tireless campaigning by UNISON members and activists, working with their local communities has helped to save some services from closure or privatisation. UNISON has a long history of campaigning against unfair policies that hurt local workers and communities, from fighting for the National Minimum Wage to resisting cuts. Given the scale of the financial challenge faced by local councils we must redouble our campaigning efforts both nationally and locally.

Since 2013, UNISON's Save Our Local Services (SOS) campaign has put a spotlight on the scale of cuts to council services and their impact. This SOS campaign toolkit gives you, our activists and members across the UK, the tools you need to organise a campaign against council cuts. As the largest public services trade union, we are one of the last lines of defence to protect local services and speak out against the unnecessary cuts being imposed by the Westminster government. It is essential that we campaign together to Save Our Local Services!

UNISON is the UK's largest trade union, serving more than 1.3 million members. We represent full-time and part-time employees who provide public services within both public and private sectors.

About local government cuts

Between 2010 and 2020 Tory-led governments cut £18.5bn from English councils, 40% of their funding. This led to job cuts, charges, closures and mergers or privatised services across the UK. Devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have also had their funding from Westminster slashed. By 2022, real term funding was still 31% of 2010 levels, but demand for services has skyrocketed. Councils are being asked to deliver much more with much less.

The cost-of-living crisis has served to compound these problems. Councils in Great Britain face a funding gap of £3.57bn for the financial year 2024/25. In Scotland the funding gap is just over £660million rising to £1.1 bn in the following year due to a lack of funding from Westminster and the choices made by the Scottish Government, whilst councils in Wales also continue to face a challenging situation due to the lack of resources from Westminster. Throughout the pandemic councils provided extra services such as food parcels for the vulnerable, housing all homeless people and delivering PPE for social care providers. At the same time, they saw various income streams decline as a consequence of government decisions (such as a business rates holiday in England) and less demand for things like leisure services and parking. Now demand for adult and children's social care has risen massively but the funding has just not kept up. The financial pressures facing councils also include inflation, energy price rises, increased demands for social care, housing, special educational needs and disabilities and school transport.

Councils are being told to raise their council taxes but many local residents simply can't afford to pay any more especially with the cost of living crisis.

Cuts have made everyday life more difficult for groups who are more likely to rely on council services regularly like women, older

and disabled people. For them, cuts to just one service, like a local bus route, can mean that they miss out on using other services, become more isolated and then need more intensive support.

What does the future hold for local government?

The future for councils across the UK is very uncertain. In December 2023, the Local Government Association (LGA) published a report that showed that nearly one in five councils are worried that they will need to issue Section 114 notice. This happens when a council cannot balance the books – i.e. when expenditure will exceed income. In such situations only statutory services will be provided meaning that all other council services are at risk.

We know that many councils are already running a near-skeleton service for their communities and can only support the most serious, high-risk cases. In the past couple of years six councils have already had to issue Section 114 notices. Councils with different political control and of different type have warned the government that the current funding system is inadequate and broken and does not enable them to adequately deliver vital community services.*1

Many local services are at risk of further cuts to fill the gaps. But community-focused

*1 - Local government funding in England | Institute for Government <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainer/local-government-funding-england#:~:text=These%20grants%20were%20cut%20by,the%20pressures%20of%20the%20pandemic.>

services that councils do not have to provide by law are even more at risk of closure. This situation is forcing councils to make impossible choices – between libraries and leisure centres, social care and street lights, parks and potholes.

What can we do to save local services?

UNISON wants proper funding for councils from central government so that vital free or low-cost services for the whole community are secure for the future. These services depend on a committed workforce, who deserve decent pay and working conditions, not pay freezes and job cuts.

As UNISON activists in local government, it is vital that we work to recruit new members, organise workers and campaign against cuts to local services. It is up to us to put pressure on the Governments throughout the UK to deliver more funding and to help councils find an alternative to cutting even more essential services. We also need to work together, where possible, to help councils speak out about what services their communities need and how central government cuts are preventing them from being provided.

How is my council affected?

You can find out about the extent of the funding shortfall facing your council by looking at our interactive map:
<https://councilcuts.unison.org.uk/>

National cuts campaign

Large parts of this guide will help you to run local campaigns against cuts in your area, but we also want to encourage you to engage with our UK-wide campaign work. Delivering more funding for local councils from the national Governments across the UK will help to reduce the need for councils to make any cuts in their area.

Make contact with your national politicians

We want our members to put pressure on governments across the UK to deliver more desperately needed funding for councils.

Our interactive map is also a campaign action tool enabling UNISON members, and members of the public to contact their Member of Parliament and/or their Member of Scottish Parliament/Member of the Senedd where applicable. Please encourage members in your area to make contact with their national politicians to tell them about how important the local services they deliver are and why they need more funding.

