



UNISON NDC 2025

DELEGATE BRIEFING PAPER

Introduction

Welcome to NDC 2025. This briefing on the NDC Agenda is intended as a guide to delegates. It reflects NI Regional Council policy and will serve as a guide on motions for delegates.

The pre-conference delegate meeting was held on 9th July 2025. This guide reflects both the Regional Council/Regional position and decisions taken by delegates at the delegate meeting.

The guide also contains updates on the key issues prioritised by both the Regional Committee and the delegate meeting and may be useful for delegates wishing to speak.

Our Regional Delegates Stephanie Greenwood and Kevin Hillick will support delegates needing assistance.

This briefing will assist you in voting. **Section 4** outlines the content of prioritised motions and should be read in conjunction with the **Draft Order of Business (Section 1)** which gives a preliminary indication of when motions will come up.

Motions and priorities:

Before we come to Conference all 12 UNISON regions, the NEC and the Self-Organised Groups chose the motions and rule amendments they want to see debated as priorities. The votes on prioritisation are then tallied and the Order of Business reflects those receiving the highest number of votes.

89 motions and numerous associated amendments are included within the NDC Final Agenda, along with a number of proposed rule changes. Conference usually manages to discuss around thirty-five motions, so prioritisation is important.

Composite Motions:

Some motions on the same topic have been grouped together as Composite Motions. Composites usually move further up the order of business.

Motions prioritised by Northern Ireland:

The following motions have been prioritised by NI for support:

- Motion 11 – Justice for Palestine – *Northern Ireland Region*
This motion has been composited & forms part of Composite Motion H
- Motion 80 – UK Government must honour its Commitment as Co-guarantor of Peace Agreement in Northern Ireland – *Northern Ireland Region*
- Motion 1 – Organising to Win and Delivering a Decade of Growth – *National Executive Council*
This motion has been composited & forms part of Composite Motion A
- Motion 75 – Urgent Steps to Back Migrant Workers – *SOAS*
- Motion 26 – Combating the Global Rise of Far-Right Movements through Solidarity and Strong Public Services – *East Midlands Region*
- This motion has been composited & forms part of Composite Motion B
- Motion 66 – Backing the Employment Rights Bill – *National Executive Council*
- This motion has been composited & forms part of Composite Motion F
- Motion 5 – Industrial Action Better and Stronger in UNISON – *Staffordshire Community Health*
- Motion 59 – Pay Compensation to the WASPI Women Now! – *National Retired Members’s Committee*
- Motion 76 – Protecting Jobs in the Age of AI – *East Hampshire*
- Motion 32 – Public Services, Living Standards, and the Economy After the 2024 General Election – *National Executive Council*
- Motion 36 – The Biggest Wave of Insourcing in a Generation – *Eastern Region*
- Motion 78 – Building Support for a Palestinian State – *National Executive Council*
- This motion has been composited & forms part of Composite Motion H.

Re-Prioritisation:

As the Conference progresses, motions prioritised for debate but not reached first time around will be the subject of a **re-prioritisation** vote.

1. Draft Order of Business

** The motions in **RED** are the motions that we have prioritised**

Motion	These items will be scheduled at the following times:	Notes
	<u>Tuesday 10 am</u>	
	Welcome to Conference	
	Standing Orders Committee Reports No.1 and No. 2	
	Annual Report 2024/35	
	UNISON Financial Statements year ended 31 December 2024	
Composite A	Organising to Win and Delivering a Decade of Growth (1, 1.1, 1.2, 2)	
	Return to remaining Order of Business	
	<u>Tuesday 2 pm</u>	
Composite B	The Far Right (23, 23.1, 23.2, 23.3, 24, 24.1, 25, 25.1, 26, 26.1, 27)	
	Return to remaining Order of Business	
	<u>Wednesday 9.30 am</u>	
Composite G	Migrant Workers (70, 70.1, 71, 71.1, 72)	
69	Developing the Migrant Workers Network	
	Return to remaining Order of Business	
12 Noon	Speaker – Christina McAnea, General Secretary	
	<u>Wednesday 2pm</u>	

Composite F	Backing the Employment Rights Bill (66, 66.1, 66.2, 66.3, 67, 67.1)	
	Speaker – Lee Saunders, President of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)	
	Return to remaining Order of Business	
	<u>Thursday 9.30 am</u>	
	Speaker – Shafer Saed, General Secretary of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU)	
Composite H	Palestine (78, 78.1, 78.2, 79, 79.1)	
H.1	(78.3)	
	Return to Remaining Order of Business	
	<u>Thursday 2 pm</u>	
	Presentation of Honorary Life Membership to Nicole and Kye Gbangbola	
	Amendments to Rules and Schedules	
3	Rule J The Political Fund	
1	Rule C Ceasing to be a Member	
2	Rule F Regions	
4	Rule Q Definitions	
	Return to Remaining Order of Business	
	<u>Friday 9:30am</u>	
Composite E	Climate Change in UNISON 2025 – Turning Commitments into Actions (54, 54.1, 54.2, 55)	

	Return to remaining Order of Business	
	<u>Friday 2pm – 3.45pm</u>	
	Re-prioritised Motions	
	<u>Friday 3.45pm – 4pm</u>	
	Closing of Conference	

2. Remaining Order of Business

	Remaining Order of Business	
34	Campaigning for a Bailout for Public Services	
34.1		
30	Don't Take Away Our Winter Fuel Allowance Away!	
30.1		
59	Pay Compensation to the WASPI Women Now!	
59.1		
64	Unite for More Rights	
9	Support for Branch Activists	
9.1		
11	Neurodiversity Training for UNISON Activists	
11.1		
12	All We Ask is to be Treated with Dignity and Respect	
5	Industrial Action Better and Stronger in UNISON	
5.1		
7	Engagement, Education and Retention of Apprentices	
13	Kinship Care and Fostering	
14	Sexual Harassment	
Composite C	The Biggest Wave of Insourcing in a Generation (36, 36.1, 37, 37.1, 37.2)	
Composite I	English Devolution, Democracy and Public Services (81, 82, 83, 83.1)	

60	Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)	
8	Support for Young Single Mothers	
17.1	Universal Credit	
17.1		
39	Respecting our Police Staff Members	
6	Lasting Legacy for Self-Organised Groups	
18	Improving Occupational Health	
4	Building UNISON in the Private Sector	
4.1		
32	Public Services, Living Standards, and the Economy After the 2024 General Election	
32.1		
32.2		
32.3		
33	The Future of Public Services	
42	Higher Education in Crisis – Save Our Universities!	
43	Crisis in Higher Education and Specifically in Wales	
49	Artificial Intelligence in Public Services	
49.1		
Composite D	Let's Talk About Assisted Dying (51, 52)	
15	Unionising Against HIV Stigma for 2030	
21	Gender Pensions Gap	
38	Defending Our NHS	
38.1		

