



## Want to know what the Local Government Service Group Executive (LGSGE) does? How it affects you and your members?

This is a report of the main issues discussed at the last LGSGE meeting held on 5 June 2025. We hope you find it interesting.

### Funding and Cuts

The Service Group organised a parliamentary event, entitled “The Importance of Local Councils to the Plan for Change” which was attended by the Secretary of State for Local Government (and Deputy Prime Minister) Angela Rayner and around 40 MPs. Three UNISON members (a planning officer, a care worker and a youth worker) spoke eloquently about their work areas and the link to the government’s five missions and the need for more council funding. The chair of the SGE, Glen Williams, also spoke on behalf of the wider Service Group about the need for more urgently needed resources for local councils.

The Service Group held a week of action in late April where members and branches were encouraged to make contact with their MPs/MSPs/Senedd members about the need for more council funding (either in person or via email) from the upcoming Spring Spending Review. Since the email action was established a total of 5,400 emails have been sent by our members.

Colleagues from the East Midlands region helped to secure a parliamentary debate entitled “East Midlands: Local Authorities and Economic Growth” where calls were made for funding for local councils. The East Midlands also worked with local MPs to table a number of the suggested parliamentary questions from our lobbying guide about the need for more resources for local councils.

We have begun our regular funding gap FOI research work where we’ll ask councils across England, Cymru/Wales and Scotland to provide details of the funding gaps that they anticipate that they’ll be facing for the next two financial years.

Councils in Cymru/Wales, unlike in England, are not subject to any limits on how high they can increase their council tax bills. Council tax bills in Cymru/Wales increased by an average of 7.2% in April. However, such is the amount of pressure

on local councils (with more than £450m in additional pressures forecasted for 2026-27 due to increased demand) that many councils are still cutting services.

In a recent appearance before the Local Government Select Committee on the topic of Local Government finance, the Minister for Local Government, Jim McMahon pointedly talked about the ongoing crisis in local government and the need for wider reform in areas such as SEND, reducing the need for home-to-school transport and reducing demand for temporary housing accommodation, rather than to just pour more resources into the sector. He also expressed a hope that “by the end of the multi-year settlement [the] vast majority of councils will be able to balance their books”.

### Education and Children’s Services

#### Careers

UNISON submitted written evidence to the Work and Pensions Select Committee on their ‘Get Britain Working – reforming jobcentres’ inquiry. Following this, UNISON was invited to present at the oral evidence session in April. The Chair of the UNISON National Careers Forum, Andrew McGregor, was able to make some powerful points on the value of careers advisers and the necessity of maintaining the integrity of careers advice in a jobcentre setting.

The survey of careers staff carried out in January 2025 showed that a high proportion of UNISON members in careers adviser roles are directly employed by schools. This has prompted work around ensuring that careers members are included in the organising campaign around the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB). The Career Development Institute has expressed interest in working with UNISON to promote any work around the SSSNB with careers professionals.

## Schools

UNISON continues to be at the forefront of work to reinstate the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) that will decide pay, terms and conditions for school support staff in England. The legislation is on track to receive Royal Assent before the summer recess.

A public consultation is due to launch in June, to inform planned secondary legislation. We expect the consultation to propose the inclusion of agency workers, the principle of no detriment and the use of the Green Book as a starting point on transition (both supported by us), and more details on the scope ie which staff will be included. We expect some senior MAT staff to be excluded and it will be important that we push hard for all to be included, once we have seen the details of the proposals. We will of course ensure UNISON responds to the consultation, but also that we encourage as many members as possible to respond. Guidance will be provided.

The SSSNB working group co-ordinated by the Department for Education (DfE) has continued to meet regularly, discussing and agreeing the way forward regarding implementation, through three strands of work: one on the constitution and operating model, a second on role profiles and job evaluation, and a third on the arrangements for transition to the new body. UNISON is represented on all of these strands by both lay representatives and officers. This work is overseen by the National Schools Committee, and the group of six reps it has elected to oversee things between full committee meetings.

UNISON's Strategic Organising Unit is working with the service group, regions, branches and members to carry out a programme of organising work, and regular updates are being held via webinars which have seen great engagement at all levels.

The 2025 seminar was held in April in Bristol, with members from across the four nations coming together to discuss shared workplace interests and concerns. The programme included online safety, organising around pay, dealing with challenging behaviour in schools, health needs in schools, climate change and artificial intelligence. Feedback received was very positive.

We have circulated an updated list of 'NJC conditioned' national MATs to branches for the NJC pay consultation. Working with Bargaining

Support we have also updated and published the 'model pay claim for non NJC academies'. A report with updates on all national MATs has also been sent to branches.

