



**Service Group Conference 2025**

**Decisions**

**15 - 16 June 2025**

**ACC Liverpool**

## **Composite A (Motions 1, 2, 3, 5, 8 and Amendment 1.1) English Devolution**

**Carried**

Conference notes the publication of the English Devolution White Paper, which will significantly impact our members' employment in every region of England. The proposals could diminish the role of district councils in strategic governance by reorganising or consolidating them into unitary authorities. The remaining district councils will be expected to focus on hyper-local service delivery and collaborate more closely with the new Mayoral Strategic Authority. This transformation reflects the government's push for streamlined governance and greater efficiency at a strategic level.

County councils will also be impacted, leaving our members currently employed by districts and county councils with uncertainty about the identity of their employer, their roles, and their pay, terms and conditions.

Conference notes that 'English devolution' is not the same as the devolution of powers to Scotland, Cymru/Wales and Northern Ireland, but many of the ideas within the White Paper could be replicated in those nations/administrations, and so we need a UK-wide approach to the proposals.

Conference notes the publication of the new Labour Government's White Paper on English Devolution. UNISON welcomes the government's ambition to democratise decision-making and bring power closer to communities. We recognise that well-designed devolution can revitalise local economies, enhance service delivery and empower citizens.

Conference recognises that the greatest direct impact of the proposals will be on our members in the local government sector. The proposed abolition of district councils and the rapid creation of large, combined authorities, run by directly elected mayors, is the biggest change in the governance of the English regions in 50 years. Mistakes made now will have a long-lasting legacy for decades to come.

Conference believes that councils are at breaking point. After years of damaging austerity, investing in services and staff must be central to any reforms made as the White Paper progresses towards becoming legislation. Any proposals to phase out smaller district councils must not undermine local decision-making or the ability of public service workers to deliver services. Nor must the plans lead to further micro-management by Whitehall. Local communities and council employees are best placed to know what works in their areas. Powers given to new or existing mayoral strategic authorities must be devolved from central government, rather than taken from local councils.

Conference, therefore, remains concerned about certain aspects of the White Paper. While it seeks to address the existing patchwork of responsibilities among combined authorities, metro mayors and local councils, it does not resolve the democratic deficits and funding challenges created by over a decade of austerity. We believe that the success of any devolution settlement hinges on robust financial support for local authorities, as well as clear and consistent frameworks for accountability and service coordination.

Conference believes that local authorities in the North East have endured years of funding cuts, leading to staff shortages and the loss of vital local services. While the devolution of power from Westminster is a positive step, much remains to be done to address the lasting damage caused by severe cuts to regional funding since 2010.

The publication of the English Devolution White Paper signals significant changes to the governance of local authorities across the country. However, the North East has already undergone substantial restructuring, with no district councils remaining. In addition, all twelve local authority areas are now part of either the North East Combined Authority or the Tees Valley Combined Authority.

One of the most important changes for the region, as outlined in the White Paper, is the introduction of Integrated Settlements. This will consolidate budgets across key areas such as housing, regeneration, local growth, transport, skills, retrofit, and employment support. The aim is to offer greater flexibility in allocating funding across these policy areas, along with more streamlined reporting on their outcomes.

While this appears broadly positive, Conference reiterates its concerns about the directly elected mayoral model in terms of: potentially concentrating power and influence into the hands of just one person, leading to less accountability and transparency; fears that the vested interests of the private sector could be the likely winners in more centralised decision-making; and, the further removal of powers from ordinary councillors may do little to promote active engagement in local democratic processes.

In the Northern region, there is a stark contrast in terms of UNISON's working relationship between The North East and Tees Valley combined authority mayors, which reinforces the strategic importance of having an incumbent that shares our interests.

Close working relationships with mayors and local authorities is also vital to ensure decision-making is in line with community need. A good example of this is the work of the North East mayor on establishing the North East Child Poverty Reduction Unit and investment in the development of The Crown Works Studios in Sunderland.

While the governance structure for devolution in the North East is now in place, there is a continual need for trade union influence in Mayoral strategy to drive regional growth in line with our bargaining agenda. This, in turn, will benefit local authorities and local government workers.

Trade unions must be a key stakeholder at local, regional and national levels in the implementation of English devolution or any other local government reorganisation.

Conference believes that devolution deals must be developed from the bottom up, not through backroom deals in Whitehall. Public sector workers must be involved in developing the proposals. Devolution deals should draw powers from the centre, not reduce local community power. Mayoral devolution should enhance union representation and not lead to a reduction in our influence.

Conferences notes that while central government civil service numbers have increased substantially, local government workforce numbers have declined

dramatically under successive Conservative governments. The White Paper acknowledges significant recruitment and retention problems in local government, and conference notes that proposed creation of a workforce development group.

Conference also notes that recent history has shown how reduced central funding – alongside increasing demand – has pushed many local authorities to the brink of financial collapse. Although the White Paper acknowledges these issues, it must go further in ensuring that councils have the resources to deliver vital public services. UNISON insists that new responsibilities conferred by devolution must be matched with adequate funding, preventing any erosion of service quality or workforce capacity.

It's also vital the changes outlined in the White Paper are not a smokescreen for cutting local authority jobs or eroding local government workers' pay, terms and conditions. Any local government reorganisation must take place alongside a proper re-set of pay and conditions, so that years of decline in real terms pay are reversed. The Government's plans for devolution must not be used as a smokescreen for further austerity or job cuts. Local authorities need proper funding and the autonomy to make decisions that benefit their communities. UNISON is committed to protecting public services, safeguarding local government jobs, and ensuring that workers' voices are heard in shaping the future of devolution. Conference, the Government's recent publication of the devolution white paper, which outlines proposals for restructuring local government, including the potential phasing out of smaller district councils. The Government does not fully understand the critical role local government workers play in delivering vital public services to communities across the UK. Conference, members are acutely aware of the ongoing financial challenges faced by local authorities due to years of austerity, which have left many councils struggling to maintain essential services.

Democratising and empowering local government can play a key role in strengthening the economy and improving outcomes for local communities. Local decision-making is most effective when it is inclusive of council workers' expertise and reflective of the needs of the community, without unnecessary interference from Central Government. Any reforms must prioritise investment in services, safeguarding jobs, and ensuring that restructuring does not lead to further redundancies or reductions in the quality of public services. Local government employees, as front line workers, are best placed to provide insight into what works in their communities, and their voices must be central to any proposed changes.

Conference also notes the impact on the NJC could be significant, affecting some UNISON regions more than others where regional and local bargaining has taken our members away from the NJC. By the same token, reorganisation could be an opportunity to bring those authorities that have opted out of the NJC back into its purview.

Conference further believes that insourcing is the preferred model for service delivery, regardless of the governance of local communities, and we must use these proposals as an opportunity to campaign for this.

Furthermore, Conference recognises the importance of preserving national collective bargaining arrangements. In previous debates on regional devolution, proposals to

introduce regional pay threatened to undermine national pay standards and terms and conditions. It is essential that the White Paper clearly rules out any fragmentation of national bargaining, safeguarding staff from a potential “postcode lottery” in wages and employment protections.

Conference notes:

- 1) The publication of the English Devolution White Paper, which proposes significant changes to local governance structures, including the creation of Strategic Authorities, the promotion of unitary councils, and the centralisation of strategic functions such as transport, housing, and economic development;
- 2) The potential impact of these reforms on district and county councils, including the reduction of their autonomy, the reorganisation of local government structures, and the potential dissolution of district councils in some areas;
- 3) The implications for our members’ jobs, including the transfer of staff to new authorities, the redefinition of roles, restructures, reorganisations, potential redundancies, and the need for retraining and reskilling;
- 4) The lack of explicit recognition of the role of trade unions in the White Paper, despite the critical importance of engaging with staff and their representatives to ensure a fair and effective transition;
- 5) The ongoing challenges faced by local authorities, including years of austerity, underfunding, and increased demand for services, which must be addressed as part of any reform process.

Conference believes:

- a) The proposed reforms must prioritise the protection of jobs, terms and conditions, services, and local democracy, ensuring that any changes to governance structures do not undermine the quality of public services or the rights of workers;
- b) The creation of unitary councils and Strategic Authorities must be accompanied by adequate funding, capacity-building, and meaningful engagement with staff and trade unions to ensure a smooth transition and ongoing trade union input;
- c) The centralisation of strategic functions must not come at the expense of local accountability and representation, and district councils must retain a meaningful role in addressing hyper-local issues and community needs;
- d) Any reorganisation of local government must include robust protections for staff, including guaranteed employment rights, no detriment to terms and conditions, access to retraining and reskilling opportunities, and measures to avoid compulsory redundancies;

- e) Trade unions must be recognised as key stakeholders in the devolution process, with a formal role in shaping the implementation of reforms and ensuring that the voices of workers are heard.

UNISON's core principles remain central to evaluating devolution reforms:

- 1) Democratic Renewal: Local communities must have genuine oversight of decisions, not only through elected mayors or combined authorities but also via transparent consultation and accountability structures;
- 2) Better Government: Devolution should demonstrably improve the coordination, quality and efficiency of services;
- 3) Devolving Power: Decision-making must take place at the appropriate local or regional level, rather than being retained in or recentralised by Westminster;
- 4) Economic Imperative: Devolution must help drive sustainable local and regional prosperity, delivering benefits to all communities;
- 5) Equitable Settlement: No region should be financially disadvantaged by devolved arrangements, nor should public service reforms be used to impose cuts;
- 6) Consultation and Stakeholder Input: Full engagement with local people, staff, and their Trades Unions must precede and shape any new governance structures.

By adopting this motion, UNISON reaffirms its commitment to a fair, inclusive, and democratically accountable approach to devolution – one that invests in public services, empowers local government staff, and ensures stronger communities across England.

Therefore, Conference calls upon the National Local Government Service Group Executive to work with the Labour Link and the Labour Government to:

- a) Secure Funding: Commit to properly resourcing local authorities, reversing cuts and ensuring any new powers come with matching revenue streams;
- b) Protect Jobs and Pay: Guarantee that national collective bargaining is upheld and that devolved authorities cannot introduce inferior terms and conditions;
- c) Enhance Accountability: Implement transparent structures, ensuring local people genuinely shape and scrutinise how services are run.

Conference calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive (SGE) to:

- 1) Campaign for a fair and inclusive devolution process that protects jobs, terms and conditions, services, and local democracy, and ensures that any reforms are underpinned by adequate funding and resources; Continue to make the economic case that Councils are crucial to sustainable regional economic growth and delivering the government's missions;

- 2) Lobby the Westminster Government to press for a guarantee that there will be no loss of pay and conditions for any staff affected by the White Paper's proposals, that TUPE will apply to all transfers, and that national bargaining will remain the basis for pay-setting in any new Unitary Authorities, Strategic Authorities, Combined Authorities, or Combined Mayoral Authorities;
- 3) To continue to highlight the impact of austerity and underfunding on local government, and to campaign for increased investment in public services and staff as part of any reform agenda.
- 4) Campaign for proper funding for any reorganisation or devolution, calling on the Government to close the £3.4bn funding gap and invest in the future of local services and good jobs; Campaign for full funding for devolution, urging the Government to close the £3.4 billion funding gap and invest in the future of local services and good jobs;
- 5) To demand that the government engage meaningfully with trade unions, including UNISON, in the design and implementation of devolution reforms, ensuring that the rights and interests of staff are safeguarded; Engage with the Government to demand trade union representation in devolution planning and workforce development, and to respond to government consultations on English devolution;
- 6) Continue to push for democratic accountability of the Mayoral model with meaningful trade union representation.
- 7) Campaign against any devolution proposals that may result in job losses, reduced funding for services, or the undermining of local decision-making;
- 8) Call on the Government to prioritise investment in local services and staff, ensuring that reforms strengthen, rather than weaken, the ability of councils to deliver high-quality services;
- 9) Support branches and regions in advocating for the involvement of local government workers and their unions in shaping any proposed restructuring plans;
- 10) Work with other unions, community groups, and stakeholders to promote an alternative vision for devolution that focuses on empowering communities, protecting jobs, and delivering sustainable investment in local government;
- 11) Monitor the impact of the devolution white paper and report back to members with updates on how proposed changes could affect jobs, services, and local communities. Where those reports show a detrimental impact, work to provide robust challenge in response to government and support regions and branches to challenge the same at a local level
- 12) Work with sectors, regions and branches to ensure that any staff transfers arising out of these proposals take place using TUPE, with protection from redundancy, and that trade union recognition and facility time are transferred and enhanced as part of any employment transfer;

- 13) To support our members affected by reorganisation, including through legal protections under TUPE or “TUPE like” transfers, access to retraining and reskilling programmes, and opposition to any worsening of terms and conditions and compulsory redundancies;
- 14) Work with sectors, regions and branches to press for full equality impact assessments of any staffing changes arising out of the creation of new authorities, using the opportunity to identify and close any gender, ethnicity or disability pay gaps;
- 15) Provide guidance to branches and regions on negotiating and dealing with the full range of impacts of English devolution.
- 16) Fight to maintain national bargaining within all devolution proposals, while ensuring the protection of local government jobs and services;
- 17) To work with local authorities, combined authorities, and other stakeholders to ensure that the transition to new governance structures is managed in a way that minimises disruption to services and staff. Also seek to ensure ongoing trade union engagement through workforce engagement boards for example;

#### **4. Local Government Reorganisation is an Attack on Local Democracy** **Carried**

Conference notes that Labour’s English Devolution white paper proposes reorganising large parts of local government. Merging many district councils into larger unitary authorities will impact local democracy and public services. Over half of the 21 county councils that had elections planned this year applied to postpone them as a result.

