



CEC Special Report

Rebuilding Local Government



**MAKE
WORK
BETTER**

GMB Congress 2026

CEC Special Report

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1. Summary

- 1.1. The basis of this report is that we will only be able to have decent Local Government services again if GMB rebuilds and organises our membership base to a position of strength – and engages in relevant campaigns.
- 1.2. The principles of GMB@Work, which has been relaunched are relevant as ever. Building our strength through the workplace organising isn't complicated, but it does require commitment to ensure success. Dedicated and confident GMB activists who are trained properly are the best placed to lead the charge at a local level. In turn, GMB must invest in and support our activists so they can get on with this work.
- 1.3. This report outlines the issues our members will face in the next 12 to 24 months, and the practical ways to tackle them, with an emphasis on mapping local government workplaces directly employed and outsourced.
- 1.4. Decent services are delivered by well organised and respected workers, whose terms and conditions are best in class. Our communities are healthier and safer in the hands of directly employed workers, from street cleansing, to managing social housing, and delivering care. GMB has a vital role to play in making work better in local government, which can only be delivered through a strong and unified membership.

List of Acronyms and Terms

- National Joint Council (NJC)
- Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)
- School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB)
- Green Book (Local Government book of terms and conditions)

Key Policy

- Greater local organisation of GMB members campaigning on local issues through GMB@Work principles
- Calls for ending short term funding for local government
- Calls for an increase in central government funding
- GMB engagement over new technology such as AI
- Council house building programme through directly employed workforce and locally procured materials
- Changes to business rates to fund local government more directly

2. Introduction

- 2.1. GMB members in Local Government, whether in town halls or out delivering services, keep our communities safe and healthy. Yet our communities are on the brink, and hard-right parties like Reform UK are benefitting from public anguish at over a decade of Tory austerity, and decades more of undervaluing women's work; outsourcing services and dwindling council-owned housing stock.
- 2.2. This report seeks to bring together a policy and industrial response rooted in how we organise to make work better in Local Government across the United Kingdom. It will also make the case for Local Government to be a well-funded, democratic tool for redistributive economic growth.
- 2.3. There are wildly different levels of organisation across the sector, from 70% membership density in the London Borough of Merton to zero membership in 39 NJC employers.
- 2.4. The formation of the SSSNB and the proposals for schools to be solely managed by Multi Academy Trusts will have huge implications for facilities time and many shop stewards and convenors have facilities time allocations dependent on membership across the employer, including schools in England. The new care negotiating body may also have an impact on facilities time if it sets pay rates and other terms and conditions of employment.
- 2.5. To drive the revitalisation of our local governments and services, we need to renew GMB organisation and campaigning. Our membership in local government outside of schools is not where we need to be. We recognise that town halls have been cluttered by redundancies, increased remote working, changing technology, and that many community services have been outsourced with multiple rounds of TUPE.
- 2.6. Without focused organising and a commitment to increasing our membership base, not just in numbers, but in activism too, we will never be able to improve conditions, nor services.
- 2.7. Our people deliver local services, and every GMB member is a service user of some sort. Building our organisation across local government will give GMB members a voice not only as providers but also as service users.
- 2.8. Renewed organisation will help our members defend against attacks on their terms and conditions of employment, their skills, their pensions, and seek to reverse the

retention and recruitment crisis. We will be able to build and solidify our membership base around equal pay campaigns.

- 2.9. It should be that our people build and maintain decent homes, run by local authorities, taking back control from the hands of private landlords.
- 2.10. In the recent local elections, Labour lost close to 1,500 councillors across England, and lost heavily in Wales and Scotland during the national elections, which has the potential to create a lot of uncertainty over the future of industrial relations, and overall management of our local authorities.
- 2.11. Building our strength in our organisation has never been more imperative considering this new political landscape. Our members must be united and confident in advocating for better local services, and their own working lives.
- 2.12. It is time for decision makers to listen to GMB members working on the frontline, and we will set out how the local government workforce must be central to the government's priorities.
- 2.13. Our members must be vigilant to political parties that have proven that they are against the interests of working people. There are no political 'superheroes', and we should be ready to challenge any political party that seeks to make work worse for our members.
- 2.14. Throughout this report our activists will tell you what their priorities are, how they plan to do things, and what they have already managed to achieve.
- 2.15. Every chapter of this report will set out a plan for rebuilding our power in local government.

3. Chapter One: The Value of Workers and Services

- 3.1 It is true that the Austerity measures brought in by the Coalition Government, and so dogmatically followed by subsequent governments has wrought misery, poverty, and instilled a fundamental decline to our public services.
- 3.2 The [CEC Special Report Local Government and Austerity \(2019\)](#) went into great detail about how the first decade of cuts affected services and the work of our members.

Redundancy, reorganisation and outsourcing have blighted local government in response to a stranglehold of central funding.

- 3.3 Anti-trade union legislation and the high thresholds on ballots have also diminished our ability to mobilise workers, and the speed at which we can do it, resulting in our members unable to take industrial action over fundamental issues such as their pay.
- 3.4 These are all conditions designed to break trade union activity, and the power of local government workers. Until the introduction of e-ballots, the law still requires 50% of eligible members to vote in a ballot. That poses particular problems in Local Government, with over 300 employers and a significant number where GMB membership is quite small. However, in 2025 the turnout in the ballot was 37%, a significant improvement on 2024 and the highest turnout of the three unions.
- 3.5 The Employers approach to trade unions has been not to negotiate, but to make “full and final” offers, without even meeting the trade unions. In 2026, they did agree to meet unions, but made a full and final offer not long after the meeting ended.
- 3.6 Local Government Pay has been held back for a generation and workers are deeply undervalued through pensions attacks, the undervaluing of women’s work, outsourcing and privatisation of services. Emerging technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) will influence our members’ work, which could impact terms and conditions, and pay. This is something that we must be vigilant to.