We are working with UNISON Policy and the TUC to provide detailed evidence for three modules of the Covid Inquiry: module 7 (test, trace and isolate); module 8 (children and young people); and module 10 (impact on society). This work will be ongoing throughout 2025 and into 2026.

We are pushing the Department for Education (DfE) for an urgent report on their long delayed updated 'Fire Safety Guidance' for schools. We are also due to meet the DfE to discuss safety concerns raised by reps relating to the use of 'pop up pools' in some schools. The next meeting of the DfE Education Estates Strategy Group will take place on 20 May where we will be raising the overall issue of school building safety/funding and our 'clean air in schools' campaign.

UNISON has continued to press the case for additional funding for schools, including capital funding, ahead of the 2025 Comprehensive Spending Review. We will shortly be launching a new campaign 'look', using the strapline 'Fund Our Future' and focusing on three core demands – defend jobs, protection education, invest in children.

Following UNISON's updated branch guidance on supporting pupils with medical conditions, we have continued to work with other unions to raise the urgency of government action on this issue. We have also produced additional materials around the importance of reporting all violent incidents in schools.

## Cymru/Wales

SSSNB for Wales

UNISON Cymru consulted its members with three options on how to proceed with a negotiating body for school support staff in Wales. Following consultation, there was a clear preference from school support staff members for a Wales-only SSSNB.

A Wales-only SSSNB is UNISON Schools members' lobbying position for negotiating with the Welsh and UK governments. Our next steps involve developing a formal policy position to be agreed with the School Forum and Local

Government Committee. Through communication with Welsh Government regarding our position, next steps involve working to progress the options in the best interests of school support staff.

A successful seminar was held for the first time in North Wales where delegates engaged in activities including Lego based therapy and understanding Artificial Intelligence.

Following increased reports across schools in Wales relating to violent incidents, together with the other education unions, we have continued to raise the concerns and evidence of this becoming a crisis in schools and colleges in Wales, including also the early years sector as there has been an increase in the number of incidents being reported from these settings.

A behaviour summit has been organised by Welsh Government which will include a range of stakeholders including practitioners, TU's, police, youth groups, school leaders and will focus on violence, use of mobile phones, and exclusion rates. Discussions will be based on identifying the issues, what the challenges are and what can practically be done to address this. UNISON is identifying practitioners who we believe will contribute passionately to these discussions.

The region has identified schools as one of its strategic priorities. This initial 15-month strategy provides a roadmap for UNISON Cymru to grow our schools membership, address key challenges, and empower school support staff in Wales. By focusing on addressing grade drift, phasing out Level One TA roles, combating workplace violence, and recruiting activists, UNISON can create lasting change for its members and the schools sector in Wales. These issues have been the focus of our engagement with schools members over the last year and this has shaped the development of this strategy which has been discussed with Schools forum and LG committee and is being developed with key activists to include a bid for BSOF support.

Following concerns from the education workforce regarding implementation of the new Additional Learning Needs (ALN) act and pressure from UNISON to the Cabinet Secretary of the consequences of this on the support staff workforce, to ensure that the voices of teaching assistants are heard, Welsh Government are organising a round table discussion with the Cabinet Secretary for Education where

nominated UNISON members will share their experiences and insights on the new ALN system.

## English Devolution White Paper

The cross-service group project team met with regions across England on 23 April to discuss the next steps in UNISON's response to the English Devolution White Paper (EDWP). Part of the discussion was how UNISON should respond to the challenges and opportunities of the EDWP. The group discussed the following:

- ❖ What are our objectives as an organisation for English Devolution and LGR? Both nationally and regionally.
- ❖ Where are the intersections in English Devolution and LGR between our sectors to support our corporate/organisational objectives and the powers that exist or are needed?
- ❖ What power can we exert now, and how does that power affect the workforce, our members and potential organising opportunities?
- ❖ How well are we exercising that power, and what challenges need addressing, including legislative changes, to further support our organisational objectives?
- ❖ How can we communicate with key people, decision-makers, our members and the wider public?
- ❖ How are all these outputs mapped so we are all working towards them with defined outcomes, and how do we measure them?

UNISON is preparing Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to local authorities that are subject to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The questions will ascertain the costs spent on consultants preparing and submitting the joint submissions to MHCLG. We will then analyse the results while ensuring we do not give any credibility to Reform's arguments about consultants.

The Reform UK party has expressed concerns about the amount of money spent on consultants, particularly by local councils. They have criticised the practice, suggesting a perceived waste of taxpayer money. However, the party has not provided detailed proposals or policy specifics on

addressing the issue beyond expressing their general dissatisfaction.