Councillors across many counties, have requested their councils be consolidated into a combined authority. These requests for devolution may also request inclusion of an elected mayor. Conference believes that this artificial formation of combined authorities will reduce accountability and transparency. There will be fewer elected representatives making decisions on vital services which affect people’s livelihoods. Workers in one level of council can currently be elected as councillors at another level (separate employers) – this opportunity will not be possible in the proposed single-tier mega-councils, effectively removing the workers’ voices.

Council services have suffered from over a decade of cuts. Without councillors fighting for the resources needed things will continue down that path. Under these plans, services could lose specialised knowledge and it will reduce the already limited democratic accountability. We will have combined authorities dictating the fate of services distant from them and the communities that rely on them.

The government has exalted the need for reorganisation to take advantage of new economic opportunities. But who will benefit the most? Outsourcing corporations that facilitate the privatisation of public services and make profits from what used to be public services. For example - Southampton’s council touts the Solent Freeport as

an example of investment that has benefited local communities. In reality, these special tax zones are most beneficial to the private sector. When businesses move into areas like Solent due to more attractive tax arrangements, the rest of the region is deprioritised.

If the English Devolution Bill is intended to make local government more democratic, why does it enable one of the most valuable resources of local government – our public services – to be kept out of public control? Larger councils will be able to sell off more services to the highest bidder and, with fewer elections, face less scrutiny for doing so.

Conference also notes the issue of local government debt. With councillors accepting the previous Tory government's austerity programme and unsuccessful building ventures, Woking council has £2 billion of debt. Councils across Surrey have £5.5 billion of debt. Any new unitary authorities will come into being weighed down by massive debts and tasked with administering services cut to the bone by austerity.

Conference calls upon the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Highlight the negative impact of local government reorganisation on public services and local democracy;
- 2) Support branches in the affected areas to campaign around the defence of jobs and services and local democracy;
- 3) Step up the campaign nationally for all privatised services to be brought back in house, for the billions taken by central government from councils over the past 15 years to be re-invested in local government;
- 4) Demand the cancelling of the massive debts owed to central government by local government.

## **6. Supporting our Members through Local Government Reorganisation**

**Carried as Amended: 6.1**

The English Devolution White Paper, released in December 2024, proposes the reorganisation of local authorities, which could see the removal of all district and borough councils in favour of unitary authorities.

Six areas: Cumbria, Cheshire & Warrington, Norfolk & Suffolk, Greater Essex, Sussex & Brighton and Hampshire & Solent have been included in the Devolution Priority Programme.

The whole process of reorganisation could take several years but this will be a period of uncertainty for many of our members across the region.

Naturally, the priority for UNISON should be for our members to be treated fairly throughout the process and that jobs are protected wherever possible during this transition period.

These reorganisations are likely to take significant time for our reps to support members and be fully engaged in negotiations on shared terms and conditions, TUPE transfers and any resulting redundancies.

We call upon the Local Government SGE to work with branches in districts, boroughs, county and unitary authorities to:

- 1) Develop negotiation guidelines on unitarisation for all affected branches;
- 2) Work with UNISON's Learning & Organising Services Department and Regions to provide a programme of training for branch representatives on negotiating around terms and conditions, TUPE transfers and the redundancy process;
- 3) Help to bring together working groups from affected councils so that UNISON can be at the heart of changes and ahead of the process rather than hostages to decisions made outside our control;
- 4) Work with other relevant unions in local government to ensure changes benefit all union members.

## **7. Local Government Reorganisation: Full and Restored Funding Must Come First!**

**Carried**

Conference notes with concern the government's proposals for wholesale local government reorganisation across England, particularly given that this was not in the recent Labour Party election manifesto or referred to anywhere prior to the Chancellor's announcement in late 2024.

Conference believes that any attempt to lift local government from out of the crisis inflicted upon it by sustained reductions in funding by the previous Conservative governments will not be resolved by restructuring local government into larger unitary authorities.

While unitaries are potentially appropriate for larger urban areas, the government's proposals fail to recognise the position in less densely populated two-tier council areas (covering over 37% of England's population and 59% of its geographic area), which could damage local democracy, identity and autonomy.

Conference notes and regrets the cancellation of local council elections which are essential for people to have their say and give their verdict on the last decade of Tory rule.

Conference further believes that reorganisation is treasury-led, based on flawed assumptions from a single County Councils Network-commissioned report from PWC and that practical experience in those areas which have been through the

unitarisation process have not evidenced discernible financial savings or improved service delivery.

Furthermore, such a wholesale reorganisation will risk undermining council services over several years, create a long period of unnecessary uncertainty for all local government workers in England whose authorities are being dissolved, which will likely be the vast majority, and fails to acknowledge the significant reductions in local government spending already delivered through cuts to local services and terms and conditions over recent years.

Conference believes that local government workers are on their knees after more than a decade of austerity and relentless restructuring, and notes that our members' health and wellbeing must be of paramount importance. The significant additional workload the Government's proposals represent, on top of 'business as usual', is unsustainable, damaging and likely to result in poor outcomes.

Conference therefore calls on the LG SGE to adopt a policy of full and restored funding for local government first, restructuring second. Conference further calls on the LG SGE to work with all appropriate bodies of the union, including its Labour Link, to demand that the government put on hold its hasty, ill-conceived rush to reorganisation until:

- 1) there has been adequate time for the findings of the fairer funding review to have been implemented;
- 2) they review the timetable to allow a more realistic timescale for efficient and effective local government structures to be considered and implemented than the current one;
- 3) they further consider waiting until after devolution has been implemented to avoid reorganisation causing problems for this reform, and
- 4) above all they allow for sufficient and meaningful consultation and negotiation with UNISON (and other unions recognised to represent local government workers) to have been undertaken before further changes proceed.

## **9. The School Support Staff Negotiating Body**

**Carried as Amended: 9.1, 9.2**

Conference notes that the government's Employment Rights Bill included legislation to reinstate the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) for England, which the Coalition Government had abolished.

Conference welcomes the reintroduction of the SSSNB, which will give members working in schools a full voice in negotiations on national pay, conditions and career development. Conference in particular welcomes the fact that the SSSNB will cover all school support staff in all state-funded schools, including academies.

Conference notes that while the SSSNB will be statutory in England, there may also be the opportunity for devolved nations/administrations to be involved in some capacity. Conference believes that decisions on such potential involvement must be

based on having full information about what it entails, and should be made by the respective devolved nations/administrations. Conference applauds UNISON Cymru/Wales' extensive consultation exercise of school support staff to determine a lobbying position and notes the clear preference of members for the creation of a Wales-only SSSNB. If members in Wales and Northern Ireland are not to be covered by a SSSNB, membership of the NJC should remain in place.

Conference believes that the SSSNB should be based on the principles of better pay and improved career structures and opportunities for all school support staff.

The new negotiating body must be backed by proper funding, otherwise it risks failure.

Conference notes that many of the funding problems in schools have been greatly exacerbated by the academy system. Academies syphon money away from those working directly with children to pay the often hugely inflated salaries of central teams. Participation in the SSSNB will not detract from UNISON policy which opposes the academisation of schools and UNISON will continue to call for schools to be fully funded and managed by their local authorities.

The new arrangements should also consider model contracts, roll-out without detriment for all staff, a job evaluation and pay and grading structure, and 52 week contracts and pay for all staff. The new arrangements must include a commitment to binding annual pay rises.

Conference notes that the full implementation of the SSSNB could take several years. Conference acknowledges that this is a major job, but believes that it should be set up as soon as possible, to ensure any benefits for members can be realised.

Conference reaffirms that any final proposal should be put to UNISON members, in line with the decision reached at the 2024 Local Government Conference.

Conference notes that since the agreement of the Service Group structures report at the 2010 Local Government Conference, the Shadow Schools Sector Committee has not had full sector committee rights. With the coming implementation of the SSSNB, it is essential that the committee is fully established as a sector committee within the Local Government Service Group. UNISON's lay representatives on the SSSNB should be drawn from the Schools Sector Committee and must be members whose own pay and conditions will be covered by the SSSNB. The committee should have motion submission rights at future Local Government Conferences.

Conference further notes that the reinstatement of the SSSNB could have major implications for UNISON's structures, including at sector committee, regional and branch levels, and these must be fully explored.

It is also essential that UNISON has a major strategic organising plan in place to ensure we are well-placed to grow our membership and activism through the SSSNB. Conference welcomes the work already carried out in this regard.

Conference therefore calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Establish the Shadow Schools Sector Committee as a full sector committee within the Service Group;
- 2) Work with the Schools Sector Committee, NJC Committee, Regions, devolved nations/administrations and Branches to conduct a full review of the structural implications of the SSSNB, and make appropriate recommendations to the 2026 Local Government Conference;
- 3) Work with the Schools Sector Committee to ensure UNISON remains the lead trade union in all discussions and negotiations relating to the SSSNB;
- 4) Ensure that all necessary information on potential involvement by devolved nations/administrations in the SSSNB is available, and work with the NJC Committee and devolved nations/administrations to ensure members' views are represented;
- 5) Work with the NEC, Strategic Organising Unit and Regions to continue to put in place an organising plan relating to the SSSNB.

## **10. A New Negotiating Body for Early Years Workers**

**Carried**

The new Westminster Government has stated that investment in early years education will be a priority. They have announced welcome increases in early years pupil premium payments and committed to the expansion of early years provision in schools.

Expansion of funded early years to children of working parents from nine months as well as increased rates of Early Years Pupil Premium by 50% will mean that funding will have tripled between 2022 and 2026. This is the biggest ever increase in eligibility and funding for early years and childcare. It will mean the state, which previously funded 40% of preschool or early years provision, will now fund around 80%, effectively nationalising the funding, much of which is delivered in the private sector on low wages.

However, this conference believes that more work is required to address the recruitment and retention crisis and to develop a workforce strategy for the early years sector. Many nurseries already report that they are unable to recruit and retain sufficient staff even prior to the planned expansion of early years provision announced by the previous government which remains the policy of the current government.

The early years and childcare sector has traditionally been characterised by low pay, low status and poor conditions of service for the workforce. The recruitment crisis in early years can only be addressed by improving the pay and conditions of the workforce. Across the UK the majority of nursery places are provided by the private and voluntary sectors, with only limited trade union membership and recognition.

This has made it challenging for unions to organise in the sector, particularly in smaller providers.

With the increase in places funded by the public purse, there needs to be greater accountability for how this public money is being spent. It cannot be acceptable that public funding for early education is being syphoned off as profit by multi-national companies with 'tax efficient' structures while highly qualified staff are being paid the minimum wage. Conference believes in universal provision for all children and families in early years and childcare.

UNISON believes that the UK Government / Devolved Governments should create early years and childcare sector wide national negotiating bodies that include unions and employers.

The body could be responsible for setting:

- 1) Minimum levels of pay linked to qualification levels;
- 2) A clear career pathway for early years staff;
- 3) A right for all early years staff to access continuing professional development;
- 4) A simplified structure of qualifications, with a focus on improving standards and outcomes for children;
- 5) Trade union recognition arrangements.

Any provider receiving public funding for places would be required to abide by the recommendations of this body.

This Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- a) Campaign for new national negotiating bodies for early years staff that can improve the pay and conditions of the early years and childcare workforce;
- b) Work with the NEC, and other appropriate campaigning bodies, to popularise this demand and campaign for more funding, universalism and better rates of pay for the sector;
- c) Work with regions to run recruitment campaigns in, especially, the private, voluntary and independent sectors, and look for successful examples to build upon.

## **11. Tackle Poor Behaviour and Violence in Further Education**

**Carried as Amended: 11.1**

Conference knows that poor behaviour in colleges leads to staff experiencing stress, mental health problems, physical injuries and high staff turnover. It is the time for us to focus our efforts on tackling learner behaviour in the college sector as lower-paid

support staff across the UK must no longer bear the brunt of abuse and violence that would not be tolerated on the streets.

Further education colleges serve a relatively high number of learners who need more support than they are getting, including learners with special needs learners from low-income communities and learners who have had negative past experiences with education. Fourteen years of underfunding have left further education colleges, sixth form colleges and the prison education service struggling to provide the education and opportunities people deserve and need.

Conference recognises that the transition to post-16 education can be difficult or even traumatic for young people who need support because they have special educational needs or are disabled (SEND). Lower levels of funding means the support they receive is often reduced when they move into further education. This is especially true for young people who do not have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) as extra funding is only available for students identified as having 'high needs'. A lack of support can leave some young people feeling isolated, anxious or frustrated which can cause poor behaviour that may be seen as disruptive or aggressive. With appropriate, fully funded support these young people can change their behaviour and go on to fulfil their potential.

