



## 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 February 2026. We hope you find it interesting.

### English Devolution and Local Government Re-Organisation

Progress is being made on our Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and English Devolution (ED) campaign work.

The primary objective of this project is to protect UNISON members' jobs during the most significant structural change to English local government in a generation. The specific goals are:

- ❖ **Industrial Protection:** To mitigate the "Harmonisation Trap" by ensuring that when councils merge, staff terms and conditions (T&Cs) are harmonised upwards or protected without detriment.
- ❖ **Job Security:** To challenge the "efficiency" narrative used by the government, which often serves as code for redundancies in back-office roles like HR, finance, and IT.
- ❖ **Pay gaps:** To achieve UNISON's policy of ending the gender, ethnicity, and disability pay gaps.
- ❖ **NJC:** To make sure the NJC is used for all new unitary councils and Strategic authorities. To achieve the NJC pay and grading model.
- ❖ **Insourcing:** To capitalise on the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill (EDCEB) to bring services back in-house from Local Authority Trading Companies (LATCs) and outsourced contracts.
- ❖ **Political Influence:** To influence local decision makers and candidates ahead of the elections for new councils and Strategic Authorities; to commit to union recognition, enhanced facility time and in-house services.

The campaign utilises a tiered audience approach to maximise impact:

Primary Audience - Current UNISON members facing uncertainty about their employer's identity,

job roles, and pay. Videos will be produced focusing on supporting members through the transition and encouraging them to become "LGR and Devolution champions". Local council leaders, decision makers, and parliamentary figures.

Secondary Audience - In regions undergoing reorganisation, the goal is to frame council staff as the "essential glue" holding services together. The campaign will target non-member staff who are concerned about cuts and reorganisation, presenting UNISON as the authoritative voice and leading vision for the sector to drive recruitment.

Local Election Strategy & Minimising Reform UK Advances - the local elections are a pivotal moment where Reform UK is expected to capitalise on anti-establishment sentiment and austerity-related dissatisfaction.

Campaign Fund funding will be used to:

- ❖ Spread our message, policy, and campaign asks across England.
- ❖ Record videos so our members can share their experiences and experts can talk about our campaign
- ❖ Organise a parliamentary event with key leaders to hear from our members
- ❖ Advertise our campaign messages, asks, and member stories across social media using paid-for advertising.
- ❖ Push our election manifesto highlighting UNISON's position on LGR and ED through targeted advertising.

### Further resources

[UNISON's Position Paper on LGR & English Devolution](#)  
[UNISON LGR/ED Link Tree](#)

## Local Government Funding and Cuts Campaign

The November budget from the Westminster Government had implications for the levels of funding receiving by the devolved governments with Scotland receiving an additional £820m, Cymru £505m and Northern Ireland £370m. These settlements will have implications for their own respective national budgets.

There was no announcement of extra funding for councils in England in the November Budget, but there were a few important financial announcements. From 2028/29 councils will no longer be responsible for funding SEND services, with the Westminster Government taking over responsibility. A new "High Value Council Tax Surcharge" was introduced for properties valued at more than £2m from 2028. Any money raised by this new tax will be handed over to the Westminster Government (rather than staying with the individual councils) who have said they'll use it to fund "local services". Areas that have local mayors will be given the power to charge tourist taxes.

£48m of funding was also announced to help to recruit 350 new planning officers across the country (UNISON research has previously highlighted how councils are carrying nearly 900 planning officer vacancies).

Mid-December saw the publication of the provisional Local Government Financial Settlement for councils in England, which was the first multi-year settlement for over a decade and saw an updated distribution of resources following the conclusion of the Fair Funding Review.

A multi-year settlement was welcomed, as it allows councils to make longer term financial decisions. Some councils, which experience higher levels of deprivation, and are primarily based in urban areas, have benefited from the updated methodology used to distribute money. The Government said the most deprived 10% of councils would see a 24% per head boost to the funding available to them, while transitional arrangements will ensure "all councils will be protected financially during this change" via a "Recovery Grant". This compares to an increase of 6% for the 10% least deprived authorities.

According to the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS), almost half of councils will see their funding fall in real-terms over the next three years. This includes the majority of shire districts (70%) and inner

London boroughs (67%), but far smaller shares of outer London boroughs (15%), unitary authorities (13%), metropolitan districts (6%) and shire counties (5% - or 1 out of 21). At the other end of the spectrum, one-in-ten councils will see their funding increase in real-terms by a sixth (16.7%) or more over the next three years. There is a concentration of such big winners in outer London, where half (10 out of 20) councils are set to gain at least this much. Five outer London boroughs (Barking and Dagenham, Enfield, Hillingdon, Hounslow and Newham) are set to receive increases of a quarter or more.