Consideration will need to be given as to how we ensure our FOI results are used to strengthen our arguments about local government reorganisation without being seen as supporting Reform's more generalised criticisms of the work of local authorities.

The County Councils Network undertook a financial analysis of the costs and savings associated with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The key findings are below.

Further information can be found by clicking or typing this link: <https://bit.ly/4mrE5jQ>.

### Online resources

UNISON's English Devolution Link Tree: <https://linktr.ee/engdevo>

UNISON's English Devolution webpage: <https://www.unison.org.uk/at-work/local-government/key-issues/english-devolution/>

### **Service Delivery - Insourcing**

[Reading Council has voted to regain control of its children's services](#) six years after it outsourced the service to a company as directed by the Department of Education (DfE). At a meeting held on 28 January 2025, Reading councillors unanimously backed a proposal not to renew the Brighter Futures for Children's (BFfC) contract to run children's services in the borough. Instead, the authority will take it back in-house, a move that will involve the transfer of 550 staff from BFfC and the closure of the company's independent fostering agency. The council aims to complete the process by autumn.

<https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2025/01/29/council-to-take-childrens-services-back-in-house/>

Peterborough has decided to insource its Local Authority Trading Company (LATC), Peterborough Limited (PL). The insourcing date is on or before 31 March 2026. PL commenced service delivery by virtue of an Operational Services Agreement (OSA) between the council and PL. PL uses the trading name 'Aragon' to refer to the services provided under the OSA. Before that date, those services were delivered commercially by an external third-party contractor.

A workforce of circa 300 FTE delivers these services.

<https://democracy.peterborough.gov.uk/document/s/s54754/PL%20Cabinet%20report.pdf>

### **Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS)**

The major change since the last update is the launch of LGPS England and Wales 'Access and fairness' consultation launched 15 May. Consultation ends 7 August - You can view the [consultation documents](#)

It has a lot of helpful changes. Major proposed changes include the following.

- ❖ It proposes to make buying service when on career breaks more flexible. It proposes to extend maternity/child care pay for pension purposes. The aim is to assist in reducing the gender pension gap.
- ❖ To remove ageist discrimination by removing the age cut off for payment of the death grant.
- ❖ It proposes to remove some remaining inequalities in defendants and spouses' pensions. Including finally bringing LGPS England and Wales into line by addressing the widowers inequality highlighted in the Goodwin case.

### **Climate crisis**

Tackling the climate crisis can't wait until a more convenient time – there's too much at stake for our members, their jobs, their families and the communities we live in – we must act now.

UNISON members—in all their different roles across local government, the health service, the community, police, fire and rescue, education, housing, environmental protection, and others—have to deal with the additional burdens of climate change, including pollution, extreme weather, floods, and cold homes. We are also increasingly affected by the financial burdens of global economic shocks that climate change causes to food and energy supplies.

Green UNISON Week, 19 – 26 September, is a chance to raise awareness of green issues nationally and locally, plan activities to encourage and enable members to get more active, and celebrate all the things they are already doing in

support of the green agenda—not just at work but anywhere.

Find out more by visiting <https://www.unison.org.uk/our-campaigns/green-unison/>.

Building on the success of Green UNISON Week, we want to raise awareness of our work in this area, support and encourage your engagement at every level of activity and recognise that everything we do in this area makes a difference.

Most members are unaware of the great work UNISON does on climate change, but that doesn't mean they don't support it—in fact, we know that most who are aware of our work are very supportive, and that includes members who aren't usually involved in other trade union issues. UNISON is dedicating 2026 as the year of green activity. This initiative is all about raising awareness of what we're doing, why we're doing it, and what members and branches can do to get involved

Watch out for more information and resources coming your way soon, but in the meantime, email Michelle Singleton at [policy@unison.co.uk](mailto:policy@unison.co.uk) with any idea you have about how UNISON can mark the year – you never know, we may be able to include it in the plans.

Our branches and members have a huge role in climate change action in the UK. Everything you do can help—from organising awareness events or local green activities to engaging in local community projects. You could also consider becoming a local green rep or exploring taking on the [branch environment officer role](#) yourself (training and support are provided).

For more information, visit the Green UNISON webpages by clicking or typing this link: <https://bit.ly/4iZK3W3>. There, you can see materials and resources you can use now to prepare.

## Equality and Diversity

We have continued to work with all the Self-Organised Groups and the young members forum on securing the legacies of UNISON's 2019 Year of Young Workers, 2022 Year of Disabled Workers, 2023 Year of Black Workers and most recently the 2024 Year of LGBT+ Workers.