UNISON has carried out two surveys, one in 2019 and one in 2024 on knife crime and drug use in colleges. We found that violence, crime and substance misuse are now widespread across colleges, with some learners regularly carrying weapons and drugs or arriving intoxicated. UNISON members described routinely finding drugs and weapons and injuries reported included a member of staff being stabbed in the back with a screwdriver and a student suffering multiple fractures and concussion, as well as bruising all over their body. More than seven in ten (73%) said they had no training on how to deal with students who bring weapons or drugs into college. As a result, more than half (53%) thought incidents were not resolved appropriately. More than a quarter (26%) of respondents said they don't feel physically safe at work, and with pressure from College management to not report incidents this will only increase.

Conference will be aware that as well as these extreme incidents, daily low-level poor behaviour and verbal abuse exists in colleges and also needs to be addressed urgently.

We need to see more training and better security to reduce violence and substance abuse in colleges. We also need stricter consequences for learners breaking college rules and increased staffing levels to deal with the problems.

Conference therefore calls on the Service Group Executive to

- 1) Conduct a survey into low-level behaviour problems in colleges;
- 2) Investigate the experiences of our members who work in the prison education service;

- 3) Develop and run a national campaign on raising awareness of behaviour issues in the whole FE sector; FE, 6th forms and prison education and involving law enforcement and local authorities where appropriate.
- 4) Work with Labour Link to lobby for SEND support funding for further education to be equivalent to the support available for children and young people in pre-16 education.
- 5) Produce an organising strategy and information materials for regional use;
- 6) Work with press to raise the issue to the wider public.

## **12. Sixth Form College Funding (England)**

**Carried**

This conference notes that according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, sixth form college funding was cut by around 17% between 2013 and 2019, with real terms funding in 2024 set to be below the level it was in 2010. The IFS also states that that funding for students in sixth form colleges is 22% lower than funding for students in secondary schools.

The needs of students have become increasingly complex since then (e.g. the sharp rise in demand for mental health support), more young people are living in poverty, and the cost of delivering sixth form education has risen significantly. This significant resource gap is further widened by the policy of ending pupil premium funding at the age of 16.

As well as providing Level 2 and level 3 qualifications to ready young people for the world of higher education and work, our colleges administer and provide bursaries, mental health support, careers advice, support for students in vulnerable housing, and all manner of specialist services.

Whilst we applaud the fact that the Secretary of State has agreed to fund to match the funding for a 5.5% pay offer to teachers, she has only done so for sixth form colleges that have become academies. This additional funding also includes funding for the pay award for support staff pay in sixth form colleges.

This currently means that many sixth form colleges that are not academies do not have the either the necessary funding from the DfE or the reserves to implement a decent national pay award.

The knock-on effects of this is likely to involve; difficulty with retention in non-academised Sixth Form Colleges affecting the quality and consistency of education for pupils. It could also force some colleges into unmanageable debt, mean that some colleges will leave national pay scales, and force other colleges into Multi Academy Trusts they would not have otherwise joined, losing the independence they have. All of this will inhibit quality, consistency and opportunity for staff and pupils.

This disparity must be corrected by the Department for Education. This motion calls for a level playing field between schools and FE and Sixth Form Colleges with regards to funding.

While average per-pupil annual funding in schools in England for 2023-24 is £7,460, the average funding for 16-19 pupils is just £4,753.

Currently, pupils have a barrier to opportunity if they have enrolled into the wrong sort of college as they will not have the funding that other learners enjoy.

This conference believes that:

- 1) Only awarding a 5.5% funding increase to Sixth Form Academies and not to non-academised Sixth Form and FE Colleges is unfair in principle;
- 2) This disparity in funding risks ending the national pay agreement all sixth form colleges are part of and undermines collective bargaining.

We call on the LGSGE to:

- a) Write to the Secretary of State to ask her to reverse her decision to withhold the additional 5.5% funding increase from non-academised sixth form colleges;
- b) Campaign for a pay award for support staff in sixth form colleges that is the same in all colleges, regardless of whether the college is an academy or not;
- c) Campaign for a fair funding settlement for all 16-19 pupils whether they are in schools, further education, or sixth form colleges.

### **13. Campaign for Classroom Assistants in Northern Ireland**

**Carried**

Conference recognises the determined efforts made by members in Education Support Services in Northern Ireland whose industrial action delivered the long-required pay and grading review, with the return of the devolved political institutions at Stormont in 2024.

However, Conference notes that classroom assistants, including Special Educational Needs (SEN) assistants in Northern Ireland, continue to face ongoing issues around pay, terms and conditions and precarious contracts and that they must be sufficiently recognised for the wide-ranging and significant role they play in supporting children and young people.

Conference supports the efforts of the Local Government Service Group in Northern Ireland in its campaign to improve outcomes for classroom assistants and protect

and improve terms and conditions, including through seeking the implementation of funded job evaluation processes.

Conference calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to support the Local Government Service Group in Northern Ireland in their ongoing campaigning efforts, including through the allocation of campaign resources where required.

#### **14. Support School Catering Services in Northern Ireland to provide Universal, Free School Meals**

**Carried**

Conferences recognises and commends the efforts of UNISON members in Northern Ireland in campaigning for the introduction of universal, free school meals.

Conference notes that the UNISON campaign in Northern Ireland has been for the introduction for universal, nutritious, free school meals for all children and young people, as a measure to promote child health and development and reduce poverty. Conference particularly notes that a key aspect of the campaign has been to recognise and safeguard the vital role played by the schools catering workforce.

Conference is aware that, following a review of free school meals eligibility undertaken by the Department of Education in Northern Ireland, a public consultation on options to introduce forms of universal provision of free school meals closed in February.

Conference agrees that any progressive roll out of universal, free school meals should be taken forwards within the publicly delivered 'in house' schools catering service, and that there must be a firm commitment from the Department of Education and Education Authority in Northern Ireland that no aspect of services will be outsourced or privatised.

Conference calls on the UNISON Local Government Service Group Executive to support the Northern Ireland Local Government Service Group in securing these commitments as part of the ongoing campaign for universal, free school meals.

#### **15. Engagement, Education and Retention of Apprentices in Local Government**

**Carried**

Conference believes that it is essential to recruit and organise apprentices, and to bargain for high quality apprenticeships to be available in local government.

In the year 2022/2023, public sector targets were that 2.3% of all public sector employees should be apprentices. At this same time, according to the most recent UK Parliament report on apprentices, in England alone, the majority of apprentices for the academic year 22/23 were under the age of 25, while there is a very similar story in Wales, this meaning that there are a significant number of young workers who are likely without representation, with UNISON data suggesting we only have

around 800 members of all ages in local government who are apprentices across the UK.

Conference notes that the quality of apprenticeships offered often varies across different sites within the same employer. UNISON is keen to push employers to take a strategic approach so that there is consistency across all apprenticeships. UNISON's Apprenticeship Charter details the rights that all apprentices should have, along with the responsibilities of employers to the apprentices that they employ. These include providing a safe and healthy working environment and payment at the rate for the job. Conference notes that further effort is required to encourage and support employers in engaging with and implementing the charter.

On UNISON's apprenticeships page, there are a large number of resources, including a model apprenticeship agreement, and toolkit for negotiators and reps. UNISON Learning and Organising Services have developed a course for branches and reps who would like to support apprentices through a mentoring scheme, covering a wide range of topics.

Conference also notes the motion passed at Local Government Conference in 2019, emphasising the need for apprenticeships to be provided, where possible, by further education colleges rather than public providers, and that FE colleges need to be adequately funded in order to deliver this.

Conference calls for the Local Government Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Work with regional local government committees and branches on campaigning activities to encourage our apprentices to be active in our union, and speak on issues that affect them in their workplace;
- 2) Work with regions to promote UNISON in colleges and 6th Forms where possible to recruit apprentices prior to starting employment and inform them of their workplace rights;
- 3) Work with regions and the NEC to develop a yearly campaign dedicated to recruitment and engagement with apprentices;
- 4) Work with local government branches to promote UNISON's Apprenticeship Charter and encourage more employers to sign up to this;
- 5) Work with UNISON College to promote UNISON mentoring for apprentices training across every region in order to engage with apprentices more effectively;
- 6) Work with branches to survey apprentices on how best to engage with them, as well as any issues that they are currently experiencing for more targeted support.

## **Composite B (Motions 16 and 17) Local Government Funding and Pay**

**Carried**

Conference notes that UNISON members in local government have seen sustained and repeated cuts in the real value of their pay over the last 15 years. Those covered by the NJC in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have lost more than a quarter of the value of their pay. While the rate of inflation has begun to fall, the prices of food, energy and housing continue to increase. With the price of essentials rising faster than other goods, it is the lowest paid who are affected the most by continued inflation. However, local government staff at all levels need better pay increases.

At the same time, the councils and schools that employ most UNISON members in local government are experiencing a funding crisis.

UNISON's research has uncovered UK-wide cumulative funding gaps of £4.3bn for 2025/26 and £8.5bn by 2026/27, leaving employers with extremely difficult decisions to make. More councils are expected to issue Section 114 notices, leaving jobs and services at risk. The Labour Government's announcement of new funding for local government in the October 2024 Budget recognised the main financial challenges that councils are facing, but far more investment is needed – alongside a fairer system for distributing it. It is vital that the 2025 Comprehensive Spending Review delivers this, along with a more stable system providing multi-year settlements.

Conference believes that our members' employers must make decent pay offers, and the government must step up and fund them. UNISON's campaigns on local government funding and local government pay are intrinsically linked, and in order for members to win sustained, real terms increases in pay, Central Government investment in local government needs to be at a higher level, with longer-term funding settlements.

This Local Government Conference calls upon the National Local Government Service Group Executive to begin an urgent and high-profile bespoke campaign to address the funding mechanism for NJC pay.

Every year that the NJC trade unions submit a pay claim for NJC staff, one of the lowly bullet points of the claim is the now common 'strap line' of calling for pay to be funded from Central Government, as pay is in many other large areas of the public sector. This 'strap line' has little or no impact year on year and is never responded to in the reply from the employers to any pay claim.

All local authorities are under significant financial pressures to balance their books and produce year on year balanced budgets by law, again not something that all other public sector services have to do.

The biggest cost pressure by far to local authorities is that of pay, especially unfunded pay awards that are not budgeted for. This leads into the spiral of the need to offer decent pay to address the recruitment and retention crisis in local government but which then poses the threat of redundancies to fund the pay increase.

This does not encourage UNISON members to participate in ballots for industrial action to improve their pay, as so many are fearful of losing their jobs.

Local government pay is negotiated nationally and should be funded nationally too.

In 2024/25, for example local government workers were offered £1290 as a cost of living pay award. Equivalent to 67p per hour this is nowhere near a proportionate offer to recompense for the cost of living crisis.

Yet even this paltry offer (and future offers) is projected to lead to further councils issuing section 114 notices, as it pushes them over the financial cliff to fund pay increase from within existing budgets.

Local government workers suffer some of the lowest pay in the public sector and there is a recruitment and retention crisis with vital roles that support society not being filled, leaving the public at significant risk. This problem cannot be left to local authorities to solve on their own, after 14 years of austerity.

Conference calls upon the Local Government Service Group Executive to work with NJC Committee, Labour Link, other NJC trade unions, LGA, Chief Executives, Leaders of Councils and not least of all the current Labour UK Government to:

- 1) Fund our NJC pay centrally, as it is in other parts of the public sector;
- 2) And for devolved nations like Cymru Wales, to receive their appropriate share of central funding via established funding consequentials.

Conference also calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Continue to build a strong, vocal, active and wide-ranging campaign on local government funding, working with Labour Link, the NEC and the devolved nations/administrations to push for far better funding – and longer-term funding - for local government from all four UK Governments;
- 2) Link this campaign to the union's wider calls for a fair taxation system that can properly fund public services;
- 3) Work with UNISON's devolved nations/administrations to develop a strategy to put pressure on the Local Government Association, Welsh Local Government Association, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, to seek to secure their support for joint campaigning on local government funding;
- 4) Ensure that pay is a central part of our funding campaign, developing campaign approaches and resources which explain our campaign to politicians, the media and the public and assist in gaining their support;
- 5) Ensure that the sector committees within the Service Group are involved in the development of the funding campaign, so that our messaging on pay and conditions reflect the views and priorities of members.

## **Composite C (Motions 18, 23 and Amendments 18.1, 18.2) Local Government Funding**

**Carried**

Conference condemns the actions of successive Conservative governments over the last decade that has resulted in local authorities facing an existential crisis.

For years, UNISON and the Local Government Association have demanded a sustainable, long term funding settlement and updated distribution mechanism to allow councils to actively support their communities.

Now there is a change in government, Conference believes we must seize this opportunity to see through meaningful reform to Council funding.

Conference recognises the financial crisis in local government which continues to result in service cuts, and lost jobs for our members. The latest iteration of UNISON's funding gap research showed that councils across the UK faced a collective funding gap of £4.3bn for the financial year 2025/26, increasing to a cumulative gap of £8.5bn by 2026/27. One in four local councils have indicated that they are likely to require emergency financial support from Central Government by the end of 2026/27 unless there is a significant improvement in their funding.