80	UK Government Must Honour its Commitments as CoGuarantor of Peace Agreement in Northern Ireland	
73	End the Exploitation of Migrant Care Workers in the United Kingdom	
22	Divest Our Pension Fund	
22.1		
29	Hate Crime Equality	
68	Ensuring the New Two Tier Code Delivers for UNISON Members	
75	Urgent Steps to Back Migrant Workers	
31	Tackling the Dangers of Online Pornography	
31.1		
40	Police Staff Cuts	
40.1		
61	Enough is Enough	
19	Improving Occupational Health	
35	Public Service Funding - a Time to Be Brave	
77	Time for the UK to Promote Universal Quality Public Services in the Global South	
28	Campaign Against Racist Reform UK	
44	End the Housing Crisis	
44.1		
46	Homelessness	
45	Council Housing is the Solution to the Housing Crisis	

53	Addressing the Social Determinants of Health Inequalities	
86	Building on Our Wins: How We Resource our Industrial Action	
88	UNISON, Fund UNISON Welfare	
76	Protecting Jobs in the Age of AI	
20	High Working Temperatures - a Workplace Issue	
47	Grenfell Never Again	
58	GB Energy and the Impacts on the Energy Sector	
63	Ensure Rights for People with Disabilities in the UK	
63.1		
	<u>Non-prioritised motions</u>	
3	Organising and Winning	
10	Learning Develops our Activists – Promoting Clear Pathways and Support	
16	Unionising Against HIV Stigma for 2030	
41	Defending Jobs in Higher Education	
48	Grenfell Never Again	
50	Artificial Intelligence in Public Services	
56	UNISON's Year of Climate Activity	
57	Climate Change	
62	Fight Caste Oppression and Discrimination	

65	Adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's Working Definition of Antisemitism	
65.1		
74	UNISON Stands With Migrant Workers	
84	Local Government Reorganisation is an Attack on Local Democracy	
85	X Marks the Spot	
87	Building for the Future: How We Resource What We Do	
89	Form Format	
89.1		

3.NEC Positions on Motions

The NEC position on motions/amendments (as of 23rd May 2025) can be found [here](#).

You can also use the camera on your phone to scan the QR Code below to take you to the NEC Position on Motions:



4. Notes on Motions

Draft Order of Business

Composite H – Palestine

(Motion 78, Amendments 78.1 and 78.2, Motion 79, Amendments 79.1)

Amendment H.1.

(Amendment 78.3)

For the past year, and on a weekly basis, UNISON members and activists across many of our branches have been participating in Solidarity action with the Palestinian People and against genocide.

UNISON has taken part in major marches and demonstrations centred on Belfast and Dublin, but there has also been strong Solidarity support in cities and towns throughout.

A number of our health branches have been particularly active holding vigils and demonstrations in support of their counterparts in Gaza and the OPT and protesting against the murder of health workers and others.

In this Solidarity campaign we work closely with Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC) and wider Solidarity groups including Mothers Against Genocide and Jews for Palestine Ireland.

To support our members, we have introduced workshops and training courses on why UNISON supports Palestinian rights and on how to implement our policy on BDS. We have also been part of lobbies to both the UK and Irish Governments calling for sanctions in response to the findings of the International Court of Justice.

The Solidarity Group and many of our branches have continued to prioritise support for the Palestinian people. Our organisers, Caitlin Ni Chathail, Susan

Neill, and senior secretary Liz Robinson give extensive support to both the UNISON group and Trade Union Friends of Palestine. As a consequence of this joint work, we have taken on organising roles for both TUFPP and ETUN. UNISON NI, through TUFPP, has been extensively involved in the campaign against genocide and in promoting the BDS strategy. In the public service we are concentrating on two key areas of procurement – payroll contracts for both the EA and health service with the company Oracle, and on boycotting the use of Teva pharmaceuticals across the health service.

In addition, and as a consequence of the Palestine composite carried at NDC 2023 we have been running courses on the UNISON guide 'Talking about Palestinian rights' and on the strategic use of BDS. We continue to work with all our solidarity allies challenging apartheid, the occupation and annexation of Palestinian land and war crimes.

The Northern Ireland region declared itself an apartheid free zone some years ago at Regional Council in accordance with our commitment to implement BDS. This means that we pay particular attention to our own procurement process to ensure ethical procurement in support of the rights of the Palestinian people.

The Regional Secretary chairs Trade Union Friends of Palestine. UNISON NI is part of the European Trade Union Network.

UNISON took part in the ICTU 'moment of reflection' for peace in Palestine on June 4th when workers across NI stood together to observe a moment of reflection in their workplaces as an act of solidarity and remembrance for the loss of life and violations international law.

Delegates are reminded of the fringe event on Palestine taking place on conference on Thursday, 19th June.

Regional Council 2024

At Regional Council 2024, council resolved to:

- Endorse and welcome UNISON calling on the UK government to recognise the State of Palestine
- Welcome and celebrate the outpouring of solidarity and support the world over for the Palestinian people and their legitimate struggle for self-determination and for dignity, respect and human rights for all Palestinians.
- Support branches to continue to affiliate to TUFPP and be active in rallies and meetings called by TURP

- Branches to continue to actively fill the key officer post of international officers across all branches;
- Campaign for an immediate and permanent ceasefire; an end to the siege of Gaza including the full restoration of water, electricity and communications; immediate access to comprehensive humanitarian aid including food, water and medicines; and the safe release of both Israeli hostages, and Palestinians wrongfully held in Israeli prisons, including under administrative detention;
- Call on the NI assembly to take measures to uphold international law, including suspending the arms trade with Israel, banning trade with the illegal settlements and supporting the prosecution of violations of international law by the International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice.

TUFP and BDS

UNISON NI continues to play a leading role in the support networks for the Palestinian people through ICTU, Trade Union Friends of Palestine and the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign. We continue to engage in extensive solidarity work across the union. This has included delegations visiting Palestine, in conjunction with TUFP.

UNISON NI continues to support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign across the union. The boycott of Israeli goods and the campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) more generally are a key form of peaceful international pressure on Israel. The BDS movement lets the Palestinian people know that they are not forgotten; sends a signal that the world will not sit by whilst Israel flouts UN resolutions, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Geneva Convention and other international laws; exerts moral pressure on the UK Government by giving expression to the desire to move towards a more ethical foreign policy; stimulates public debate and offers a focus for leafleting and discussion; and exerts moral and economic pressure on Israel to comply with international law and principles of justice.

Motion 80 - UK Government must honour its Commitment as Co-guarantor of Peace Agreement in Northern Ireland

The devolved government in NI was restored in February 2024, almost two years after the Assembly Election in May 2022. With the next Assembly Election due to be in 2027, the current Assembly has just two years to deliver for our members, their families and their communities in Northern Ireland.

We desperately need a new deal on public services funding to ensure that the Executive can deliver for Northern Ireland. This is essential for the Executive to function within a rights-based framework and implement necessary legislation and strategies to improve the social and economic conditions of all our citizens.

Northern Ireland has faced serious cuts to public services imposed by previous UK Governments during the decade of austerity as well as significant cuts to public spending forced on us by the last Conservative government in the absence of an Assembly from 2022-2024. Despite the election of a Labour government and the restoration of the Assembly, our public services funding crisis continues.