Diverting more resources to councils in poorer parts of the country is something that numerous UNISON conference motions have called for in recent years and is a positive step in the right direction. However, rather than focusing on the metrics behind dividing up funding for councils, the clear priority needs to be significantly increasing the whole pot of money available to local councils.

The demand for council services all across the country continues to rise significantly. No council has escaped the damaging impact of austerity and our research has shown how nearly all councils are dealing with substantial funding gaps that won't be addressed by these increases in funding. There is still an undue emphasis on councils generating money through raising council tax levels as high as possible rather than money from central government. There are also 6 councils that have been given special permission to breach the 5% cap on council tax rises for two financial years in order to help address the consequences of their historically low council tax bases and drops in central government funding. It is very likely that more councils will have to utilise exceptional financial support from the government in the coming months.

The Scottish Government published its draft budget in January which included its own version of a Mansion Tax. Unlike in England, any money raised from this new tax would go directly to councils where the houses are based rather than being collected centrally by the Government. The Scottish Government claimed that funding for councils increased by 2% in real terms whereas the Institute for Fiscal Studies said that the increase only amounted to 0.3%. Either way it will put pressure on local councils to significantly increase their council tax rates. Unlike in England, no cap has been set for how high councils can increase their council tax rates. Both UNISON Scotland and COSLA have been both

critical of the Scottish Government's failure to adequately fund councils.

The Welsh Government published their draft budget in late 2025 ahead of the budget being scheduled to pass in late January 2026. The Labour Government secured an agreement with Plaid Cymru that generated additional funding for local government in 2026-27 (an extra £112.8m to the initial draft budget), which provides an overall 4.5% increase to the local government settlement. All councils will receive increases above 4%. There was also additional funding agreed for the health and social care budget (an extra £180m), which, taken with the funding in the Draft Budget, is equivalent to a 3.6% increase in 2026-27. Whilst these increases in funding are welcome, they must be set against significant levels of increased demand for services and the ongoing impact of years of major funding cuts to council budgets. There is still the need for significantly higher levels of funding in order for councils to be put on a sustainable footing once again.

Mid December saw the launch of a landmark report from Cymru at the Senedd on "The Future of Local Government Services in Wales". The UNISON-commissioned APSE report demonstrates, a failure to adequately fund local government preventative services over decades means society now spends even greater sums, and pushes demand, on reactive services, such as the NHS and criminal justice system. This report poses fundamental questions for the Welsh government and the parties vying to be the next Welsh government: what do we want local government to deliver and how are we going to fund it; how outsourcing services discriminates against women, undermines accountability and extracts millions of pounds of profit from Wales and into offshore tax havens. Essentially, it asks what society we want to build? World class public services are the foundation.

The Service Group is finalising the collection of the responses to a range of Freedom of Information requests which will illustrate how local councils are pivotal to the Westminster Government's ambitions and will be providing reports on the data in the coming weeks and months. This information will be used to support our campaigning activities throughout the coming year and will help us carry out our conference motion actions.

We have been working with SGE members to produce some new campaign video content about the impact of council funding cuts. We hope to

finesse this new approach and make more video content throughout the year. Furthermore, we are taking forward the suggestion, made by the SGE, to focus on particular service areas and the cuts they've experienced on a rolling basis, using our growing body of research.

### Local Service Champions Awards

January 2026 marked the closing date for nominations for Local Service Champions. There has been a positive response from members and many great nominations for local government workers across the UK.

The next stage of the awards will be for the panel to score the nominations and select a winner, with the winner and two runners up being announced at the local government conference.

Once the winners have been decided, videos will be recorded to exhibit the valuable work of the winners and runners up, which will also be shown at conference. The videos will also be used on social media platforms to promote more broadly the crucial and tireless work on local government workers and the contribution they make to communities across the UK.

During the period leading up to conference, we will continue to use the awards to raise awareness, celebrate and recognise the important work of local government employees.

The webpage for the awards is: <http://unison.org.uk/champions>

### Climate Crisis

The UNISON's Year of Green Activity has begun. The year started with a successful launch event in early January. The Local Government highlight event took place on 21 January. This event highlighted activism in local government and included a presentation on the risks to members in Local Government posed by climate change and how green projects in local government can leverage other benefits in terms of skills and infrastructure. The session also included a presentation by Sam Perry from the TUC speaking about his experience as a UNISON green activist. In February the highlight for the month focuses on sustainability officers working across local government and health with a written editorial piece across the UNISON website and social media. Local Government sustainability officers were represented by Ash Dolling, UNISON Environmental Branch Officer and

Environmental Projects Officer at Fenland District Council. The upcoming highlights for March are “Women and Climate Change” and “AI and Climate Change” and you can register to attend through the website.