4. Funding

- 4.1 For anything to work at a national level of bargaining (across the four nations) we need to have strong and unified local bases of membership across local authorities.
- 4.2 Funding for Local Government is a massive issue that has been unsustainable for years. This has fuelled the restructuring and redundancy nightmares of the last decade, whereby councils have not been able to plan further in advance due to the short-term funding commitments from Westminster, and the freezing of council tax.
- 4.3 Our members have been highly critical of the management of councils and the high wages at the top of the spinal points, and not enough workers delivering the core and important work on the frontline.

- 4.4 Short term funding has damaged long-term service planning, workforce stability, and value for public money. Members have raised concern that this has led to a growing number of the workforce being employed on insecure, short-term contracts. (M168)
- 4.5 We simply need more money in the system for all our services and GMB has long campaigned and lobbied government for more funding for local government. As of 2025/26, local authority core spending power was still about 9% in real terms below its 2010/11 levels in England as a whole and much lower for some authorities.
- 4.6 The Labour government set its first full year of funding for local government in 2025/26. That year the government laid out plans for a 4.1% real terms increases in spending power between 2024/25 and 2025/26. However, that increase included £502 million to compensate local authorities for the rise in employers' national insurance contributions announced in 2024. Excluding that funding, spending power rose by 3.3% in real terms.
- 4.7 From 2026/27 to (and including) 2028/29, the government have announced a new three-year (multi-year) settlement. In doing so, it has consolidated previous smaller separate funding streams. The settlement distributed £83.5 billion to local authorities in England in 2026/27, rising to £90.5 billion in 2028/29.
- 4.8 The funding in this settlement is distributed using new formulas set in the Fair Funding Review 2.0 and is the first full assessment of local authorities relative levels of need since 2013. The new formulas mean that some local authorities (particularly those in cities with high levels of deprivation) will have higher spending power than in previous years, whilst others (particularly rural shire districts and authorities with very low council tax rates) will have less to spend.
- 4.9 In this settlement, the government has also set 'referendum principles' – limits on the amount by which local authorities can raise their council tax rates without holding a referendum. It will also extend the statutory override allowing local authorities to run deficits related to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) until 2027/28 and will assume responsibility for funding SEND centrally from 2028 onwards.
- 4.10 The benefits and potential pitfalls of this settlement are:
- A) Greater financial certainty for councils, although final figures for later years will be confirmed in future settlements. They will be able to better plan for services, investment and commissioning in areas such as social care and homeless prevention. However, due to how the money will now be distributed to councils

based on need, some councils receiving lower settlements may still face tough decisions prioritising services and delivery.

- B) Greater flexibilities for councils over how to spend funding means they can better target spending to local priorities. But without ringfencing that previously existed, there is a risk that non-statutory services such as libraries and community centres, continue to lose out.
 - C) Council tax remains a core driver for delivering spending power and council can increase this by up to 5% without the need for a local referendum. However, this means that the public (GMB members) are likely to see continued council tax increases.
 - D) Multi-year funding settlements allow councils to better plan workforce requirements and hopefully avoid crisis-driven restructures. However, widespread recruitment growth is unlikely as councils focus on retention, vacancy control and service redesign rather than expansion.
 - E) Unions can make claims for better pay awards based on known funding arrangements. However, with council tax rises accounting for much of the funding and services still being under extreme pressures, collective bargaining arrangements may struggle to deliver what is deserved and expected by workers.
- 4.11 The overall settlement does not remove structural funding pressures in some core services such as care and children's services.
- 4.12 We will need to make the case for central funding clearer in our campaigning and incorporate it into our organising with our members. They possess valuable skills and experience that keep our services running.
- 4.13 Proper funding means that fewer local government workers are under stress of uncertainty and more can get decent training and experience to benefit all. We must understand where these vulnerable workers are and what job roles they are in so we can be vigilant to the services most at risk, and campaign for their jobs.
- 4.14 Our national committees for local government and schools in collaboration with the regions must lead the way with in how this messaging can be shaped, and how members can feel engaged, as well as using our lobbying power with the government.