The money available for day-to-day spending on public services in Northern Ireland largely comes from the NI Block Grant, which is determined through the Barnett Formula. The Barnett Formula is the equation used to determine the level of public funding Northern Ireland should receive as a proportion of spending on comparable public services in England. However, it has been widely recognised that Northern Ireland requires more funding to deliver public services on a similar level to those in England. Dr Lisa Wilson of the Nevin Economic Research Institute has stated that the "*reasons for this are as simple as they are complicated. The reasons have got to do with differences in population sparsity, income deprivation, ill health, ethnicity, numbers of children and numbers of old people.*" (<https://www.nerinstitute.net/blog/northern-irelands-public-finances-fiscal-floors-and-funding-adequacy>)

Adjustments to the Barnett Formula will provide some additional funding on the basis of need, however this is an interim measure and will not offer long term solutions. It demonstrates that the over reliance on Barnett Consequentials to fund pay awards in the public sector has resulted in delays in implementing pay awards to our members.

Dr Wilson has highlighted that "*the NI Fiscal Council has projected that using the 24 per cent Barnett consequential uplift it will take until 2035-36 to get to funding which equates to relative need. Eleven years. It will take us eleven years to get to the most conservative estimate of our relative need. The uncertainty in this is also not to be exaggerated. And so, in reality where we have got to a place where we'll*

get a bit more money via the Barnett formula, but we're still unsure about funding adequacy in the future." Dr Wilson concludes that to speed up a transition to funding that corresponds to relative need, some other needs-based factor could be applied to Barnett, or Barnett could be abandoned to move towards a true needs-based approach to public finances
(<https://www.nerinstitute.net/blog/northern-irelands-public-finances-fiscal-floors-and-funding-adequacy>)

The UK government must ensure that sufficient, sustained, needs based funding is available for public services in Northern Ireland, and that investment in public services in Northern Ireland to improve the social and economic outcomes for all the people is an essential aspect of fulfilling the promise of the peace agreements.

Equality and human rights

26 years on from the Good Friday Agreement, numerous commitments made within the Agreement and successor agreements to equality and human rights remain unimplemented. In addition, the UK Government has continued to put forward legislation that risks undermining key commitments to equality and human rights.

Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland

Over the past 27 years, UNISON and the wider trade union movement's support for the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, including the Bill of Rights, has been unwavering. In 1998 we recommended to our entire membership that they vote in support of the Good Friday Agreement. The key commitments in the Agreement recognised as having the potential to create a fair and just future included the provisions on equality of opportunity, human rights, a Bill of Rights for NI (with a particular emphasis on social and economic rights), and a firm commitment to deal with legacy issues and the past.

A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland remains an outstanding commitment within the Good Friday Agreement. During the last Assembly mandate, an Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights was established. It remains our view that the Bill of Rights should be legislated for via Parliament at Westminster, in line with the intention of the Agreement.

Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023

Despite widespread concern from human rights organisations, academics, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and international human rights observers, and despite being opposed by groups and bodies representing victims and survivors of the Troubles, the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023 was passed in September 2023.

The Act provides for the almost entire ending of the current system of criminal prosecutions, inquests and civil claims, replaced by reviews carried out by the newly created Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery. It provides for immunity for those suspected of involvement with offences where they cooperate with these reviews. After the Act was passed, a number of judicial review challenges were taken

<https://nihrc.org/news/detail/northern-ireland-human-rights-commission-responds-to-legacy-judgment>

In the case of *Re Dillon and others* – NI Troubles Legacy and Reconciliation Act 2023, the NI High Court ruled that some provisions contained in the Act were incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights and the Windsor Framework. The Court held that the immunity provisions under the Act should be disapplied

<https://www.judiciaryni.uk/judicial-decisions/summary-judgment-re-dillon-and-others-ni-troubles-legacy-and-reconciliation-act>

The UK Government has commenced an appeal of the High Court ruling at the Court of Appeal in Belfast (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crggkwwrvxeo>)

In its manifesto for the General Election, the Labour party has stated that *“The Legacy Act denies justice to the families and victims of the Troubles. Labour will repeal and replace it, by returning to the principles of the Stormont House Agreement, and seeking support from all communities in Northern Ireland.”*

<https://labour.org.uk/change/serving-the-country/#northern-ireland>

This follows from comments previously made by Sir Keir Starmer in January 2023 that Labour would repeal the Act <https://www.ft.com/content/20b6a5df-92fb-4eb2-8cdd-0ab17a6422f0>

In December 2024 the Secretary of State for NI, Hillary Benn, began the process of formally repealing the Legacy act

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cz9gp8g32v5o>

In April 2025, Benn extended the timeframe for Legacy investigation reports by six months. This means that where all that remains to be carried out by the investigating body is the preparation of the investigation report or something subsequent to that, it may carry out those post-investigating tasks until 31st October 2025 as opposed to 30th April 2025.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/secretary-of-state-extends-timeframe-for-legacy-investigation-reports>

This motion calls for the UK government to reconsider the role and status of the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery as part of dealing with the legacy of the past.

It calls on the National Executive Council to support UNISON Northern Ireland in engaging with the UK government in taking forward the priority issues outlined within this motion.

Composite A Organising to Win and Delivering a Decade of Growth (Motion 1, Amendments 1.1, 1.2, Motion 2)

BACKGROUND

The organising recruitment strategy development project (ORSD) was commissioned by UNISON in autumn 2021 to develop a comprehensive national organising strategy to meet the changing demands on UNISON and provide a clear vision for a stronger union. The full report titled "Organising to Win" (OtW) was endorsed by 2023 NDC.

The Organising to Win strategy (OtW) can be summarised around the four key cornerstones of:

1. **Purposeful organising.** To grow and strengthen the union in ways that deliver protection, support, and wins for members. This includes Base Organising - the routine development and maintenance of a strong and functional union at workplace and branch level and Strategic Organising - building member participation and power within an escalating plan to win a specific material change.
2. **"One UNISON" priorities.** To deliver on the project goals and develop UNISON's organising approach workstreams have been developed covering: priorities, planning, tools, skills, organising staff, member participation, workplace activism, organising systems, workplace communications, union structures. In addition the strategy identifies four

2023/4 "One UNISON" organising priorities of: Devolved Nation Social Care; England Multi Academy Trusts (MAT); NHS Pay Fair for Patient Care; Ballot and Action Readiness. Head of Organising Thomas Mahaffy is a member of the strategy management team and project board and also leads the priority devolved social care campaign. Regional Officer (Education) Caitlin Ni Chathail is also on the project board and the 'tools and training' workstream..

3. **Member participation.** New opportunities for meaningful participation and development to rebuild a representative activist base, ensure sustainable membership growth, and achieve the power necessary to tackle the big collective issues faced by members.
4. **Consistent best practice.** Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of activity to capture key lessons and develop UNISON best practice tools and training based on what works.

Progress to date has been very positive including increased unionwide joiner levels and membership growth; increased recruitment and training of new activists; a more consistent understanding of organising and developing best practice UNISON tools and training; and significant reporting of activity and outputs against objectives for the OtW "One UNISON" priority campaigns - including the Pay Fair for Patient Care campaign and the social care campaign. However, the overall stewards base continues to decrease.

