

# Scottish local authorities confirm 13,000 public sector job losses

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The scale of the public spending cuts planned for Scotland is becoming clear. So far, 13,000 public sector job losses have been confirmed by local authorities in Scotland. Another 20,000 are anticipated over the next few months.

Indications of what this will mean can be seen in North Lanarkshire Council's proposals, under which 2,000 of its workers will lose their jobs over the next two years. The proposals flow from the Labour controlled council decision to bring forward £70 million spending cuts by 12 months.

Services in the area, which includes former industrial towns of Airdrie, Coatbridge and Motherwell and which hosted the huge Ravenscraig steelworks until its closure in 1992, will be seriously impacted. If implemented, the equivalent of 1,153 full-time positions will end, along with over 500 vacancies remaining unfilled. Many of the posts are part-time and job-share, bringing the final tally to over 2,000.

Proposals include the closure of elderly care homes and removing 230 residential and homecare workers. The budget for supporting adults with learning disabilities will be cut by £2 million. The price of meals at pensioners' lunch clubs will be increased.

Learning and leisure services will see a £6 million cut, most of which will come from cutting additional teachers in deprived areas. The number of classroom assistants, early years workers, and psychologists will be reduced. Classroom size limits will be ripped up, with English and mathematics classes increasing from 20 to 33 pupils.

Some primary schools will be closed outright. The council has already identified target schools. Free transport to schools will be cut back, saving £1.8 million, while the school crossing patrol service will be put under review. A children's toy library will close.

Charges could be introduced or increased for cemeteries, while opening hours for parks and leisure facilities will be cut.

Further proposals include pooling administrative functions with other local authorities at the expense of office workers. In one of the most cynical proposals, the council suggested "adjusting the deprivation formula" under which particularly impoverished areas receive additional support.

North Lanarkshire has a number of very poor areas. Across the region, some 18.3 percent of children are in receipt of free school meals because their parents are on the lowest levels of benefit. But in a number of schools, such as Logans Primary in Motherwell, over 40 percent of children get free meals.

Similar cuts are being considered in all areas. While many of the specifics have not yet been outlined, some have already been announced.

In Labour controlled Glasgow, 4,000 jobs of 35,000 council staff will go over the next three years, to save £120 million. Glasgow City Council has told 158 supply teachers not to turn up for the term that has just started. Outside the council, the local health board, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, has announced 1,200 posts will go, including 670 nursing and midwifery positions. Hospital beds are to be cut by 20 percent.

In total, some 11,000 public sector jobs are expected to go in Glasgow alone by 2014.

Glasgow's semi-free-standing Glasgow Life agency, which runs the city's libraries, cultural and sports centres, has already announced £10 million worth of cuts, and hundreds of jobs are imperilled.

In Fife, 1,800 out of 20,000 council workers will have been let go by March. The city of Edinburgh intends to remove 700 posts, and school closures are possible. The council intends to transfer refuse collection, school

meals and street cleaning to private operators. West Lothian hopes to sack 1,000 staff over four years, and reduce elderly home and day care centres. Adult training and childcare cuts are also expected.

Dundee City Council, led by the Scottish National Party, announced it intends to make “an unprecedented level of savings over a short period of time”, as it outlined cuts in the workforce and wholesale reorganisation of services. The council anticipates £40 million of cuts over three years. It is proposing an all-party committee to oversee cuts which, it concedes, are not even the worst case scenario.

Renfrewshire council intends to lose 1,000 posts; 300 jobs have already gone. The council is reviewing the introduction of charges and full or partial transfer of services to private companies. Similar measures are being considered in Inverclyde where 500 staff face redundancy, while North Ayrshire, East Renfrewshire and South Lanarkshire have already, or soon intend to remove staff.

All other local authorities face similar pressures. Highlands Council, in the North of Scotland, is considering merging fire, police and ambulance services, while joint services are being proposed across a number of northern authorities. Many authorities are also considering emulating Glasgow, in farming out as many services as possible to agencies.

The major public sector unions have made clear that they absolutely will not mount any challenge to the most devastating attacks on social spending seen for many generations. On September 4, months after the announcement of huge cuts by the government, public sector union Unison, which has over 1.3 million members, hosted a four and a half hour conference in Glasgow entitled, “A Better Way for Public Services”. Keynote speaker was Unison leader Dave Prentis.

A mere 270 delegates were informed by Prentis that the roots of the government’s attack on social spending were purely ideological, and therefore had nothing to do with the breakdown of the world capitalism and the gargantuan bailouts pumped into the world’s financial system.

“Let’s not be fooled by the scaremongering about the debt,” he said. The government, Prentis claimed, was driven by “an ideology that hates public services. An ideology that loves privatisation.”

Prentis was backed by a presentation from the

Scottish Trades Union Congress’s Stephen Boyd entitled “There is a Better Way”. The line advanced by both officials was to call for raising taxes.

Unison officials have made clear that they will do everything in their power to avoid strikes. Where unavoidable, they will be pointless isolated one-day affairs designed to minimise any impact.

Diversions will be seized upon to create confusion, take up time, and waste workers’ energies. One of the most bizarre was proposed by Martin Doran, a representative for the GMB union in Glasgow. Following a series of short strikes in Glasgow Life, Doran proposed that a light plane should be hired to tow a banner over the tens of thousands expected to visit the Pope’s upcoming visit to Glasgow calling on papal support for Glasgow Life strikers.

“We are also making a cry for the Pope’s Swiss Guards to stand shoulder to shoulder with striking Glasgow Life workers on our picket line,” said Doran.

A few days later unions Unison, Unite, Bectu and the GMB suspended a re-ballot of Glasgow Life workers, as a “gesture of goodwill” to the city council.



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