5. Pay

- 5.1 Our membership knows that there is a terrible problem at the bottom of the pay and grading bands, that the lowest are no better off than the national minimum wages (National Living Wage) particularly in roles like catering and cleaning. This is a symptom of failures across the trade union movement to mobilise workers and build strong membership; the lack of central funding from Westminster; and the unwillingness of local government employers to engage in meaningful negotiations with unions over pay.
- 5.2 The Green Book of terms and conditions for local government workers has been the fail safe for our members, which should ensure consistency across local authorities. The National Joint Council (NJC) of the recognised trade unions and the employer's side have negotiated pay claims drawn from the demands of the membership over many decades, but more recently there have been fewer instances of negotiations, replaced with just full and final offers. This must change if the NJC is to be the vehicle of bargaining for consistent rates and the gold standard of terms and conditions, making local government a decent place to work. GMB remains committed to NJC bargaining, but we will only win what we want with greater mobilisation of our members.
- 5.3 We recognise that local rates, and outsourcing have meant that some local authorities are paying many different rates for the same job have gone out of kilter. We shouldn't get in the way of local bargaining – as we have been incredibly successful in Northern Ireland and Scotland in particular – but workers up and down the country should be able to earn similar rates from one authority to another.
- 5.4 Pay restoration and our industrial engagement can only be determined by the strength of our organisation. This requires us to be on top of member communication and engagement with clear messaging.
- 5.5 This means we need greater information sharing of settlements and campaigning methods across the union. Mapping of pay rates across the country where we have membership is encouraged so local government workers can have a better understanding of where large differences in pay occur. We shouldn't be shy in asking our members directly through surveys what their views on pay are, we must understand their priorities and maintain decent communication about what GMB is doing in their workplaces, and how they can also get involved. (M163, M164, M166, M167, M168)

6. Northern Ireland – Case Study

6.1 The 2022/23 NJC pay claim was a flat uplift of £1,925, agreed nationally by GMB and UNISON, with Unite rejecting it. However, due to the cost-of-living crisis in Northern Ireland, the Trade Unions recognised that members needed additional local support beyond the national agreement. Using Part 3 of the Green Book, members in Northern Ireland were able to put in a claim in addition to the National claim, which allows local terms for;

- Hours of work – local variations on standard weeks.
- Holiday arrangements – especially for part-time workers.
- Overtime and standby duty – including sleeping-in and standby pay.
- Annual leave and sickness – local rules for when staff fall ill during leave, etc.

6.2 It was agreed that all the Trade Unions involved would have a joint approach (GMB, Unite, NIPSA, and in two councils SIPTU), by surveying the membership, and filing joint claims (spinal point uplifts; reduction in working week; a one-off payment).

6.3 Councils initially refused to engage, claiming it broke the national framework, but with unprecedented unity and coordination between the unions, trade disputes were registered across all 11 councils, including a near 8-week strike in Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council. Regular meetings with members strengthened our organisation and new workplace leaders were recruited (from 2 to 8 reps), building the union through membership growth and visibility. The proof was there in the turnouts for the NJC ballot for the pay round.

6.4 The campaign resulted in two spinal column points; an uplift of £750–£1,000 one-off payments; a commitment to a full pay and grading review; agreed job evaluation process; and crucially it strengthened union organisation and membership density across councils.

6.5 This was a historic win – the first of its kind in Northern Ireland, demonstrated that local negotiation under Part 3 works when unions act collectively. It shows what's possible through solidarity, organisation, and persistence. The next step is ensuring councils honour the agreements and maintain fair pay going forward.

Belfast	78%
North Eastern	81%
South East	78%
Southern	84%
Western	70%

Ballot turnout for Northern Ireland Part 3 dispute

7. Organisation in Scotland

- 7.1 Scottish local authorities are in a separate funding and bargaining unit, devolved from the rest of the UK. GMB has undergone fundamental reforms to how we approach our organising and bargaining, starting with the membership taking on Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) in 2019.
- 7.2 GMB Scotland Local Government Committee has developed a well organised structure which organises the bargaining timeline, pay surveys, pay claim, and strategy for each pay round. They are reps from the majority of Scottish Councils who meet quarterly and more during pay campaigns, and uses a mixture of in-person and hybrid meetings to ensure greater participation.
- 7.3 The committee focuses on local campaigning and developing their negotiating and pay strategies which also gives a vital space for activists to share their workplace issues, learn from other councils, and ultimately draw on the collective experience to use in their local campaigns.

8. Recruitment and Retention Crisis

- 8.1 Funding, pay, and conditions play a crucial role in retaining staff, and making the work attractive in the first place. The private sector is now offering better pay and more flexibility for roles on the lower bands, which is impacting this crisis. Our local governments should have dedicated and well-treated staff so that they can deliver the best possible services for our communities. Austerity ripped through our workforces, forcing many to leave either through redundancy or out of despair.
- 8.2 When we asked members about what it was like working in local government for the 2025 pay claim and the overwhelming response was that budget cuts and the constant fear of redundancy and restructuring was making the job miserable.

“Staff leaving and being replaced with agencies workers. Staff sickness and staff signed off with stress.” **Nursery officer**

“Staff shortages, pay in public sector is way below private sector” **Workshop Manager**

“Budget cuts, losing posts, finding efficiencies for last 14 years. Taking on more work/responsibilities for same pay. Some highly skilled technical specialists are reaching retirement age but no succession plan due to lower posts been deleted, just not sustainable.” **Head of ICT**

“Complete and utter lack of resources, stress and pressure of being overworked, having to work a significant number of hours over and above contractual hours just to keep up, having no money left near to the end of the month due to rising costs of living and wages not coming anywhere near close.” **Group Auditor**

- 8.3 Our NJC Pay Claims have highlighted the dire recruitment and retention issues, which will only be resolved with better pay, and ultimately some stability in councils – no more restructuring, reorganising, and redundancies.