SUMMARY OF ORGANISING TO WIN IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Organising has been a core UNISON NI priority for 30 years and during 2024/25 we have successfully integrated OtW and the Branch Support and Organising Fund (BSOF) initiative into the Regional Committee Recruitment and Organising Plan.

These initiatives complement our existing organising strategies and activities and, by integrating OtW best practice approaches, methods and tools, we have been able to maximise the recruitment potential arising from our pay campaigns and industrial action in health and education, as well as our other campaigns¹, to persuade a record number of workers to join UNISON. During

¹ Other activities and campaigns that have secured membership increase include challenging funding cuts, budget cuts and proposed service closures; public policy campaigns to advance the position of our members, their families and communities, including our Free School Meals for All campaign; challenging the roll-back on workers' rights, attempts to bypass direct engagement with us, and failure to produce equality and human rights impact assessments; negotiating

2024, UNISON NI recorded 8355 new joiners, net 3.5% growth and finished the year with 52,642 full members – a 43% increase over the past 10 years. During 2025 to date, we are well above our recruitment target with over 3000 members to end May and current net growth of 2%+.

The UNISON College NI is also a key organising resource that supports all this activity through education and training, as well as the use of new online tools & digital platforms to attract new joiners and encourage member involvement on workplace issues.

Our organising priorities include:

A high level of member engagement, healthy branches and a strong and functional union at workplace and branch level:

Since the inception of UNISON we have focused on high level of staff and activist engagement with members and non-members at workplace level and developing their collective power and strength to build a strong and functional union at workplace and branch level. This requires ensuring that branches are effective & efficient and work to the benefit of the members. Membership participation is prioritised at workplace level and in all aspects of branch and regional life.

Excellent working relationships and strong partnership working between activists and the staff team:

UNISON NI's particular organizing strength has been our partnership working between branches and the staff teams to deliver on the UNISON bargaining and campaigning agenda. For example, our full-day Joint Branch Assessments and subsequent Branch Plans (incorporating the Organising Framework) are key tools to deliver a well-organised workplace. This significant partnership engagement also extends the staff team which provides a range of centralised services to branches. There are no branch based staff in UNISON NI.

UNISON College NI is a recruitment tool:

on health & safety issues, particularly post-pandemic; challenging the UK's punitive budget for NI and its impact across all services; bargaining for recognition agreements - particularly through our social care campaign; our continuing equality and human rights campaigns.

Organising activity is supported by our Education Programme through UNISON College as well as through our use of new online tools & digital platforms to attract new joiners and encourage member involvement on workplace issues.

Good communications, public profile and reputation – standing up for our members right at work, at home and in the local community:

We have made effective use of regional and branch communications and social media systems and platforms to encourage workers to join UNISON and to support our organising (and bargaining/ policy/campaigning) agenda. UNISON NI also has an extensive media publicity and profile as the union supporting the Peace Process and campaigning about issues our members face at work, at home and in their local communities.

Special recruitment initiatives and projects:

UNISON NI have made very successful use of special project funding (such as the previous Fighting Fund and current BSOF) to progress special recruitment, organising and member retention projects initiatives/projects across branches, existing employers, in priority growth areas such as social care, and in key occupational groups. This has allowed branches to access critical organising support to recruit new members, identify potential work place leaders and train and mentor new stewards. We also prioritise infill recruitment in key occupational groups, especially within health and education, and support UNISON-wide recruitment initiatives (such as Stars in our schools) at regional and branch level

Implementation and monitoring of recruitment and organising plans:

At individual, branch and regional level. This requires ensuring that branch recruitment & organising plans are linked to branch and regional bargaining, representing and campaigning priorities.

Our retention strategies are focused on engaging with new joiners, reintroducing DOCAS as a payment method for those who decided to join online, ensure that existing protocols are followed with regard to retention, restatements and data cleansing process, and continue to maintain RMS centralised processing and databases in partnership with all branches.

Our key challenge, however, continues to be to identify, recruit and train more stewards. The Branch Development Group is working with the staff team to continue to support branches to initiate a programme of physical and online meetings to support the election and re-election of stewards, and to increase cover across all areas and workplaces.

Strategic organising activity: BSOF / 'One UNISON' Social care project – Northern Ireland

UNISON NI are the largest union organising in private sector homecare and care homes and we have taken a lead role in the 'One UNISON' social care project that has been prioritised as part of Organising to Win. It is also an agreed UNISON NI Branch Support & Organising Fund (BSOF) project.

With an estimated 20,000+ staff working in hundreds of (mainly private sector) nursing and residential homes, the potential for further recruitment in this sector is huge and ringfenced resources have been allocated to this project including the appointment of a temporary Strategic Regional Organiser and two Local Organisers employed under BSOF. The challenges of organising in the sector include high staff turnover, a dispersed and fragmented membership and hundreds of often hostile employers, but we are committed to organising this too often exploited workforce.

The key objectives of the social care project are to recruit more members; elect more stewards; organise and mobilise the workforce; and secure new bargaining arrangements and recognition within private sector homecare employers and private nursing and residential care homes. As such, this new campaign aligns closely with our existing social care strategy which has the additional objectives of halting further privatisation from the NHS to the private sector; and, ultimately, returning privatised services back in house. It is also essential to ensure that the membership are properly serviced and our 10 health and social care branches that form the Project Steering Group are considering what changes to current branch structures and business will best facilitate this moving forward.

Strategic organising activity in the private social care sector in NI has resulted in significant membership growth, activism and material wins for UNISON members. Intensive member engagement and the development of workplace organising committees have driven campaign activity forward, with specific bargaining strategies including the submission of informal complaints and formal grievances on issues such as non-payment for mandatory training and minimum wage breaches; as well as creating disputes as part of the pay bargaining cycle.

To date during 2025, 349 members have been recruited in the 12 private nursing homes and homecare companies targeted by the project. 6 new stewards have also been elected, organising committees have been set up and

we have recruited 50 new active members. In total we have recruited 596 new members in the private social care sector in the year to date and now have a full membership of 5472 – a 22% increase over the past 2 years. Considerable organising and bargaining activity continues across target employers on a wide variety of issues and a current priority is to identify branch social care leads to support new stewards and active members.

The new Active Members Forum met for the 1st time in April and the Social Care Steering Group have agreed to progress the Fair Visa Campaign with significant regional activity and support for the London demo in December.

We have recruited 80 new members in Beaumont Care Homes and 40 in Connected Health. It would appear that Beaumont will soon be taken over and meetings with members have taken place across all homes.

Migrant workers:

Organising migrant workers has been a priority in Northern Ireland for many years and we currently have over 3500 members in NI who state that they are black and/or migrant workers (EU nationals and others) - 93% work in health (54% are nurses); 70% are women. The private nursing home sector continues to have a higher proportion of migrant workers than the general workforce and we have intervened with the Department of Health to ensure that all care home operators were reissued with the code of practice for international recruitment. Further work is ongoing to address exploitative practices and the major employment issues they face associated with their employment status, immigration policies, racism and discrimination.

