

## Local Government Matters - Scottish Government Local Governance Review

The Scottish Government is carrying out a Local Governance Review to consider how powers, responsibilities and resources are shared across the country, at local government level and at community level.

The paperwork states -

*'The aim is to strengthen local democracy to improve outcomes in local communities, grow Scotland's economy for everyone's benefit, and ensure local communities have more say about how public services in their area are run.'*

It declares, - *'local democracy is about to change.'*  
To this end a number of initiatives are planned under the heading Democracy Matters.



### DEMOCRACY MATTERS

The Scottish Government launched the first phase of its review in 2018, by inviting individuals and groups to hold a 'conversation' (a meeting) to discuss Democracy Matters. Participants were asked to consider and respond to the following questions:

1. Tell us about your experiences of getting involved in decision-making processes that affect your local community or community of interest?
2. Would you like your local community or community of interest to have more control over some decision? If yes, what sorts of issues would those decisions cover?
3. When thinking about decision-making, 'local' could mean a large town, a village or a neighbourhood. What does 'local' mean to you and your community?
4. Are there existing forms of local level decision-making that could work well? What kinds of changes might be needed for this to work in practice?

5. Do you have any other comments, ideas, or questions? Is there more you want to know?

To help cover costs, application could be made to the Scottish Government's Democracy Matters, Community Engagement fund.

This phase of the review led into Regional Deliberation Events (roadshow events) attended by the Scottish Government Democracy Matters Team, at venues in Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen, Irvine, Inverness, Glasgow, Oban and Shetland during November/December 2018.

Information from this process will then be fed back to the Scottish Government and influence new legislation, which the Government states will be designed to devolve more decision-making powers to local level. Possible timescale for legislation is 2019.

There is a second strand to the review. Here, the Scottish Government and COSLA will be working with its public sector partners, such as local authorities, to consider if increasing the powers they hold could improve outcomes for people.



### LOCAL AUTHORITY - BACKGROUND NOTES

There is a strong case to argue that one of the biggest threats to working class communities is the relentless stripping away of the democratic element of local democracy.

This is not a new process, and its impact can be seen in all four parts of the UK.

Different labels have been attached to the stripping away process, but the results are the same. Cuts to budgets, services, jobs, pay and conditions, powers and accountability.

Notwithstanding Community Councils, whose early promise was never developed, local democracy has remained insufficiently local, but at least it once was reasonably powerful and could be influenced to supply non-statutory services to meet local need.

In Scotland, the Council Tax freeze took financial responsibility out of the hands of local authorities.

# CAMPAIGNING FOR A BETTER DEAL FOR OLDER PEOPLE SINCE 1992

Swinging budget cuts followed and the challenge was to keep jobs and services going.

But it got worse. Managerialism among council staff flourished as did the use of partnerships that conceal policies that subordinate communities for example, in the interests of property developers instead of tackling the acute need for adequate affordable housing in our cities and rural areas.

The committee systems reduced the role of the elected councillors, outsourcing, and privatisation of services came in and elected back-bench councillors lost out. Far too many of them seemed content to step into the shadows and rubberstamp rather than scrutinise.

When local democracy becomes weak what flourishes, other than commercial self-interest and government by the rich for the rich. The democratisation of local government with accountability and redistributive powers, won by workers in the past is weakened, power is reclaimed by the wealthy.

Increasing the powers vested in local authorities, ie the state at local level, without addressing issues such as funding and democratic accountability will not help hard-pressed working-class communities, indeed, it would consolidate local power in the hands of the wealthy.

Clearly, this process of attrition has reached a critical point whereby the government of our local communities has become distanced from our communities.

## Save the Over 75s TV Licence

The SPF have asked BBC leaders to call on the government to take back financial responsibility for free TV licences for the over 75's.

A recent well attended protest organised by SPF and formally supported by UNITE Glasgow Retired Members Branch, Dundee Pensioners' Forum, Civil Service Pensioners Alliance Scotland and NASUWT RMA as well as many other local pensioners groups at the BBC Scotland headquarters in Glasgow led to a lengthy, respectful discussion with Ian Small, Head of Public Policy and Corporate Affairs for BBC Scotland.

This event was followed by a slot on STV's news programme Scotland Tonight when SPF Chair Maureen Gardiner ably defended our position for retention of the concession for older pensioners. In addition Maureen dealt with a raft of points associated with the general debate on means-testing versus universality in relation to pensions and welfare benefits.

A BBC spokesperson, speaking on the consultation, said a decision would be expected in June. The SPF asks all supporters, individual members and affiliated groups to lobby MP's for the reversal of this cut to pensioner benefits by the government. It also seeks support for an Age UK on-line petition which aims to safeguard the TV licence concession. You can add your support via <http://ageuk.org.uk/tvpetition>

### WHAT NOW?

Reject any approach based on individualism and localism which could be used to:-

- Set working-class communities and communities of interest in competition with one another for essential services.
- Lead to further fragmentation and privatisation of service delivery. Job losses/low pay.
- Would undermine democratic accountability thus discharging local democracy of any democratic real content.

The SPF favours the re-introduction of a strong democratic system of local government that enables all councillors to initiate business, to make policy.