The situation is dire. For the 2025/26 financial year, councils face a collective funding shortfall of £3.4bn—a figure projected to surge to £8.5bn by 2026/27. Research conducted by UNISON in July 2024 highlighted significant funding gaps within the North East. The highest three were: Gateshead (£36 million), Newcastle (£24 million) and Durham (£17 million).

At a recent budget meeting, Newcastle Council has reported cuts amounting to a staggering £381 million since 2010; an average of £2,629 per household. These cuts clearly have a direct impact on local services. In the Northern region, 72 youth centres have closed (with only 18 remaining) and 54 council-run children's centres have been lost. Furthermore, council-run libraries in the region have dropped from 204 to 147 (a 27% decrease) and public toilets have fallen by 43.

Conference notes the outcome for local councils of the October 2024 budget from the new Labour Westminster Government. Via the Barnett formula an additional £3.4bn was allocated to Scotland, £1.7bn to Cymru/Wales and £1.5bn to Northern Ireland.

The Scottish Government promised councils a £1bn uplift in funding when compared to their 2024/25 funding settlement and ended its council tax freeze policy. However, Conference is acutely aware that years of under-investment combined with continued high levels of demand for council services mean that many councils will still contemplate cutting more jobs and services even if they significantly raise their council tax bills, with one in four Scottish councils admitting that they may not be able to balance their books in 2025/26. Similarly, in Cymru/Wales, despite a 4.3% increase in the settlement to Welsh councils, this uplift alone is still not enough to relieve the growing pressures that councils are experiencing.

Although the October 2024 budget allocated an extra £1.3bn, this increase pales in comparison to the overall £3.4bn gap faced by councils nationwide. While the additional funds help address challenges in social care, housing, and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), they are insufficient to counteract over a decade of deep cuts and growing service demands.

The additional £1.3bn in grant funding for local councils in England was provided by the government alongside plans to alter the system of redistribution to recognise the impact of deprivation on local service pressures. Conference believes that whilst the government recognised the need for extra money to support councils deal with soaring pressure in adult social care, housing services and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), the level of funding was not enough to allow councils to stabilise after years of rocketing costs and demand, never mind allowing them to begin to restore important services after the huge damage inflicted by austerity. Austerity measures and subsequent cuts to funding have significantly impacted LGBT+ services, leading to reductions in services, staff cuts, and strained financial resources for voluntary and community organisations. This has had a particularly strong impact on the LGBT+ community, potentially pushing them further to the margins of society and exacerbating existing inequalities.”

A fairer funding model is urgently required. The government’s consultation on a more equitable distribution of funds - prioritising councils with higher levels of deprivation - must be fast-tracked.

A recent publication by the Local Government Association (LGA), the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (Solace), and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountability (CIPFA) presents a compelling case for further reform. It calls for stability, a reversal of austerity impacts, enhanced accountability and transparency, and better alignment with local priorities. The report also underscores how the increasing reliance on council tax, due to a lack of alternative funding, exposes the weaknesses of an outdated system.

Council tax increases cannot be the way to achieve fundamental funding reform. In February 2025 five councils were given permission to increase their council tax by more than 5% without a ballot, and nearly a quarter of London councils have asked for emergency funding from the Government. The Local Government Association assert that there is a £600 million gap in the funding just to pay for the increase in employers’ national insurance contributions.

Conference is keenly aware of how local councils are central to the Westminster Government’s ambitions to improve the country; from driving economic growth, solving the NHS crisis, through to tackling crime and reducing carbon emissions. Conference also notes how positive previous investments in council-run services have been. A report by the Institute for Financial Studies in 2024 estimated that for every pound spent at its peak in 2010, Sure Start council run children’s centres averted approximately 19 pence in public spending on youth justice and children’s social care, equivalent to £500 million (in today’s prices) of savings per cohort attending at the time. Whereas cuts in council services since 2010 have had severe economic and societal costs. A 2024 report from Warwick University compared neighbours who were and weren’t affected by almost a third of youth centres in

London closing. The teenagers affected did 4% worse in exams and were more likely to commit crimes, costing the country nearly £3 for every £1 saved.

Conference is therefore committed to demonstrating to MPs both the moral and economic arguments for significant levels of extra investment in local government.

Conference supports the call for massive re-investment in local government from the centre, along with longer term and fairer funding models, because there is money in the UK economy: in 2024 the FTSE 100 companies paid £80 billion in dividends to shareholders and the major UK corporations and companies hold close to £1 trillion in liquid assets that are not being invested. We also continue to support a positive vision for local government which recognises the fantastic work local government staff do and roots local public services in an ethos of democracy, equality and public ownership.

Conference welcomes UNISON's continuing campaign on local government funding over the last year, including our new and updated council cuts website, which showed the scale of the problem and also showed what these cuts meant in practice, and which once again led to thousands of emails being sent by UNISON members to national politicians across the UK calling for more funding, alongside our widespread lobbying work at national, regional and branch levels. UNISON's work and campaigns on funding received significant media and social media coverage in 2024, playing a key role in raising political awareness.

Given the critical state of local government finances, Conference believes our negotiating priorities should be advocating for a significant boost in funding for local councils to support children's and adult social care, SEND provision, and housing support; ensure that councils are recognised as essential partners in national missions such as economic growth and planning; and, pushing for a larger, multi-year funding settlement that reflects the true financial pressures on councils.

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Continue to campaign strongly for proper recognition of local government services, highlighting how central councils are to helping the Westminster Government deliver its main priorities in office;
- 2) Strengthen the funding reform campaign by advocating for a sufficient, fair, and long-term settlement that genuinely meets councils' needs;
- 3) Working with the devolved nations/administrations, generate a range of political activity in parliaments across the UK calling for more funding for council services, working with Labour Link to impress upon the Labour Government in Westminster the importance of rebuilding the range of public services that councils provide back towards 2010 levels;
- 4) Collaborate with politicians at every level to secure decisive action from the Treasury and ensure that local councils remain central to the national agenda for renewal and economic growth.

- 5) Encourage regions, branches and members to undertake lobbying of MPs in their local constituency surgeries making use of the campaigning and lobbying guides that have already been developed which emphasise the positive difference that local councils can make to society;
- 6) Work with branches and regions to develop local no-cuts campaigns and campaigns for restoration of lost central government funding involving other trade unions, local community and voluntary organisations and local politicians opposed to cuts;
- 7) Encourage branches to work with local LGBT+ community groups to secure funds to provide services for local LGBT+ people
- 8) Raise awareness about the human consequences of service cuts while highlighting the critical value of local government services; Produce materials for regions to use including case studies on specific cuts, their impact and successes in fighting them, for use in regional events bringing together workers and communities with elected politicians to campaign for the reversal of cuts;
- 9) Produce materials for use in branches that clearly show how services could be both funded and improved by raising taxes for corporations and the richest UK citizens.
- 10) Convene meetings of those branches that face either 114 enforcement notices or make requests for emergency government funding to support them in campaigning locally, regionally and nationally against cuts resulting from those decisions including potentially opposing where agreed high rises in council tax rates;
- 11) Prepare a model motion for branches to use with councillors including demanding an end to austerity, reversing the cuts, restoring lost pay, insourcing, and a minimum pay rate of £15 an hour;
- 12) Work with UNISON's policy team and the TUC to publicise new research by the New Economics Foundation that demonstrates how additional council spending on preventative services leads to significant cost savings and therefore justifies additional investment;
- 13) Continue to raise awareness of the importance and contribution of local government workers to our society with the Local Service Champions campaign and provide opportunities for UNISON members and members of the public to lobby for more council funding;
- 14) Promote Local Government careers by increasing the profile of local government work through initiatives such as 'Local Government Champions' to inspire the next generation of workers;
- 15) Leverage transparency through continued use of Freedom of Information requests to update the Council Cuts website, thereby bolstering lobbying efforts with up-to-date evidence; Conduct a further Freedom of Information

request and use the data to update the Council Cuts website to illustrate the scale of the funding gap faced by councils across the UK, along with other key metrics of financial distress, and encourage the public to lobby national politicians for more council funding;

- 16) Empower activists through advanced training on local government funding, enabling them to effectively scrutinise council budgets, and continue providing lobbying guides for Councillors and MPs; Continue to provide high quality local government finance training to help branches across the UK to understand, interrogate and influence their local council's budgetary process;
- 17) Work with the NEC to organise a national meeting that highlights the reality of the cuts, and campaigns to bring services in house or to defeat or reverse cuts;
- 18) Work with the NEC to organise a national demonstration (and potentially regional demonstrations) around demands to return the lost billions to our communities, rebuild communities through democratic public ownership, and end the rise in poverty and inequality by redistributing wealth from the rich and business.

## **19. Undoing the Damage: Rebuilding Services for LGBT+ People**

**Carried**

Conference notes the damage 14 years of the Conservative government's austerity agenda has done to local government services and to tailored services for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Plus (LGBT+) people. Libraries and community centres were closed and specialist LGBT+ Youth Workers, Housing Officers and sexual health staff were made redundant. Social care was left to wither away, and for many older LGBT+ people this meant having to go back into the closet.

Many young LGBT+ people were left without housing, mental and sexual health support, whilst local government services designed to support LGBT+ people were often the first to be cut.

Conference welcomes the election of a Labour Government in July 2024, with a manifesto that committed to:

- 1) give councils multiyear funding settlements;
- 2) end wasteful competitive bidding;
- 3) provide capacity and support to councils.

Conference acknowledges that the Labour government was left with a £22bn financial black hole due to the financial mismanagement and uncostered promises made by the last government. However, conference believes that multi-year settlements and an end to competitive bidding can help local councils to plan better

and end short term decisions such as staff redundancies and cuts to equality services.

Conference also notes that the following investment has been announced:

- a) Using VAT and business rates on private schools to fund a new network of Youth Hubs;
- b) A record £1 billion of new funding to reduce and prevent homelessness in England;
- c) Increasing the Public health grant, which funds sexual health services, to £3.858 billion, an uplift of 5.4%.

Conference also welcomes the government's first step, to establish a social care national negotiating framework, as part of the Employment Rights Bill.

Good quality care is reliant on those people providing care being properly valued, with national pay, conditions and progression routes vital. This includes LGBT+ awareness training, which will allow older LGBT+ people to live as their authentic selves for their whole life.

Conference recognises that it will take significant change and investment to undo the damage to local government services of 14 years of austerity and that we will need to fight even harder for the return of specialist services for LGBT+ people.

Conference instructs the Service Group Executive to work with Labour Link where appropriate to:

- i) Make the case for local government funding, including for specialist services for LGBT+ people;
- ii) Encourage local authorities to include specialist LGBT+ youth workers and housing staff as part of the offer at new youth hubs and homelessness prevention services;
- iii) Put pressure on local authorities public health to employ specialist LGBT+ sexual health workers;
- iv) Seek to contribute to UNISON's response the Casey Commission on social care, including the need for LGBT+ inclusive services.

## **20. Severe Weather Events and Local Government**

**Carried**

Conference notes the increasing number of severe weather events taking place across the world, including the UK, because of global warming and climate change. The science is clear that this is because of the burning of fossil fuels and that these events will only be more frequent and more serious in the future.

Conference recognises that severe weather has a significant impact on local government and local government workers.

During the recent Storm Eowyn, which saw record wind speeds recorded, local government workers were exposed to life threatening danger as they attempted to deliver essential services and to respond to emergencies.

In South Lanarkshire a Home Carer's vehicle was hit by a falling tree, residential workers had to work double shifts as they could not travel home, roads department workers were asked to grit roads at the height of the storm and housing workers had to carry out emergency re-housing as damage occurred to tenants' accommodation. In the days after, workers in several departments worked overtime to enable services to be restored. The cost to the Council of repairing damage is likely to run into millions of pounds.

This is becoming a common experience as we deal with the effects of storms, floods, freezing temperatures and heatwaves.

Conference welcomes UNISON's campaigning around climate change issues but recognises that there are specific actions required in local government to cope with severe weather and to contribute to reaching the target of Net Zero Carbon Emissions to prevent further catastrophic climate change.

Local Government Conference calls on all local authorities in the UK to

- 1) Develop robust emergency plans for each possible severe weather event. This should include identifying what services are essential, which service user will require a service, and having in place plans for how these services will be secured, whilst at the same time minimising risks to the workforce;
- 2) Ensure that the necessary equipment is available to staff to enable them to be safe;
- 3) Negotiate Severe Weather Emergency Plans with UNISON branches.

Local Government Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to-

- a) Develop guidance for branches on severe weather emergency planning;
- b) Raise with governments the need for councils to be appropriately funded to meet the cost of maintaining and recovering services during and after severe weather events;
- c) Support the sector committees to raise these concerns within the bargaining forums seeking consistent policies to protect staff and services.

## 21. Our Communities Deserve World Class Public Services

Carried

Everyday council workers in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England go to work knowing they cannot provide the level and quality of service they would wish because the deep spending cuts since 2010 make that impossible.

