



# Local Government Service Group Executive

**Event:** Annual Policy Weekend

**Date:** 16-17 July 2024

Attended by Regional Delegates:

Rob Turner: Cambridgeshire County

Sue Hayden: Uttlesford Branch



The annual Service Group Executive two-day policy meeting was held in Stevenage, our own region, and attended by your newly elected representatives Rob Turner (general seat) and Sue Hayden (women's seat). Not only did a lot of planning for the year take place and business conducted, we also received a number of presentations which we will look forward to having at our Eastern Region meetings. Following the conclusions of day one's business, a dinner, hosted by the Eastern Region was held. With our very own Tim Roberts and Alex Porter in attendance. Tim gave members of the SGE an outline of all the good work which has taken place over the past few years. It was great to hear, and have celebrated, all the regions achievements and excellent work

### **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 and policy seminar, on 16 - 17 July 2024. We hope you find it interesting.

### **Funding and Cuts**

UNISON's recent Local Government conference made clear how funding and cuts remains the biggest priority for the service group, with intensive debates on the conference floor and a packed-out fringe meeting.

Two of UNISON's series of local government FOI requests, which captured the damaging impact of austerity across local councils since 2010, were press released during our local government conference. We highlighted how 1,243 council run youth centres have been closed between 2010/11 and 2022/23 across England and Cymru/Wales, whilst over 1,100 council run children's centres have been closed across the same timeframe. Despite the challenges of publicising our research during a general election campaign, which hoovered up most news coverage, our findings still received significant coverage in the Financial Times, Express, Mirror and a range of local papers.

A timely report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies entitled "[What is the Outlook for English Councils' Funding?](#)" has captured the huge funding cuts that the sector has endured since 2010 and the pressure that it remains under. It was critical of all the main political parties' silence on how this funding challenge would be dealt with and set out a range of scenarios on future funding and what would it mean for service delivery and financial sustainability. It argues that more cuts to council services are very likely and that more councils will be pushed to effective bankruptcy, unless investment from the Government is forthcoming.

The Local Government Association has produced a [new report](#) forecasting that councils across England are facing a £6.2bn funding gap over the next two financial years. Separate research by the BBC showed that councils in England are facing a collective shortfall of almost £1bn for supporting children with special educational needs.

The auditing crisis across local government continues with many councils struggling to get their accounts audited. Warrington Council, which has debts of over £1.8bn had its credit rating withdrawn because of the failure by the council to get their accounts signed off. The Labour Party's general election manifesto promises to overhaul the local audit system.

Work has been ongoing across the summer to capture the extent of the funding gap that councils across Scotland, Cymru/Wales and England are facing for the financial years 2025/26 and 2026/27. We anticipate that our findings will be more accurate than the LGA's recent research, given those were based on modelling of future costs and pressures rather than stated funding gaps. We have also been capturing what ratio the funding gaps represent when set against a local council's net revenue budget to help put the figures into context.

Once our figures are finalised, we will launch them as part of a renewed campaigning push on local government funding.

## Sector Pay

NJC – the meeting heard that 81% of members had rejected the employers' offer of £1,290, on a turnout of 29%. The NJC Committee met following the seminar and voted to trigger an industrial action ballot. GMB have voted to accept the pay offer; Unite has rejected and will be balloting.

SJC – at the time of the meeting we were waiting for the ballot results for waste workers; after that, we will be balloting members in schools.

Chief Officers – members have voted to accept the offer.

FSA, CQC, Ofsted – we are waiting for the civil service pay remit guidance to be published.

## SGE Policy Seminar

During the seminar, the SGE discussed how it would action all of the motions carried at Local Government Conference. The SGE carried out a detailed prioritisation exercise, and agreed to give particular priority to work on Migrant workers, Cuts and funding, Schools, Pensions, Young workers, Pay and terms and conditions.

The second day of the seminar included sessions on the environment and meeting net zero in local government, migrant workers, and organising in schools and local government.