The findings from an online survey to gather information about our members' experiences of the menopause and to what extent they are supported in local government workplaces, will be published soon.

As part of the legacy from the Year of the Black Workers (YOBW), Black members are invited to an inspiring one-day workshop designed to build confidence, skills, and leadership potential. This is a chance to gain a deeper understanding of branch structures, race-related legislation, and how you can use their voice to participate in the democratic process for the annual general meeting (AGM). You will also find a downloadable leaflet to share with the branches on your patches. The workshop has already been successfully piloted in 3 regions – Cymru/Wales, Eastern and West Midlands and now it's time to run it everywhere. Each region will host its own one-day workshop and the dates for each region can be found at [Empowering future Black leaders](#).

Attendees will - Identify strengths & areas for growth; Learn about branch structures & key legislation; Develop leadership skills to participate in regional, national, and self-organised groups (SOGs) and Create a clear action plan for personal growth & progression

By the end of this workshop, Black members will be ready to step up, whether that's as a Black Members Officer or in any other leadership role within the union.

## Social Care

UNISON continues to be heavily engaged in discussions with government with regard to the delivery of the Fair Pay Agreement (FPA) in social care. UNISON sits on the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) working group and all of the task and finish groups which are discussing the scope, make-up of the negotiating process and resultant agreement. This group will eventually produce proposals to go to public consultation ahead of implementation. Along with GMB and other unions, UNISON is pushing for a model of national sectoral collective bargaining. Recently, a series of amendments to the ERB have been published in relation to the proposed Adult Social Care Negotiating Body (ASCNB). This includes amendments which enable the Welsh Ministers and the Scottish Ministers to establish a Social Care Negotiating Body for Wales and for Scotland. The word "Adult" doesn't feature in the Negotiating Body text for Wales or

Scotland and the option to include children's care in their negotiating bodies is made explicit in the explanatory notes.

In January, the government announced a new independent commission to look at social care in England. The commission, led by Baroness Louise Casey, has the stated aim of building consensus around a national care service for England. It will report back to ministers on interim measures in 2026 and with full recommendations by 2028. UNISON continues to call for the creation of an NCS as soon as possible. UNISON also produced and distributed an informal video to activists explaining the latest developments in regard to a National Care Service campaign. In the coming weeks, we will once again be asking members to write to their MPs to insist that progress towards an NCS happens faster than currently planned.

UNISON has responded to recent announcements about the ending of the care visa with two statements, emphasising the need for reassurance and clarity for those migrant care workers already in the UK, and the renewed urgency this places on delivering a substantial and meaningful FPA (see above). Responses are [here](#) and [here](#). We are also issuing briefings to regional migrant worker leads and regional social care leads on the proposed changes and the support UNISON can offer.

## Housing

Actions from the last UNISON housing forum meeting included:

- ❖ Follow up analysis of UNISON housing worker survey – breaking results down by region and employer for further analysis
- ❖ Looking at ways to better promote housing workers as having a professional/practitioner role (reps were concerned that housing workers are not recognised as 'professionals' in the way that some other similarly paid roles are within local authorities are)
- ❖ Producing a new housing worker leaflet focused on violence at work (in response to the housing worker survey result showing a significant number of violent incidents experienced by housing workers)

The Policy Unit and the Local Government Service Group have collaborated with the UNISON Comms Team to launch an editorial

series on the housing crisis titled "Firm Foundations." This series shows the housing crisis from the perspective of our members and the impact of cuts to individuals and public services.

Firm Foundations – housing:

- ❖ Part 1: A basic human right - <https://magazine.unison.org.uk/2024/12/04/firm-foundations-housing-a-basic-human-right>
- ❖ Part 2: the crippling cost of the crisis - <https://magazine.unison.org.uk/2025/02/03/firm-foundations-part-two-the-crippling-cost-of-the-crisis>
- ❖ Part 3: the history of council housing - <https://magazine.unison.org.uk/2025/04/14/firm-foundations-part-three-the-history-of-council-housing>

UNISON is working with APSE (the Association for Public Service Excellence) on a research project, looking at the current pressures facing the social housing sector (particularly local authorities) and how well prepared they are for the new housing policies being introduced by the new government. The project will also consider how the sector can respond to the new government's targets. This will include an analysis of measures local authorities can take to deal with their own particular challenges, including the possibility of bringing housing stock back under direct control of councils.

