

1.1 UNISON is the UK's trade unions with over 1.3 members UK-wide, and 100,000 in Wales. UNISON members predominantly work in public services, including local government, education, education, health and outsourced services.

2. Insourcing

2.1 Long term budgetary pressures faced by local authorities had led to large areas of local government services being outsourced in a bid to save money. The financial climate in which local authorities must operate is well documented. Authorities have had to find the best possible means of achieving service transformation and ongoing efficiencies within extremely challenging circumstances.

2.2 UNISON believes that services are best provided in-house in order to ensure value for money, accountability and the flexibility to respond to changing needs and priorities.

2.3 Outsourcing hasn't worked. Instead, service quality has suffered, outsourced workers have seen their pay, terms and conditions cut, and local authorities have had to bail out failing contracts.

2.4 In contrast, the benefits of insourcing are vast and include: improving efficiency and reducing costs; the ability to integrate a range of services; enhanced flexibility; minimising risk; regaining control; reducing cost and time spent managing contracts; boosting local engagement and accountability; greater staff motivation and improved service quality; maintaining expertise and capacity.

2.4 As we work to ensure an equality-led recovery to the COVID pandemic, it is important that insourcing is prioritised to ensure the best outcomes for communities across Wales. It is worth noting that public services have additional responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty which further contributes to an equality-led recovery.

2.5 As a starting point, it is essential that local authorities are in a position to be able to receive services. The evidence that the current methods of outsourcing services has failed is already there – social care and leisure services across Wales alone are testament to this, even prior to COVID.

2.6 Research commissioned by Hft, a charity providing services for people with learning disabilities, in 2020 evidences that 56% of providers have reported either a deficit, with costs exceeding funding, or that their surplus has decreased slightly or significantly. The evidence also identified that 62% of

providers had to close some parts of the organisation or hand back marginal contracts and services to their local authority over the past year (<https://www.hft.org.uk/spc-for-2020/>).

2.7 It is important that Welsh Government now take leadership to ensure the infrastructures and expertise are in place to be able to properly run, for example, the framework agreements outlined in the recent *Rebalancing Care* consultation, and the legislation drafted to deliver on this agenda needs scrutiny.

3. Finances

3.1 The Local Government and Housing committee must remind Welsh Government of the importance of local government services within the context of the wider Welsh budget. Communities expect high standards of public services and value those services – this has become even more evident during the pandemic. To meet need and expectation, it is essential that services are fairly and adequately funded. Furthermore, Welsh Government must also ensure there is sufficient funding to apply pay awards. Welsh Government needs a pay strategy for public sector workers and must be held to account on this issue.

4. Job Evaluation

4.1 UNISON believes a wholesale job evaluation across local authorities in Wales is overdue. We continue to operate across Wales with 22 different ways of doing things, with 22 different job evaluation schemes, and 22 different rates of pay. Local government would undoubtedly benefit from harmonisation of job evaluation schemes.

4.2 Taking schools staff as an example, we need to ensure schools staff - including teaching assistants of various levels, cleaning staff, administrative staff, catering staff, grounds workers – have a commonality of pay and parity across authorities. There are significant differentials between both the expectations on teaching assistants and the pay of teaching assistants across authorities. Furthermore, a higher level of demand and expectation does not necessarily translate into higher levels of pay.

4.3 This same principle occurs in local authorities across the piece and is damaging to service delivery and to local government workers. Local government will be at the centre of the recovery from COVID. Local government services will be key to getting communities back on their feet. The staff

delivering these services are essential and their pay, and terms and conditions must reflect this.

4.4 UNISON believes the process of job evaluation across local authorities should commence in the next 12 months.

5. Local Government post-COVID

5.1 COVID has been devastating and public sector workers have stood up to the challenges presented to ensure services continue to operate in the face of this deadly virus. All services have had to rapidly adapt to new ways of working and as a result we may now be able to consider some more creative ways of working that didn't seem possible previously. The public sector has risen to the many challenges presented by the pandemic, and we must ensure we learn lessons from these circumstances and take this forward. UNISON has identified some key areas for development below.

5.2 Youth services – no child should be left behind. Almost one in three in Wales live in relative income poverty – a figure likely to worsen as a result of welfare reform and the pandemic. The combination of over a decade of cuts to youth services and the pandemic has been devastating to youth service provision. This is undoubtedly impacting the mental health, wellbeing, and prospects for Wales' young people. Current rules allow youth service provision to be merged and provided as part of a broad package of education and social care measures. As a result, real youth work is being lost. When youth services go, benefits to young people and communities are lost – along with resulting savings in intervention services further down the line. Local authorities must have a genuine duty to provide universal, open access youth services, back up by the necessary resources. Children's services are a lifeline for many families, and this must not be forgotten.

5.3 Hubs – Welsh Government is encouraging and increase in remote working and has set a long-term ambition for 30% of the Welsh workforce to work away from a traditional office. There are many benefits to remote working that are being widely discussed. Community hubs will be key to the development of this agenda. The running of community hubs is naturally suited to local government and could become a core function undertaken by local authorities, so modernising and regenerating local government services. Multi-purpose hubs could be utilised for work spaces, to support people experiencing social isolation, and to support the running of youth provision, for example. Many local authorities have excess estate, and this could put it to good use with clear community benefits.

5.4 Agile working – discussions around agile working have gained momentum as workplaces have adapted to new ways of working. UNISON is clear, agile working should not be to the detriment of job security. It is also important to

recognise that agile working goes beyond hot-desking, and in fact hot-desking can cause concerns relating to disability and neurodiversity.

