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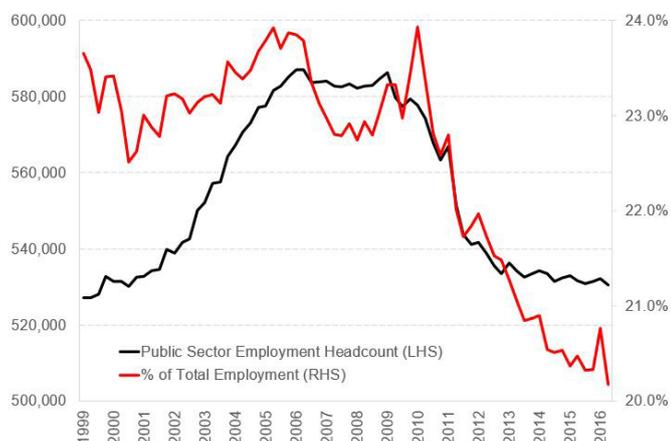
Briefing:

AUSTERITY, CUTS & THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Austerity is having a real and meaningful impact on our communities and on the fabric of Scottish society. The public sector delivers vital services which support the health and wellbeing of people across Scotland and in many ways is the foundation of our economy. Infrastructure, education and skills, health and wellbeing, and care for both old and young, are all shaped and delivered by the public sector and the public sector workforce is highly skilled and makes a vital contribution to Scotland.

Nearly a decade of cuts and austerity has decimated the public sector and is placing an ever increasing strain on the public sector workforce. Stress, staff shortages, and underfunding are repeatedly highlighted as issues in every public sector workplace.

Cuts as a result of austerity have been severe. Estimates from the ONS suggest that over 60,000 public sector jobs in Scotland have been lost since 2010. This includes devolved and non-devolved public sector employment. The Fraser of Allander Institute highlights the loss of council jobs as particularly severe.¹



PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYMENT STATISTICS, Q2 2016

A loss of employment on this scale is unprecedented and if an equivalent situation was happening in the private sector, there would be calls for a taskforce and for Government to intervene. Yet this is a programme driven by Government and routinely championed, particularly by Westminster, as a way to balance the books and stabilise the economy.

This 'austerity narrative' takes no account of the value of the public sector and the contribution that it makes to economic development and the wellbeing of people in Scotland and across the UK. Not only are the numbers of jobs being lost too high but they come at a time when the Scottish population is both growing and ageing (the population was 2% higher in 2016 than in 2011²) creating an ever increasing demand for public services.

The pressures on the public sector and the public sector workforce are simply too great. It is time to end austerity, reinvest in our public sector and value our public sector workforce.

The NHS

Despite Government promises to protect funding for the NHS, pressures on budgets are clearly having an impact on service delivery. It should be remembered that the cited increase in the most recent budget of £264.30 million is a 1.9% cut when inflation is taken into account³.

In 2016-17 NHS boards had to make unprecedented levels of savings at almost £390 million (3% of total budget)⁴. 2,818 whole-time equivalent (WTE) nursing and midwifery posts were unfilled at the end of March 2017, a 27.5% increase from March last year⁵. Waiting times are rising in the NHS, with trusts now routinely unable to balance the books. GP surgeries are also highlighting severe pressures on funding and social care continues to be chronically under-funded, creating negative outcomes for workers and those who depend on social care services, and increasing pressure on the wider NHS.

These cuts are having a real and meaningful impact on services with Audit Scotland highlighting that people are waiting longer to be seen. Waiting lists for first outpatient appointments and inpatient treatments have increased by 15% and 12% respectively in the past year.

The majority of key national performance targets were not met in 2016/17 and wider indicators of quality suggest that the NHS is beginning to struggle to maintain quality of care.⁶

NHS staff regularly report issues due to stress and the under-resourcing of services. The NHS is a vital service that many rely on and still provides high quality care for patients across Scotland despite the pressures that staff are under.

We must value the NHS and invest in it, reversing the damage from underinvestment and recognise the skills and dedication of staff.