9. Pensions

- 9.1 The Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) has proven to be an issue our members care deeply about. Despite it not being the ‘gold plated’ scheme that those who want to destroy it say it is, it is still one of the best pension schemes that a worker in the UK could be part of.
- 9.2 Our members have proven how important it is to them, when in 2011 thousands and thousands of members went on strike to save it from the most savage of cuts from the Coalition Government.
- 9.3 We were successful in getting a meaningful strike because we were clear in our messaging about what the proposed changes meant; “Work Longer, Pay More, Get Less”
- 9.4 The biggest threat to the LGPS come from those who believe it to be a ‘gold plated’ scheme, and would like to see the scheme closed off for good and place everyone into a far inferior Defined Contribution Scheme.
- 9.5 Reform UK have previously expressed a desire to stop newly appointed Local Government workers joining the LGPS, something that will make people even poorer in retirement. They think they are being clever by trying to pit the current workforce against the desperately needed future workforce.
- 9.6 Reform have now launched a second attack on the scheme – this time from Reform UK Deputy Leader Richard Tice MP – who has written to councils under Reform control, urging them to cut employer contributions to staff pensions down to zero. Now that more councils are under Reform control, it will be important for regions affected to mobilise in case this becomes a more widespread issue.

9.7 GMB members will not be told by the multimillionaires that lead Reform UK, nor any other political party, that they have too good of a pension. We must keep our membership united so that these schemes are available and affordable for future generations, otherwise we will continue to out race each other to the bottom.

9.8 We will not be divided over this issue.

10. Equal Pay

10.1 Local government work has been devalued, affecting all workers, but what GMB has exposed is how starkly women's work has been devalued. GMB does not accept that the work women do is worth less than the work of men.

10.2 In recent years we have not shied away from taking on Equal Pay campaigns within local authorities and not given way to the perception that women are not willing to organise and take industrial action. These campaigns have not been easy, but if we are to recapture the soul of the union, particularly in local government membership, we must do the hard graft of organising.

10.3 Historical pay injustice does not go away even when employers, and sadly trade unions too, try to buy women workers out of their problem with paltry sums that in no way reflect what they are worth.

10.4 In every equal pay campaign, we are clear about our purpose: **to lift women up, not push men down**. While male workers are used as comparators in equal pay claims, they are not the source of discrimination. Employers are.

10.5 Equal pay is not women versus men. It is workers versus a discriminatory employer.

10.6 Where unequal pay exposes better terms and conditions held by men, the answer is not division but collective struggle. Fighting for equal pay must always mean fighting for all workers. Not only is that possible- it is essential.

10.7 This is not just theoretical and aspirational but tried and tested strategy that works.

10.8 In Glasgow, 8,000 women took strike action for equal pay. Picket lines stood at every refuse depot – because women clean those depots. Glasgow's refuse workers, proudly GMB, made a clear decision: they would stand beside their fellow

workers and union sisters. On strike day, not a single GMB bin worker crossed a picket line.

10.9 When the workforce stood together, the city stopped. Schools and public buildings closed. Home care services stopped. Not a bin was lifted, not a street cleaned. Parking attendants later joined the picket lines, strengthening the dispute still further.

10.10 The results speak for themselves:

- Over £750 million in stolen wages won back for women
- 3,000 women brought back in-house from arm's-length services
- No privatisation
- No cuts to any worker's pay or conditions
- Over 200 new jobs created in refuse and parks services

10.11 Eight years on, Glasgow workers are still benefiting from that unity. As they now face the rollout of a new Job Evaluation scheme, the workforce stands ready and united once again.

10.12 Solidarity is not a slogan. It is a strategy. The solidarity dividend of Glasgow was simple and profound: when workers fight side by side, everyone is stronger.

10.13 It is likely that there are plenty more local authorities that have equal pay issues. It is our job to ensure that our activists and regions are geared up to be confident in taking these campaigns on.

10.14 **What to look for in an Equal Pay Claim**

10.15 Spotting an equal pay claim starts with knowing what is happening across the whole employer, not just in one corner of the workforce. Officers and Reps need a clear picture of developments in all departments and job groups. Effective information-sharing between reps is essential.

10.16 Focusing only on male-dominated roles, without examining how their pay, bonuses, and conditions impact women's work, allows discrimination to go unnoticed and unchallenged.

- 10.17 Industrial change is often the trigger for equal pay problems. New pay and grading structures, restructures, local agreements, service reforms, and changes to terms and conditions all increase the risk of unequal pay if they are poorly designed or badly implemented.
- 10.18 One of the most common red flags is outdated job evaluation caused by job creep. Work done predominantly by women has often changed dramatically over the past 10-15 years, becoming more technical, demanding, or complex yet grades and pay have stayed the same. This systematic undervaluing of women's work is a recurring source of equal pay claims.
- 10.19 **Ask your members.** Reps should directly question workers: has your job changed significantly in the last five years? Have you taken on new skills, responsibilities, or pressures? And if so, has your grade or pay increased to reflect this? If the answer is no, an equal pay issue may exist.
- 10.20 Watch for red flags in bonuses and additional payments. Be alert to payments that are poorly defined, inconsistently applied, or paid regardless of whether the stated conditions are met – for example, standby payments where there is no real expectation of call-out. Look closely at benefits such as task-and-finish or enhanced rates that are only available in male-dominated jobs.
- 10.21 Finally, scrutinise job evaluation schemes. Schemes that do not make sense, rely on bias, or are applied inconsistently can embed discrimination. If you are unsure how to challenge a scheme or spot bias, contact your Regional Organiser for training and support.