Year of Green Activity Calendar of Events 2026: [2026-UNISON-Year-of-Green-Activism-YoGA-Events-Calendar-4.docx](#)

Register for the YOGA events: [Events – UNISON National](#)

## Responding to Reform UK

We continue to work closely with colleagues across UNISON to progress this work. The Local Government team and service group is a crucial part of the UNISON-wide strategy. We are holding regular meetings with branches working in Reform controlled councils since the results in May 2025.

A Seminar was held on 18 December at UNISON Centre with senior branch officers and regional staff who support the branches locally, creating an opportunity to bring branches together further discuss their experiences. In addition to providing updates the seminar focused on Organising to Win - Base Organising and the Branch Vision Project; Organising in Reform Councils - Northern / Durham case study; Managing difficult conversations presentation; Key messaging from branch perspectives and experience.

The seminar was an opportunity to listen to the feedback from branches and regions to inform the strategy and training that will be delivered in UNISONS response to reform and the far right.

Moving forward, to ensure that we are on track to achieve the agreed actions arising from the Emergency Composite at last year's Local Government Conference, the next steps will focus on looking at where we are one year on.

This will include surveying the 10 branches to analyse and monitor changes in employer relations, the impact on terms and conditions, i.e. consultations, cuts to services, job losses, what support branches feel they need, and whether they are considering balloting for industrial action.

Following the seminar there are some additional areas that were identified that we should map and monitor going forward - In addition to recognition agreements what facility contracts exist and Service level agreements for DOCAS; Data protection agreements between branches and

employers; Map areas where Reform UK are gaining power and influence eg Pension Boards and Joint regional Councils.

## Recruitment and Organising Report

The Working Group meeting in November 2025 focused on organising updates on national campaigns including Reform, Equal Pay and Funding & Cuts. We explored how Organising to Win principles can be applied to support both local and national campaigns.

Data from 2024/25 Organising Frameworks highlighted that 70% of LG Branches reported that they are not at inductions and that only 50% on retention/DOCAS calls to members are made.

These are two areas that could make a significant difference to branch recruitment and retention; evidence shows that when making retention calls 25% of leavers did not know they had left. The Working Group has requested a report and data after the next Organising Frameworks deadline in March 2026 and will analyse this information to identify any trends, decline or improvements to share and work with the SGE to support branches in their regions.

## Education and Children's Services

### Careers

UNISON exhibited at the Career Development Institute's 2025 National Conference, with members of the National Careers Forum able to network with colleagues and explain the benefits of UNISON membership. We are working with researchers in the careers field to develop a survey to careers members, with the particular aim of finding out more detail on the roles carried out by careers members in schools. We have insured the inclusion of careers advisers in upcoming research on job profiles and school support staff, which will inform the union's work on the SSSNB.

### Schools

#### School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB)

Now that the Employment Rights Bill has been signed into law as an Act of Parliament, the provision for the reinstatement of the School Support Staff Negotiating (SSSNB) for England is set in law. The next step from the Government is to publish a response to the public consultation that was held in summer 2025, followed by

secondary legislation setting out further detail about the scope and implementation of the SSSNB. The SSSNB should come into being later this year. In the meantime discussions and work between the unions, employer organisations and the Department for Education have continued on various strands of work. Officers and lay reps from the Schools Committee have led this work for UNISON.

In strand 1 discussions on the draft constitution for the body are nearing completion. There has been a large degree of consensus on this, with the constitution being based on the constitution from the previous SSSNB before it was abolished. We have also begun discussions with GMB and Unite about the constitution and operating model for the trade union side; UNISON will have an absolute majority of seats.

Strand 2 concerns a national approach to job evaluation and role profiles. UNISON has pushed hard for this be prioritised, while some of the employer organisations have lobbied against it. We continue to push for this work to start.

Strand 3 concerns the transition. This strand has met twice. It has been established that school support staff will take with them all of their current terms and conditions when they move from the NJC (or local terms) to the SSSNB; after which negotiations will take place to build on that basis. So there will be no detriment.

Members' pay uplift for 2026/27 will be as per their existing bargaining group (ie NJC for most members); pay uplifts from 2027/28 will be negotiated through the SSSNB, with that process starting later in 2026.

UNISON is committed to consulting members on the SSSNB. We are working on the timetable and communication plan for this consultation, which will include all members to be covered by the SSSNB. At its meeting in December 2025, the School Sector Committee voted to recommend that members vote yes/support. The organising campaign relating to the SSSNB continues, with Champions being given regular activities. So as to give greater focus and meaning to this organising work, the School Sector Committee has agreed three priority bargaining aims for its initial work in the SSSNB: pay, year round contracts, and address workloads and TA cover. These were selected following the very clear results of a survey of members.