Each local authority continues to grapple with an absolutely dire financial situation and core services are likely to be impacted. It doesn't have to be like this.

According to the Wales Local Government Association, local authorities in Cymru face a deficit of £559m for 2025/26, not including cost pressures caused by the changes to National Insurance in the UK budget for commissioned social care providers. 14,000 jobs are threatened this year, on top of the 34,000 that have been axed since 2010. This deficit will continue for 2026/7 and in all likelihood 2027/28. No Welsh council has yet gone bankrupt, but there is a feeling it is only a matter of time.

Authorities respond proposing huge council tax increases during a cost-of-living crisis, but even these would not deliver high quality services, such is the enormous shortfall in funding.

The £253m boost Welsh authorities received as part of the UK Government budget was less than half of the funding required to meet the shortfall for 2025/26.

As dedicated public service workers, we know investment in libraries and leisure facilities, in youth clubs, schools, day centres, adult and children's social care, social work and all those other vital services make our communities, happier, healthier and more equal places to live – and keep people out of an overstretched NHS.

Many of us are doing the jobs of two or even three people and we're burnt out. Severe spending cuts and pay freezes didn't need to happen. They were a political choice.

We have every right to demand investment in world-class public services and investment in public service workers.

Conference recognises educating the public about the value of local services and winning their support is critical to securing the investment we need. It is essential UNISON thinks of innovative ways to promote services building on the success of 'everyday action heroes.'

Conference notes UNISON Cymru is developing a report on how austerity has damaged Wales and that it will be used to highlight to politicians how people are suffering.

Conference recognises only significant and sustained funding can undo the harm of 14 years of austerity and therefore calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Campaign for the UK Government to better fund local authorities in England and (with Barnett consequential money), the governments of Wales and

Scotland, and the Northern Ireland Executive, to provide services to the quality the public needs;

- 2) Campaign for fully funded future pay awards for local authority employees;
- 3) Develop a broad-based public relations campaign promoting everything the local council workforce provides, similar to the 'everyday action heroes' which drew on a range of creative expertise.

## **22. Housing Budget Cuts**

**Carried as Amended: 22.1**

Cuts to housing budgets are having significant consequences for our members, who are already suffering 14 years of Tory austerity.

Over the past number of years, we have seen this workforce depleted resulting in additional pressures for housing workers, a rise in absence and many leaving the service. This has also meant for many having to lone work putting them in dangerous situations.

The lack of community mental health services has also played a significant part in contributing to the uncertainty housing workers face on a day-to-day basis.

The Scottish Government have announced that they will slash the affordable housing budget. A report from a Holyrood committee raised significant concerns on its impact on poverty and the economy.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation have said this decision is 'baffling' amid the wider housing crisis and the cut is a hammer-blow for tackling poverty and homelessness.

The New Labour Government is promising 1.5 million new homes which is welcomed, but only if they are affordable, predominantly aimed at the social rented sector and focus on the issues raised in this motion for both communities and housing workers.

This conference calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Liaise with the NEC and Labour Link to put pressure on the Labour Government to meet its commitment to build 1.5million new homes (homes that will address issues like homelessness, poor mental health, poverty and disability);
- 2) Raise the profile of the cuts to housing and impact on our members while also surveying our members in community housing services to establish the degree of impact budget cuts have had on the services they provide;
- 3) Lobby all Governing UK bodies to reverse the funding cuts and invest in our housing services;

- 4) Establish guidelines/advice for Housing Workers around lone working and the impact of additional work pressures;
- 5) Liaise with the National Health & Safety Committee to issue advice on work risk assessments and how they can be used.

## **24. NJC Bargaining**

**Carried as Amended: 24.1, 24.2, 24.3**

Conferences notes that the bargaining framework for many UNISON members in local government is changing.

The government's Employment Rights Bill, published in October 2024 included clauses to reinstate the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) and to put in place the means to create a fair pay agreement in adult social care.

Conference welcomes these developments as providing the potential to deliver real improvements for members in schools and social care, as well as giving those members a far greater voice in the determination of their own workplace pay and conditions.

There needs to be careful consideration of the devolution implications of these changes. For example, the SSSNB is being set up as England only, though other nations may be able to be involved in some way. Devolved nations/administrations need to be full partners in any decision-making process affecting members and conference notes the result of UNISON Cymru/Wales' extensive consultation of school support staff was for the creation of a Wales-only SSSNB. And broader consideration of the implications for the members remaining in the NJC will be essential.

NJC pay increases in recent years has been implemented through a succession of one-year settlements. Conference notes existing Service Group policy, passed in 2006, opposing pay settlements of more than 12 months.

Conference believes that there are benefits and drawbacks to this approach. Sometimes, we would not want to tie ourselves to a multi-year pay settlement which could end up being a worse deal, for example if inflation were to rise more than expected.

However, many members welcome the stability and certainty that multi-year settlements provide. A multi-year claim could strengthen our case for a better pay deal, as employers will be able to plan more effectively over the medium term. Furthermore, the longer period between negotiations would give UNISON the opportunity to build stronger, more effective campaigns and to build organisation locally. Multi-year settlements, if reached, would also enable sectors to start the work on subsequent pay rounds earlier.

The sector committees within the Local Government Service Group are responsible for proposing draft pay claims and consulting members on their content. Conference

believes that these sector committees should have the flexibility to consider all relevant factors and propose a pay claim covering one or more years, as appropriate, and to consult members on that basis.

Conference instructs the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Ensure that all necessary information on potential involvement by devolved nations/administrations in the SSSNB is available, and work with the NJC Committee and devolved nations/administrations to ensure members' views are represented;
- 2) Seek to ensure school and care staff in Cymru/Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are placed at no disadvantage to their counterparts in England by the passage of the Employment Rights Bill;
- 3) Work with the NJC Committee and UNISON's devolved nations/administrations to consider the implications of the SSSNB and social care fair pay agreement for members left in the NJC, including issues relating to pay and conditions, the pay spine, devolution and internal democratic structures;
- 4) Work with the NJC Committee and Schools Committee to ensure a fair and positive transition from the NJC to the SSSNB for schools members ensuring our members voices are heard at every stage of the process and giving them the right to have their say on how the move to the SSSNB will impact them;
- 5) Work with the NJC Committee and the newly established National Social Care Committee (England) to ensure the co-ordination of Service Group policy on behalf of care workers directly employed by local councils and/or covered by NJC pay bargaining;
- 6) Issue guidance to all the sector committees within the Service Group, permitting them to submit pay claims of one or more years, providing they follow all existing procedures for consulting members, including consulting members explicitly on the length of the claim as well as the contents of the claim.

Conference further notes:

- 1) When back pay following a pay award is paid as a lump sum, for some people this may have the effect of reducing and in some cases wiping out completely, a member's universal credit payment, for the period in which the back pay was paid. This results in them not receiving the benefits of the back pay and can result in hardship;
- 2) There is no easy solution that will work for every member as each member's situation is different but believes that for some members the option of having back pay paid across a number of months, may assist them. The Department of Work & Pensions could be doing more to recognise back pay payments and potentially apportion these across the period in which they relate. This

would avoid members with universal credit losing all their entitlement in one month, if the monies were spread over a number of months;

- 3) Backpay is members' money so payment should only be staggered if they specifically request it

Conference further instructs the Service Group Executive to:

- a) Issue guidance to all the sector committees within the service group permitting them to negotiate with employers that they agree to stagger back payments over more than one month when specifically requested to do so by individual employees

## **25. Artificial Intelligence and its Impact on Local Government Workers**

**Carried as Amended: 25.1**

Conference notes the rapid spread of new technologies powered by artificial intelligence (AI) across UK local government.

These new systems promise increased efficiency and productivity, and as such can appear to be attractive to local service providers grappling with the sector's entrenched issues of underfunding, under-resourcing and steadily growing demand.

Conference recognises the many potential benefits to local government of using AI systems, and particularly those that improve the experience of workers. For example, AI technology can be used to complete repetitive tasks, reducing the administrative burden on staff and freeing up time to perform other, more rewarding elements of jobs.

However, Conference also notes that AI cannot provide expertise in formal settings, for example hearings; and the use of AI in local government can present many risks to services, and workers.

Some of these risks are being increasingly recognised by policymakers and local government leaders, such as the potential to cause harm to citizens if systems go wrong. When algorithmic systems are introduced into our public services, the implications of mistakes in those algorithms can be catastrophic for vulnerable individuals reliant on services. There are also concerns about the tech lobbying firms that are pushing increasing AI use.

Conference echoes these concerns and calls for all deployment of AI in local government to take full account of these risks, and for councils to actively work to prevent such harm to the public.

Conference also notes that the roll out of AI across UK local government will disproportionately affect women. Women – who make up 78% of the local government workforce in the UK, many of which work part-time – are particularly vulnerable to job displacement and work intensification due to the automation of roles concentrated in female-dominated professions, such as administration, customer service and clerical roles.'

However, Conference also believes that the risks posed directly to local government workers by new technologies in their workplace are being overlooked. Urgent action needs to be taken to protect workers and ensure their voices are heard in this technological transition.

The impacts of AI on workers include work intensification, risks to health and safety, discriminatory and unfair outcomes, lack of control over data, loss of privacy, lack of human agency and freedom over work, and the degradation of human judgement and skill.

Conference also recognises that Black women are over-represented in routine and frontline roles in local government, making them more likely to face redundancy or redeployment as AI tools are introduced. Disabled women, too, face disproportionate barriers, particularly where algorithmic recruitment or performance monitoring tools are introduced. Algorithmic decision-making and machine learning systems can embed and replicate historical biases and structural inequalities. This can lead to serious discrimination against women, especially those who are disabled or from Black and others marginalised groups. For example, facial recognition and natural language processing tools have been shown to perform more poorly for darker-skinned women and people with non-standard speech patterns, resulting in exclusion or misidentification.

However, the impact of AI on workers and their needs and concerns are being sidelined at all stages of the digitalisation process in local government. The workforce is not being adequately considered in policymaking discussions, and the government is embarking on a rapid process of AI roll-out across the public sector without sufficient worker and union engagement.

At a workplace level, this pattern continues. New AI systems are being introduced into local government workplaces without any worker consultation, and trade unions are being notified of their use after they have been deployed - if they are notified at all. This lack of worker and union engagement is unacceptable.

This Conference believes that the digitalisation of local government is a critical and pressing issue for the sector, and that UNISON needs to mobilise rapidly on the issue.

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Establish AI and digitalisation of local services as a key campaigning and organising issue for the SGE;
- 2) Seek to ensure that national local government employers' organisations engage in consultation and negotiation and conduct impact assessments when new AI technologies are deployed in the workplace, with particular attention to gender, race, disability and other protected characteristics, and support regions and branches to seek to ensure the same happens in individual employers;

- 3) Develop and promote materials to support local government UNISON activists in recognising, understanding, negotiating and organising on AI and technology issues in the workplace especially its impact on women workers;
- 4) Work with the NEC and other Service Groups to develop and promote union policy and strategy on the use of AI in the public sector.

## **26. Job Evaluation and Equal Pay in Local Government**

**Carried as Amended: 26.1**

Conference notes that the NJC Green Book was agreed in 1997. As part of this, 'Single Status' – a single pay spine for all council staff up to spinal column point 49 at the time in England, Cymru/Wales and Northern Ireland – was agreed. The Green Book includes the NJC job evaluation scheme, an equal pay-proof scheme that was jointly developed with the trade unions.

Proper adoption and implementation of an objective job evaluation scheme is a cornerstone of implementing common terms and conditions and equality proofed grading structures. To operate effectively, the job evaluation scheme should be transparent and include trade union representatives in the process. Effective job evaluation should be delivered in partnership and implemented with employers and trade unions working together to ensure fairness and equality in pay and grading.

However, for most councils it is now 20 years or more since a comprehensive job evaluation exercise was undertaken. Conference is concerned that knowledge of how to implement job evaluation has been lost from many councils and that, increasingly job evaluation of new posts, regrading cases, or during reorganisations, is a singular exercise undertaken by employers.

As a result of both trade union and employer turnover the numbers of staff / trade union representatives trained in job evaluation has diminished.

Conference is concerned that employers may be using local variations to the agreed job evaluation scheme, or other schemes that are not equality-proofed, that may result in equal pay issues in the workforce. This has been demonstrated in two legal cases taken against Glasgow and Fife councils, where the amended schemes were disappplied as being unsuitable to be relied upon. Conference is further concerned to note that some third parties are undertaking job evaluation for councils or providing job evaluation training, and this may have less preferential outcomes for our members.

Conference further notes that where pay structures are not implemented with due regard to job evaluation, equal pay and equality impact assessments, this may result in unequal pay structures becoming embedded in local government.

In recent years, equal pay cases have come to light at a number of councils and UNISON is supporting equal pay claims for affected members. Council workers

should not be facing unequal pay and properly implemented and maintained job evaluation schemes will help to achieve this.