11. Outsourcing

- 11.1 There is not a local authority in the country where there are no outsourced services. Our view, and policy, remains that workers who deliver local government services, should be local government employees. The most vulnerable workers are those who are already on low pay, and poor terms and conditions.
- 11.2 Being vigilant to outsourcing requires us to be highly organised, well mapped out, and engaged with each council we have a presence in.
- 11.3 We already have a large presence in those services which have already been contracted out, particularly in refuse and recycling. These workers – our members

– have likely TUPE'd between more than one employer depending on the length of the contracts and which companies can win tenders. Without us being vigilant, our members can fall prey to these companies reorganising, and cutting terms and conditions, falling behind the directly employed staff.

- 11.4 We can lead successful campaigns to stop outsourcing. In Ards and North Down council in Northern Ireland, GMB stopped the leisure centres from being outsourced to Serco, one of the largest outsourcing companies in the world.
- 11.5 Even if we cannot campaign for insourcing, we should be organising the workforces who deliver our local services.
- 11.6 Often it is GMB ensuring members are protected during TUPE transfers, protecting facility time, and that we maintain our bargaining rights. Employers come and go as the contracts come up for tender, but GMB members remain.
- 11.7 It is entirely possible to map out contracted services that can aid activists, branches, and regions to determine membership growth and opportunities to campaign for insourcing; or simply ensure that those delivering services are not at risk to losing out on terms and conditions as they transfer to different companies.
- 11.8 Most activists will know of the larger private companies such as Serco, Biffa, or Veolia, and we have strong membership with agreements within these. Local Authorities may also set up their own Wholly Owned Subsidiaries in order to keep workers and services at an 'arms length', which often leads to poorer terms and conditions, and pay.
- 11.9 Using or adapting the methods, with resources explained below, reps can get started on mapping out services most vulnerable to outsourcing.

11.10 **Mapping Services Vulnerable to Outsourcing**

Types of Local Authority and their responsibilities

- 11.11 There are a few ways Local Authorities are structured which affect the services they are responsible for providing and therefore what they can outsource.
 - 1. County Council
 - 2. District Council
 - 3. Unitary Council

Table to show responsibilities for each type of authority.

Type of Authority	Unitary	County	District/Borough/City
Education			
Transport			
Planning			
Fire and Public Safety			
Social Care			
Libraries			
Waste Management			
Trading Standards			
Rubbish Collection			
Recycling			
Council Tax			
Housing			
Planning Applications			

11.12 Combined Authorities

11.13 Some areas are part of Combined Authorities which is two or more Local Councils which join to form a group that work across council boundaries to tackle broader issues. A council can be a full or part member of a Combined Authority. This impacts the influence they have within in.

11.14 Typically, they look after Regional Transport planning and infrastructure, Economic Development and Regeneration, and by using links such as that below, you can find out where these combined authorities are and their responsibilities

Local Government Authority (LGA)	https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/devolution/combined-authorities
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11.15 Commonly Outsourced Services

11.16 The Type of Local Authority will determine who the contract for outsourcing will be with, e.g. Refuse Collection will be a contract with a district, borough, city or unitary authority.

11.17 This table is a brief outline of some commonly found outsourced services and colour coded by the opportunity for membership growth and the leverage they have for collective bargaining.

11.18 Some leverage can increase or decrease depending on the timing of a campaign

Service	Membership Potential	Leverage
Waste Management – Refuse Collection, Recycling, Waste Transfer Stations, Street Cleansing	High	High
Parks and Grounds Maintenance	High	Medium – More in Summer months
Parking Attendants and Enforcement	High	Medium – More when there's big events
School Transport	High	Medium – High during School term exam season
Facilities Management – Cleaning, Catering, Housing Repairs	High	Medium/High depending on density
Libraries	Low	Low – few staff and many are volunteer operated now
Children's Homes	Medium	Medium
Social Care – Homes, Agencies, Home Care/Domiciliary	High	Medium/High – Depends on workers taking action

11.19 Finding the Contractors

11.20 There are several ways to find who runs a contract within a Local Authority.

1. Local Knowledge

11.21 Local reps or branch activists in Local Government will likely have a rough idea of who provides what services in their local councils are outsourced. Whether it's by looking at the Hi-Vis jackets of Bin Workers, Parking Agents or Grounds Maintenance

or having represented members in those services. They may have even sat on the TUPE consultation.

2. Internet Search

- 11.22 Often Councils or Contractors will put out a press release regarding their new partnerships. If you search the “Local Authority Name + Service + Contract” something may crop up.

3. Government Contract Finder website

UK	https://www.gov.uk/contracts-finder
Scotland	https://www.publiccontractsscotland.gov.uk/search/search_mainpage.aspx
Wales	https://www.sell2wales.gov.wales/
Northern Ireland	https://e-sourcingni.ukp.app.jaggaer.com/web/login.shtml

- 11.23 The UK wide contracts finder will include awarded contract information for all the regions and nations in the UK for contracts valued over £12,000.
- 11.24 Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own dedicated websites for Public Sector Procurement. Some of these are just for potential suppliers and contractors. Some will have awarded contract info.

12. Devolution and Reorganisation of Local Authorities

- 12.1 There is an ongoing issue of local authority reorganisation in England, with neighbouring authorities merging or sharing more services.
- 12.2 Any reorganisation is an opportunity for us to make use of our access to speak to our members. We have a vital role to play in helping our members mobilise against any negative proposals or changes. There is a real threat that current bargaining units, good membership bases, and reps facility time is at risk with these changes. It is essential that areas affected are mapped and engaged in the process.