Education

Cuts to education budgets, resulting from wider cuts to local government funding, have contributed to teacher shortages, a reduction in the number of teaching assistants and a reduction in funding for educational psychologists and other additional support needs specialists, all of which is having an impact on outcomes for pupils

The Scottish Government has reported that there was a decrease of 1,841 support staff in schools between 2010 and 2015⁷, and a decrease of 1,389 teachers whilst there was an increase of 6,707 pupils in the same period.⁸ The Scottish Local Government Benchmarking Framework (January 2016) has reported a reduction in real costs per pupil since 2010/11 of 10.8% in primary and 4.1% in secondary.

UNISON reports that 40% of support staff now carry out unpaid work, while teachers are routinely providing teaching supplies from their own pocket and supporting students who are living in poverty. At the same time pay is falling. The EIS report up to a 16.4% shortfall in agreed teachers' salary progression when considered against inflation since 2003.⁹ Yet teachers are working up to 60 hours per week to deal with staff shortages and changes in the curriculum.

Colleges are also feeling the strain. Audit Scotland found that there had been a real-terms funding cut of £53 million between 2011 and 2014. Staff numbers fell by 9.3% since 2011-12 and there was a reduction of 48 per cent in part-time students and a reduction of 41 per cent in the number of students aged 25 or older between 2008-09 and 2013-14.¹¹ Universities share many of these pressures with workloads rising and many lectures under strain. Since 2009, the cumulative loss to lecturer's pay when inflation is considered is over 16%¹².

It should be remembered, however, that Scotland still has a high quality education system. The commitment to free education and widening access is admirable. Ambitions for education will not be realised, however, if the education sector is not properly resourced. Early year's provision also requires significant expansion and a proper level of financial support.

It is essential that education is supported, well resourced and valued to support the Scottish economy and Scotland's people.

Local Government

Local government continues to receive a disproportionately high share of the cuts which is having a measurable impact on communities across Scotland. Analysis by the Fraser of Allander Institute found that more than £1 billion over the last five years has been taken out of local authority budgets.¹³ There has been a decrease in employment across local government of 14.7% between 2011 and 2017, either through job cuts or outsourcing.¹⁴ For the staff still working in local government, they have seen a real-terms cut in basic pay of 21% since 2010. 78% of this workforce are women, contributing to the low pay and negative

results for women in the labour market.¹⁵

The services that local government provide are essential and a life-line for many people. A report by SPICe, the Scottish Government's information centre, shows that almost 50% of the savings made by Scottish Councils come from services used most by lower income groups.¹⁶

It is also not simply about service provision; the amount of shared public space has dropped, with high numbers of community centres closing. This coupled with the withdrawal of public subsidy for transport, particularly buses, means that individuals within communities are increasingly isolated and community resilience has been reduced.

The role of local government is often not recognised and there continues to be a need to reinvigorate local democracy in Scotland, giving Councils a greater ability to raise their own revenue and make their own decisions.

The contribution that local government makes to communities should be recognised and the skills of the workforce should be valued.. Without properly funded local government services, many communities will continue to suffer with negative outcomes falling most severely on the poorest families.

The Civil Service

Civil service jobs have been cut across the UK by up to 21% since 2010.¹⁷ The proposed closure of tax offices and cuts to the number of staff will have an impact on collection of tax revenue which will have a knock-on effect on funding of public services. DWP offices in Scotland, eight in Glasgow alone,¹⁸ are earmarked for closure which will have an impact on people accessing social security, leaving individuals facing destitution and increasing levels of poverty across Scotland.

The median wage of a civil servant is £23,810¹⁹, which is £2,690 below the Scottish average. Increasing pressures and workload for civil servants and at times difficult working environments driven by decisions made within the Westminster Government or the pressures of Government restructures, increased devolution or Brexit, is placing strain on a vital workforce and potentially creating problems with recruitment and retention.

Too often the role that civil servants play in our society is overlooked or undervalued but little in the public sector can function without a well managed and well funded civil service.

Other Services

Fire and Rescue Services and Police Scotland are both under pressure with a reduction in staffing levels and a centralisation of service provision.