The constant recruitment of international personnel in the Trusts and private care sector means that almost all new black and migrant worker members are on sponsorship visas / work permits. This group continue to face major employment issues associated with their employment status, immigration policies, racism and discrimination and we have made progress in challenging repayment clauses imposed on migrants trying to change employers. Further work is ongoing to address exploitative practices.

We continue to have a high profile in the BME community sector organisations and communities through our campaigning / policy work, but also on the ground, thanks to our immigration advice clinics and IELTS and OET English classes which are open to referrals from BME sector and Refugee support organisations. Our Immigration advice clinics are open to referrals from BME

sector and Refugee support organisations and operate every second Thursday of the month. However, lack of access to immigration advice and representation through our legal services remains a key issue. We are asking for something similar to what is offered in criminal cases, personal injury cases or through the Professional Services Unit.

Strategic organising activity: Non-Education Authority Schools project – Northern Ireland

Although the start of this project in Non-Education Authority schools was delayed until September 2024, significant outcomes have been achieved to date. The project is targeted on the non-EA workforce, primarily in integrated and voluntary grammar schools, and focuses on recruiting new members and activists; and delivering recognition, facilities and collective bargaining agreements to improve pay, terms and conditions. Irish Medium Schools have also been targeted as part of the project.

During 2025, 44 members have been recruited to date in the 13 integrated and voluntary grammars targeted by the project. 2 new stewards have also been elected with 2 more expected shortly. In total we have recruited 94 new members in the sector in the year to date and now have a full membership of 1452 – an 85% increase over the past 2 years.

Negotiations have started on recognition agreements with a further 3 schools and significant organising and bargaining activity continues. As a result of our activity ALL Staff in maintained, controlled, and voluntary schools are now paid NJC rates for a minimum 3-year period. Specific organising activity has also now started in Irish Medium schools.

BSOF Activity Fund Project 2025/26

Over the past 2 years UNISON NI branches have contributed £400,000 to part-fund temporary Local Organisers on multi-branch recruitment, organising and member engagement projects. These type of projects have provided a lifeline for us – supplementing our small team of permanent organisers.

The 2024/25 project that finished in February 2025 involved 19 branches and resulted in 1716 new joiners - 23% above its overall recruitment target and 20% of total NI recruitment during the year. The majority of branches reached their own recruitment targets, and all benefited from the thousands of member engagement activities including 60+ potential new stewards, ULRs, contacts; 400+ members transferring from Direct Debit to DOCAS; 4000+ workplace/Dept/area visits; 600+ workplace meetings; 100+ branch events; 10,000+ member conversations; 500+ issues referred to branches/staff; 20+

lunch & learn sessions and 100+ attendance; 2000+ members signing up to the Skills Academy

These projects have succeeded due to central management, partnership working with branches, and proper targets, monitoring and evaluation. 250 new members is always a minimum recruitment target and LOs are also supporting branches in building the activist base, meeting with thousands of members, undertaking organising conversations, helping to introduce new items for the bargaining agenda, and helping us to retain the thousands of members who joined us during industrial action.

The 2025/26 initiative started in April and is funded by 21 UNISON NI branches, BSOF and the UNISON College NI. 7 Local Organisers are allocated to respective branches for a 12 month duration. Again, LOs are responsible for designated recruitment and organising in their specific branch. They also have a team role in wider organising initiatives and workplace mapping; a team role in campaigns; a joint role in identifying new stewards; and an onward referral role on bargaining, representation and other issues encountered. Since 6 April 200 new members have been recruited – 20% above target.

Motion 75 – Urgent Steps to Back Migrant Workers

Organising migrant workers has been a priority in Northern Ireland for many years, and we currently have over 3500 members in NI who state that they are black and/or migrant workers (EU nationals and others) - 93% work in health (54% are nurses); 70% are women. The private nursing home sector continues to have a higher proportion of migrant workers than the general workforce and we have intervened with the Department of Health to ensure that all care home operators were reissued with the code of practice for international recruitment. Further work is ongoing to address exploitative practices and the major employment issues they face associated with their employment status, immigration policies, racism and discrimination.

The constant recruitment of international personnel in the Trusts and private care sector means that almost all new black and migrant worker members are on sponsorship visas / work permits. This group continue to face major employment issues associated with their employment status; immigration policies, racism and discrimination and we have made progress in challenging repayment clauses imposed on migrants trying to change employers. Further work is ongoing to address exploitative practices.

We continue to have a high profile in the BME community sector organisations and communities through our campaigning / policy work, but also on the ground, thanks to our immigration advice clinics and IELTS and OET English classes which are open to referrals from BME sector and Refugee support organisations. Our Immigration advice clinics are open to referrals from BME sector and Refugee support organisations and operate every second Thursday of the month. However, a lack of access to immigration advice and representation through our legal services remains a key issue.

Unfortunately, we have too many cases of our members experiencing racism in the workplace and in their communities. We continue to support them and to stand against racism in all forms.

Nurses in the Northern Trust were intimidated from their homes after being the victims of targeted racist attacks

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cql8z2k9ndko>

Sadly, our member Anu Okusanya from the Newry and Mourne branch, died after experiencing a panic attack when she ran from the scene of a racist attack after she herself had been attacked on two previous occasions in the same area.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c7v5yn6q15do>

<https://www.unison-ni.org.uk/press-release-unison-condemns-their-members-death-following-racist-attacks>

As a region we have also proudly joined the many anti-racism demonstrations that have taken place since the race riots last summer and continue to support these demonstrations and any counter protests to the anti-immigration protests that have been happening.

This past week we have seen a number of anti-immigration protests across Ballymena, Larne, Belfast and Portadown. There have been reports of gangs going door to door to find where migrant families are living. People are being asked to fly union flags outside their houses to demonstrate that it is "locals" living in the house to keep them safe from attack. Filipino families have hung signs on their doors saying "Filipino lives here" in an attempt to prevent their houses being targeted. Larne leisure centre was attacked and set on fire after it was suspected that migrant families that had been moved out of Ballymena because of the attacks were being temporarily housed in the leisure centre. In

Portadown, Arbour Housing Association issued letters to residents telling them to secure their property and to consider staying elsewhere for their safety.

We have been supporting members who have been impacted by this and continue to keep a close eye on the situation as it unfolds.

Composite B The Far Right (Motion 23, Amendments 23.1, 23.2, 23.3, Motion 24, Amendment 24.1, Motion 25, Amendment 25.1, Motion 26, Amendment 26.1, Motion 27)

There has been an alarming increase in far-right activity in recent months and years and an increasing acceptance of far-right ideas and rhetoric in politics. We have seen a rise in tolerance for racism, homophobia, misogyny, transphobia and anti-immigration dog whistle rhetoric in the media, on social media and in our Assembly.

Racist violence and intimidation in Northern Ireland take a distinct form compared to the rest of the UK and Ireland, partly due to the involvement of certain paramilitary elements. The high frequency of racist attacks, combined with the relatively small size of the migrant and broader ethnic minority communities, makes the experience of such intimidation particularly severe and visible.