13. Skills and New Technology

- 13.1 An increasing concern for our members is the encroachment of and uncertainty with Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems within the public sector. Our local government membership has for over decade, been subject to redundancy and squeezing of budgets, it is only natural that there would be trepidation with new technology that has seen other jobs being replaced across the economy.

- 13.2 Members are concerned that functions such as rostering, resource planning, welfare assessments, customer service interactions, and HR processes will increasingly be carried out by AI or machine learning affecting those who have those tasks in their job roles. Members are also concerned that some employers are implementing these technologies without proper consultation with trade unions, nor with enough concern for GDPR.
- 13.3 A fear is that without the right checks and balances or scrutiny over which systems are employed, there is a heightened risk of bias, reduction in service quality, undermining professional judgement, intensifying workloads, and deterioration of terms and conditions for the remaining workforce.
- 13.4 GMB members in local government must have a say on the future of their work. Technology should enhance and not replace the human workforce. Our members must be informed on how these systems work and have the right to challenge 'automated' decisions. Local Government, and many more public services depend on human empathy, experience and democratic oversight, which our members believe cannot be replicated by automation or AI.
- 13.5 AI and automation must work for workers and communities, not against them GMB will always demand transparency, accountability, and negotiation at every stage of the digital transformation. (Motion 165)

14. Chapter Two: Services, Housing and Public Spaces

- 14.1 Undoubtably the largest and most complex services to deliver are Adult Social Care, Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provisions, and housing. The people who work in these services take care of some of the most vulnerable members of our communities, and their sustainability should concern us all.
- 14.2 **Adult Social Care and SEND**
- 14.3 Adult Social Care, and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provisions are delivered in large parts through local government.
- 14.4 GMB has publicly stated that the billions in funding promised to mainstream schools in England to make them more inclusive for SEND pupils is very welcome.

However, we cannot deliver an inclusive approach if opportunities for training and development only extend to headteachers and teaching staff. GMB members who are school support staff play a crucial role in SEND provision and must be included in any skills or workforce strategy.

- 14.5 Local authorities will see an additional £4.6bn in 2028-29 for Adult Social Care. The ambition is to simplify the funding for local authorities to distribute where it is needed most. One of the most important priorities of the government for GMB is the impact this will have on the workforce who deliver care – we all want skilled workers delivering the care our loved ones deserve, but those workers also need to be paid and supported properly for the quality we expect. The Fair Pay Agreement which will establish the Adult Social Care Negotiating Body must deliver these decent terms and conditions for GMB members working within local authorities and their partners.
- 14.6 If services like this are valued and delivered properly communities will feel safer and better taken care of.

15. House Building

- 15.1 It is true that 1.3 million households are on local authority waiting lists for social housing and GMB members make the bricks that can help build them. Fewer people may be able to afford to live in the social homes that will be built under this Labour Government and its plans to support council housebuilding does not go into detail. Meanwhile rising energy costs have increased the price of construction materials.
- 15.2 It is longstanding GMB policy for there to be more council built and maintained housing. We want to see future homes being built by directly employed GMB members, using building materials manufactured by GMB members, and managed by GMB members through housing authorities.
- 15.3 The severe shortage of social housing across the UK and the increasing reliance on hotels to accommodate vulnerable homeless individuals and families, often leads to placing people outside their local authority areas.
- 15.4 GMB believes that hotels are wholly inappropriate accommodation for vulnerable people, that out-of-area placements disrupt employment, healthcare, and family

support networks, and that this represents a false economy with public funds diverted into costly private provision. (M296)

- 15.5 The private sector has utterly failed in addressing the demand for social and truly affordable housing and in turn has created a booming rental market for slum landlords. Increasingly, to be successful and wealthy in the UK, you don't need to work, rather, earn vast amounts from passive income through landlordism. As wages have not kept up with the inflation of rents, the young, and working classes have been trapped in housing where the rent can take up a significant proportion of their income. Office of National Statistics (ONS) showed that in 2024 tenants across the country were paying on average 36% of their income on rent, with that number rising to over 41% in London.¹
- 15.6 The lack of affordable housing, for both renting and buying, has been a significant contributing factor to community division. We are mired in debates about who is worthy for housing, fuelled particularly by the right-wing press, and political forces.
- 15.7 The research group Common Wealth has determined that the 1.9 million council homes sold through Right to Buy since 1980, is now worth £430bn. Most councils were required to sell these homes at a discounted price averaging 44%. If councils had sold at market value of the times, they should have been in receipt of £91bn (£184bn in 2024) in cash terms, rather than what they did receive; £51bn (£108bn). **They also estimate that “780,000 council homes worth £176bn are estimated to have now entered England’s private rental sector via Right to Buy.”²**
- 15.8 This policy accelerated by Hesletine under Thatcher’s Government has proven to be another layer of asset stripping away from our national wealth, into the hands of the few.
- 15.9 Council housing has provided safe and healthy homes for the working classes, and we must campaign for this again. It is imperative that this work is delivered by a directly employed workforce through local authorities, to build and maintain the housing stock.
- 15.10 Our members want construction and maintenance work back in house that supports fair pay, secure employment, and union recognition. We believe that councils with strong Direct Labour Organisations are better equipped to meet housing needs, maintain public buildings, and deliver climate resilient infrastructure.