We are also helping to facilitate virtual meetings between branches and their members with national politicians so they can put across the case for more funding in more detail. If you are interested in this sort of meeting then please email

SOS@unison.co.uk

Building the case against cuts - understanding local government

In any campaign, understanding the issues and having clear, simple arguments for your position is essential. A basic understanding of local government decision making and funding will give you a good starting point for your campaign.

Local government services: what you need to know

This section provides a brief overview of the structure of local government.

Councils must provide some services - these are known as statutory services, other services are discretionary services. Some services that councils must provide include waste collection, libraries and social care, but they have a certain amount of freedom over how they are actually delivered. Discretionary services, include leisure centres, arts and culture and parking.

In England, local government varies by area. It can be made up of different types of councils that have responsibility for different services. Some areas have two tiers of council - county and district/borough - where the county council will provide most services, including adult social care and children's services. District or borough councils cover services such as waste, housing and planning. Many cities have just one level of government - a unitary or metropolitan council - which provides all the services in their area. Some parts of England also have town and parish councils. These councils have very small budgets and sometimes manage town or village centres, litter, cemeteries, parks, allotments and so on.

Every London borough has a unitary council, but there are some services, such as transport, police, fire and rescue and strategic planning, that the Greater London Authority (GLA), an overarching body, provides.

Combined authorities

Some councils have joined up with neighbouring areas to create a 'combined authority'. Combined authorities work alongside local councils, but they can have powers over services agreed by the member authorities on areas such as transport, infrastructure, or health and social care. This only applies in England and Wales - so far there are only English combined authorities.. You can find out more about combined authorities in this parliamentary briefing: <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06649/SN06649.pdf> or at: **Combined authorities - Local Government Association**

Fire and rescue services are governed by fire and rescue authorities. Police authorities supervise police forces in Scotland and Northern Ireland. In England and Wales, local police forces are managed by a directly-elected Police and Crime Commissioners.

All councils in Scotland and Wales are unitary councils. Councils in Northern Ireland do not have the same responsibilities as the rest of the UK. Separate organisations control health services, social care, education and libraries. If you are campaigning in Northern Ireland, make sure you contact your branch to determine which body provides the service you are campaigning for.

How do councils make decisions?

Councils can be structured in a number of different ways:

- **Leader and Cabinet**
A council leader, elected by councillors, selects a group of councillors to form a cabinet. Each cabinet member has responsibility for a particular sector.
- **Council and committees**
A council leader is supported by committees, who are responsible for different sectors instead of individual councillors.
- **Directly elected mayor**
A mayor, directly elected by the public, chooses a cabinet of councillors. Each cabinet member is responsible for a particular sector.

Councillors have a responsibility to work with local organisations to engage with residents and service users and represent their ward at the council. How decisions are made will depend on the structure of your council – some will be made by a cabinet member or a committee, the cabinet as a whole, or for larger decisions the full council may have to vote. Have a look at your council's constitution or scheme of administration – this should be available on the council website. It will explain how the council is organised and who makes decisions about particular service areas.

Local government finance: the basics

Local government finance is complex. Here is some basic information to get you started on thinking about the financial situation that councils face.

Council spending is either 'revenue' spending on day-to-day costs, such as staffing, or 'capital' spending on assets that have a long life, such as a new building.

Revenue Spending

Councils get most of their income for revenue spending from three main sources:

Council tax

In England, Wales and Scotland residents pay council tax (which replaced rates, and then the poll tax), whereas in Northern Ireland residents pay 'domestic rates.

Business rates

A tax on commercial properties.

Central government funding

In England and Wales the main government grant is called Revenue Support Grant. In Scotland, it is known as General Resource Grant and General Grant in Northern Ireland.

There may also be specific grants that can only be spent on specific services, for example the Public Health Grant (in England) or Dedicated Schools Grant (in England).

Other income comes from various sources including interest on money invested, trading and fees and charges.

In England, the government has drastically cut revenue support grant. It was just over £15bn in 2013/14 but by 2019/20 it fell to just £2.3bn and is £4bn for 2024/25. *2

Funding has also been cut in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Capital spending

Councils finance their capital spending by:

- Government grants
- Selling assets
- Borrowing
- Revenue contributions

You can spend revenue income on capital projects but you can't spend capital on revenue projects – so councils can't borrow money to finance day-to-day spending.

*2 - [Government confirms over £64 billion funding package for councils](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-confirms-over-64-billion-funding-package-for-councils) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Councils that still own their own housing stock must keep a separate ring-fenced account, known as the housing revenue account (HRA) and the income from council rents is paid into that account.

Council tax

Councils collect council tax on domestic properties and use this money to help pay for local services.

Council tax was frozen in Scotland from 2007 until 2017 after which it increased by 3% or more every year except 2021/22 when it was frozen again. In late 2023 the Scottish Government made a pledge to freeze council tax for 2024/25.

In Wales, Council Tax has been rising by around 4% each year but most of this has been included in the funding settlement assumptions made by the Welsh government. Some councils have seen far higher council tax rises.