Conference calls upon the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Survey branches in order to understand the level of knowledge of job evaluation, the NJC scheme and equal pay;
- 2) Raise the issue of job evaluation and the NJC scheme nationally with local government employers, and to seek to agree with the employers an action plan to introduce a more standardised approach to job evaluation that includes equalities and equal pay;
- 3) Develop and deliver training for branch activists so that knowledge of job evaluation and equal pay is more widespread, working with national local government employer bodies where possible and appropriate;
- 4) Develop and circulate advice to branches on the different job evaluation schemes in local government, along with clear advice on potentially problematic schemes;
- 5) Provide advice on positive action measures to redress gender imbalances.

## **27. Advancing Opportunities for Black Workers in Local Government (including fixed-term contracts)**

**Carried**

Conference acknowledges that despite the significant presence of Black workers in frontline roles within local government, they remain disproportionately underrepresented in managerial and senior positions. Instead, they are often concentrated in lower-level roles, facing systemic barriers to career progression.

Research indicates that institutional racism continues to shape the experiences of Black workers within organisations, leading to their exclusion from development opportunities and career advancement (Brockmann et al. 2001; Kline 2012; Love 2019). Black workers, particularly those on fixed-term contracts, face persistent challenges in progressing to middle and senior management roles, resulting in widespread discrimination and career stagnation.

Conference firmly believes that every Black worker should have equal access to professional growth and advancement, irrespective of their background or contract type.

It is our collective responsibility to address these disparities by fostering inclusivity, diversity, and equality at all levels within the organisation. Recognising the invaluable contributions and unique perspectives of Black workers, it is essential to create an

environment that supports their development and provides equitable opportunities for progression.

Conference supports the need to collaborate with employers to ensure a firm commitment to creating an inclusive, diverse, and equitable workplace that actively values and promotes the career progression of Black workers, including those on fixed-term contracts. Taking decisive action in this regard is a crucial step towards a fairer and more inclusive future for our Black members.

Conference calls on the Local Government Service Group to work in partnership with the National Black Members Committee and other relevant bodies within UNISON to:

- 1) Advocate for a thorough review of existing policies and practices related to recruitment, retention, performance, and career development, with a focus on identifying and addressing any discriminatory practices or biases;
- 2) Work with employers to assess the impact of fixed-term contracts on Black workers, ensuring they receive fair and equitable treatment, and prioritising their representation and career advancement.

By taking these actions, we can help break down systemic barriers and pave the way for greater career progression and opportunities for Black workers within Local Government.

## **28. Food Standards Agency – Pay, Terms & Conditions**

**Carried**

Conference notes that our members employed by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) in England, Cymru/Wales, and Northern Ireland work diligently to ensure the public consumes safe and hygienic meat, dairy, and seafood. Our members work in slaughterhouses, offices, and from home, making UNISON the biggest union organising in the FSA.

Conference also notes the vital contributions of members employed by the contractors Eville & Jones and Hallmark in safeguarding the UK from unsafe and unhygienic meat.

Conference calls upon the Service Group Executive to continue advocating for our members' terms and conditions by:

- 1) Securing improved wages for our members through collective bargaining;
- 2) Negotiating and campaigning for pay progression restoration within the civil service;
- 3) Raising our profile within the meat and food sector via press communications and advertising;

- 4) Resisting efforts to undermine our members' roles in food safety by advancing the Protect Our Food campaign through events, engagement with decision-makers, and digital communications, including social media;
- 5) Extending our organising efforts within the FSA to sustain membership levels and recruit from non-traditional roles;
- 6) Hosting pay and pension webinars to inform, consult, and support our members regarding their terms and conditions;
- 7) Continuing to benchmark FSA pay grades with equivalent regulatory roles in the civil service and local government to ensure fair remuneration;
- 8) Opposing the privatisation and deregulation of meat hygiene inspection.

## **29. Gender Questioning School Guidance – A UNISON Issue**

**Carried**

Conference welcomes the end of the disastrous Conservative government's 14- year rule. In their time in government, the Tories stoked division and utilised anti-LGBT+ narratives for political gain, especially about trans people.

In 2023, the Department for Education published their new guidance for teachers on how best to support pupils in schools "questioning" their gender. Gillian Keegan, the then Education Secretary noted that "This guidance puts the best interests of all children first, removing any confusion about the protections that must be in place for biological sex and single-sex spaces... Parents' views must also be at the heart of all decisions made about their children – and nowhere is that more important than with decisions that can have significant effects on a child's life for years to come."

Just as Section 28 aimed to prevent the "promotion and indoctrination of homosexuality", these guidelines could do the same for transgender, non-binary and gender diverse people. It states that there is no general duty for schools to allow a student to socially transition and references the Cass Review's Interim Report in stating that social transitioning (i.e. using different pronouns, wearing different clothes and changing one's hair) 'is not a neutral act', that this may have later impacts on children that are not yet fully understood.

Furthermore, the guidance sets a dangerous precedent by advising that parents should be informed when a child is questioning their gender or socially transitioning unless forcibly outing a young person to their family carries a "significant risk of harm". Some LGBT+ people grow up in unsafe homes, where being LGBT+ is unacceptable and is a safeguarding concern and involving parents may not be in the best interests of the child or young person. There can be a lasting impact of parental rejection on LGBT+ children and young people. For children questioning their gender identity facing parental hostility, school may be the only safe place available, and this guidance can strip them of that safety.

This guidance has a direct impact on our LGBT+ members who work in schools, as it may result in them being concerned about being open about their gender identity and refrain from discussing gender in classrooms for fear of reprisal. Our members are also having to make difficult decisions on whether following this guidance might put a child questioning their gender at risk of harm at home.

Conference notes that the TUC survey of LGBT+ Workplace Experiences 2023 concluded that although LGBT+ workers are protected under the Equality Act 2010 from discrimination, harassment and bullying, it is common for LGBT+ workers to experience workplaces as negative and harmful. LGBT+ workers surveyed largely had low expectations and were grateful even when the most basic legal protections were in place.

The survey also highlighted the situation for transgender, non-binary and gender diverse employees to be particularly shocking, with many referencing the toxic narratives about LGBT+ people that are prevalent in the media and this new school guidance as leading to a hostile working environment. Furthermore, another TUC survey carried out in 2022 noted that 1 in 5 workplaces do not have any policies to support LGBT+ staff.

Conference calls upon the Local Government Service Group Executive to work with the National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Plus (LGBT+) Committee as appropriate to:

- 1) Promote LGBT+ bargaining factsheets, model policies and LGBT+ policy checklist to branches so they can assess whether existing workplace policies are inclusive for LGBT+ members;
- 2) Work with Labour Link to seek ways to raise concerns with the Labour government around the schools guidance and its impact on members.

### **30. Reasonable Adjustments and the Disability Employment Charter** **Carried as Amended: 30.1, 30.2**

Conference notes that it is 30 years since the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 first gave disabled people the right to request reasonable adjustments at work.

When the Equality Act became law in England, Scotland and Wales in 2010 the duty to make reasonable adjustments was included. The DDA remains in force in Northern Ireland.

Despite this, our 2023 Equality Survey found that disabled members still struggle to get the adjustments they need. In local government 39% of disabled members were refused some or all of the adjustments they asked for and, shockingly, another 11% didn't even receive a response to their request.

When reasonable adjustments were agreed, disabled members in local government reported long waits before they were put in place. Less than half of adjustments (43%) were made within a month, 26% took up to six months, 12% over six months

and 8% of disabled members had to wait for over a year to receive the support they needed.

UNISON is a founder member of the Disability Employment Charter (the charter). The charter asks that the government introduce a statutory two-week limit for employers to respond to reasonable adjustment requests.

This does not mean implementing all reasonable adjustment within two weeks, but employers will be required to let the person who made the request know if it is agreed or not within two weeks. If it is agreed they should provide a reasonable timescale for putting the adjustment in place. If refused the employer should also say why they don't believe the request is reasonable.

Other workplace adjustments the charter asks for include:

- 1) The right to request flexible working from day one of a job;
- 2) The right to paid disability leave for assessment, rehabilitation and training;
- 3) Increase in statutory sick pay to the European average;
- 4) A statutory right to facility time for trade union equality and disability reps.

Some, but not all, of these are included in the Employment Rights Bill but employers do not need to wait for a change in the law to make the changes.

Over 225 employers have signed up but disappointingly fewer than 20% of these are in workplaces where UNISON organises. Only six councils are currently named as signatories on the charter's website.

Reasonable adjustments aren't just something that is nice to have. They are essential to the health and wellbeing of disabled members. Without them, disabled members can miss out on training, development and promotion opportunities, be put through difficult sickness absence hearings, targeted for redundancy, forced to reduce hours or even leave their jobs altogether.

Conference calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to work with the National Disabled Members Committee to:

- a) Develop a campaign targeted at local authorities and all other employers in the local government sector that encourages all local government employers to sign up to the Disability Employment Charter;
- b) Write to the Leader of every council in the UK explaining the benefits of signing up to the Disability Employment Charter including a draft motion for their council to agree;
- c) Work with Labour Link to campaign for the government to introduce a statutory two-week time limit for all employers with over 250 employees to respond to reasonable adjustment requests;

- d) Bring a report on progress made, including the number of new councils and all other employers in the local government sector signed up to the charter, to Local Government Conference 2026.
- e) Work with National Women's Committee to encourage branches to work with employers to provide flexible working arrangements, including remote working options and adapted schedules, to accommodate caregiving responsibilities, which disproportionately affect disabled women.

### **37. Supporting Migrant Workers in Local Government**

**Carried as Amended: 37.1, 37.2**

Conference notes that migrant workers working across local government services face workplace discrimination and exploitation linked to their visa status. The complexity of the UK's immigration system means that different visa types can lead to different challenges for members and branches. Many migrant workers across public services have been affected by changes to the skilled worker visa, particularly dramatic increases in salary thresholds last year. Many UNISON members who work in public service roles as recent graduates have found themselves having to move to the private sector in order to meet the salary levels set out for their job roles. UNISON members on family visas and other visa types not linked to employment contend with severe financial issues due to Home Office visa fees and charges and the Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS). Many migrant workers pay a double tax as they contribute through their taxes as well as through the additional surcharge they pay towards the NHS. In addition, because of 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) they are unable to rely on essential safety nets available to others.

Conference notes that for workers on the health and social care visa, the sponsorship link with employers has provided fertile ground for exploitation and modern slavery. Care is one of the most precarious sectors in the UK. Firms regularly go under or lose their council contracts. The consequence is staff find themselves without work and in financial hardship. For migrant care workers, the situation is even worse. Workers are fearful of raising concerns about employment practices when the same employers can remove their visa sponsorship. Unscrupulous employers are using the threat of removal to a care worker's home country to victimise migrant workers who whistle blow/complain about their treatment. These challenges can be enhanced if the worker identifies as LGBT+ and the fear of homo, bi+ and/or trans phobia is very real to some workers who may not know their rights in Britain.

Conference welcomes the work by local government branches to recruit and organise migrant workers in the social care sector. UNISON has increasing numbers of migrant workers becoming active in the union as workplace reps, on our National Social Care Committee (England) and on equivalent bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Increasing representation has enabled our migrant worker members to set the bargaining agenda at workplace level and our campaigning agenda at national level. This has seen activity across all UNISON regions ranging from migrant worker charters, campaigns aimed at local authorities, MPs, MSPs,

Assembly members and Westminster and national governments. These campaigns have responded to the voices and experiences of our members and the challenges they have experienced in the UK.

Conference notes that a key concern for our members has been to challenge the sponsorship element of the health and social care visa. Conference believes that moving towards a sector-wide sponsorship scheme run by an independent agency with a health and social care focus would remove the ever present threat used by unscrupulous employers to threaten workers with the Home Office. Being able to move employer would enable overseas staff to challenge exploitation without fearing deportation.

Conference asserts the need for UNISON to ensure that our bargaining and negotiating agenda at workplace and national level reflects the experiences and concerns of migrant workers. Only a trade union approach to tackling discrimination and exploitation will truly transform the experiences of our migrant worker members. Conference welcomes activity being led at branch, regional and national level to raise the knowledge and confidence of UNISON reps and activists to take an organising approach, with leadership from migrant workers themselves. Conference also welcomes increased legal resources from UNISON to support our migrant worker members, including expanded hours for the JCWI immigration advice helpline as well as specialist legal support for immigration casework. This support can be vital for members facing threats from employers and the Home Office around complex and contradictory immigration rules.

Conference therefore calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to build on this work by:

- 1) Supporting the work of branches and regions in organising migrant workers with resources and advice, ensuring that relevant advice is widely promoted;
- 2) Working with elected politicians at all levels and local authorities to raise awareness and tackle exploitation of migrant workers in the social care sector;
- 3) Promote the work of Rainbow Migration to all branches, which gives them the tools to reach out to migrant LGBT+ workers.
- 4) Campaign for and lobby governments to properly fund enforcement agencies who work to uphold the rights of migrant workers, including those who are subject to modern slavery. These agencies include: the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority, the Employment Agencies Standards Inspectorate and His Majesty's Revenues and Customs;
- 5) Campaigning with UNISON's migrant workers network for the removal of sponsorship rights from individual employers in social care, to be replaced with a sector-wide visa scheme;
- 6) Continuing to campaign for a rights based immigration policy which treats migrant people with respect and dignity including an end to the IHS and NRPF, and for the removal of income thresholds.