Since 2010 the number of fire fighters has been cut by 11,000²⁰ and the proposed restructure of the service is likely to come with increased responsibilities on current staff and a diminution in the service provided.

Through the creation of Police Scotland due to budget cuts in the new organisation, nearly 2000 police staff jobs were lost.²¹ The Scottish Government will also cut £1.1 billion from police budgets by 2026 – and the protection of police officer numbers means that police staff like control room operators, crime analysts, and criminal justice staff are losing their jobs.²²

Too often mergers and centralisation is pursued across the public sector in Scotland, something that creates pressure for workers in the name of savings which are seldom realised.

It is important that the need for local provision is valued, that all communities in Scotland are supported and that sufficient funding is provided to create high quality services in both urban and rural settings.

All of this takes funding and a recognition that public services are not a luxury but fundamental and essential for everyone living in Scotland.

Looking to the Future

Given the level of cuts that have already taken place across the public sector in Scotland, it is simply untenable to continue with an austerity agenda. Public services are crucial for the promotion of equality and wellbeing for

people and communities. Without them families begin to struggle and often it is the poorest that carry the greatest burden. Too often this debate is reduced to numbers on a page or lines in a budget statement and the voices and experiences of people working in public services and relying on public services are lost.

Over the coming period, therefore, the STUC aims to consistently make the case for properly resourced public services and to champion the views and experiences of public sector workers across Scotland. It is not enough to simply stop the cuts, we must begin to recognise and value the role the public sector plays in the fabric of our society and we must seek ways to ensure that it is properly resourced and maintained as an asset for the future.

Coupled with this is the need to value and properly pay public sector workers. After a decade of pay restraint, workers have seen their pay fall in real terms and pay levels are now lower than they were before the crash. In this period, public sector pay has risen by only 4.4%, while the cost of living has risen by 22%.²³

If we are to value our public sector, we must value its workforce and we must continue to strive to make it an attractive place to work, with fair pay and fair work principles at its heart.

1 <https://www.sbs.strath.ac.uk/economics/fraser/20161118/20161118-Labour-Market-Trends.pdf>

2 <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/news/2017/scotlands-population-is-increasing>

3 <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/12/6610/7>

4 <http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/report/nhs-in-scotland-2017> Audit Scotland

5 <http://www.isdscotland.org/Publications/index.asp>

6 <http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/report/nhs-in-scotland-2017>

7 <http://www.unison-scotland.org/library/20170109-Schools-Damage-Series.pdf>

8 <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/teachcenssuppdata>

9 <http://www.eis.org.uk/images/Employ%20Relations/PayClaim17/SNCT%20Letter.pdf>

10 <http://www.eis.org.uk/public.asp?id=3788>

11 <http://www.unison-scotland.org/2016/04/19/cuts-to-further-education-must-be-reversed/>

12 <http://www.ucu.org.uk/circ/pdf/UCUBANHE14.pdf>

13 <https://www.sbs.strath.ac.uk/economics/fraser/20160913/ScotlandsBudget-2016.pdf>

14 <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00524658.pdf>

15 <http://www.publicfinance.co.uk/opinion/2017/07/local-government-remuneration-its-time-pay>

16 http://www.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/S5/SB_16-84_The_social_impact_of_the_2016-17_local_government_budget.pdf

17 <https://www.pcs.org.uk/news/investment-needed-to-arrest-decline-in-services>

18 <https://www.pcs.org.uk/departments-for-work-and-pensions/news/pcs-opposes-dwp-announcement-of-glasgow-office-closures>

19 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/publicsectorpersonnel/bulletins/civilservicestatistics/2017>

20 <https://www.fbu.org.uk/circular/2017hoc0442ad/fbu-pay-consultation-23-august-13-september-2017>

21 <http://www.unison-scotland.org/library/Justice-Committee-nov16.pdf>

22 <http://www.unison-scotland.org/library/Police-2026-May-2017.pdf>

23 <http://www.unison-scotland.org/2017/10/07/public-service-workers-march-holyrood-fair-pay/>