It is well documented that there is a particular problem of the involvement of elements of loyalist paramilitarism in racist violence and intimidation, whether sanctioned by leaders of groups or factions or not, or involving persons with paramilitary connections. This often manifests itself in violent racist and sectarian intimidation from housing in areas of control, which can be preceded by related racist materials in public space to deter migrants from living in the area. Reflecting on past approaches to sectarian intimidation, there has been a limited state response to this.

As Co-convenors of the Equality Coalition we commissioned Rabble Cooperative to conduct online research into far right, racist and sectarian activity. The research involved analysing online agitation and associated accounts and was aimed at mapping and analysing online far-right activity associated with Northern Ireland.

The findings of this are included in the report [Mapping Far Right Activity Online in Northern Ireland](#)

Composite F Backing the Employment Rights Bill (Motion 66, Amendments 66.1, 66.2, 66.3, Motion 67, Amendment 67.1)

This motion is relating to the Employment Rights Bill, introduced in Westminster in October 2024. As stated in the motion, the NI Executive and Assembly have devolved powers over employment, equality and trade union laws in Northern Ireland, but it is important we are aware of the progress of the Employment Rights Bill as often, the Assembly and Executive here will be informed by legislation in Westminster.

With our Economy Minister, Caoimhe Archibald, currently drafting and Employment Rights Bill for Northern Ireland, we are working alongside NIC-ICTU to ensure that it is a robust piece of legislation that enshrines the rights of workers and trade unions in law.

In April 2025, Minister Archibald outlined her proposals for our Employment Bill, supported by secondary legislation, statutory Codes of Practice and guidance following last year's public consultation.

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/The%20Good%20Jobs%20Employment%20Rights%20Bill%20-%20The%20Way%20Forward%20-%20Final%2022.5.25.pdf>

The proposals, which will now be brought to the Executive for agreement, cover four main themes – terms of employment, pay and benefits, voice and representation, and work-life balance. The wide-ranging reforms include proposals to:

- End exploitative zero hours contracts
- Enhance protections for agency workers
- End abuse of fire and rehire tactics
- Ensure tips left to workers are passed on to them in full
- Modernise our trade union framework
- Make it easier to attain flexible working
- Enhance rights to family-related leave, including the introduction of carer's leave, as well as neonatal leave and pay

In the proposed Bill people on a zero-hour contract will have the right to move to a banded hours contract that reflects their average working hours. Workers on a zero-hour contract will also have the right to reasonable notice of shifts, and the right to compensation if shifts are cancelled or curtailed at short notice. Such contracts will only be permissible for work that is genuinely casual or seasonal.

The proposed Bill will also tackle the unscrupulous practice of a perfectly solvent business firing and rehiring workers on less favourable terms. The practice known as 'fire and rehire' will only be permissible when the business can show it is not viable and the alternative is the loss of jobs.

The legislation will also strengthen obligations on employers to ensure compliance with formal notification procedures when making collective redundancies and ensure that those responsibilities apply to companies employing people working at sea.

Agency workers will be provided with clearer information about the terms of their work assignment - such as:

- the name of the company who is employing the worker
- the rate of pay that the worker will receive
- payment dates and intervals and
- holiday entitlement.

The loophole, known as the "Swedish derogation", that permits agency workers to receive less pay than their permanent counterparts, even after twelve weeks in the job, will be abolished.

The proposed legislation will give more workers the opportunity to be represented by a recognised trade union, by lowering the recognition threshold from 21 employees in a business to ten employees.

Trade unions will be able to request access to a workplace in order to promote the benefits of trade unions, engage with members, and negotiate with employers on issues such as terms, conditions and pay.

An employer will not be permitted to unreasonably withhold access. The rules of engagement on workplace access will be stipulated in guidance.

The proposed bill will also permit trade unions to use electronic balloting.

Currently trade unions must keep detailed records of members' addresses, jobs and workplaces. Sanctions for administrative error and the provision of incorrect information are unnecessarily severe. Department officials will consider in consultation with employers and trade unions what changes can be made to reduce these restrictions on trade unions when balloting their members.

The Bill also proposes to abolish the 12 week time limit on protection against dismissal for employees taking part in official industrial action.

The Bill proposes to legislate to remove the current 26-week qualifying period for employees to request flexible working. Instead, it will be a Day One right.

The process will also be made easier, by removing the requirement for an employee to consider the impact of a flexible working request on the employer. Instead, the onus will be on the employer to state why their decision to refuse an application for flexible working is 'reasonable'.

At the moment only one request for flexible working can be made in a rolling 12-month period. It is proposed that this is increased to two requests each year.

The Bill will also look at making it easier for people to take time off for caring responsibilities as well as neonatal leave for parents whose newborn babies require neo-natal care. The Bill will also make paternity leave more accessible.

UNISON have been involved in recent years in shaping some progressive employment legislation in the Assembly including the Parental Bereavement Leave Bill, Safe Leave Bill.

Parental bereavement leave and pay is the right to take up to two weeks' time off work to deal with the death of a child, if the child has died under the age of 18 or is stillborn after 24 weeks of pregnancy. We continue to push for this to be extended to people who experience loss as a result of miscarriage and abortion.

Safe Leave allows up to 10 days of paid leave in each leave year to address issues related to domestic abuse. The legislation for this was passed in March 2022 and has still not been implemented. We have responded to relevant consultations on the execution of this through regulations and continue to push for its implementation.

Motion 5 - Industrial Action Better and Stronger in UNISON

With the Labour government's new Employment Rights Bill, the landscape for industrial action is about to considerably change in a way that should benefit Trade Unions. For years, restrictive strike laws have made it harder for UNISON disputes to succeed, with many unable to progress beyond the ballot stage. That is now changing.

Why it matters:

- New freedoms in strike law give us more scope to act, and win, for our members.
- Our experience with Organising to Win has shown that when we combine careful planning with strong member engagement, we can achieve meaningful victories.
- Even in large, complex bargaining groups, coordinated and targeted ballots and action have delivered real gains for members.

The motion supports the *Winning for the Future* project, which is helping the union improve how it plans and delivers ballots and disputes. This includes building ballot readiness into core organising, training activists, sharing learning, and improving access to reliable dispute data. Combined with lessons from *Organising to Win*, this work must now be strengthened to make the most of upcoming legal changes.

The motion asks for the NEC to collaborate with service groups and regions to review the impact of changes to strike laws, focusing on internal procedures, decision-making coordination, effects on collective bargaining, and practical support for ballots and industrial action.

Motion 59. Pay Compensation to the WASPI Women Now!

The 1995 Pensions Act increased the state pension age for women from 60 to 65 in order to equalise the age with men, with the change to be phased in over ten years from 2010 for women born between 1950 and 1955. This transition was later sped up by the 2011 Pensions Act. Both the 1995 and 2011 changes came as a shock to many, with women discovering that they would have to wait up to six years longer for their state pension, potentially affecting their retirement plans.

In 2015, WASPI was formed by five women to argue for the government to provide transitional payments to women born in the 1950s receiving their pension after the age of 60. They also call for compensation to women who now receive a state pension but had to wait longer.