Adequately fund Local Government including Community Councils and develop their respective powers. This would strengthen democratic accountability and local democracy. (Your right to vote) Why do we think we can rely on those we don't elect to deliver services we need?

The funding of local government is not an economic question – it's a political one in the sense that we must campaign collectively against further privatisation of services and fight for a system based on equality and justice,

Now is the time to push for more working-class rights to be enshrined in law, adequate state funding through fair systems of national and local taxation, and quality services - something that only the state is capable of delivering through redistribution of wealth



# Low Pay – USDAW petition, Time for a Better Pay

In this issue Scottish Seniors features SPF founding affiliated organisation, the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW). Thanks go to members of USDAW for consistent practical support throughout the years and a special mention goes to our current Assistant Secretary June Whitelaw, who represents USDAW on the Executive Committee of SPF.



## High Pay

Figures issued by the High Pay Centre and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development show that the average annual wage of chief executives at leading British companies is 133 times more than workers on a median annual salary of £28,758.

By 1pm on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> January 2019 Britain's top executives were paid more money than the average worker will earn in the entire year.

Pharmaceutical company AstraZenica's chief executive Pascal Soriot, was awarded a pay package of £11.4 million last year despite a shareholder backlash - 9% up on 2017, the company's annual report revealed.

USDAW is a UK wide trade union with over 433,000 members working in a variety of occupations and industries including shop-workers, factory and warehouse workers, drivers, call centre staff, clerical workers, dairy processing, catering, chemical processing, home shopping and pharmaceuticals.

USDAW launched its **Time for a Better Pay** petition in early January calling on the government to tackle low wages and insecure work.

USDAW General Secretary Paddy Lillis said that real and urgent improvements were required to deliver an economy which works in favour of all working people. He said: *'we are a major driving force behind the creation of the national minimum wage and have always made strong cases for increases in the rates'* USDAW is acutely aware of the *relationship between low pay and pensioner poverty*.

A recent USDAW survey of more than 10,500 working people showed that 92% of those surveyed reported they had seen no improvement in their financial position over the past 5 years and 63% believed that financial worries were having an adverse effect on their mental health.

This important petition can be found at [www.usdaw.org.uk/T\\$BP](http://www.usdaw.org.uk/T$BP)

## SERCO Lose Asylum Accommodation Contract



**An update on article about SERCO in Scottish Seniors Issue 49.**

SERCO which was contracted by the Home Office will no longer deliver asylum accommodation in Scotland from September 2019. The Home Office has now awarded the contract to the Mears Group.

Private provider SERCO faced sustained opposition from protest groups and legal challenges after it introduced a lock-change eviction process in Glasgow.

Scottish Refugee Council Policy Officer, Graham O'Neill welcomed the news, He said 'It is time for a new approach and in Glasgow we welcome this new chapter in supporting people needing refugee protection. Providing housing to people in need is an essential public service and the rights, needs and dignity of people seeking refugee protection must be at the heart of the work of the Mears Group as they take over from SERCO.'



**Join the Scottish Pensioners' Forum**

**Campaigning for a better deal for older people since 1992**

[www.scottishpensioners.org.uk](http://www.scottishpensioners.org.uk)

333 Woodlands Road, Glasgow G3 6NG Telephone 0141 337 8113

Also on Facebook and Twitter @ScotPensForum

## **£220 Million Stealth Grab**

Tory government welfare policies will rob 40,000 low-income pensioners an average of £7,000 a year in pension credit. Recent findings from a parliamentary written question indicate upcoming changes that will prevent mixed age couples on low-incomes from claiming pension credit.

From May 2019 couples will no longer be eligible to claim pension credit when the older partner reaches state pension age if the other has not, and will have to claim universal credit instead.

The government has affirmed that 40,000 couples will be affected by 2021-22, saving £220 million.



Age UK, director, Caroline Abrahams said: *'It's a substantial stealth cut. For some the impact will be truly devastating.'*

National Pensioners Convention, general secretary, Jan Short said: *'The roll out of universal credit has already been a complete shambles and now the government is making it worse by forcing pensioners into the system.'*

SPF chair, Maureen Gardiner said: *'This will hurt some of the most vulnerable people in our society. The government must reverse this decision'*

## **SPF 28TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

The 28th Annual Conference of the Scottish Pensioners Forum will take place on **Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> June 2019 at the Best Western Queens Hotel, Dundee.**



The event is open to all SPF members and affiliated organisations and Minister for Older People, Christina McKelvie is confirmed as one of our guest speakers. We hope that you can come along and celebrate another successful year for the SPF.

## **WITH OUR DEEPEST CONDOLENCES**

It is with deep regret that we inform our membership of the passing of two of our former Executive Committee members, John Gray and Sheena Glass.

John, the former representative for UNISON Ayrshire, was a much valued member of our Executive Committee for many years and was a lifelong SPF member.

Sheena, the representative from GOPWA, served on the SPF Executive Committee for many years before her recent retirement. During her time as Chief Executive of GOPWA, Sheena became known as Glasgow's Champion for the elderly, working within communities to ensure older people had a good quality of life.

We would like to convey our condolences, on behalf of our membership, to their family and friends. Their expertise, and valuable input, will be sadly missed by the older people's movement.



John Gray



Sheena Glass

**IN MEMORIAM**