The lay working group set up to consider the potential implications of the SSSNB for the Service Group's structures has completed its work. The working group contained reps from the SGE, School Sector Committee and NJC Committee. The SGE approved the report including its recommendations; that the report is circulated to branches for information; that the report is included in the SGE's annual report; and that a motion from the SGE, putting the report's recommendations to Local Government Conference, be submitted.

National MATs - the organising campaign around SEN allowance continues in three Lift schools in Essex. A recent ballot saw a 98% vote in favour of industrial action, with a turnout of 75%. The employer made an offer which members have rejected, and there are plans to serve notice of industrial action on the employer. Lift have announced plans to TUPE two of the three schools to a new Trust from September 2026.

Health and safety - in late 2025, there were reports of two schools closing due to the high number of staff and students affected by flu. UNISON continues to highlight the efficacy of air filtration units in reducing absence due to sickness, and will host a joint-union webinar about this in March. The union advice on improving air quality in schools and colleges was updated last year and is being promoted to branches regularly.

COVID Inquiry - the final module of the Inquiry, due to be heard in February and March 2026, will look at the impact on key workers. A UNISON survey to education members yielded a lot of powerful quotes, not just of working during the pandemic, but also how work in schools has changed since the pandemic. These will feed into the TUC evidence to the Inquiry.

Teaching assistants - we continue to campaign for an NHS-commissioned nursing service for schools, and are promoting a [joint union petition](#). This is due to the increasing pressures being put on teaching assistants to carry out clinical tasks in place of NHS provision. We continue to push the government for the publication of new guidance on clinical interventions in education settings, which has been delayed from the Autumn term.

Our annual Stars in Our Schools celebration took place on 28 November 2025. We hosted a parliamentary drop in event on 25 November which was well attended by MPs, who were able to hear about school support staff issues first-hand from a number of UNISON members. We

also arranged a joint UNISON school visit with the Secretary of State. There was good media pickup of the UNISON story about the impact of school support staff shortages on children's education, which was run in the Independent, TES and the Sun.

At the time of writing, the Department for Education had just announced a new investment of £200m on training school staff on SEND in England. We are seeking clarity on how much of this will be spent on school support staff, and/or whether they will receive the same training as teachers or something more bespoke. The long-awaited Schools White Paper and accompanying SEND reforms (for England) are now expected to be published in mid-February.

## CYMRU

### School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) for Wales

The UNISON Cymru / Labour Research Department report on a potential SSSNB for Cymru was launched in early December at an event in the Pierhead building in Cardiff. The report authors presented their findings to the audience of forum members, Welsh Government officials and MSs from both Labour and Plaid. Their evidence shows staff are routinely employed on the wrong grade, regularly work above their contracted hours and are rarely paid for additional responsibilities. Many are in single-income households, and a significant proportion rely on benefits. The report highlights a stark contradiction: this largely female workforce is essential to delivering national education priorities yet remains undervalued and underpaid. These conditions are driving staff away and creating a recruitment and retention crisis across Cymru.

Sitting at the top table with the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Lynne Neagle MS, the forum chair and vice chair and one of our forum members shared very powerful, moving and honest testimonies of what working in school as a teaching assistant looks like on a day to day basis. Overwhelmingly the message that they shared hit hard at the demands, the pressures and the very low pay that accompanies the role and together, we called upon Welsh Government to put an end to this social and moral injustice of inconsistent deployment, term time only pay and lack of recognition that impacts on a predominantly female workforce. Whilst the Cabinet Secretary has committed to explore how this could work in Cymru, the Senedd elections in

May mean this commitment will need to be strengthened and we are lobbying currently to get this into both Plaid Cymru and Labour's manifestos.

The Welsh Government are currently undergoing a review of professional Standards for assisting teaching, teaching and leadership. Other consultations we are responding to include annual updates to the Curriculum for Wales Framework guidance, and provision of INSET days in Cymru.

We will hold three smaller seminars across Cymru during the year as a way of reaching more members who find it prohibitive to travel to Cardiff for one big seminar.

The schools BSOF project has begun. Local Organisers will be working with branches in Caerphilly, Denbighshire and Carmarthen. Using Organising to Win, each LO will develop plans with the branch they are working with through a range of techniques including identifying active members, signposting and arranging training and introducing regular means of communication to support UNISON campaigns and identify issues within schools. A new BSOF LO will be employed to work across Cymru to support the delivery of generic schools campaigns such as the WSSSNB, digital comms, materials for branches, and activist development events.

## Northern Ireland

The regional Local Government (Education) Service Group has continued to lead our activities to support and advance the position of our members in education support services, working alongside branches and the regional staff team.