In England, councils have to hold a referendum if they want to increase council tax by more than the limit set by government ministers. In 2023/24, councils providing adult social care could increase council tax by a higher amount and could hold referendums to seek agreement for higher council tax rates.

District councils can increase council tax by up to 3%, and councils with responsibility for social care (counties, unitaries, metropolitan boroughs and London borough councils) can raise council tax by up to 5% (2% must be spent on social care) without holding a referendum. A very small number of councils that are experiencing major financial challenges (such as Slough and Woking) have been given dispensation by the Government to increase their council tax bills over the limit.

Business rates

Business rates (sometimes called non-domestic rates) are a tax on commercial properties.

In England, councils collect business rates.

Some councils are business rates rich, while others are business rates poor – so councils pay a ‘tariff’ or get a ‘top up’ from central government that partly evens things out.

Until 2013/14, councils paid all the income from business rates into a central pool and central government paid it all out to local councils through something called ‘formula grant’ – revenue support grant plus business rates. But as government funding was cut the government could see that the money raised from business rates would be more than it was paying out to local councils.

Since 2013/14, councils forecast how much they will collect each year and pay 50% of the forecast to central government. The other 50% is kept locally and shared between the different tiers. So, for example, in the shire areas 40% goes to the county council and 10% goes to the district. Local councils keep 50% of any rates they collect above the forecast.

In Northern Ireland, business rates have two components: a district element that goes to the local council and a regional element that goes to the Northern Ireland Executive.

In Wales and Scotland, councils pay the rates they collect into a central pool which is distributed back to councils as part of the local government settlement.

Reserves

Councils face turbulent times and need reserves to deal with emergencies that they cannot fund with their usual income, such as a sudden growth in the number of looked after children or natural disasters such as floods.

All Councils will have ‘unallocated reserves’ and ‘earmarked reserves’ that are sums set aside for specific purposes such as equal pay back pay liabilities. Each year, as part of the budget setting process, the Chief Finance Officer must issue a statement on the ‘adequacy’ of the reserves.

Councils face the ‘double whammy’ of cuts to their funding from central government and increasing budgetary pressures.

Councils may use their reserves to support services when they are being restructured but they can only be used once.

Your council's budget

By law, councils must set a balanced budget. Some councils must do so before 1 March and the rest must do so by 11 March each year.

Councils should also publish a medium term financial plan, which usually outlines the budget cuts they expect to make over the next three, five or even ten years.

These documents can be very complicated, with detailed financial language and jargon. But have a look at the summaries which can give you an idea of the cuts and budgetary pressures faced by your council and their plans for the future. This information may be useful when lobbying MPs against cuts to local government funding.

Local councils are not the enemy. National politicians, primarily those in Westminster, have chosen to stop properly funding public services over the last decade. They have then failed to provide councils with the additional support they required to help them deal with the pandemic. These decisions are forcing councils into making terrible cuts. It is important to show the council that you understand the situation it is in and that you want to work together to find a way to save services and jobs!

Show the impact of cuts on your community – encourage campaign supporters to tell their stories about the impact of cuts. Helping councillors to understand how many people would be severely disadvantaged by proposed cuts could influence their final decisions.

What is a section 114 notice?

There have been many recent news reports of councils being at risk of 'going bankrupt'. A council cannot actually go bankrupt, but instead they can issue a section 114 notice when they expect to spend more than their income for the financial year, which is unlawful.

Once a section 114 notice is issued, it means that the council cannot spend any more money without permission from the finance officer. Council leaders, along with central government oversight or intervention, must take action to balance the budget.

This could mean even more severe spending cuts, council tax rises or appointed commissioners from the government taking over some, or all council decision-making.

Issuing a section 114 notice is a last-resort decision - most councils will make a series of announcements about their struggles to balance their budgets and appeal to the government for further support before issuing a notice.

It is extremely important that you start your campaign as early as possible in the budget-setting process. Make your voice heard and try to influence decision-makers as soon as you can - do not wait until your council actually issues a section 114 notice!

You can find out more about section 114 in this video by the Local Government Information Unit <https://lgiu.org/bite-size-learning-section-114s-for-unison/> (UNISON members who haven't registered on the LGIU website before will be prompted to sign up for free before accessing the video.)

Recruiting and organising members

Although this toolkit concentrates on campaigning against cuts, it is important to remember that recruiting new members and organising members to stand up for their rights at work and get more involved in the union is a top priority. The more we build the union through our campaigning, the stronger those campaigns will be.

Campaigning against cuts is a great way to recruit and organise members. You can raise awareness about what UNISON does and it gives you a chance to talk to colleagues and others about the benefits of joining.