- 15.11 We have a brick manufacturing industry, employing thousands of GMB members, that has a domestic supply ready (with significant reductions in carbon emitting and energy intensive production methods) to build a new wave of housing.
- 15.12 We will use our influence with the current Labour Government nationally to press the matter with the relevant departments, for this programme of works – for decent council housing, for direct labour, and for UK manufactured materials, seizing the opportunities that will come through initiatives such as the new towns' projects.
- 15.13 In the meantime, we need to consolidate our membership in workforces that already carry out this kind of work. We need to map where contracts may be up for tender, so we can make the case that these workers are better off directly employed. None of this is achievable without the workforce in GMB membership – organising, recruiting, and strengthening union presence within newly established or existing in-house construction teams. (Motion 226)

16. Public Spaces

- 16.1 Having decent public spaces, particularly those which offer communities the opportunities exercise, play, and gather. GMB has done several Freedom of Information request campaigns to understand the rate of decline of such spaces, particularly with regards to swimming pools and football pitches.
- 16.2 Our research found that 500 public swimming pools have closed since 2010³ with nearly half of the closures occurring in the last 5 years, with council-owned facilities hit the most. This is the brutal edge of Austerity and has led to fewer young people learning to swim or being confident swimmers. This puts many people in danger of drowning if in water and simply discourages healthy activities.
- 16.3 GMB has also found that the UK has lost almost 1000 local authority owned or operated football pitches⁴ between 2010 and 2024, with Scotland suffering the most losses. GMB members are also concerned that Sport England might be removed as a statutory consultee for planning applications before a playing field is built on. We will ensure to use our influence to make sure that there is a balance between the much needed housing development and community and sport facilities. (M258)
- 16.4 **Policy asks**

- Decent council house building and maintenance through direct labour, using materials made locally
- Preservation of playing fields and public spaces for the health of our communities

17. Chapter Three: Tax and Spending

- 17.1 There are going to be changes to how Council Tax is collected in England, and in other parts of the UK (namely Scotland and Cornwall), there will be second home taxes coming into effect to combat housing shortages.
- 17.2 GMB has long criticised how Council Tax rates have been applied, and due to them not being updated since 1991 we are now in a situation where property bandings are so outdated that higher value properties do not pay what they should be if the rates had kept up with the market. Our position will always be that those with the broadest shoulders must their fair share, and certainly more than they are currently required to.
- 17.3 We have also been highly critical of the way council tax debt is collected, which has been the most dangerous debt to find yourself in. We welcome the recent changes to council tax from the Labour Government, making council tax debt far less pernicious and ensuring that households have more debt advice support. This is the first major change to council tax in 30 years. At the time of writing, GMB is conducting a Freedom of Information campaign to ascertain how many people are in this debt, and how much councils are owed. We are expecting the number of both debtors and the debt owed to be huge and show how much of a deficit councils have got into from uncollected council tax. In addition, there needs to be an overhaul of the banding altogether.
- 17.4 The new High Value Council Tax Scheme, better known as the 'mansion tax' (where properties worth over £2 million) is expected to raise £430 million to be redistributed throughout local governments. It is a welcome step, particularly for redistributing wealth from areas of the country with higher land value like London and the Southeast, but not a silver bullet for local government finances.
- 17.5 Business Rates also need to be reformed to ensure that our high streets get a fair chance of survival and do not pay proportionally more than global mega online retailers such as Amazon. There is an outdated tax system which favours online retailers over traditional brick and mortar shops.

- 17.6 GMB research conducted in 2022 found that the number of RIDDOR reports increased at Amazon warehouses across the country rose by 27% over the COVID year⁵. Investigating these incidents comes as an expense on the local authority for a multi-trillion-dollar company that has only ever benefitted from low taxation and the facilities of local authorities.
- 17.7 Currently Business Rates get collected by central government and redistributed back to councils, but we believe that reform is needed so that businesses pay more directly into the local authorities, so they have more ability to effect and regenerate local high streets and also pay for our vital services.
- 17.8 Policy asks
- Reforms to tax collection by council tax and business rates need to continue to be fairer and more redistributive

18. Chapter Four: How GMB Rebuilds

- 18.1 GMB@Work remains the central tenet of how we organise workers. Our philosophy, and strategy, for the last 20 years has been;
1. The workplace is the building block of GMB
 2. Each workplace should be organised as if a ballot for action was due
 3. The employer has different interests than GMB members
 4. It is the process of industrial relations that builds GMB, not the result
 5. People are strongest when they organise themselves.
- 18.2 We start in the workplace, building strong and unified membership led by teams of confident reps who complement each other's skills. This entire report has focused on what GMB must do so we can make the changes we want to see in local government, and the services they deliver to our communities.

19. Growing our membership (organising around union density)

- 19.1 We are fortunate to have a presence in almost every authority in the country and therefore have access to workers who are not yet in a union. We must take the opportunity to consolidate our membership so that we get to levels of density and organisation to really make a difference, to all the issues we have laid out throughout this report. We have said from the outset that we cannot make any serious demands without a strong and engaged membership.