## Public Health

Every year, more than 300,000 people leave the workforce because of ill health – meaning around 4 million people out of work because of their health conditions. All too often, these are people who have dropped out of work not because they want to, but because they weren't able to access support in a timely manner. The Royal Society of Public Health convened experts from the worlds of occupational health, business, and public health to discuss what can be done to remedy this position. It came up with 5 main areas where this could happen:

Managers - For most people in work, their meaningful interaction with their employer is through their manager. Having a supportive manager can be the difference between accessing support in a timely manner, and being forced out of work due to worsening health. There is training and support out there to support

managers in this role, but take up is often too low. It is critical as a first step to create healthy work to ensure that every manager is actively supporting their employees' health.

Health as Culture - Many employers run Employee Assistance programmes, but take up is often low. For example, the average Employee Assistance Programme is used by only 3% of eligible employees a year. Healthy work is something which is created by an organisational culture – starting with the way in which work itself is designed. The building blocks of good work – fair pay, autonomy, and control – all contribute to reducing stress and improving mental wellbeing, but they also create a culture where people are empowered to improve their physical health at the same time.

Joining Up Systems - The current fit note system is often seen as binary – people are well enough to work as normal, until they meet a threshold beyond which no work is appropriate. Rather than encouraging a gradual movement between systems, people often end up facing a binary choice where they are labelled unfit for work, rather than supported to do what works for them. Fixing this means encouraging employers to engage in meaningful case management, with supportive absence management procedures. Underpinning this, there needs to be a closer relationship between occupational health and management, where both sides understand the demands and offer of the other.

The Barriers to Change - The barriers to implementing these better systems are well understood. For many employers, health support is seen as a cost, with insufficient return on investment to justify the capital that needs to be put in. While many employers have seen the benefits of a more supportive approach, this is often hard to quantify, and businesses are wary of sharing data on issues such as absence rates. At the same time, where an offer does exist, awareness and uptake are often lower than they should be. Changing this comes back to ensuring that everyone with management responsibilities is fully aware of – and comfortable with – the support available, and staff are actively encouraged to access the services that they need. There are sometimes perverse incentives in the system – making it seem easier or cheaper for an employer to just let staff go when they face ill health, rather than investing in keeping them healthy in the first place. If we want to move to a preventative system, this is one of the first things which needs to change.

Making the Change - These are not changes that can be achieved by Government regulation alone. Businesses who go above and beyond see better outcomes, so we need to spread this good practice voluntarily – creating a situation where employers compete to offer the best health support, rather than treating it as a drag on their resources.

Resources - UNISON can play its part in raising the awareness. Reps should investigate whether the employer has employer assistance programmes and publicise these to members. UNISON has produced a number of guides to help in this process – Mental Health Guidance for Branches, Carers Policy, Reasonable Adjustments guide. These are all on the UNISON website.

<https://shop.unison.site/product/bargaining-on-mental-health-policies-a-practical-guide-for-unison-branches/>

[Model-carers-policy-1.docx - UNISON](#)

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2023/05/Quick-Guide-Reasonable-Adjustments-2023.docx>

## Social Work

2025 Social Work Seminar will be held on Saturday 18 October at Aston University Birmingham. Workshops topics will include Artificial Intelligence, Fitness to Practice, Supporting Migrant Workers and Wellbeing. Branches will be entitled to send two delegates and a branch circular giving registration details will be issued shortly.

UNISON has been campaigning against Social Work England (SWE)'s proposal to increase registration fees by 33% in 2025 and by a further 1.85% in the following 3 annual registration cycles. Such increases are unreasonable given stagnant wages and heavy workloads. They would add to social worker stress and risk pricing some out of a sector that's already experiencing chronic recruitment and retention issues. Councils who pay reimburse their social workers registration fee may decide not to foot such a big increase.

Our campaign has concentrated on getting members to respond individually to the consultation, strongly opposing the proposals. We have been urging employers to respond too

and raised the issue with the Local Government Association. We shared with them the results of our FOI on whether councils paid/reimbursed their social workers the 2024/25 annual fee. This revealed that 60% of responding councils paid their social workers' fees in full or in part, which in headcount terms amounted to 39% of social workers. The FOI data was also shared with regions for their campaigning.

The consultation closed on 13 May and it is understood SWE had a big response. UNISON also submitted a collective response based on member feedback at our online seminar on 7 May. SWE has not indicated the timetable for their Board to consider the feedback and submit a recommendation to their sponsoring department (the Department of Education). However, the Secretary of State will need to approve SWE's recommendations before the summer Parliamentary recess for fee increases to come into effect by 1 September, when the 2025/26 registration period opens.

The Department for Education is consulting on a new set of post-qualifying standards (PQS) for child and family social workers and setting out proposals to enhance early career support to help the transition from initial education and support social workers to stay in practice.