Whilst you are planning and carrying out your campaign, think about the points below to make sure that you are also using every opportunity to get members organised, spot potential new activists and recruit new people to the union:

Talk to people about UNISON! Find out what people are worried about at work and how the cuts are affecting their lives. Talk with them about how being a member of UNISON might help to solve these issues and how UNISON can help them take action to challenge cuts. Ask them to take a small action, e.g. sign a petition or come along to the next campaign meeting. Make sure you keep note of who you speak to and when, so that you can follow up with them later.

Make sure you involve a broad range of people. A diverse membership equals a stronger union and shows employers that you speak for everyone. Make sure you talk to underrepresented groups of members, including low-paid, disabled, Black, LGBT+ and young workers.

Involve members in the campaign. Get their views and ideas before deciding on the campaign focus. Encourage members to take on small campaign tasks. Not only will this mean less work for you, members will feel like part of the campaign and may be encouraged to get involved in union activism more regularly.

Keep in regular contact with your branch.

Your branch is there to support you with all aspects of being a UNISON activist and they will have years of campaigning experience. They will be able to give you advice, support your work to recruit and organise members and may be able to help with resources.

Look out for workplace 'leaders'! Have you come across any members who seem to know most of their colleagues, are good at talking about and solving issues at work or want to get more involved in the union? These members would make great workplace reps! Start to build a relationship with them and talk about opportunities to get more involved in UNISON.

Involve your UNISON region. They will be able to provide some advice and support with planning and implementing your campaign. They can also help your branch with asking questions of your council and challenging cuts to services and jobs.

Make it easy to join up. Always include recruitment material or information about joining UNISON in campaign communications to the public and colleagues at work.

"We did things a little differently... arranging a meeting with the council leader and 400 members where they gave testimony about the effect of the changes being proposed. We recruited 600 members" – Andy, East Midlands

Local campaign planning

A good campaign plan is the most important part of a successful campaign. It will help you to keep to schedule, make sure you target the right people and spot any potential problems before you start.

First steps

Working with the members affected, identify the problem that needs to be addressed.

Whilst UNISON's national priority is to put pressure on the different governments throughout the UK to provide more funding for council services, there will undoubtedly be a need to run campaigns in your local area to protect services. Which services are under threat in your area? What is being cut – funding, jobs, opening hours – or is the whole service at risk of closure?

Contact your local branch. Let your branch know that you are planning a campaign – they will be able to give you ideas and advice on other people to involve in your campaign, campaign activities, using the media and so on.

Think about who else is affected. Which service users and community groups have an interest in tackling this issue? Are there less obvious allies you can draw in? Talk to them to get their views and make them part of your planning. Local anti-cuts campaigns are more successful when they can show a high number of residents are against proposals, so the more groups that can support each other, the better! Find out more about organising with other groups in your community in the UNISON guide, 'Working with local communities to fight cuts and privatisation': <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2013/06/On-line-Catalogue199103.pdf>

Identify those with power and influence who you want to persuade. It is important that you aim your campaign activities at the right people to the change you want. Identify who will have the most influence over the decision on cuts. Do some research on their responsibilities, political leanings, interests

and groups that might influence them – this should help you to estimate how supportive they could be of your campaign. Potential targets could include:

- Colleagues at work
- Council leader and cabinet members
- Councillors
- Professionals that could be affected by cuts to your service, e.g. teachers, health professionals, social workers, emergency services etc.
- Your local Member of Parliament (MP), Member of Scottish Parliament (MSP), Assembly Member (AM) or Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA)
- Local or national media
- Service users
- General public

Do your research! Find out when decisions about cuts to services will be made, who will make them and how. Are there possible alternatives to these cuts that you can include in your arguments? What is the best way to influence the decision making process and at which stage - it's normally best to get in there early!

Decide on your aim. A campaign aim outlines what you hope to achieve. It can be wide-ranging, like "stop funding cuts to local services", or it can be more specific, like "stop the council from approving a proposal to cut our library's opening hours". Make sure your aim is realistic, achievable and keep it as simple as possible!

Find fellow campaigners. This can be a good way to recruit new members to UNISON, get to know existing members and see who is interested in campaigning against cuts from an early stage.

Agree on objectives. Think about the changes that need to take place to reach your goal. How can your campaign team make them happen? Your objectives need to be specific, realistic and have a timetable so that you can check your campaign's progress.

Have an open campaign-planning meeting to recruit volunteers to your team. This way you can raise awareness of the cuts proposed by the council and recruit new members at the same time.

Plan your activities. Once you have agreed your campaign aim, objectives and your targets, think about what activities could help decision makers to change their mind on cuts and support your campaign. How and when will you communicate with them – do you need to use local media?

Do you have enough time and resources to achieve your objectives? It is essential that you have as much time as possible to build up your arguments and influence your targets. Be aware that sometimes campaigns can take months, even years, before they are successful.

Be clear about your campaign resources. Think about how much time you have before the final decision is made on your service and how you will fund your campaign activities. If you are worried that you do not have enough resources, get in touch with your local branch and regional office and see if they will be able to support you.

