

# Damaging impact of unfair council cuts

## Introduction

UNISON branches are campaigning hard against looming council budget cuts that will see more jobs lost and increasing damage to important services, with the most vulnerable people worst affected. We oppose austerity cuts across all public services and the effects on the NHS are a key concern. Pressures over the winter saw A&E waiting times reach record highs in late December and cuts have affected important areas including children's mental health services, with immense stress on many NHS workers. Scotland's discretionary block grant from the UK Government will have gone down by £2.6 billion or 8% in real terms between 2010/11 and 2019/20, affecting all services. The next two years see real terms cuts of more than £500m. But, as [Briefing 93](#) said, the draft Scottish Budget 2018/19 is more bad news for councils, roughly a steady state elsewhere.

## What kind of cuts and where?

Name a key service and there are proposals somewhere in Scotland, to further cut it or to reduce its staffing costs, with resulting poorer service and worse conditions for workers. Of course, many councils are looking at very similar kinds of cuts packages. Education is taking a big hit. Do parents really want their children losing school crossing patrols, missing out on breakfast clubs, classroom assistants, school libraries and trying to learn in dirty schools, with shared janitors? Yet these type of cuts are being widely proposed. How does that help nurture children, close the attainment gap and tackle inequalities, let alone meet other educational needs? A few 'floated' cuts do win welcome reprieves (e.g. the music school in **Edinburgh** or now "off the table" initial proposals by **Highland** Council to cut 300 school jobs including teachers, additional support need (ASN) staff and pupil support assistants), but the reality is that all of the cuts go too far.

**Some proposed cuts examples include:** **Moray:** halving school library and school technicians posts to save £319,000, nearly £500,000 of cuts to integrated children's services including ASN, homeschool link workers and child mental health. Loss of around 100 FTE posts and overall savings needed of £7m this year and £16m in 2019/20. **South Ayrshire:** Nearly 300 FTE posts including school assistants, homelink and school librarians. Perhaps 160 teaching posts to save £4.25m. Cutting school crossing patrols. Overall total of £12.5m savings this year, £7m next. **South Lanarkshire:** Increased charges for school meals, crematorium & burials, care services. Cuts to libraries, end mobile library service, redesign of adult and older people care services, cut behaviour support in high schools, cut to litter enforcement, environmental services & trading standards. £23.5m total. **West Lothian** Council has to save £78m over the next 5 years, with 1800 FTE posts to go. The scale of cuts across the country, on top of those in recent years & 30,000 jobs lost, is truly frightening.

## KEY POINTS:

- Councils continue to bear the brunt of austerity cuts.
- The 2018/19 settlement to local authorities is most definitely not a "fair deal".
- UNISON branches are campaigning Scotland wide to defend all public services from harsh cuts hurting the most vulnerable.
- Cuts to schools staff (incl librarians, ASN & school crossing patrols), to libraries, museums, social care, bins, environmental health etc. affect tackling attainment, inequalities, health & wellbeing.
- Hard pressed council staff deserve a fair pay deal. Boosting their pay helps the local economy.



## Contact UNISON's Bargaining & Campaigns team:

Dave Watson  
[d.watson@unison.co.uk](mailto:d.watson@unison.co.uk)

Fiona Montgomery  
[f.montgomery@unison.co.uk](mailto:f.montgomery@unison.co.uk)

0141 342 2870  
0800 0 857 857

Most councils ask local people to feedback on the proposals. But as the City of **Edinburgh** UNISON branch has rightly [pointed out](#), these consultations don't allow people to say 'No to Cuts!'. The branch applauded councillors who fought to save the music school, but said all communities should have access to music schools and asked for similar support over potential cuts in early years and health and social care. **North Lanarkshire** council is consulting on options for proposed cuts totalling £14.7m. It says £9m cuts must be agreed from these. However, the UNISON branch is asking WTF... 'What's the Future, North Lanarkshire?', complaining that the public consultation does not say how many jobs are at risk or how the workforce would be affected by the cuts. Among proposals are: reducing school cleaning from five days to three, primary school janitors working across several schools, closing Kilbowie Outdoor Centre, cuts to libraries and community centres and an 18% rise in cemetery fees. **Inverclyde** Council is consulting on cuts options totalling £6.2m and must implement around £3.1m worth. **Clackmannanshire** has to make £29m of cuts in the next three years from a total budget of £118m. The UNISON branch was warned last year that 450 jobs must go by 2020, 1 in 6 of the workforce. Other cuts proposed include removing 20% of school learning assistant posts, increasing the price of school meals, closing public toilets and halls, and attacks on terms, conditions and hours, including a threat to unsocial hours pay that will hit mainly low paid women in social care, leisure attendant and school cleaning jobs.

#### **False economies – councils are so important to local areas**

In new [UNISON research](#) from the Jimmy Reid Foundation, lead author, Professor Mike Danson, Professor of Enterprise Policy at Heriot-Watt University, said: 'Boosting the wages of lower paid public sector workers can ameliorate austerity cuts and generate expansion in the Scottish economy more effectively and efficiently than cutting taxes for the rich and powerful or building major infrastructure projects.' The report also highlights the fact spending per head was cut more in the most deprived areas 2010-13, yet poorer households rely far more on eg elderly care or public sports facilities. And those deprived areas will also be hardest hit by the loss of £1.6billion annually from welfare reform. The report warns that the level and speed of cuts is unsustainable, with councils "facing the risk where they will be unable to meet their statutory duties and unable to deliver critical services to their poorest and most vulnerable citizens."

It may well be possible to quantify direct economic benefits (or losses due to cuts e.g. in Edinburgh reducing museum & gallery opening hours to save money led to predictable [reduced visitor numbers](#), down 21% with a 25% drop in income). Much harder to measure, yet desperately damaging, is the effect on the people hit by cuts; elderly people whose day centres are closed; children who benefit from the work of classroom assistants and other support; youngsters whose families struggle to pay for school meals; parents working in social care losing unsocial hours pay and sinking into debt; people struggling in various ways finding that charities/support organisations to which the council is referring them have had funding cut, by the council; & we all lose if libraries, sports centres and museums are less accessible.

Ministers should look urgently at the harsh and damaging impact of spending reductions being proposed in every community and should offer a significant increase to councils. This must include sufficient to pay local government workers [the increase they deserve](#) after years of effective pay cuts.

#### **Further information:**

**UNISON Public Works Blog:**  
**Not a fair deal for councils**  
<http://publicworksscotland.blogspot.co.uk/2018/01/no-deal-for-councils.html>

**UNISON Briefing 93 - Draft Scottish Budget 2018/19**  
<http://www.unison-scotland.org/library/Policy-briefing-93-draft-budget-201819.pdf>

**SPICe Briefing - Draft Budget 2018/19**  
<https://sp-bpr-en-prod-cdnep.azureedge.net/publisherd/2017/12/18/Draft-Budget-2018-19/SB%2017-89.pdf>

**SPICe Briefing - Draft Budget 2018-19 & provisional council allocations**  
<https://sp-bpr-en-prod-cdnep.azureedge.net/publisherd/2017/12/18/Local-Government-Finance--Draft-Budget-2018-19-and-provisional-allocations-to-local-authorities/SB%2017-88.pdf>



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[d.watson@unison.co.uk](mailto:d.watson@unison.co.uk)

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[f.montgomery@unison.co.uk](mailto:f.montgomery@unison.co.uk)

0141 342 2870 / 0800 0 857 857

#### **Action for Branches**

Keep the B&C Team updated with your campaigning and the most up to date budget situation with your [cuts impact assessments](#).