## **38. Insourcing Adult Social Care**

**Carried as Amended: 38.1**

Conference recognises:

- 1) The social care system in the UK is in crisis, characterised by chronic underfunding, fragmented services, and a workforce that is undervalued, underpaid, and overworked;
- 2) The devastating consequences of a privatised and market-driven care system, which prioritises profit over people and fails to deliver the quality care that individuals and communities deserve.;
- 3) Migrant workers have played a vital role in sustaining the care sector, often filling staffing gaps and providing essential care with dedication and skill, yet they face exploitation, discrimination, and insecure immigration statuses;
- 4) UNISON has long campaigned for a National Care Service (NCS) that is publicly funded, publicly delivered, and free at the point of use, ensuring high-quality care for all and fair terms and conditions for care workers;
- 5) The Labour Party has committed to establishing a National Care Service, and it is essential that this promise is delivered in full, with adequate funding, workforce planning, and a commitment to ending the outsourcing of care services.

Conference believes:

- a) A National Care Service must be rooted in the principles of universality, equality, and human rights, ensuring that everyone has access to high-quality care, regardless of their income, background, or postcode;
- b) The contribution of migrant workers to the care sector must be recognised and valued. This includes ensuring fair pay, safe working conditions, and secure immigration statuses, free from the threat of exploitation or deportation;
- c) The government must be held accountable for delivering on its promise to establish a National Care Service, with clear timelines, transparent funding commitments, and meaningful engagement with trade unions, care workers, and service users;
- d) Privatisation and outsourcing have no place in Adult Social Care. The profit motive must be removed from care provision, and all services should be brought back in-house under public ownership and democratic control.

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive;

- i) To continue campaigning for a National Care Service that is fully aligned with UNISON's policy, including public funding, public delivery, and free access for all;
- ii) To work with UNISON's Labour Link structures to;
  - A. seek to ensure a Labour Government delivers on its commitment to establish a National Care Service within its first term;
  - B. recognise the vital contribution of migrant workers in the care sector by granting them secure immigration status, ending exploitative practices, and ensuring they are treated with dignity and respect;
  - C. hold the Labour Government to account at every stage of the development and implementation of the National Care Service, ensuring that UNISON's policies and principles are upheld and that the voices of care workers and service users are central to the process.
- iii) To oppose any attempts to outsource or privatise care services under the guise of a National Care Service and to campaign for all care services to be brought back in-house;
- iv) To work with all parts of UNISON, other trade unions, community organisations, and service users to build a broad-based campaign, which includes regularly available, shareable graphics and campaign assets for use by regions and branches, that ensures a National Care Service that puts people before profit and delivers the care system we all deserve.

### **Emergency Composite 1 Reform and the increase in Reform Councillors**

**Carried**

Conference notes the results of the local elections in England on 1 May 2025. Conference notes with concern Reform UK's recent electoral gains, which signal a significant political shift with serious implications for local government. Conference expresses its concern and dismay that Reform UK now control 10 English local authorities, spanning six UNISON regions. Reform also won one regional mayoralty and increased its vote in many areas. The party now has more than 800 councillors across England, Cymru/Wales and Scotland.

In the Northern Region, Reform UK made substantial advances - gaining support in the Northumberland Council and the North Tyneside mayoral elections, and notably took control of Durham County Council, securing 65 seats.

Conference is clear that Reform UK is a right-wing, populist political party. Its anti-migrant rhetoric and positions are contributing to an atmosphere of increasing hatred and division in the country. There should be no place for their dog-whistle style of politics in our democracy.

Conference notes with grave concern the comments made by Reform leader Nigel Farage following the local elections about diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI), stating that staff working on DEI initiatives should be “seeking alternative careers very, very quickly”. This represents an unacceptable threat to members’ jobs with no regard to employment processes, and a commitment from Reform to make local government a less equal place.

Conference further notes Reform’s position on local government finance, claiming that hundreds of millions of pounds is being wasted. This represents a complete lack of understanding of the realities of local government: as UNISON’s own research has shown, each year the sector faces a multi-billion-pound funding gap, with councils struggling to keep essential services going while seeking to avoid effective bankruptcy. Reform’s position on local government finance is a transparent attack on our members and the vital work that they do.

Conference is also extremely concerned by comments made by Richard Tice, the deputy leader of Reform UK, about the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), in which he described the LGPS as “unaffordable” and said “we should not be employing people on defined benefit contribution schemes” and “we’re going to have to go to war with these people”. Conference is clear that the LGPS is affordable and represents vital deferred pay for local government workers. Conference also condemns the inflammatory language used.

Conference is also concerned by proposals in the Government’s Immigration White Paper which could pose a very specific threat to local government workers, including changes to social care visa applications, graduate visas, visas for those without degree qualifications, and indefinite leave to remain.

Reform UK’s open hostility toward trade unions and public services poses a growing threat to workers’ rights, collective bargaining, branch organisation, and employment standards within councils.

In his first televised speech in Durham, Nigel Farage chillingly urged council staff involved in diversity, climate initiatives, or remote working to “find alternative careers, very quickly.” Conference strongly condemns these remarks. Such threats dismiss the professionalism, expertise, and commitment of local government workers who deliver vital public services. Councils such as Durham are already under immense strain, and it is only through the dedication of staff that they continue to function at all.

Despite these challenges, Conference recognises the practical reality that UNISON branches and council staff will need to engage with newly elected Reform UK administrations. This must be done in a way that upholds UNISON’s values and advances our agenda in the best interests of local communities.

Considering this situation, Conference affirms the need for a coordinated and strategic response, aligned with UNISON’s Organising to Win strategy, to support branches in the following areas:

- 1) Base Organising. Strengthen branch structures and staff resources to increase union density, improve member-to-steward ratios, and support the development of effective local stewards capable of engaging members.
- 2) Industrial Bargaining. Establish professional, constructive relationships with newly elected Reform UK councillors to identify areas of common ground and influence decision-making, while robustly defending members' terms and conditions.
- 3) Strategic Campaigning and Escalation. Where necessary, launch targeted, winnable, issue-based campaigns with activity including potential industrial action if required.

To support branches in areas where Reform UK holds power, and to establish best-practice approaches for future campaigns, Conference calls upon the Service Group Executive to:

- a) Provide support and guidance to UNISON branches and regions as they deal with ruling Reform UK groups in councils (or any increase in Reform councillors), ensuring they are fully equipped to robustly defend members' jobs, terms, conditions, pensions, trade union organisation and collective bargaining machinery;
- b) Ensure branches are fully briefed on relevant employment law, including the Employment Rights Bill, consultation requirements, and equalities legislation.
- c) Support branches that are considering balloting members for potential industrial action, within the UNISON rules and all relevant legislation, in response to proposals to cut members' jobs, terms or conditions, liaising with the NEC's Industrial Action Committee as appropriate.
- d) Assist branches in monitoring council agendas and other documentation to identify early signs of hostile or regressive proposals. Collating these across all Reform UK councils to identify trends and coordinate responses. Gather and collate evidence of hostile or regressive proposals from Reform-led councils, so as to identify trends and coordinate responses where appropriate, and share relevant information with appropriate partner campaigning organisations;
- e) Work with migrant workers networks to collate evidence specific to the rights of migrants working in services covered by local government branches, for example regarding changes to applications for skilled worker, graduate and care worker visas, and councils offering them;
- f) Develop communications and campaign materials that can be used in branches where Reform control the council or have a presence on them; Develop adaptable communication materials, including leaflets and social media content, that can be tailored to local contexts.

- g) Support branches in building alliances with MPs, mayors, Police and Crime Commissioners, councillors, community groups, and other unions to mount collective opposition to any threats to services or workers' conditions.
- h) Facilitate opportunities for branches affected by Reform UK leadership to share experiences, successes, and challenges, fostering mutual learning and collective resilience. Provide mechanisms to bring together affected branches and regions to share experiences and good practice in relation to organising and campaigning in authorities controlled by Reform UK;
- i) Work with the NEC and regions to produce an organising response to Reform, including applications to use the Branch Support and Organising Fund, engagement with members, active participation in the union and political education;
- j) Encourage relevant branches to make applications to BSOF to enhance organising capacity, particularly through the recruitment and development of new workplace leaders.
- k) Provide guidance on increasing density and engagement among chief officer posts, recognising their key role in supporting bargaining outcomes.
- l) Continue to work with the NEC to maintain a strong political response nationally to Reform's policies and rhetoric regarding equalities and local government finance;
- m) Raise the profile within local government of UNISON's campaign highlighting the vital contributions made by migrant workers to local government services, and work with the NEC on physical and digital materials aimed at our local government workplaces and communities to challenge anti-migrant narratives and myths and build workers' solidarity;
- n) Continue to robustly defend and promote the LGPS as a core and indispensable part of local government terms and conditions, and support branches and regions in resisting any attacks on the LGPS.

## **Motions not reached which had Service Group Executive support**

### **23. Reforming Council Funding**

Conference condemns the actions of successive Conservative governments over the last decade that has resulted in local authorities facing an existential crisis.

For years, UNISON and the Local Government Association have demanded a sustainable, long term funding settlement and updated distribution mechanism to allow councils to actively support their communities.

Now there is a change in government, Conference believes we must seize this opportunity to see through meaningful reform to Council funding

The situation is dire. For the 2025/26 financial year, councils face a collective funding shortfall of £3.4bn—a figure projected to surge to £8.5bn by 2026/27. Research conducted by UNISON in July 2024 highlighted significant funding gaps within the North East. The highest three were: Gateshead (£36 million), Newcastle (£24 million) and Durham (£17 million).

At a recent budget meeting, Newcastle Council has reported cuts amounting to a staggering £381 million since 2010; an average of £2,629 per household. These cuts clearly have a direct impact on local services. In the Northern region, 72 youth centres have closed (with only 18 remaining) and 54 council-run children's centres have been lost. Furthermore, council-run libraries in the region have dropped from 204 to 147 (a 27% decrease) and public toilets have fallen by 43.

Although the October 2024 budget allocated an extra £1.3bn, this increase pales in comparison to the overall £3.4bn gap faced by councils nationwide. While the additional funds help address challenges in social care, housing, and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), they are insufficient to counteract over a decade of deep cuts and growing service demands.

A fairer funding model is urgently required. The government's consultation on a more equitable distribution of funds - prioritising councils with higher levels of deprivation - must be fast-tracked.

A recent publication by the Local Government Association (LGA), the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (Solace), and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountability (CIPFA) presents a compelling case for further reform. It calls for stability, a reversal of austerity impacts, enhanced accountability and transparency, and better alignment with local priorities. The report also underscores how the increasing reliance on council tax, due to a lack of alternative funding, exposes the weaknesses of an outdated system.

Given the critical state of local government finances, Conference believes our negotiating priorities should be: advocating for a significant boost in funding for local councils to support children's and adult social care, SEND provision, and housing support; ensure that councils are recognised as essential partners in national missions such as economic growth and planning; and, pushing for a larger, multi-year funding settlement that reflects the true financial pressures on councils.

In addressing these priorities, Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Strengthen the funding reform campaign by advocating for a sufficient, fair, and long-term settlement that genuinely meets councils' needs;
- 2) Leverage transparency through continued use of Freedom of Information requests to update the Council Cuts website, thereby bolstering lobbying efforts with up-to-date evidence;
- 3) Raise awareness about the human consequences of service cuts while highlighting the critical value of local government services;

- 4) Empower activists through advanced training on local government funding, enabling them to effectively scrutinise council budgets, and continue providing lobbying guides for Councillors and MPs;
- 5) Promote Local Government careers by increasing the profile of local government work through initiatives such as 'Local Government Champions' to inspire the next generation of workers;
- 6) Collaborate with politicians at every level to secure decisive action from the Treasury and ensure that local councils remain central to the national agenda for renewal and economic growth.

### **31. Safety, Equality & Human Rights for Migrant Workers**

Conference honours the invaluable and expert contribution our migrant workers bring to local government, often in the face of racism and at great personal expense.

Conference notes:

- 1) the case study evidence provided by the African Social Workers Network and commends the self-organising by migrant worker communities in tackling discrimination;
- 2) that the punishing impact of Home Office rules applies to all migrant workers and their families and threatens the basic right to a private and family life;
- 3) notes that while many obvious learning needs remain unmet, mandatory training in professional qualifications is extortionately expensive for migrant workers. It is not uncommon for workers to pay £10,00 per year to train for a job in which workers are then overworked, undermined and exposed to harassment. Students on placements often feel unsupported in their learning and isolated in dealing with discrimination and harassment.

Conference recalls the rising level of racist violence and aggression and the specific targeting of council workers and council services in the summer of 2024. Conference also notes the prevalence of lone working among migrant workers in local government and highlights the need for individual risk assessments.

Conference also notes that, in addition to their role as employers, local authorities play a crucial role in procurement and outsourcing where migrant worker exploitation is particularly extreme.