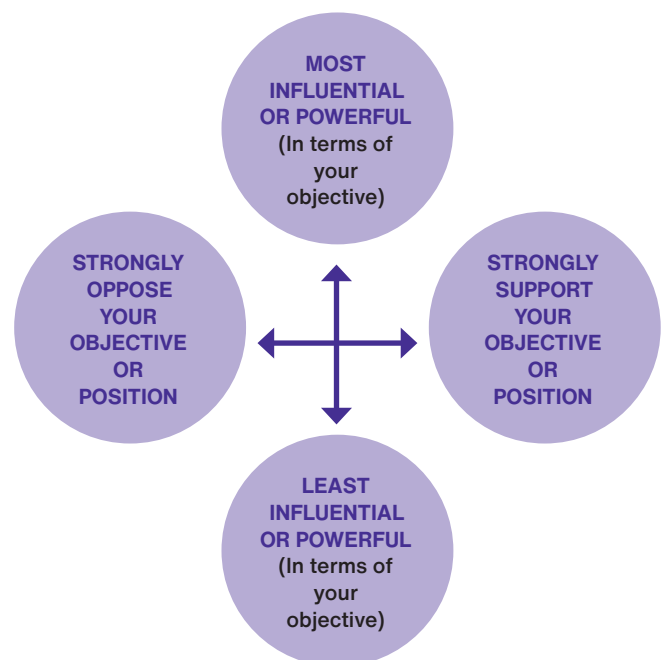
Think about how you will evaluate your campaign. How will you know that it has been a success? How will you measure the impact of your campaign activities?

Check back on your plan during your campaign to check on your progress and make adjustments as circumstances change.

A great place to get ideas for your campaign is UNISON's Organising Space, an online community for activists to share knowledge and build relationships. The space has lots

of information on recruiting, organising members and campaigning, as well as forums where you can ask other activists for ideas or advice. Find out more at <https://www.unison.org.uk/get-involved/in-your-workplace/key-documents-tools-activists/organising-space/>

With your campaign team, make a list of all the people you want to target. Decide on how much influence they have and how positive/negative they are likely to be towards your campaign, then place them in the chart below. This should help you choose who to spend the most effort on (start with those who are the most powerful and likely to support you!)



Different ways to campaign

There are many activities you can ask other activists, members and the wider community to take part in as part of your campaign. It is important to involve people in the campaign by giving them an activity or action to take part in. This makes people feel part of the campaign and can help to spread the word. We have listed some ideas for campaign activities below.

Which ones will be useful in your campaign

Local campaigning

- Petitions
- Leaflets, posters
- Public meetings
- Demonstrations, rallies
- Stalls at local events
- Fundraising events
- Public stunts
- Exhibitions
- Social media
- Surveys
- Online petitions
- Short videos of service users or workers facing cuts

How can you make your local campaigning activities inclusive, positive and eye-catching in a way that will appeal to the public? Remember, social media can help to spread the word quickly and handing out printed leaflets or paper petitions can help to identify and recruit new members and activists for your branch and campaign.

If you think you might need extra resources for larger activities, ask your branch about applying to UNISON's Campaign Fund. It supports political campaigning at all levels of the union and any branch with members who pay into the fund can apply.

"Try and campaign in a variety of ways - paper letters, online petitions, speaking to people, press releases"
- Mark, Cymru/Wales

Showing the impact of cuts

There are national and local resources that you can use to find statistics or research on the rate and impact of cuts to local services:

UNISON's council cuts website: UNISON's SOS campaign has information about the local government funding crisis at unison.org.uk/sos

Your council: Some councils have a page on their website that summarises statistical information about local residents.

Other campaigns/organisations: local or national campaigns and other groups, such as charities that work with the type of service you are campaigning for or its service users, may have relevant research and statistics that you can use.

Freedom of Information: By law, you have the right to ask your council for information. You can use it to find out how much money they have cut from a service and why they have made certain decisions. Some information is exempt from this law, e.g. if it will affect a current legal case. The council can also refuse your request if it will take too much staff time or resources to answer, the request is vexatious or repeats a previous request. For more details on how to make Freedom of Information (FOI) requests read this UNISON guide: <https://www.unison.org.uk/guide-to-using-the-freedom-of-information-act/>

Case studies: Talking to people to collect case studies is another good opportunity to recruit people to UNISON. You can make short videos on your mobile phones too, which would work really well on social media.

"Get the message out to the service users so that [they] can contact councillors about the loss of service"
- Colin, East Midlands

Develop your campaign messages

It is vital to have a few clear 'messages' or arguments that you can use to explain your local campaign and drum up support. These will form the basis of your media work, political lobbying and general campaigning, so it is really important that your messages are simple, clear and persuasive. When developing your campaign messages, consider:

Are they easy to understand? Try explaining each message to a friend or relative in one sentence.