## Action plans from the seminar

The SGE agreed 10 actions for committee members to take away:

1. Local Service Champions - share the celebrity film widely when it is released. This is an interview with UNISON's Local Service Champions Winner, Alys Exley-Smith
2. Listen to and share the Podcasts - [The UNISON Local Government Podcast](#) | [UNISON National](#)
3. Advise National Officer Paul Bell ([P.Bell@unison.co.uk](mailto:P.Bell@unison.co.uk)) of any successful insourcing stories - ask your region for some examples
4. Strike Pay/Hardship Funds - raise the issue with your regional lead and regional local government committee - ideas as to how to increase funds to support Industrial Action
5. Regional Social Work Forum - if your region does not have one ask for one to be set up. National Officer, Gill Archer, will help as required
6. Visit [End Violence at Work!](#) - raise it with your employer - complete the link and email your local councillors - it takes less than a minute. Share on social media
7. Climate Emergency - ask your employer if they have become a climate emergency organisation, and encourage activists across your region to do the same
8. Regional Local Government Service Group Agenda - get your report and Climate Emergency on the agenda as standing items on your Regional Local Government Service group
9. Find out who your Regional Lead for Migrant Workers is – and find out what, if anything is going on
10. Ask your Regional Head of Local Government about BSOF (Branch Support and Organising Fund) bids/projects

## Education and Children's Services

### Schools

The Labour Government has confirmed that it will re-introduce the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB), and this was included in the recent King's Speech. Discussions have begun about what this should look like. We will also need careful consideration, through UNISON's Schools Committee and the SGE, about what it means for our future work and structures. The trade unions on the SSSNB will be the current recognised trade unions for school support staff – UNISON, GMB and UNITE – and not the NEU.

With UNISON's Bargaining Support Unit we produced a model pay claim for 'non NJC' academies. This model claim mirrors the NJC pay claim for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We have also produced guidance for branches on the Catholic Education Service template 'schools capability policy'

Following reports of the rapid the spread of a fire in 'low rise' residential buildings in Barnet - [Fears of new UK cladding crisis after blaze destroys timber-frame homes | Housing | The Guardian](#) - we have been raising urgent questions with the Department for Education over fire safety procedures for school buildings with Grenfell style cladding. UNISON's Health and Safety Unit will also be producing guidance for branches. In addition working with UNISON's Policy team we sent a joint unions letter to the Secretary of State and a briefing to all MPs calling for the roll out of air filters to all schools.

UNISON published a [large-scale report](#) into the issue of teaching assistants being used to cover lessons in England and Wales which received mainstream media coverage. The recommendations from the report have been shared with politicians and other key stakeholders, and will be useful in future campaigning, policy and negotiation work.

UNISON updated and reissued its model policy for preventing and dealing with violence in schools, along with a new guide for organisers which was developed alongside the Strategic Organising Unit and the national Health & Safety unit. The 5-phase plan provides an organising framework to work with schools in way that engages members and builds UNISON organisation and strength, to ensure we win and sustain change to safeguard school support staff and prevent violence and abuse at work.  
[Cymru/Wales](#)

A successful Schools Support Staff Seminar was held in Cardiff on 23 February with over 70 members enjoying presentations on the ALN Act, Curriculum for Wales and the report from the Teaching Assistant Job Descriptions review task and finish group.

There were workshops on working within professional boundaries, the menopause and history of unions and the world of work. Plans are being considered by the schools forum to consider bringing next year's seminar forward to coincide with Stars In Our Schools later this year and include a celebration during the day.

The new First Minister for Wales made changes to his Cabinet – as a result, we have a new Cabinet Secretary for Education. An invitation to meet has been sent, to discuss: Review of TA Job Descriptions; Increasing concerns about challenging behaviour in schools; Concerns that schools are using apprentices as TAs on the cheap; Middle Tier review of school improvement services; Re-visit the TA school governor role as created by the previous Education Minister and Reform of the school year consultation

Welsh Government have announced that they will no longer subsidise the registration fees for support staff. Since support staff registration was introduced in 2016, TAs have paid £15 of the £45 fee; the balance of £30 was funded by the Government. For 2024/25, the Education Workforce Council (EWC) have agreed to fund the subsidy but will only commit to this for one year. Discussions are ongoing with both the EWC and WG about how the subsidy will be funded in the future.

Schools Forum - At the forum in April, the deputy director of Estyn (the education and training inspectorate for Wales) attended to understand more about the school inspection process and the engagement and impact this has on TAs. The Region is planning more regular meetings and to help frame ways in which support staff can confidently engage in the school inspection process.