The campaign for classroom assistant members has combined activity aimed at both encouraging members to get involved in shaping the campaign, alongside promoting greater public awareness of the issues the workforce face.

UNISON NI published information obtained through the Education Authority (EA) that showed that out of 21,815 classroom assistant posts, 14,930 are temporary. This means that around 68% of classroom assistant posts are temporary. Of those on temporary contracts, 2,727 have been employed by the EA in the same post for more than 4 years. We shared this information via social media, a press release, and undertook radio interviews on BBC Radio Ulster. Our call throughout was that the EA urgently address precarious employment for classroom assistants,

which we continue to press for via the regional bargaining structures with EA (see further below).

Online meetings with classroom assistants from across Northern Ireland were organised to gather their views on the key issues affecting them, in order to help shape the ongoing campaign. Members' views were also sought on the various workstreams the EA has now established to examine a new employment model for classroom assistants in NI. Following these meetings a Classroom Assistant Good Work charter has been developed summarising the actions UNISON NI is calling on the Department of Education, Education Authority and wider NI Executive to take. A launch event is planned at Stormont in March.

EA workstreams on classroom assistant employment model - Following the publication of the above data on the high percentage of classroom assistants on temporary contracts, an immediate priority action UNISON NI has pursued is seeking that the EA move those staff who have been on temporary contracts for four years or more onto permanent contracts. As the work to do so progressed, we made clear, alongside other education support services unions, that we expected the EA to follow the previously agreed circular that provides that staff moving from a term time to full time contracts should have the option to move to a 52 week contract of employment, a term time contract, or be given the option to retain their existing contract. It is accepted that this process had been previously applied when staff sought permanent contracts.

Regrettably in December 2025 the EA proceeded to issue letters to a cohort of staff with four years or more continuous service advising that they intended to make them permanent, but without offering the options outlined above. UNISON NI and other support services trade unions were not consulted on these letters in advance. UNISON NI has objected strongly to the approach taken by the EA, which we do not believe to be in line with previous agreement and which does not effectively deal with the issues facing classroom assistants.

The EA has agreed to pause sending any such further letters to other cohorts of affected staff whilst discussions continue. Our aim is that the EA offers this group of staff the previously agreed options as part of the move to permanency. The EA has already highlighted that its financial position (see further below) is a factor in relation to the approach that they have taken on the issue. The NI Local Government (Education) Service

Group will consider next steps in this issue at its meeting on 21 January.

In Spring 2025, the EA advised UNISON NI and other support services trade unions of its intention to revise eligibility criteria for the essential car user allowance (ECUA) and implement new mileage rates. A period of negotiations with EA over these issues commenced. During the course of that process, EA decided not to change the eligibility criteria it had put in place, albeit it accepted that these criteria were not consistently applied. However, without the prior knowledge of UNISON NI and other trade unions, EA proceeded to issue letters to staff in December 2025 in relation to whom they proposed to withdraw the ECUA; and stating that they intended to implement new mileage rates from April 2026 for both casual users and essential users. UNISON NI and other support services unions have sought these letters be withdrawn, on that basis that no agreement had been reached on the issue. Following a meeting with EA, the EA has declined to do so and has not committed to further negotiations with trade unions. On that basis, unless there is a change in position by EA, it is likely that this issue could escalate into a trade dispute. The NI Local Government (Education) Service Group will consider next steps in this issue at its meeting on 21 January.

## Equalities and Diversity

A report of the key findings from our survey of members' experiences of the menopause in local government workplaces will be published in a branch circular to mark [International Woman's Day](#) on 8 March 2026.

A Freedom of Information (FOI) request was sent out to all UK councils at the end of October 2025 to gather information about the identification and implementation of workplace adjustments for disabled people. 94% of all UK councils have responded to our request so far. The data received still needs to be recorded and analysed before the results can be published in April 2026.

In November 2025 our [new webpage](#) was launched to allow branch activists and members to write to their council leader and local government employer to sign up to the Disability Employment Charter. A link was sent to local government branch activists and through branch circulars to coincide with UK Disability History Month 2025. The webpage will be promoted throughout 2026.

A new Freedom of Information request will be sent to all UK councils to gather information about whether councils have policies and practices in place to prevent workplace sexual harassment.

## Equal Pay

Training on equal pay claims arising from task and finish practices was delivered to regions in December to regional leads on Equal Pay, Local Government and Education. The training covered a legal update and what signals may alert us to potential equal pay claims. This was supported by a comprehensive toolkit which includes guidance on a variety of areas that need to be considered when submitting multiple claims, including: Identifying comparators; Statutory time limitations; Processes - UNISON, Thompson's and ACAS; Organising and developing action plans using the five-phase organising plan; and Template letters i.e. Collective Grievance, Freedom of information.