- Do they reflect the main issues you identified in your initial planning?
- Do they include a possible solution to the cuts you are campaigning against?
- Can you include a slogan from an existing UNISON campaign (eg Save Our Local Services)?
- Do they include an action or 'ask' that people can take to get involved in the campaign?

Once you have your messages agreed, make sure that everyone in your campaign team uses them whenever they talk about the cuts or the campaign, especially in the media.

Local Service Champions

Celebrating the vital work that UNISON's local government members do is an important part of our national campaign against further local cuts.

Every year, UNISON invites you to nominate those who go above and beyond in their work for the council and the local community - you can find out more on our website <https://www.unison.org.uk/our-campaigns/local-service-champions/> We make a film profiling the work done by three winners - this helps politicians, councillors and council leaders, as well as the wider public, understand how important the work of local government is.

Since 2022, UNISON has also established our Local Service Champions day. This day in the autumn is a chance for your branch to identify and celebrate the vital work carried out by members where you work. You can invite and involve MPs, councillors and council leaders, mayors, the local press and others to get involved in shadowing the work that our members do. You can also involve them in recognising our members' work in through local awards and/or celebrations.

In 2023 UNISON brought together our Champions to meet a number of MPs so that they could hear first hand what the impact would be if their services were cut.

Equalities

It is important to consider the impact of cuts in relation to equalities and the protected characteristics of service users and members of staff. Make sure you consider any equalities angles in your campaign.

Services heavily used by those with protected characteristics are often the most likely to be vulnerable to cuts. In England, Scotland and Wales there are nine 'protected characteristics' that the law protects:

- Gender
- Disability
- Race
- Gender reassignment
- Religion and belief
- Age
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Sexual orientation

In UNISON, we include low-paid workers as a group that are particularly disadvantaged and should be protected. Some groups, particularly women, disabled and Black workers are more likely to be low-paid. Many local government workers are low paid. Think about how to show the impact of service cuts on the low-paid in your community. Remember that low-paid workers are more likely to use local services and spend money locally, so would be disproportionately affected by local cuts.

Councils have a legal responsibility under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) to consider how to:

- Eliminate discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations between groups

In England, councils must consider the impact of their policy decisions on protected characteristics. When implementing a

reduction in a service, it is good practice for councils to carry out an equality impact assessment to demonstrate that they have met the PSED's requirements. Ask your council how they have considered the equality impact of planned **cuts** and for a copy of their impact assessment if they have one.

Councils in Scotland and Wales must carry out a full assessment of how policy decisions will affect those with protected characteristics and publish their findings.

If you believe that your council has not correctly identified the equality impact of cuts or changes and your analysis shows that certain groups would be unfairly affected by cuts, use this to challenge councillors about their decisions. If you are campaigning in Scotland or Wales, find out how you can give evidence or take part in equality impact assessments.

Team up with local community or voluntary organisations who work with these communities. They will have powerful examples of how important these services are for particular service users, which your campaign can use to highlight the potential impact of cuts.

Talk to your branch's equalities or Self-Organised Group officers about your campaign – they may be able to help you to organise workers with these protected characteristics' and advise you on supporting workers who have been unfairly affected by cuts.

Find out more about UNISON's work to fight for fairness and equality at: <https://www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/fairness-equality/>

Lobbying politicians

In order to deliver more funding for local councils, we need to put enough pressure on the Governments across the UK through our national politicians. The Westminster Government is our primary target for national campaign work as they not only can provide funding for councils in England but can also dictate how much funding the Governments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland receive. Members in these countries will also want to engage with their local members of their national governments in order to ensure that they allocate enough funding to local councils.

"It was pre-election time so the borough council was sensitive to bad publicity...we received significant councillor support"
Colin, - East Midlands

Lobbying national politicians

Your local member of parliament (MP), and if you are in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, your MSP, AM or MLA, can be very helpful in campaigns against cuts. We want them to support our national campaign goal of closing the funding gaps that councils are facing.

They can support your campaign locally as well as highlighting the impact of cuts in your area to central government or at their nation's parliament or assembly.

In some constituencies, the total number of UNISON members can be more than an MP's election majority. This gives UNISON real campaigning power which you should exploit! Even MPs of governing parties can be willing to join campaigns against unpopular cuts if they feel that their position is threatened. UNISON can help you identify whether your constituency is one of these.