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive:

- a) to gather evidence of the specific experience of council workers from branches and regions;
- b) to liaise with the Strategic Organising Unit to ensure a powerful organising response with guidance and support on access to BSOF funds for migrant worker campaigns targeting local government;

- c) to use the testimony of migrant workers to develop a local government charter and press the call for equality, human rights and safety at work with employers, and the Governments across the UK nations.

### **32. Reviewing Redundancy Policies in Local Government**

Conference notes the ongoing and impending budget cuts within local government across the UK, recognising that, as of September 2023, 86% of UK councils anticipated a budget gap, with a national cumulative deficit of £7 billion by 2025/26. At present, many employers are committed to a policy of no mandatory redundancies and favour service cuts instead of staffing cuts.

Conference notes that the current economic model is failing local governments. Councils are being cut to the bone with many looking to privatise public services in order to maintain a legal budget. Conference agrees that this is simply unacceptable and we cannot stand by as our youth centres, schools, and leisure and culture facilities are cut or put into private hands. Conference notes the Scottish Trade Union Congress' paper "Raising Taxes to Deliver for Scotland". Although this paper focuses on Scotland, the basic proposals of tax increases and new taxes on those with the broadest shoulders are ones that can and should be applied across the UK.

However, it is clear that once there are no more services left to cut, the focus will shift to the workforce. Conference highlights that employers may use a 'last in, first out' policy as part of the selection process for redundancy. Conference agrees that this technique is not necessarily discriminatory in its nature, however, it is likely to predominantly affect young workers, given that they simply haven't been in the labour market as long as some colleagues have.

Conference calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Work with Local Government branches to review and assess local authorities' redundancy policies to determine whether length of service is an appropriate determining factor in selecting employees for redundancy;
- 2) conduct an audit on which local authorities have signed up to the 'Respect Your Youth' young workers' charter, and share the results with the National Young Members Forum;
- 3) consider commissioning a report looking at the revenue raising levers which UK, devolved, and local governments can use to reverse 14 years of austerity, and in order to prevent local governments renegeing on no redundancy policies;
- 4) use all available means to support local governments to push back against

### **33. Proposed LGPS Investment and Governance Reforms: The Need for Accountability to Scheme Members**

Conference reaffirms support for the local government pension scheme (LGPS) which is a high-quality defined benefit public sector pension scheme, and the importance of access to such schemes for workers delivering public services.

Unlike other public sector schemes, the LGPS has funds that help cover the costs of meeting pension benefit entitlements that are built up under the rules of the scheme.

Conference regards employee and employer contributions to a pension fund as constituting workers' deferred wages. Conference believes workers have legitimate rights and interests as to what is done with the funds that exist to help provide for their retirement pensions. Pension fund governance arrangements should involve those making investment decisions being accountable to scheme members such that the fund is invested in a way that secures the payment of accrued pension scheme entitlements (through fiduciary duty) while reflecting the collectively expressed environmental, humanitarian and wider material interests of scheme members.

A number of LGPS funds in Scotland are substantially reducing their contribution levels from 19.3% to 6.5%, many of which are using the savings to plug the underfunding of local government by the Scottish Government. Pension 'holidays' were a significant factor in the pensions dispute in 2011. For example the Strathclyde Pension Fund has twelve member councils which will save millions of pounds. That represents deferred wages taken out of members' pensions' schemes.

Conference notes that:

- 1) The existing structure of LGPS governance involves the existence of over 80 funds in England & Wales and 11 funds in Scotland. The combined assets of the funds are worth some £400bn;
- 2) The key local fund decision-making body is a pensions committee, usually made up of councillors. The law also requires that each committee has an advisory board with equal numbers of member and employer representatives. Many UNISON reps sit on these boards;
- 3) Investment performance has been good. Most funds are currently in surplus, which has enabled some reductions in the contributions required of employers. This supports the delivery of council services, preserves jobs, and also may make it more attractive for other employers to offer their staff the LGPS:
- 4) There are many examples of local pension funds investing long-term capital in investments with local impact, with benefits for scheme members and their communities. But most funds have invested either very little or no money in this way. The extent to which LGPS investments reflect worker interests and preferences under current governance arrangements is generally more limited than we would like. UNISON reps involved in local fund governance sometimes express frustration with the influence of advisers in making decisions, and the lack of responsiveness to proposals for divestment from, for example, fossil fuels and corporations on the United Nations list of

business enterprises involved with the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank. The existing governance arrangements have been criticised widely, including by UNISON, for their fragmentation and inefficiency. The structure sustains a huge investment adviser and management industry, paid for from member funds. In 2010, National Delegate Conference passed a motion committing the union to campaign for one investment fund for England, one for Wales and one for Scotland;

- 5) In 2016, the Conservative government required funds to join together to create pools to invest their liquid assets. There are currently eight pools with a variety of organisational models and inconsistent geographical footprints. Funds have put varying amounts of their investment monies into them. Each pool has inadequate levels of member involvement in their governance such that they are less accountable to members for investment decisions than the local funds;
- 6) The incoming Labour government is continuing to pursue the pooling agenda. Their aim is to reduce costs through economies of scale and to boost UK economic performance through an emphasis on “productive finance”. LGPS governance and investment reform is very much linked to the government’s growth agenda.

Conference notes that a UNISON response was submitted to the government’s consultation in January 2025 and shares the concerns raised including:

- a) The lack of accountability to members in the governance arrangements of the existing pools;
- b) That pools can be remote from the areas supplying their funding such that they may under-value investment which would benefit those places
- c) The need for LGPS money to be invested in viable investments, with funds deciding upon investment strategy, and enabled to specify the investment approaches to be used, and what specific investment categories are included or excluded from the investment made on their behalf.

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- i) Continue to engage in government consultations about the future of the LGPS working with other parts of the union as appropriate;
- ii) Continue to raise concerns about accountability to scheme members and to push for pools to have meaningful member involvement in governance;
- iii) Provide support and information to UNISON reps involved in fund governance, to assist them in pursuing ethical investment decisions.

### **34. Divest Our Pension Fund**

This Conference notes that the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) with 6.4 million members is the largest direct benefit scheme in England and Wales, holding

over £370 billion in total assets valued in 2022, which are concentrated (two-thirds) in pooled investment vehicles.

Conference notes that research conducted for the Palestine Solidarity Campaign indicates that LGPS investments include more than £4.5 billion in companies that are engaged in supplying armaments and/or surveillance technology to the Israeli military, and others that are complicit in the construction of Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian land in violation of international law.

Conference further notes and welcomes that UNISON has been to the fore among trade unions in Britain in building support for a campaign “Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions” among its own members and the wider trade union movement in solidarity with the Palestinian people. The union has published a number of very useful guides on divestment for use by branches.

Conference believes that those companies currently supplying weaponry and logistical support to the Israeli military risk not only reputational damage but also significant financial and legal risks.

Conference further believes that many LGPS members, whether they currently pay into the scheme or are beneficiaries will be concerned by such investments being made on their behalf without their knowledge or informed consent.

This Conference therefore calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Support the union’s efforts for divestment from those companies that supply weaponry to the Israeli military and repressive regimes;
- 2) Campaign proactively for ethical investment of our pensions – no war, no occupation, no fossil fuel extraction;
- 3) Work with all relevant parts of the union, and particularly with the National Retired Members Committee as many of our retired members are now living off the proceeds of such investments and should also have a voice, to achieve these aims.

### **35. It’s Time we Started Addressing the Gender Pension Gap**

Conference notes that the gender pay gap is a well-known issue, with women often earning less than their male counterparts. As of 2024, the gender pay gap stood at 13.1%, with older women being disproportionately affected. Unfortunately, this disparity extends into retirement, manifesting as a gender pension gap.

The gender pension gap refers to the percentage difference in pension income between men and women. This gap starts early in a woman's career, with an initial pension gap of 16%. Across all age brackets, women consistently have smaller pension pots. By retirement, the average pension pot for men is twice the size of that for women.

### Pension Savings Comparison:

On average, UK pension pots for individuals over 50 are:

- 1) £84,205 for men;
- 2) £39,654 for women.

This means men have more than twice the pension savings of women, leading to a more comfortable retirement. Alarming, a third of women have less than £5,000 in their pension pots.

Local Government Pension Data (2016 Actuarial Review analysis produced by GAD):

- a) 62% of pensioners are female;
- b) Average male pension: £6,957;
- c) Average female pension: £3,550;
- d) Pension gap: 49%.

Causes of the gender pension gap: Research by Legal & General indicates that the pension gap starts at 16% early in women's careers and can widen to 55% by retirement. Factors contributing to this gap include:

- i) High childcare costs and career breaks;
- ii) Pay inequality;
- iii) Barriers to accessing pensions;
- iv) Lack of financial knowledge;
- v) Earnings below the auto-enrolment threshold;
- vi) The cost-of-living crisis;
- vii) "Two-tier pension benefits" when it comes to contracted out staff and those providing commissioned services.

But it doesn't stop there. Divorce can significantly affect pension and retirement income. Only 7% of people seek financial advice during divorce, and women are more likely to waive rights to a partner's pension, resulting in a decrease in their annual income post-separation.

Conference acknowledges the hardship faced by current and former local government members face because of the gender pensions gap

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- A. Commission research to identify the gender pension gap within local government pensions;
- B. Identify measures that can be taken to negotiate with employers that can mitigate the current pension gap and prevent its growth;
- C. Produce a comprehensive briefing on the gender pension gap to be shared with members, branches;
- D. Engage and work with other organisations to lobby employers and engage in conversation around the gender pay gap to find solutions and campaign for legislative change.

### **35.1**

In the second paragraph, insert a new second sentence:

“The scale and causes of the gender pension gap in the LGPS have been the subject of extensive research by the Government Actuary's Department and others.”

Insert new paragraph after "Conference acknowledges the hardship faced by current and former local government members face because of the gender pensions gap."

“Conference notes that while there is a gender pension gap within the LGPS, the overall effect of public sector defined benefit schemes such as the LGPS is to reduce the gender pension gap on a societal level. Women make up the majority of the members of good quality public sector schemes like the LGPS, and this reduces the overall gender pension gap by some 10 percentage points according to the Pensions Policy Institute. Conference reaffirms the importance of defending defined benefit public sector pension schemes and the need to highlight the inadequate and unequal retirement incomes that result from the defined contribution arrangements that predominate in the private sector.”

Delete action 'A': "Commission research to identify the gender pension gap within local government pensions".

### **35.2**

In the Sixth Paragraph, (beginning " causes of the gender pension gap") add a new sub-paragraph :

- viii) some public service pension schemes still need to remedy differences of treatment where the husband or male civil partner of a female scheme member is treated less favourably than other surviving spouses or civil partners,

### 35.3

Under point C:

C. Produce a comprehensive briefing on the gender pension gap to be shared with members, branches

ADD: 'and develop and promote training for branches on model bargaining in this area.'

### 36. Social Care

Conference applauds the advances in supporting and empowering care workers within UNISON over the last 12 months. These include significant growth in care worker membership, particularly of migrant care workers; the establishment of a national committee for care workers in England; and winning a commitment from the Westminster Government to establish a Fair Pay Agreement for care workers. The Employment Rights Bill should lead to other improvements for care workers, such as a clamp-down on zero-hours contracts and the establishment of a new single enforcement body, the Fair Work Agency.

Conference notes that many challenges still remain for our care worker membership and the wider workforce. From the flawed proposals for a National Care Service in Scotland, the shameful and widespread exploitation of the workforce particularly migrant care workers, through to the underfunding of all councils across the UK.

Nevertheless, Conference notes that the union's social care work is continuing to build momentum and welcomes the plans by the Strategic Organising Unit in tandem with UNISON's regions to make social care a priority area for organising.

Conference recognises that despite the differences in the delivery of social care throughout the UK, UNISON's own National Care Service campaign continues to present a clear vision for the service that should be aspired to across the union. Conference believes that improved funding and consistent terms and conditions for care workers must ultimately be allied to insourcing of the service to bring about better standards of care for the elderly and disabled.

Conference therefore calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Campaign and build support for a national care service across the UK and for all outsourced care services to be brought back in house;
- 2) Ask branches to encourage care worker members to participate in the democratic structures of the union;
- 3) Encourage local councils to pass motions expressing support for UNISON's National Care Service campaign;
- 4) Campaign for and lobby governments and social care employers to employ staff on pay and conditions directly equivalent to rates for comparable roles in the public sector;

- 5) Continue to ensure that social care remains a priority campaign issue within the Service Group;
- 6) Continue to highlight the scandal of sleep-in pay rates across the UK and to raise the matter with the UK Government, Low Pay Commission and His Majesty's Revenue and Customs;
- 7) Campaign for more funding to be given to councils across the UK in order to help fund the delivery of better-quality care services and better pay and conditions for care workers;
- 8) Promote examples of UNISON branches and regions which have won campaigns to return care services back in-house and put pressure on all other councils to do the same.
- 9) To work with Labour Link and the NEC to oppose any plans to further delay implementation of a National Care Service.

### **36.1**

4th paragraph – delete “the elderly and disabled” and replace with “older and disabled people”