## Scotland

The Education Issues Group (EIG) continues to participate in a range of Scottish government working/advisory groups. SAGRABIS, Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviours in Schools and the ASL Working Group have produced action plans and recommendation for Scottish Government. In relation to SAGRABIS we have advised we cannot formally sign up due to lack of funding to support the plan. We will continue to campaign around funding based on this.

Cuts to local government spending and the impact on members' jobs remain a priority. There are local campaign groups now springing up in Scotland against school cuts and the Region is liaising with Parents groups on this. Tied to this are the impact of dysregulated behaviour on school support staff. Violence in schools remains a key part of 2024 workplan, with a move to focus on debriefings and staff training. Branches continue to roll out Violence in Schools survey and have attracted good local media interest. EIG has agreed to hold another School Summit in January 2025.

Education workers took strike action as part of last year's local government pay campaign and recruitment and retention had been a key focus for EIG. We are now moving to another strike ballot of these members for Pay 2024. EIG continues to engage our members with a view to ensuring support for the ballot.

Mapping of members with careers guidance job titles indicates that 20% of these members are in the Community service group, and a further 5% are in the Higher Education service group. Currently, only members in the Local Government service group may sit on the Careers Forum, thus excluding a quarter of our members in the sector. It is proposed that the Careers Forum become a cross service group committee, allowing regions to nominate anyone who works in a careers guidance role.

The organisers of the Careers Festival, an online event for careers professionals, have agreed to promote the new UNISON careers recruitment leaflet with their resources, and we are in discussion with them about future involvement in the festival.

## **UNISON Local Government Podcasts**

The Latest Behind The Service: A UNISON Insight into Local Government podcast is out now. The 14 years of austerity have brutally hit local government services, but have you ever wondered about the extent of the damage caused? This this podcast episode exposes the harsh reality of local government funding. Discover the impact of persistent cuts on your local services and how the money moves behind the scenes.

Download and listen to this current podcast and the series by visiting the UNISON website [The UNISON Local Government Podcast | UNISON National](#)

You can also listen on every major podcast platform.

## **Service Delivery**

UK outsourcing firm Capita will start focusing on its public services, contact centres, and pension solutions businesses. It will restructure and right-size the organisation to reduce costs, drive efficiency, and improve cash flow.

Read more here: <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/finance/news/uk-outsourcing-firm-capita-sharpen-072258944.html>.

Outsourcing giant Mitie reports record sales amid AI-led security projects. The UK government has been spending money with Mitie, which has led to these bumper sales.

Read more here: <https://www.msn.com/en-gb/money/other/outourcing-giant-mitie-reports-record-sales-amid-ai-led-security-projects/ar-BB1nIRjW>.

The Welsh Government has produced a check-list for contracting authorities to prepare for procurement law changes. The legislative changes are the Procurement Act 2023, the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023, and the Health Service Procurement (Wales) Act 2023. The toolkit asks local authorities to consider whether they have updated the corporate risk register and if they have an up-to-date contract register.

You can find the document here:

<https://www.sell2wales.gov.wales/helpandresources/6/preimplementationchecklist2024>

## UNISON Year of LGBT+ Workers 2024

The Local Government Service Group continues to support the work of the LGBT+ Self-Organised Group on the UNISON Year of LGBT+ Workers. Continuing to encourage branches, regions and members of the service group committee and forums to promote and get involved in the Year of LGBT+ Workers. This is being done through regular circulars and social media.

As a result of all the effort by LGBT+ members and allies, the number of LGBT+ branch officers has increased to over 240, they have trained over 4,000 UNISON members on how to be a good trans ally. Over 300 members are now part of our national young LGBT+ members' network and the regional self-organised groups activist base has grown. And we are only halfway through the year – there is still lots of time to celebrate the year in your branch, workplace and region.

Sue Sanders was the guest speaker at Local Government Conference. She spoke about how the work of LGBT+ people in grass-root organisations and unions has led us to the place we are today and that we have been the actors of our own destiny. The fact that LGBT+ people have some basic rights that heterosexuals have taken for granted is due to our hard work. In the Year of LGBT+ Workers it is fitting to be celebrating our pride in UNISON and embedding this across our labour movement. We must use the year and beyond to continue building on our legacy to improve the rights of LGBT+ people within the workplace and wider society and there is still much more to do.