- 19.2 This requires GMB (from activist to regions) to map and target our membership for growth opportunities. This is not limited to numbers on a spreadsheet – although this is an imperative first step – it is about understanding the issues of our members, and the workforce we want to bring into GMB, and organise.
- 19.3 Where do our members work; how do they work; how are they best communicated with; who are they most influenced by? These are crucial questions we need to remember to ask ourselves when we head out to organise.
- 19.4 The previous section on outsourcing detailed how contracted out services can be mapped. Mapping all directly employed staff and understanding the issues these members face is crucial for union building within our local government membership.
- 19.5 Our challenge is to ensure that our activists know who their members are, know where they work, and how to ensure that as many of their colleagues are in GMB as possible.

20. Growing our activist base

- 20.1 In comparing the statistical reports on trade union facility time in the public sector, it appears that between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2025, the total number of trade union representatives with facility time (across all trade unions recognised in the sector) has reduced from 7,577 to 4,593 – a reduction of 40%.⁶
- 20.2 Headcount of local government employees has decreased in this time, as well as the continuation of outsourcing, and privatisation through school academisation, however these figures should concern us.
- 20.3 This dataset from the gov.uk website gives a breakdown of the headcount, full time equivalent posts, the estimated hours of facility time, and the costs to every council in the country. It has the potential to help activists and regions see where we need to grow our rep numbers, and where there may be risks to cuts, particularly in areas where there are hostile political forces in charge. Regions and current local government activists will need to assess where we need strengthening.

- 20.4 There is no guarantee that facility time will stay the same or improve. Facility time must be used effectively to ensure we are speaking to our members as well as time for local representations.
- 20.5 The political landscape of local government has been upended in these most recent elections. This new landscape could impact facility time and trade union participation in decision making. Parties without a strong understanding of trade unions, and those who are outright hostile to our existence could make moves to remove us, which is why it is important now more than ever to build our activist base.
- 20.6 Local Government activists should also have more avenues to speak to each other; about what is working for organising, and winning campaigns. The National Public Services Section has begun running sector specific summits, bringing activists together from across the country to meet, exchange ideas, and ultimately set priorities for the sector.
- 20.7 A GMB rep doesn't have to be great at doing all the things that is needed in union building. Some reps are fantastic representatives for their colleagues, some are fantastic campaigners, some are fantastic strategists and coordinators. We must develop our activists to play to each other's strengths, rather than asking one person to be all things

21. Campaigning – always having a coherent claim on the table

- 21.1 Whilst National Bargaining over pay and spinal points is important for consistency over conditions across the country, and a sense of sector wide unity, it is local campaigning that solidifies our membership. It has been proven by GMB in Northern Ireland that there are ways and means to campaign on local issues even within national agreements such as the application of Part 3 of the NJC. We should not assume to know what our members priorities are, understanding that requires us to ask them – and ask what they are willing to do to achieve it.

22. Ballot Readiness and Targeted Action

- 22.1 We must be confident in our ability to exert our industrial strength. Having members ready, engaged, and organised to where we can take members out on strike is vital to our efforts in rebuilding local government.

- 22.2 This means that branches, or workplace organisers and regions need to keep on top of decent data on our membership. Knowing who and where our members are is essential to us being able to deliver ballots over the thresholds we still have.
- 22.3 We can also be targeted in where we have our greatest strength, knowing which membership groups are the most engaged. Ensuring that they have the best kept records can help us get to the level of turnout we need to make the most impact.
- 22.4 This means contact details, job titles, departments, how our members pay, all need to be up to date, ahead of any campaigning. It is a job that needs relative constant upkeep, and an understanding of where our biggest impact will be.
- 22.5 Workplace ballots are essential to carry out to ensure we are making good contact rates, that members feel engaged, and that there is encouragement to vote through a proper discussion and delivery of the issue, with a ballot box ready. It is policy to carry out workplace ballots as the default in many regions, with other means in order to capture remaining votes.
- 22.6 Southern Region has recently (May 2026) targeted school members in Merton and Greenwich to take on strike over inner-London weighting payments, hoping to make an impact across their boroughs. This was determined by understanding where our most active base of members is, and the most impact we can have on the service. This dispute has grown the membership in Merton to GMB now having a density of over 70%, making us an incredible voice within the local authority.
- 22.7 In Scotland we targeted action at the **Clyde Tunnel**, involving only **eight GMB members**, but impacting **around 100,000 vehicles per day**. This action was instrumental in forcing council leaders back into meaningful negotiations.
- 22.8 There are still ballot thresholds and administrative hurdles to take action that is 'legal' in front of a judge, which makes this exercise even more crucial to carry out, and for us to be more strategic in where we take action.

23. Chapter 5. Conclusions

- 23.1 This report has laid out the value of Local Government services, and the workers – our members – who deliver them. We believe that despite the broader economic and political climate the UK finds itself in, GMB has the capability to make work better for this workforce, and the lives of the people they serve.

- 23.2 There is no guarantee that a particular stripe of politics is the answer, the only people who can make real differences to work are those who are part of an active and engaged union – GMB has proven time and again that it can be that union.
- 23.3 The pay and conditions, and future work of our members is dependent on our local workplace organisation.

References

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² <https://www.common-wealth.org/publications/wrong-to-sell> (August 2025)

³ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/swimming-pool-closing-uk-london-b2813768.html>

⁴ <https://www.gmb.org.uk/news/uk-loses-almost-1,000-public-football-pitches-on-eve-of-euro-championships>

⁵ <https://www.gmb.org.uk/news/more-1000-serious-injuries-reported-amazon-sites>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/public-sector-trade-union-facility-time-data>