You can find out more about your local MP, MSP or MLA by visiting www.theyworkforyou.com. In Wales, you can find your AM by visiting the Welsh Assembly website: <http://www.assembly.wales/en/memhome/Pages/memhome.aspx>

If your branch doesn't have links with them already, the best way to start a relationship with your MP is to write to them. Our campaign action tool allows members to write directly to their MP and also their MSP, Member of the Senedd or MLA if applicable, to call for more council funding: <https://action.unison.org.uk/page/110060/action/1>

Tips on writing to your MP

1. Confirm that you live in their constituency by providing your address – national politicians only represent their own constituents.
2. Include information on your campaign, why you are fighting against cuts in your area and why more national funding is required to fund local councils.
3. Explain clearly what you want your national politician(s) to do – this could include:
 - Asking the Chancellor and/or Finance Minister for more funding for local councils
 - Meet you and service users to discuss your campaign
 - Attend or speak at an upcoming event
 - Write to your local authority in support of your campaign
 - Ask the relevant government Minister for further information on funding cuts

- Raise questions on the cuts at parliament
- Support your campaign in the local media and online

4. Ask for a reply

Your national politician may agree to meet with you in person or online. If you need help or advice arranging such a meeting then email sos@unison.co.uk for assistance and ask your regional organisers for help. Remember, they'll be really interested to hear from front-line workers about their experiences and concerns. After the meeting, follow up with a letter or email to thank them, outline what you think the outcomes of the meeting were and what they agreed to do.

Lobbying local politicians

It will be vital to get your message across to influential decision-makers at your local council. Your branch may already have established relationships with local councillors or committees who could support your campaign.

Talk to your branch about the political makeup of your council and how you might have to tailor your campaigning tactics to deal with this – is there one party that runs the council or is it a coalition of two or more parties? Could the ruling party or parties be sympathetic to the campaign, or would you be better off targeting the opposition?

Meeting with councillors would be a good place to start. It is important for your branch to be able to talk with the key decision makers who have overall democratic responsibility for council services.

Councillors are good at raising issues and asking questions of key decision-makers, particularly if they are in opposition. If you organise a meeting with local councillors, decide what you are going to ask them to do for the campaign before you meet. This could include:

- Asking the relevant cabinet member or committee specific questions about proposed cuts to your service
- Raising questions at council meetings
- Attending one of your campaign events
- Supporting your campaign in local media

Make sure you follow up regularly with councillors after the meeting to keep them updated on the campaign and remind them of the actions they agreed to take.

Make sure you also point out to any councillors you engage with that UNISON is working hard to secure additional funding for council services which would hopefully relieve the pressure that they are under and that we share the same objectives.

A mass lobby

This is when you arrange for many campaign supporters to hold meetings with their councillors at the same time, so that you can arrive at the council as a big group. This can be a great way to promote your campaign in local media, demonstrate how many residents are against the cuts and how a particular service benefits the whole community.

Asking questions in public meetings

Look at your council's website to see which public meetings might be relevant to you – where are the key decisions being made about finance and changes/cuts to services? You should also find out how to ask questions at public meetings as you may have to submit them to the council beforehand.

Asking campaign supporters to respond to public consultations

If your council is running a consultation on proposed cuts, encourage supporters to respond. Ask supporters to include your campaign messages in their response and personal stories of why the service is important to them.

Submitting a petition

Petitions can be a useful way to show your council how many people in your local community want the service to stay open. They can also be a great way to raise awareness of your campaign and build up local support. Think about how you will submit the petition – can you submit it as part of a protest, event or photo opportunity that you can invite local media to?

“Online petitions are brilliant and really easy to set up - it gets the message right to those who need to hear what’s happening”

– Mark, Cymru/Wales

Lobbying your scrutiny committee (England and Wales only)

A scrutiny committee reviews council decisions. They can recommend that a decision is changed or reconsidered but they can’t force the council to do this. You can go to meetings and ask questions, submit a request for scrutiny of your service and offer to give evidence, or you can ask councillors to lobby the committee for you.

Communicating your campaign

How you communicate with others about your campaign will be an important factor in your success.

Using social media

Social media can be a cheap and fast way to spread the word about your campaign.

Many organisations use Facebook to build an online community. Keeping your Facebook pages up-to-date keeps followers informed about activities, helps to share information and answer comments.

X (formerly Twitter) is faster-paced, and a more concise social media platform. Posts are limited to 280 characters (about 40 words). It is used by many politicians, organisations and campaigners to share information and interact with the public and each other.

If you create a Facebook and/or Twitter profile for your campaign, remember to:

- Follow like-minded campaigns (including UNISON!), politicians, local media and any of your targets who have Facebook pages or Twitter profiles
- Post regular updates and any interesting information about your campaign or what is happening in your area
- Try to start conversations with your followers about cuts – make sure you respond to any comments or posts as soon as possible
- Repost other relevant posts – you can also add your own comment. This will notify the original sender that you have sent their message on to your followers. This can be a good way to draw attention to your profile
- Ask your followers to repost or share messages when you are asking for help or for people to take action e.g. signing a petition or attending a meeting

- You can include people in your X or Facebook posts by adding '@' followed by their profile name (e.g. @UNISONinLG). This is a good way to reply to people or ask them questions directly
- Add the hashtag symbol (#) to key words in your posts so that they appear in topic searches (eg #cuts, #SOSlocalservices) – this can be a useful way to pick up new followers

If you do not feel confident in using social media, you can try it out by creating a personal account first and experiment with posting, liking and sharing, before you create accounts for your campaign.