In response to the climbing number of equal pay claims a working group has been established of relevant staff groups and regional leads to ensure we continue to track, update, share best practice and monitor progress.

We have met with colleagues in Northern Ireland to develop bespoke training relevant to legislation and have discussed what tools and strategies may need to be considered to respond to different challenges.

## Social Care

In December almost one thousand UNISON migrant care worker members from across the UK came together in Westminster to lobby politicians to push for a reversal of immigration plans that would make it harder for some care workers to settle in Britain.

The demands made by UNISON members to MPs focused on the following key areas: to get the government to abandon their proposal to triple the time (from five to 15 years) before workers can apply for indefinite leave to remain; to call for an end to the control exploitative employers exert on overseas workers through the visa sponsorship system; to deliver fair wages in the sector via a fully funded Fair Pay Agreement; and to draw attention to the impact of raised salary thresholds across public services – including in the NHS, which for the sake of £63 is leading to swathes of

frontline NHS staff being dismissed and put at risk of deportation.

Workers shared their experiences of exploitation and abuse at the hands of bad employers, such as being significantly underpaid, frequently given excessively long shifts, and going long periods without being given work or pay. Some talked about how they have had to share a bed with strangers or sleep in their cars because accommodation was not as promised or close enough to their work.

Over 70 MPs came to meet with their constituents, the largest lobby of MPs that has ever taken place outside of the Parliamentary estate. A significant number of MPs, including Government Ministers from the Home Office and Department of Health and Social Care, were also lobbied directly in Parliament.

Following powerful testimonies from UNISON members the Home Office said they would be prepared to explore a system that would be better for care workers who are here on the Health and Social Care worker visa but we await confirmation as to whether this will lead to any real and positive changes. Whilst the lobby was only part of this ongoing campaign, it was a memorable day, coordinated by the Strategic Organising Unit, that demonstrated the power that care workers have when they come together as UNISON members.

The UNISON response to the Fair Pay Agreement consultation will soon be submitted, following approval from both Policy Committee and the National Social Care Committee for England.

## Housing

Key areas of discussion at the next Housing Forum will include ongoing editorial work, the upcoming housing survey, and our APSE/UNISON research project on housing challenges for councils and insourcing.

Work continues on the next series of housing editorial features for the UNISON magazine and website. Current focus is on a piece addressing migrants and refugees, aiming to challenge myths around social housing and immigration. This article will include insights from housing reps working in homelessness and allocations.

UNISON and APSE are collaborating on a major research project examining the capacity of councils to meet ambitious housing targets and the role of insourcing. APSE is now developing its

research process, with work scheduled to begin shortly. The report will provide recommendations on workforce capacity and skills and is expected to launch in May 2026.

Preparations are under way for UNISON's next housing survey, planned for 2026. We will be working closely with press and media teams to refine the questions and design follow-up work. The survey will help shape future campaigning and lobbying around housing issues affecting public sector workers.

## Social Work

### UK Wide

The Social Work Dictionary project delivered in 2025 was highly successful, achieving strong engagement from regions. Feedback indicates that the dictionaries were well received and actively used by regional recruitment leads. Plans are now underway to expand the project for 2026.

Filming of the new Social Work Student Recruitment video took place in November 2025. The footage is currently in the editing phase, with the first cut expected to be available shortly. Once the initial version has been reviewed, we will work closely with the Comms team to coordinate a full launch, ensuring that the film is promoted effectively across UNISON channels and reaches student audiences at key recruitment points.

In addition to these initiatives, new student-focused recruitment materials are being planned for 2026. These will complement existing resources and support UNISON's wider strategy to increase engagement with social work students and build strong early connections with the union.

### Cymru

UNISON Cymru has embarked on a programme of Social Work Student recruitment in 2025 as part of a BSOF project. We have engaged all relevant Universities and designed a suite of recruitment materials which we have used during presentations to students. Engagement with the Universities proved difficult as this is a new initiative, from a standing start, but we have now established good relationships and contacts.

According to UCAS 120 people started a degree course in 2025 and we have managed to recruit over 60 of those to UNISON. We have also engaged with the Open University and have produced an online presentation for students who

are studying remotely. We have also worked closely with Social Care Wales (the regulatory body) and our award-winning WULF (Wales Union Learning Fund) colleagues to design a number of bespoke learning opportunities for Social Workers (and students) such as vicarious and secondary trauma.

We are currently working with branches to ensure that students on second and third years placement in LG workplaces are identified and recruited too.

As part of the Cymru LG Committee report commissioned from APSE on the [future funding of local government in Wales](#), we were keen to get the voices of our members working in local government as well as carers, leaders and activists. We were proud that one of those [25 Voices](#) was social worker and activist, Evelyn Williams (no.9) who spoke for so many social workers in her page.

