



SAVE OUR SERVICES

Campaign against local cuts

Revised December 2024

A quick start campaign guide

Having faced over a decade of reduced central government funding, growing demand for services and the cost of living crisis, some councils have been pushed to the brink of bankruptcy and many others have been forced to make devastating levels of cuts to services.

But determined campaigning by UNISON members and activists can help to save our services from closure and our councils from disaster.

If you want to set up a campaign against local cuts, but don't know where to start, this short guide is for you. If you already have an idea of what your campaign might look like but need more detailed advice, read our full *Campaigning against local cuts* toolkit:

unison.org.uk/SOS-toolkit

Campaigning: Before you start

Before you launch your campaign, it is important that you are clear about what you are asking for and who your campaign is aimed at. Here are some things to think about:

- **Who is on your campaign team?** A dedicated group that has the same aims as you, can contribute good campaign ideas and help you complete activities, is essential. Building up your team is a great way to recruit and organise members too!
- **Learn about local government cuts and finance.** A basic knowledge of how council finance works, when budgets are set and how decisions are made will guide your campaign and strengthen your arguments for more funding. See the *Building the case against cuts* section below and in the **full toolkit**.

In recent years, many council have issued or come close to issuing a section 114 notice; equivalent to declaring bankruptcy'.

A council issues a section 114 notice when they expect to spend more than their income for the financial year, which is unlawful. It means that the council cannot spend any more money without permission from the finance officer. Council leaders must take action to balance the budget. This may involve oversight or intervention from central government.

This could mean even more severe spending cuts, council tax rises or Westminster taking over some or all council decision-making.

Develop your campaign plan

Once you've assembled your campaign team, it's time to make a plan of what you will do to tackle local cuts:

- **Talk to your branch.** They can give you ideas and advice on campaigns that are already underway and who will be likely to support or oppose you
- **Talk to members and local people** about the things that are hurting them most. Build your campaign around them. Personal stories from staff and service users are a very powerful way to help illustrate and make your case
- **Decide on your aim.** Make sure it is realistic, achievable and simple!
- **Identify who has the power to change things.** Who has the most influence or power locally and nationally over decisions on cuts? Who will also be more likely to support your position - these will be the primary targets of your campaign activities
- **Set campaign objectives.** What needs to change in order to achieve your aim? How can your campaign team make these changes happen?
- **Find your audiences.** You can aim activities at audiences that will help to influence or put pressure on your campaign targets, such as work colleagues, local or national media, service users or the general public
- **Plan your activities.** What activities might change your targets' minds on cuts and convince them to support your campaign? See the *Different ways to campaign* page of the full **toolkit** for ideas
- **Set your timeline.** Is this an ongoing campaign or do you have a deadline? Campaigns can take months or even years before they are successful. Do you have enough time to influence

your targets before the final decision is made?

- **Assess your resources.** How much time, money, and how many people can you dedicate to the campaign?

Build your case against cuts

Once you have a campaign plan you can develop your arguments against cuts and for more funding for local services:

- **Use national and local resources to show the impact of cuts in your area.** Here are some suggestions about where to find out more information on the impact of cuts:
 - **UNISON's council cuts interactive map**
unison.org.uk/councilcuts
 - **Your council's website** may have information on local residents such as equalities data or satisfaction surveys
 - **Other campaign groups or organisations** interested in services affected by planned cuts may have helpful research or statistics
 - **Freedom of Information (FOI) requests** can be helpful to find out how much has already been cut from a service or how the council has made certain decisions. Find out more in our UNISON Guide to FOIs:
<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2017/06/Freedom-of-Information-Act-RV.pdf>
 - **UNISON's Save our services campaign webpage** has lots of resources including graphics, videos and more to use in your campaign:
unison.org.uk/sos

- **Do your own research.** If you have the resources, a survey of staff and/or service users can be a powerful way to show the potential impact of cuts to a local service.
- **Set your campaign messages.** Keep these simple and easy to understand. They should explain the main problem and its impact, outline a possible solution and how your campaign targets or audience can make that change happen.

Lobbying politicians

Consistent cuts to local government funding have decimated council finances. Central government ultimately has the power to bail out councils on the brink of bankruptcy and dictate how much funding the other governments in the UK receive. It is important that you include lobbying national and local politicians in your campaign as they have a huge influence on funding decisions that affect local services.

National

Your local MP, and MSP in Scotland, AM in Wales or MLA in Northern Ireland, can be very helpful in supporting local campaigns against cuts.

- **Talk to your branch.** Do they already have a relationship with your local MP or other national politicians?
- **Write to them.** You can use UNISON's template letter on the council cuts interactive maps or write your own. Make sure you provide your address to show you are a constituent, include information about your campaign and what you want them to do - try using your campaign messages! Ask them for a meeting to discuss your campaign further and how they can help.

unison.org.uk/councilcuts

Local. It is likely that your branch will already have an established relationship with local councillors. Your branch may also be able to guide you on tailoring your campaign to meet the political makeup of your council.

You can influence councillors through meetings, either individually or as part of a mass lobby; ask questions at public meetings; organise responses to public consultations and circulate petitions. Find out more about all these different types of lobbying activities in the *Lobbying politicians* section of the **toolkit**.

It is important to show how cuts have different impacts on different groups as their voices are often missed out. Women, disabled, Black, LGBT+, older and younger people are often low-paid and more likely to rely on services that are vulnerable to cuts.

*Councils have a duty to consider the impact of their decisions on these groups and people with other 'protected characteristics'. If you believe your council has not identified the impact on groups who may be unfairly affected by cuts you can use this to challenge councillors on their decisions. Find out more in the Equalities section of the main **toolkit**.*

Communicating your campaign

There are plenty of ways to get the message out about your campaign to your local community and beyond, from involving your local press to using social media. See below for things to think about when planning local media work:

Local media

- Talk to your **UNISON regional office** about potential news stories - they can work with you to give your story the best chance of media coverage
- If you want to include any data in your story it needs to be robust and come from a credible source
- Can you include any case studies to help bring your story to life?

Social media

- Think about who you want to communicate with and which social media platforms they use - Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), Instagram, TikTok or others?
- How much effort do you want to dedicate to building a social media profile? This can take time - it may be faster to ask your branch or regional office to post information for you
- Follow UNISON, like-minded campaigns or organisations, politicians, local media and other campaign targets on their social media profiles

Closing your campaign

When you are ready to bring your campaign to a close, it is important for the legacy of your hard work and for future campaigns that you:

- Publicise your successes, both within UNISON and locally - let your branch, regional office and local media know what you achieved!
- Ask campaign volunteers to become a UNISON member, workplace contact or steward
- Evaluate your campaign to help make sure that next time you repeat what went well and avoid making the same mistakes.

We hope that this guide has inspired you to campaign against cuts where you live and work. Please take a look at the main toolkit for more advice once you have started on your campaigning journey!

Stay in touch with us at **sos@unison.co.uk** so we can help to support and publicise your campaign too.

Remember that we can all make a stand against cuts. Together we can create real change and make sure we get the local services that we deserve.

Join UNISON's fightback against cuts to our services!