If you are using social media to campaign against cuts planned by your employer, be aware of whether there is a work policy about private use of social media and what it says. Steer clear of messages that could be offensive, particularly aimed at your employer – as a general rule, if you would not say it to their face, do not post it!

BUT, using social media to campaign is not always as easy as it sounds! Building up a community of followers and keeping social media accounts updated with interesting news about your campaign can become a big job. Remember that social media campaigns can be complementary to but can't replace face-to-face meetings and organising.

Before setting up your own blog or social media profile for the campaign, think about who you are trying to communicate with – are they likely to follow blogs or use platforms such as Facebook or X? If your branch and regional office already have a

website, blog or social media accounts then talk to them about using their profile online to promote your campaign.

The SOS campaign also has a Facebook page at [facebook.com/unisonLGcampaigns](https://www.facebook.com/unisonLGcampaigns) and Twitter account twitter.com/UNISONinLG – you can ask us to promote your campaign nationally if needed.

Media coverage

UNISON's media work is looked after by a national team and specialist regional staff. They enhance the union's reputation by working with journalists and broadcasters.

If you think you have a news story or campaign that would benefit from media coverage, start off by getting in touch with your UNISON regional media contact. Their details are on the regional pages of the UNISON website, where you can also find examples of local stories.

The regional media staff can work with you to give your story the best chance of coverage. If they think it has potential for wider coverage, they will contact the national team.

Before getting in touch with your regional media contact, here are some things to consider:

- What's the story?
- Who is doing what?
- Where are they doing it?
- When are they doing it?
- Why are they doing it?
- How are they doing it?

You need to be able to answer these questions to have the basis for a clear story.

What do the figures show?

If you have a story that is linked to data or figures, make sure you can robustly explain and defend what you think it shows and answer questions about the source.

What is the impact on people?

It is important to bring your story to life by providing case studies. Think about some people who might be willing to talk about the issue and could help bring it to life in the media by talking about their experiences. Remember, they must not be put in a position where they might get in trouble with their employer.

What is the impact on the union?

Consider how your story fits in with wider union objectives and reputation. Your regional media contact can discuss that with you.

Helpful links

UNISON regional pages

<https://www.unison.org.uk/regions/>

UNISON media centre

[UNISON+media+centre](#)

Closing your campaign

How you end your campaign is almost as important as how you start it. Make sure that you publicise your successes in local media.

Let us know, via your branch or regional office, about your campaign's impact - we would love to share your stories of successful campaigns nationally. This can help to inspire others to fight against cuts in their area - it's vital that we learn the lessons from your campaigns and share them across the union.

The end of your campaign is a good chance to thank everyone who got involved in making it a success. If you had any volunteers for your campaign who were not already UNISON members or activists, talk to them about becoming a member, workplace contact or steward.

Evaluating your campaign - thinking about what worked and what did not - is often missed in the very busy time at the end of a campaign, but it is so important to do.

Every time you evaluate a campaign it helps to make sure the next one is better because you can repeat things that worked well and avoid making the same mistakes.

How to evaluate your campaign

As always, your campaign plan will come in handy here. Think about what you aimed to achieve at the start of the campaign and then answer the following questions:

1. Did we achieve our goal?
2. What campaign activities had the biggest impact? Why?
3. What worked well when we recruited and/or organised members during the campaign?
4. What should we do again in our next campaign against cuts?
5. What should we do differently next time?

Keep your evaluation simple and make sure that you allocate time for your whole campaign team to discuss this together and share their thoughts on the campaign.

We hope that this toolkit has inspired you to join us in our campaign to stop the Westminster Government from underfunding local councils any further, and to protect local services and jobs.

*Remember to stay in touch with us at **sos@unison.co.uk***

Further Resources

UNISON Council Cuts website:

[***https://councilcuts.unison.org.uk/p/1***](https://councilcuts.unison.org.uk/p/1)

UNISON Save Our Services campaign:

[***https://unison.org.uk/our-campaigns/save-our-local-services/***](https://unison.org.uk/our-campaigns/save-our-local-services/)

Local Government Information Unit (LGIU)

Government finance - a through the year checklist: [***https://lgiu.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Local-government-finance-a-through-the-year-checklist.pdf***](https://lgiu.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Local-government-finance-a-through-the-year-checklist.pdf)

Local Government Information Unit

(LGIU): Council finance training resources:

[***https://lgiu.org/training-resources-local-government-finance-for-unison/***](https://lgiu.org/training-resources-local-government-finance-for-unison/)

(UNISON members who haven't registered on the LGIU website before will be prompted to sign up at: ***Sign up - LGiU*** and then they will be able to access the training video via the webpage above, or by typing 'UNISON' into the LGIU search function.)