Sue promoted the [LGBT+ History Month](#) website which has, over the years, developed many free resources for all to use to demonstrate the breath of our influence and impact of our cultural heritage. She urged those working in schools to look at the website and take part in a competition to design the badge for 2025. This will be a big year as they will be celebrating Schools Out reaching 50 and LGBT+ History Month will be 20 years old.

The Local Government Conference fringe meeting 'UNISON Year of LGBT+ Workers in Local Government' was well attended and very engaging. The panel of speakers included Tim Roberts (Regional Secretary – Eastern Region), Jenny Black (Co – Chair of the National LGBT+ Committee) and Jennie Antonio (National LGBT+ Committee).

The motion submitted by the national LGBT+ members' committee to National Delegate Conference on a rule change '[Rule D Regional Representatives](#)' was carried. This rule will change the regional NEC male reserved seats to general seats because members who do not identify as either male or female have been prevented from standing for our NEC regional seats in every region. This affects members who identify as non-binary or gender diverse because they are not solely male or female. In all structures within UNISON bar the NEC, we had replaced male seats with general seats.

## Equality and Diversity

Programmes and events are still taking place demonstrating the success of the Year of Black Workers campaign. With a significant number of employers still signing up to the Anti-Racism Charter, further briefings on the Ethnicity Pay Gap (EPG), and the potential second reading of the Bill later in the year, we have a legacy to be proud of. Discussion at the NDC fringe meeting was centred around what strategies activist can take to engage with employers for breaking barriers, review of policies and making sure pay claims also include addressing pay disparity and inequality.

The second phase of the [Ethnicity Pay Gap toolkit](#) was launched at the fringe meeting. The EPG campaign is about highlighting the barriers of racism Black workers face while focusing on measures to dismantle discrimination and race inequality in the workplace and wider society. It's all about 'Establishing Legacy to Generate Change'. Labour have given a commitment in their manifesto to make the EPG compulsory for employers. Future activities are planned to engage with Parliamentarians and Peers to push the campaign for legislative change and encouraging activists to get employers to adopt UNISON's anti-racism charter and further [cement the legacy of the Year of Black Workers](#). On 19 June it was announced that UNISON won its challenge against the government over the Windrush Scandal. Read the full article here on the [High Court rules governments windrush failings are unlawful](#). The next Government to implement those recommendations.

Almost 200 employers have now adopted the [Disability Employment Charter](#), but only a few local government employers and council leaders have agreed to sign up. We must do more to encourage local government employers to adopt the Charter and branches are reminded to provide feedback about how successful they have been in getting council leaders to adopt the Charter by completing our [short online survey](#). The Labour Party has committed to introduce disability pay gap monitoring, easier and more timely access to reasonable adjustments and time off for disability reps. Our work on supporting UNISON's campaign to introduce mandatory disability pay gap monitoring and reporting in local government workplaces will continue to be a priority for the Service Group in the coming year.

At its fringe meeting on Tuesday of National Delegate Conference, UNISON's young members launched their new campaign: [Young Members Mental Health Matters](#). Local Government Service Executive Members are asked to use the following new resources to campaign to support young members and bargain for more mentally healthy workplaces:

- ❖ [6 postcards about young members health](#)
- ❖ [Leaflet about young members mental health and how UNISON can help](#)
- ❖ [Young members right to disconnect leaflet](#)

A fringe "Addressing the childcare crisis", took place at the NDC. It was a very informative and engaging session. Each speaker presented the issues and solutions. An overview of how the sector is funded and who's driving the high prices was provided. Sadly, over the last 20 years, childcare has moved into the sights of Private Equity Companies, and this market-based system has driven costs beyond the affordability of most families. It was outlined how much unpaid work women do in childcare and eldercare, in the UK, with 23.7 billion hours equivalent to £382 billion. Women are 7 times more likely to be out of the labour market due to caring responsibilities and this rises to 12 times more likely for Black women.