In a report in March 2024, the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman considered in detail the experience of six women - "sample complainants" - selected to represent the range of issues women had complained to the ombudsman about.

The Ombudsman found that the sample complainants should receive between £1,000 and £2,950 compensation for maladministration because of the Department for Work and Pensions' failure to heed its own research showing that public campaigns were not reaching enough women and found that individual letters should have been sent by it to them between 2007 and 2012.

The Ombudsman noted that some women were aware of the increase to pension age because of the public campaigns, and that older women's pension ages were increased by less. He also noted that compensation for affected women could either be assessed individually or by a flat payment. The Ombudsman stated that "the Department must do the right thing, and it must be held to account for failure to do so".

On 17 December 2024 the Labour government rejected the recommendation of the Ombudsman with the minister for work and pensions, Liz Kendall, stating that there was no evidence of 'direct financial loss' and no financial compensation pay-out would be made to the WASPI women.

<https://news.sky.com/story/compensating-waspi-women-not-fair-or-value-for-taxpayer-liz-kendall-says-13275438>

Our Regional Women's Committee and our Retired Members Forum have been involved in the WASPI campaign for many years, fighting for pension justice for all WASPI Women as society continues to undervalue the work that women do. On Thursday 23rd March the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman reported that the Department of Work and Pensions had failed to communicate pension changes adequately and recommended that Parliament should provide compensation of amounts between £1,000 and £2,900.

On June 5th the High Court granted permission for the WASPI women case to proceed to a full hearing, determining that the case is arguable and "ought to be considered at a final hearing" <https://waspi.co.uk/legal-update-6-june-2025/>

Motion 76 - Protecting Jobs in the Age of AI

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is expected to impact nearly 40% of jobs globally, with some being replaced and others transformed. A PwC report (2021) predicts that up to 30% of UK jobs could be automated over the next 20 years, potentially displacing a significant portion of the workforce. Research commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission highlights that vulnerable groups—such as people with disabilities, young people, women, and ethnic minorities—are more likely to work in roles at high risk of automation. Despite the rapid advancement of AI, current legislation lags behind. Few unions have responded to the government’s consultation on AI regulation, with the National Union of Journalists being a notable exception, as well as . The text emphasizes the need for unions to act proactively to protect workers' jobs.

This motion calls on the NEC to

- 1) Lobby government for an automatic right to retraining (at the cost of the business) for staff whose roles are made redundant by AI;
- 2) Lobby for protections for staff whose workloads are reduced by AI;
- 3) Join public debates on AI so that the workers' voice can be heard in the discussion and not be drowned out by vested interests;
- 4) Work with Labour Link and the Labour party to formulate legislation that safeguards the rights of workers whose roles are threatened by AI.

UNISON has created an “AI Hub” for members, reps and activists on AI at work to help members understand the issues around AI in public sector workplaces and to both negotiate and organise on these issues within their branches.

<https://www.unison.org.uk/aihub/>

On the Bargaining side, in Health we have started to raise the issues surrounding AI and requested it’s use within the health service to begin to be scoped, where AI might be used within the health service and what the implications of this could be. We have explicitly stated that trade unions need to be involved in any considerations of the use of AI. We’re particularly concerned about what this may mean for admin, clerical and cleaning jobs.

The Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NIC-ICTU) has actively addressed the implications of artificial intelligence (AI) on

workers. At their Biennial Delegate Conference in 2021, NIC-ICTU adopted a motion highlighting the rapid advancement of AI and digitalisation, warning that up to 47% of jobs in the UK could be affected. The motion called for robust protections for workers against job displacement, surveillance, and precarious employment resulting from technological changes.

<https://www.ictu.ie/motions/2021/automation>

It highlighted that Northern Ireland is particularly at risk from the adverse effects of new technologies, such as automation, due to its reliance on service sector jobs, those sectors deemed to be most affected by replacement and displacement of existing jobs. Of course, its effects will be felt across all sectors with transport, retail and finance being the at the cutting edge of change at present, however, all occupations and sectors will be impacted.

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) has highlighted the need for robust legislation to protect workers from the potential harms of AI in the workplace. Their proposed Artificial Intelligence (Employment and Regulation) Bill calls for:

Pre-implementation Consultation: Employers must consult with trade unions before deploying AI systems that significantly affect workers.

Human Oversight: All AI-driven decisions, especially those impacting employment, should be subject to human review to ensure fairness and accountability.

Transparency: Employers should disclose how AI is used in decision-making processes, allowing workers to challenge decisions that may be discriminatory or unjust.

Motion 32 - Public Services, Living Standards, and the Economy After the 2024 General Election

This motion highlights the severe impact of 14 years of austerity and Conservative government on public services, including local government, the NHS, education, social care, and the justice system. It notes crumbling infrastructure, job losses, and declining pay and conditions. These effects extend beyond public service workers to the broader economy, weakening local high streets and job quality. The election of a new government in July 2024 brought some changes, including implementing pay review body recommendations and

increasing public spending in the October 2024 budget through higher taxes and borrowing.

The motion notes that new fiscal rules will reclassify capital investment borrowing, enabling funding for schools, hospitals, and key infrastructure projects. However, concerns remain about potential NHS privatisation under Health Secretary Wes Streeting and speculation about further public sector cuts. It takes the view that it believes the government must take bolder, more radical action to reverse the damage of the past decade and truly transform public services and the economy.

The motion also expresses concern over several issues with the government's approach:

1. Budget spending is front-loaded, creating future uncertainty.
2. Local government funding remains inadequate after years of cuts.
3. Rising interest payments on debt threaten future spending.
4. Ruling out progressive tax increases limits future funding options.
5. The government relies too heavily on growth to fund services, overlooking how public spending itself drives growth.
6. Policies like the two-child benefit limit and ending universal winter fuel payments risk increasing poverty and straining public services.

The motion warns that the government's focus on efficiency savings and reform may lead to counterproductive cuts. It stresses that increased funding is essential to meet community needs. Well-funded public services are seen as key to improving living standards and reducing poverty. The welfare state should reflect a shared responsibility to support all citizens. Tackling poverty requires both fair wages and strong social security, alongside efforts to manage living costs and promote economic growth.

The motion welcomes some initial steps by the Labour government to reduce poverty and improve living standards—such as increasing the minimum wage, extending the Household Support Fund, introducing free school breakfast clubs, and proposing the Employment Rights Bill. However, it criticises the government for placing financial pressure on vulnerable groups like children in poverty, pensioners, and WASPI women, while avoiding taxing the wealthy. It opposes public sector pay restraint and urges bolder action. It affirms UNISON's key role

in advocating for sustained public service investment across the UK, amid ongoing attacks from right-wing political forces and media.

The conference calls on the National Executive Council to lead a comprehensive campaign for long-term investment in public services. Key actions include:

- Collaborating with political fund sections to secure sustainable funding,
- Advocating for a compassionate welfare system, including restoring winter fuel allowance and scrapping the two-child benefit cap,
- Supporting service groups in addressing sector-specific challenges,
- Coordinating efforts with trade union bodies across the UK,
- Conducting research to highlight the needs of public services and propose economically beneficial solutions,
- Exposing the negative impact of Tory and Reform UK policies,
- Equipping local branches with tools to engage MPs on public service investment, and
- Investigating UNISON members' experiences of poverty and the cost-of-living crisis.