### England

Clause 3 of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill creates a legal duty to have multi-agency child protection teams, and the Department of Education's (DfE) Families First Partnership (FFP) programme sets out how to make these teams work in practice. DfE guidance on FFP is not statutory, so it does not have legal force, but it is official DfE guidance to support statutory partners in implementing Clause 3. The FFP guidance builds on learning from the Families First pathfinders where these multi-agency teams are being piloted. These pathfinders have not been fully evaluated but nevertheless DfE has pressed ahead with national roll out across children's services in England. We are concerned that significant structural changes are being pro-actively encouraged in FFP guidance, whilst the evaluation of the pathfinders has been limited and inconclusive in terms of effectiveness of this model.

Attempts to mitigate or delay the implementation of Clause 3 have been unsuccessful to date. A meeting with the Children's Minister has been held to express our concern that the FFP rollout is moving too quickly and changes lack a rigorous evidence base, risk destabilising successful local arrangements, and could cause harm at a time when children's services and their statutory partners are already under immense financial strain and facing complex operational pressures. We want more workable, evidence-informed approaches to strengthening multi-agency

safeguarding. If Clause 3 is passed unchanged attention will turn to the scope of regulations to prescribe MACPTs to come into force in late 2027. Last month DfE published a policy statement which said DfE will engage with the sector and use existing best evidence of effective multi agency working and evidence from FFP pathfinder to develop regulations. An update will be given at the meeting.

As part of meeting the Employers Standards for Social Workers, employers are committed to conducting an annual 'health check' survey to assess practice conditions and working environment for their social care practitioners. This survey enables social care staff to identify priority areas and branches are asked to engage with employers to follow up on action for improvement. This year and for funding reasons the Health Check is only being run for adult services. UNISON is asking the Department of Education why children's services are omitted from the survey. Ofsted ratings will not capture evidence about growing the workforce or engaging with it to ensure better outcomes for children.

### Scotland

Scottish Social Work Partnership will be launched in April 2026 and the new Chief Social Work Adviser to the Scottish Government (and head of the National Social Work Agency – one of the partners alongside CoSLA and Social Work Scotland), Joanna MacDonald has agreed to meet with UNISON to discuss the part we will play. A date is to be confirmed for this.

Social Work Issues Group (SWIG) will agree an annual plan which will include continuing our series of Radical Social Work online seminars, a repeat of the social work and social care conferences that were successful previously and inputs to external conferences.

Social Work Conference is open to social work stewards and members and branches are asked to help promote it. Further details will be forwarded to branches soon.

Not all branches send reps to the SWIG meetings. We have written to branch secretaries asking them to identify one or two reps to attend.

The Scottish Government are proposing to give voting rights to "Lived Experience Representatives" on the Integrated Joint Boards (ILB). They also consulted with UNISON on

whether trade union reps should have voting rights. In line with policy UNISON opposed both proposals, arguing that this would further dilute the democratic accountability of IJBs with less influence of councillors. They are pushing ahead with the Lived Experience reps proposals.

Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) Scotland Bill includes proposals on financial transparency and profit limitation in children's residential care. Unfortunately, they do not include proposals to remove profit from children's services despite this being a previous commitment, a recommendation of The Promise, and something that the Government in Cymru has introduced. We have briefed MSPs on this issue.

We have launched an action to call on the Scottish Government to step up and support the rebuilding of social work services in Gaza and to support the social work workforce in Palestine. Branches are asked to circulate to members and encourage them to take part.  
<https://action.unison.org.uk/page/182601/action/1>

### **Local Government Pension Scheme**

Two major consultations have been issued for LGPS England and Wales in recent months that potentially directly affect members' benefits. We are expecting similar proposals for LGPS Scotland and LGPS Northern Ireland.

The '[Access and Fairness](#)' consultation on changes to regulations in England & Wales closed in August and we hope that regulations will be laid soon. The consultation included positive proposals aiming to address the gender pension gap that UNISON supported in its [response](#).

The Access and protections consultation on changes to regulations in England & Wales consultation document can be found here: [Local Government Pension Scheme in England and Wales: Scheme improvements \(access and protections\) - GOV.UK](#) The consultation includes positive proposals on the long-awaited 'new fair deal' relating to improved protections for transferred staff, and minimum pension age protections. UNISON responded to the consultation in December 2025, available [here](#).

Our latest understanding is that some regulations from both consultations, will be laid in April. Likely to be changes to Maternity leave and shared cost purchase of longer term agreed absence. Also changes to access to spouses' pensions.

