



WANT TO KNOW WHAT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICE GROUP EXECUTIVE DOES? HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOU AND YOUR MEMBERS?

This is a report of the main issues discussed at the last Local Government Service Group Executive meeting and policy seminar, on 18 - 19 July 2017. We hope you find it interesting.

SAVE OUR SERVICES / CUTS CAMPAIGN

The SOS campaign launched its focus on libraries at Local Government Conference. We collected positive stories and comments on the importance and value of libraries in their communities.

The SOS page of the website has now been updated to reflect this year's focus on libraries.

SOS Day will be held on 19th October. The Service Group is finalising a briefing for the day and campaign materials will be available.

Composite C, carried at Local Government Conference, will also be a particular focus for our work campaigning against cuts over the next year – supporting branches and regions in their work, raising our profile, promoting alternatives to the cuts, and making clear the vital work our members in Local Government do.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE BILL 2017

Following the general election the Bill fell as it had not concluded all the parliamentary stages in the House of Commons.

It had been expected that the Bill would be re-introduced following the general election. However, it wasn't included in the Queen's Speech, presumably because parliamentary time will be dominated by the 8 bills that are linked to Brexit.

This means there will be no local government finance bill for at least two years, and the business rate surplus that UNISON campaigned around last year remains (and will have grown). Our policy is that it should be invested in social care.

SOCIAL CARE

UNISON is continuing its opposition to the introduction of the National Assessment and Accreditation System for children and family social workers in England. We are putting pressure on the new Children and Families Minister to drop the proposal.

We launched the Service Group's Residential Care Charter at the Local Government Conference. All branches and councillors have been sent copies of the Charter with mapping information, tips on how to recruit and organise in residential care and draft motions to help gain access to the workforce. Please use it!

HOMECARE

The Welsh Government is currently consulting on substantially limiting the use of zero hours contracts in the homecare sector, alongside measures to make pay more transparent and to improve rotas.

Fife, North Lanarkshire, Swansea and Hackney councils have announced that they are going to adopt the Ethical Care Charter, bringing the total number of councils up to 30.

UNISON's 15 Minute Care Makeover film was viewed 3.6 million times and shared over 50,000 times on social media. It has helped to raise more awareness of this big problem.

UNISON's report evaluating the impact of the Ethical Care Charter has now been finished. It documents the positive impact the Charter has had on care workers, employers and service users.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME (LGPS)

Initial reports of the LGPS funds valuations in England and Wales show an overall decline in funding deficits from around £48 billion in 2013 to £37 billion in 2016. This is welcome news and should lead to better funding levels for many funds. Work is being done to assess the reason for the fall in the deficits, but it is likely to be linked to changes in actuarial assumptions. Fund valuations set the employer contributions, not member contributions or benefits.

Initial indications of the LGPS Valuations (that are not based on the value of the funds) should mean that there will be no increase in employee

contribution rates and the LGPS will not infringe the employer contribution cap set by the Treasury. The main cost pressure on cost share that could lead to changes in the way pension is earned in the future, is the very low take up of the 50/50 option. The original scheme assumed 10% of the lower paid would take up the option. A recent survey showed many members were not aware of the option, which may well have caused the low take up. Branches are asked to make sure members and non-members of the scheme are aware of the 50/50 option.

The LGPS Scheme Advisory Board has set up a committee looking at changing ill-health provision in England and Wales. UNISON is pushing for the removal of tier 3, which was introduced in 2008 in England and Wales (but not Scotland or Northern Ireland), so all those retiring on ill-health would receive a pension for life.

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Despite overwhelming opposition to a number of proposals set out in a consultation on new education structure, the SNP government in Scotland has decided to go ahead with many of the changes. UNISON Scotland and other organisations had expressed concern in particular at the move to undermine the role of local government in relation to schools. The government is consulting on the document and will then bring forward an Education Governance Bill. The government is also consulting on a Ten Year Strategy for the Learning Provision for Children and Young People with Complex Additional Support Needs 2017-2026.

UNISON is working with the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions on a new united strategy and campaign to secure resources, achieve better pay and defend education workers against more austerity.

The Wales Support Staff forum will be hosting a policy seminar for school based members on 28 September about devolved education issues, such as the role of support staff in relation to significant policy changes in Wales like curriculum reform and the (Wales) Additional Learning Needs Bill. A new UNISON guidance document for support staff in Wales will be launched.

Since the election, the Westminster Government has given some indications on how they will address school funding in England, with a proposed 1.3 billion increase in funding for schools – though higher inflation could mean this will still not be a real terms increase. Justine Greening, Secretary of State for the Department for

Education, has confirmed in Parliament that the government plans to go ahead with a national funding formula (NFF) that would see no school have its budget cut as a result of the new formula. She also said the NFF would be issued 'shortly'.

THE TWO CHILD POLICY

A two-child policy is a government-imposed limit of the payment of government benefits only to the first two children. Families won't be paid an additional amount for more than 2 children, unless the children are born before 6 April 2017.

In the last General Election campaign the Conservatives said that their manifesto was dedicated to the interests of ordinary working families. But the government is making it more difficult for working people to manage by cutting the help they get from in-work benefits.

UNISON has played a big part in the campaign to stop the cuts to tax credits that would have left the average family £2,000 a year worse off. UNISON briefed MPs and journalists and told the public to understand just how bad the changes were.

UNISON members now face a new threat because the Government is taking money away from low income families. Ultimately it is the children that will lose out.

SGE POLICY SEMINAR

During the seminar, the SGE discussed the action points on conference motions and agreed to prioritise work on social care, homecare and children's social care, pay, schools, libraries and cuts.

The second day of the seminar focused on devolution. It is vital that the Local Government Service Group is geared up to address the challenges posed for us by devolution. We heard detailed presentations from speakers from key UNISON officials in Cymru/Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and discussed what devolution means for how we organise our members, negotiate on their behalf, and develop policy. We also discussed the particular issues for social care across the four nations of the UK.

We will now be looking at using what we learnt at the seminar to ensure that the SGE reflects the needs of our members across the four UK nations.