After two years without a government, the NI Assembly was finally restored in February 2024, after an intensely frustrating period for UNISON members and the wider public sector workforce, with the UK Government not taking action to release the funding required to resolve public sector pay disputes in the absence of an Executive. But it still took another 7 months before a draft Programme for Government was published. UNISON responded to the public consultation and raised a number of key concerns.

Following the return of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive in February 2024, the then Finance Minister Caoimhe Archibald announced a one-year budget for 2024–2025, which was approved on 28 May. She emphasized that financial demands far exceed available resources. The new budget follows severe public service cuts under the 2023–2024 budget imposed by the Secretary of State. A new Interim Fiscal Framework agreed with the UK Treasury provides Northern Ireland with a 124% needs-based funding adjustment, reflecting higher costs of delivering public services compared to England. However, despite this improved funding model, challenges remain, with ongoing concerns—such as those raised by UNISON—about the impact of

budget cuts on services like health and social care. Experts like Dr. Lisa Wilson have also noted that the 124% figure may still fall short of addressing long-term underfunding.

The lack of a genuine needs-based approach to funding for public services in Northern Ireland, combined with a lack of multi-year budgeting undermines the stability of public services and will significantly, detrimentally impact on the public sector workforce and the most vulnerable in our society.

We are also conscious that since the publication of the draft PfG, the new UK Government has announced its first budget, which has provided a further £609 million in resource DEL and £30 million in capital for 2024/25, with a further £601million in resource DEL and £266 million in capital anticipated for 2025/26. Whilst these increasing levels of funding are welcome, we are conscious that the then Finance Minister has stated that challenges remain for the Executive.

On this basis, UNISON maintains that the Executive as a whole should collectively call for a new deal for Northern Ireland that:

allows Government to invest in our public services so they can be rebuilt and reformed;

ensures public sector workers and all those in private sector providers delivering public services are recognised through decent pay and terms and conditions;

addresses our sustained levels of poverty and deprivation through proper social security protections and investment on the basis of objective need;

and which builds a fairer and more equal economy and society within a framework of equality and human rights.

Composite C The Biggest Wave of Insourcing in a Generation (Motion 36, Amendment 36.1, Motion 37, Amendments 37.1, 37.2)

The Labour Party have launched their policy document "*Make Work Pay: Delivering the New Deal for Working People.*" <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/MakeWorkPay.pdf>

It contains a number of commitments including the promise to end the Conservative Party's drive to privatise public services; extending the Freedom of Information Act to apply to private companies delivering a public service; require public bodies to undertake a public interest test before outsourcing and when contracts come up for renewal to better consider the in-house option;

Reinstate and strengthen the last Labour government's two tier code to end unfair two-tiered workforces; and ensure that the two-tier code and the public interest test apply to wholly owned subsidiary companies.

The Government's Employment Rights Bill includes the first instalment of the Make Work Pay reforms, including the power for the minister to create a statutory code to prevent the emergence of a 'two tier workforce' when outsourcing occurs. However, the motion highlights problems with the previous two-tier code, including poor enforcement and employers redesigning jobs to evade the code.

The motion calls for an intensified "Bringing Services Home" campaign to include:

- a) Working with the political fund to keep up the pressure on government to ensure that the biggest wave of insourcing in a generation can be delivered as a priority;
- b) Engaging with the policy development process so that the measures proposed by the government included within Make Work Pay are fit for purpose. This should include providing case studies, demonstrating the situation faced by outsourced workers;
- c) Making support available to service groups during the development of sector specific policy, guidance and interpretation of the Code and other measures instrumental to decisions about service provision;
- d) Working through appropriate channels within the UK government, devolved nations, and mayoral authorities to enable approaches to public service procurement that maximise direct employment;
- e) Keeping up the pressure on employers with contracts coming up for renewal, or contemplating further outsourcing, urging upon them the need to recognise the direction of travel;
- f) Supporting branches by providing updated information about the new measures that can be used to support local insourcing campaigns.
- g) Discussing with National Labour Link committee how best to ensure the Labour government delivers on its manifesto pledges regarding outsourcing.

We continue to work to bring Social Care back in house. In domiciliary care, the latest data from 2024 published by the DoH highlights that 76% of domiciliary care contact hours are provided by non-statutory services. 72% of domiciliary care visits were provided by non-statutory services.

In December 2017, the Department of Health (DoH) published 'Power to People: proposals to reboot adult care and support in NI', the report of the Expert Panel appointed by the then Health Minister, Michelle O'Neill MLA, to develop proposals for reform of the system of adult care and support in Northern Ireland.

UNISON made a detailed written submission to this Panel, and engaged with the Panel members on a number of occasions as they prepared their report, detailing our many years of involvement in both the policy development and implementation of adult care and support.

When the Panel's report was published, we viewed its findings around the conditions faced by the social care workforce as a vindication of our long-standing campaigns highlighting the low pay, poor terms and conditions and unethical treatment they experience, particularly those workers whose jobs have been outsourced and privatised.

In general terms, UNISON has long been opposed to the use of the non-statutory sector to deliver care, believing that it has led to inadequate and increasingly precarious provision and major concerns regarding capacity, quality of care, treatment of staff and medium to long term viability of services.

Privatisation and the use of the private sector in delivering public services does not increase efficiency, raise the quality of care or improve the quality of services and leads to staff becoming under-paid, casualised, deskilled and in a service which is not fit for purpose. It opens up the potential of a 'race to the bottom' where private providers may choose to make savings and bear down on labour costs, under investing and over-straining the workforce.

It is critical that these vital services are delivered by publicly accountable and directly employed public workers, rather than being subjected to outsourcing and privatisation. UNISON wishes to see the current trends being reversed. Our general view is that privatisation and outsourcing should cease and that services should be brought back 'in-house'. We consider this as the best route to improve the care and support received by clients, their families and carers, whilst also improving the conditions of the workforce.

Fair Work Forum and social care

UNISON was engaged with the Department of Health in efforts to recommence the work of the Social Care Fair Work Forum. The Forum includes representatives of employers, Government Departments, trade unions and other statutory agencies and stakeholders and is convened by the Minister of Health. UNISON is represented on the Forum alongside the GMB and RCN.

UNISON sought the establishment of the Forum and has been seeking that it progresses initiatives to improve pay and terms and conditions. The Department of Health has provided economist support to prepare a business case to seek funding for the purpose of improving pay and terms and conditions.

A comprehensive survey of social care workers was launched by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) on behalf of the Fair Work Forum in September 2024. UNISON encouraged our members to respond and intends to be fully involved in analysing the results and ensuring that they inform the case for better pay, terms and conditions.

A survey of employers was launched in December 2024 calling for employers to share their experiences of delivering services within the current economic climate and of managing staff to provide high quality care in a rapidly changing sector as well as the supports they provide for staff to help them in their social care role.

Notes