The changes that will replace the pension directions with new Fair Deal Regulations in the LGPS are likely to take longer as employers have raised concerns about having the resources to manage the changes. UNISON is pushing for the date it comes into force to be backdated to at least the start of the consultation in October. UNISON fear some employers will try and remove members from the LGPS before the regulations come into force. Any evidence of this happening should be reported to the Pension Unit as soon as possible.

UNISON has also responded to a consultation on guidance on LGPS investment matters, including Pooling. In our response we concentrated on the need for proper member representation in Pool governance, and for Pools to follow the strategy set for them by each Fund. The response was discussed by the LGPS forum before it was submitted.

The government has announced the formation of a Pensions Commission to look at the long-term future of the pensions system. It is presented as a follow-up to the Pensions Commission of 2002-6, which led to the introduction of auto-enrolment and the flat rate state pension. The Commission is expected to look at pension adequacy for current workers and will report in 2027. The Pensions Minister currently emphasises rates of return on savings rather than the rates of savings, but it is apparent that without higher employer contributions an improvement in investment performance is highly unlikely to provide adequate retirement incomes. UNISON is keen to promote a higher minimum employer contribution than the current 3%, which is very low by international standards.

A union contact group coordinated by the TUC has been formed and will have a formal role in contributing to the Commission's work; UNISON will participate. There is a mirror group coordinated by the CBI grouping employers. Though its scope is wide, public sector pension schemes are excluded from the Commission's remit.

There is a separate statutory review of the state pension age. The government was required to set up such a review under existing legislation, so the review itself does not mark a change in policy on the state pension age.

Dr Suzy Morrissey has been appointed to lead the independent review by the government. She previously conducted a similar review in New

Zealand that concluded with no increase in the state pension age. Dr Morrissey met with trade union pension specialists in September and UNISON pensions unit staff were able to share points about how increases to the SPA cause poverty and the difficulties in continuing in employment in public services deep into your 60s. UNISON's written response was greatly enhanced by the inclusion of case studies submitted by members. We are grateful to members who contributed their thoughts and insights. You can access the response [here](#). UNISON also responded to the call for evidence of the DWP select committee on the transition to state pension age.

Increasing numbers of UNISON members are being put into inferior defined contribution (DC) arrangements. While UNISON members who are in DC schemes generally have their employer pay significantly more in than the minimum 3%, there are UNISON members in auto-enrolment schemes where only the legal minimum contributions are paid. There is scope for employer-level bargaining, campaigning and organising to improve inadequate defined contribution pension arrangements. There are opportunities to ratchet-up employer contributions by comparing employer pension arrangements with their peers in the sector/locality.

The Pensions Unit already supports organisers and branches involved in local pay negotiations with points to assist bargaining to improve inadequate pensions – but we are keen to develop more work and activity in this area. We would welcome the involvement of members of the LG SGC in this work.

## Fire and Rescue

The key issue that arose at the last the Fire and Rescue Forum meeting was job evaluations and overtime payments.

Following on from the previous meeting in August we are conducting analysis on the workplace culture questionnaire and into issues surrounding harassment, abuse and discrimination in fire and rescue. We are working on producing resources and materials to support regions.

During the meeting, members gave regional reports on relating to recruitment, job evaluations and workplace culture. Plans for the in-person meeting in May were discussed, along with

possible ideas for a training session for forum members.

We have been in contact with the FBU and have a date for an introductory meeting. We continue to seek to arrange meetings and build relationships with key ministers who cover fire and rescue services.

### **Apprentices / Apprenticeships**

We have prepared a new online survey for apprentices in local government workplaces and schools to complete to help us explore how best UNISON can engage with them and to identify any issues that they are currently experiencing for more targeted support. The survey will be sent to UNISON apprentice members as well as a circular letter to branches and regions asking them to promote and encourage apprentices to complete it.

### **Local Government Conference 2026**

The SGE discussed Conference and agreed to submit motions on the following topics:

- ❖ Local government funding and cuts
- ❖ Violence at work - empowering local government workers to speak up
- ❖ Climate change in Local Government
- ❖ Responding to the harassment of local government in politically volatile contexts
- ❖ Responding to Reform UK - Local Government Staff and the Increase in Reform UK Councillors 2026
- ❖ UNISON's Relationship with the Local Government Association
- ❖ Funding pressures, additional needs and the school workforce
- ❖ Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams and Families First Partnership Programme
- ❖ Local government reorganisation and English devolution
- ❖ The impact of the Immigration White paper on local services
- ❖ AI and digitalisation in UK local government: putting workers and service users first
- ❖ Best Start Family Hubs
- ❖ The School Support Staff Negotiating Body for England – impact on UNISON structures

The LGSGE also considered possible topics for fringe meetings and initial ideas for guest speakers.