The results of recent polls clearly demonstrate that the public are well ahead of the Government in supporting childcare and access for all children, with 66% agree that those with no recourse to public funds should have access to childcare. Students are not able to complete training due to the high costs and lack of availability of childcare, rural women, Black women and children with special needs are suffering this crisis at a higher rate and greater negative impact. Childcare is an economic driver, when invested through the public purse it will enable women to contribute to society, not just to work but to be part of creating cultural change that means everyone is valued in society.

## Social Work

This year's national campaign to recruit the student social worker intake to UK universities will start in August. Individual emails will be sent to students via UCAS before they start their course explaining the benefits of UNISON membership. A new student social worker leaflet is being produced for this campaign.

UNISON is running a workshop on Safe Haven – our updated Guide for Social Workers Supporting Refugee and Migrant Children in England our guidance at Community Care Live on 8 October 2024.

## National Social Worker Seminar

UNISON is holding a seminar for social worker stewards and members on the theme of UNISON standing up for social workers. on Saturday 23 November 2024 at The Wesley 81-103 Euston St, London NW1 2EZ. Branches can register 2 delegates using UNISON's online conference system (OCS).

The seminar is open to social work members employed in Health and Community Service Groups. The deadline for delegate registration is 11 October.

## Social Care

The Labour Party's general election manifesto included a commitment to create a National Care Service, although timelines remain vague. It also includes a commitment to work with trade unions and care employers to establish a Fair Pay Agreement. Work is underway to try and support both these initiatives if and when the Labour Party win the Westminster General Election.

UNISON's new social care committee for care workers in England is on track to hold its first meeting in September and will hopefully play a key role in advancing the treatment of care workers in England.

In Cymru/Wales a new Social Care Workforce Partnership has begun to meet which will establish informal sectoral collective bargaining. Due to the financial challenges in Cymru/Wales the body will initially look at developing standard best practice HR policies for the sector. A Fair Work Framework will also be launched in September which will require social care employers to demonstrate that they are abiding by in order to have a better chance at winning public sector contracts.

## Housing

UNISON will soon carry out a survey of members working in housing services, to better understand their concerns and priorities.

UNISON recently updated our housing affordability campaign website to include the latest house price data available: [www.housingripoff.org](http://www.housingripoff.org)

A parliamentary event with housing charity Shelter is being organised. This will be an opportunity for UNISON and Shelter to convey to MPs just how severely the housing crisis is affecting our members.

UNISON worked with housing campaign group Generation Rent to deliver some online roundtable/focus groups involving our members, which took place in April. A draft report has been shared with UNISON and we are awaiting some final amendments.

UNISON is developing a training website for housing members. This will incorporate much of the remote and online training we already offer - but aimed at our housing members. This will form part of our offer for recruiting new members in housing services.

## Climate Crisis

Green UNISON Week takes place on 13 – 20 September this year. Branches are invited to start planning local activity to boost recruitment and organising on environmental issues.

## Local Service Champions Project

All three champions award winners attended the presentation at Conference. Nominations for the awards this year, though fewer in number, were of a higher standard with more nominators following

the judging criteria provided online. This reflects the substantial changes made to the nomination process for 2024.

To raise the profile of local government workers following the awards, the service group has engaged the help of a famous actor who will be filmed interviewing UNISON's Local Service Champions Winner, Alys Exley-Smith.

Champions Day on Thursday, 17 October is intended to keep the campaign's momentum going ahead of the launch of next year's Local Service Champions Awards in early December.

It is an opportunity for branches to celebrate their own heroes at a local level, identify members who could be strong contenders for next year's awards, organise and recruit. Materials and resources will be available to branches.

In preparation for local campaigning, UNISON regions have been given copies of the best nominations the service group received this year for the awards.

### **Dates of future SGE Meetings**

Thursday, 6 February 2025

Thursday, 3 April 2025

Thursday, 5 June 2025

Saturday, 14 June 2025

Sunday, 15 – Monday, 16 June 2025 – LG Conference, Liverpool

Tuesday, 15 – Wednesday, 16 July 2025 – Annual Seminar, venue in South East Region  
*tbc (travelling to the venue on 14 July)*

Thursday, 20 November 2025

We are looking forward to representing branches in the region in the forthcoming year.

Thank you

Rob and Sue