5.5 UNISON believes this is the optimum time to analyse other possible and sustainable ways of working such as a four-day working week and a 35-hour working week, as well as other possible concepts. The benefit to the economy and to the health and wellbeing of workers could be exceptional.

6. Equality-led Recovery

6.1 UNISON's overriding approach to all the issues outlined in this paper is to ensure we rebuild our communities in a way that puts people first. We need a society that pays workers their worth, that properly funds public services, that delivers good quality and readily available social housing, that prioritises a fair work nation. We need an equality-led recovery that leaves nobody behind and ensures equality for all.

7. Housing

7.1 Access to decent and affordable housing is a basic human right and the foundation to a fair standard of living. Wales is undoubtedly experiencing a housing crisis. The context of the coronavirus emergency laid bare the extent of the crisis, and how our housing system falls far short of meeting the needs of working people.

7.2 Councils struggled to safeguard homeless people from COVID. Workers were deployed to homeworking. Workers were furloughed. Vulnerable people were told to shield. The common thread to emerge was that the 'stay at home' message for many people meant staying in homes that were wholly unsuitable.

7.3 Issues range across the inadequacy of space in which to work, the poor quality of many existing homes, families struggling for areas for their children to use for home education, lack of internet connectivity. Young workers in shared houses had to double up their bedrooms as offices, as well as those in shared homes being unable to shield because of shared facilities.

7.4 Investment in a new generation of council housing across Wales, at scale and pace, must be at the heart of solving the crisis in affordable homes to rent, and Welsh Government must be held to account on the development of this work.

7.5 Corporate Joint Committees (CJC's) can be at the heart of this agenda, pulling together the expert resource, including design, planning, and workforce, to deliver on the housing agenda. Long-term austerity and outsourcing have

reduced capacity in these areas for over a decade. CJC's present an opportunity to pool resource to tackle this key issue.

7.6 The legislation, roll-out, and implementation of the legislation progressing through the Senedd regarding CJC's need scrutiny to ensure that their potential is fully realised.

7.7 The new generation of council housing must maximise the opportunities for green growth and green construction skills. The response to the housing crisis must also be a response to the climate crisis. Welsh Government have rightly declared a climate emergency, and this must be reflected throughout policy and implementation.

7.8 New homes must be 'Healthy Homes' and for this reason adoption of the Healthy Homes Act should be a priority in Wales. The Healthy Homes Act advocated by the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) offers a powerful way for national governments and local councils to promote and secure good place-making. Enshrined in law, healthy homes principles would protect communities from poor quality housing, securing such simple but often ignored design principles of access to light, public realm, and quality and space standards. Such an Act would place a new duty on the relevant Minister or Ministers to secure 'the health, safety, wellbeing and convenience of people in or around new buildings, and on local authorities to plan for the long-term delivery of affordance housing'.

7.9 A wider exploration, and expansion of Living Rents pilots should be considered, giving immediate support to those living in housing poverty. Whilst Living Rents are not the only solution to housing affordability, better linking earnings and rent paid, would lift thousands out of rent poverty. It will not substitute for a new generation of council housing but would be a pragmatic support to those living now in poverty as a result of the cost of housing.

8. Housing and COVID

8.1 Whilst homeworking has not been a matter of choice but a necessity for many workers, it is recognised that some workers have benefited from these new working arrangements: avoiding daily commute, greater flexibility in working hours in some sectors, and arguably a better work-life balance. For others this has not been the case.

8.2 The pandemic has exposed the lack of housing quality in a number of groups of workers. For example, the growth in young people and older single people relying on houses in multiple occupancy (HMOs) for their housing needs has resulted in problems for those who needed to self-isolate but are forced to use shared bathrooms and kitchens. For working parents, the burden of balancing childcare whilst homeworking appears to have fallen

disproportionately on female workers. However, in many homes an overriding issue has been the lack of a dedicated workspace.

8.3 Lack of space and cramped living conditions play a big role in causing health problems, as well as an increase in those seeking mental health support. Notwithstanding the serious impact poor housing has on individuals, it also has a much wider impact on social wellbeing and the economy, creating further pressures on public services including mental health support.

8.4 For homeworkers to enjoy the best possible experience, this would mean: a private and safe working space without encroaching on 'living space'; adequate space to house equipment including ergonomically adjustable furniture and equipment; adaptable workstations for workers with disability; excellent WiFi connectivity; good lighting and heating systems; access to outside space to enable breaks and fresh air away from computer screens.

9. Enforcement and Housing

9.1 UNISON believes Welsh Government has a stronger role to play in laying our expectations and enforcement. There must be the right housing mix across each local authority to ensure the needs of local communities are met – including considerations around where the local workforce live if there is no suitable and affordable local housing. Second homes and holiday homes must also be considered as a part of this discussion, and it is important that the needs and interests of local people are prioritised. Local authorities must have the structures and capacity to develop and manager housing stock. Welsh Government must be held to account on the enforcement role they play.

9.2 A joint UNISON APSE report, *A decent place to live: Homes fit for Key Workers*, published July 2021 goes into further detail about addressing the housing crisis across the UK and provide additional data to support taking this agenda forward. The report can be viewed online: [A-decent-place-to-live-updated.pdf \(unison.org.uk\)](https://www.unison.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-07/A-decent-place-to-live-updated.pdf).