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voices

UNISON
Cymru



Introduction

Darron Dupre

Head of Local Government, UNISON Cymru

Council funding in Wales is at a profound crossroads, the outcome of which will determine whether services, service users, carers, staff and a plethora of organisations that make Wales a better and kinder place to live will be supported and provided for in the future.

Twenty Five Voices is the real, authentic words of real people from right across our great nation of Wales who have a view on how important the services provided by or funded by Welsh councils are to them. And just as importantly, how well funded support for the army of family carers, like Tilly and Chris, can make all the difference to their life too.

What is clear amongst our voices is that good local government funding matters to every person who lives in Wales.

Twenty Five Voices range from real carers and service users, to council workers, UNISON reps and council leaders, from leading not for profits CEOs to the Future Generations Commissioner and the Football Association of Wales.

I want to thank them all for so generously sharing their voice with others in this UNISON publication and for trusting us to give visibility to their opinions.

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December 2025



Cllr Anthony Hunt

Leader, Torfaen County Borough Council

I'm a Council Leader in Wales working with our fantastic local government workers to protect vital local services. We should never forget that public services are the sum total of the efforts of those who work in them, from our schools to social care, environmental and community services. Those services are the glue that holds our communities together, making communities tick and helping those in need.

They also have an essential preventative role, because as well as improving lives they help reduce demand on acute services like the NHS. Take the person who receives community meals and help to stay independent. Or the young carer supported by our services. Or the young people who benefit from our play service, or users of our libraries. Or the family who receive support and advice to help them out of debt and avoid homelessness. Or the local group helping improve physical health and mental wellbeing in their community. All of these and more are helped by local government workers – the stars in our communities.

We need to help these workers build our communities up and intervene earlier to help people avoid crisis situations. Instead austerity over the last 15 years has meant our workers are struggling to do more with less. That's why fairly funded Local Government is so important now, to build a better future for our communities – so people have the services they need to thrive.



Dr Alun Thomas

Chief Executive, Adferiad

I'm Dr Alun Thomas, Chief Executive of Adferiad, a major charity delivering services to people in all 22 counties of Wales providing support to people in relation to mental health, substance use and addictions, veterans, families and carers, and serious mental illness.

Our *Diverse Cymru* team strive to eliminate discrimination and inequality and are committed to developing a nation where every person is equal, and diversity is celebrated.

I'm in my 25th year of working with the charity, and I know through our integrated work with local authorities and health boards in Wales, never has a strong, responsive, and well-funded public service been needed more. People rarely have one challenge in life, and good quality public services are the key to ensuring all of us in Wales are supported to live our best lives, engage in and contribute to society, and to feel part of our communities.

Partnership work between charities and public services is one of the key strengths of the Welsh approach and together we provide holistic, person centred care and support. Without the appropriate level of funding, resource, and recognition of the role of the public sector we are at risk of losing one of the jewels of Welsh society.

Strong local government advocates for the local people, seeks to channel the voices of those it represents, and works to provide the wrap around framework we all need in our daily lives.

Mark Fisher

Branch Secretary,
Neath Port Talbot UNISON Branch

We require extra funding for Local Government to maintain our services, jobs and pay and grading, without this extra funding Neath Port Talbot Council like all other 21 local authorities will have to outsource services and reduce costs, which will lead to employees being made redundant, just as we need them most.

I call on Westminster to allocate extra monies to the Senedd that will allow all 22 local

authorities to remain stand-alone within their budgets. Any less could make them issue Section 188 notices, as they have done in England and they could go bust.

I also call on the Senedd to work with UNISON and the Welsh Local Government Association on a true social partnership model.

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Denise Thomas
Support Worker,
Major Charity

I've worked for over 30 years as a support worker for a major charity in adult social care. In that time, I've seen services steadily eroded by chronic underfunding. Every day I witness the difference good care can make, and the strain when services don't have enough time or resources. Staff are exhausted, services are stretched, and organisations are being forced to cut back.

We're seeing colleagues being made redundant, and many leaving for better pay in retail, which is a sign of how undervalued care work has become. We carry out highly skilled, compassionate work, yet are too

often underpaid and overlooked. Too many people are left without the care they deserve.

Social care is the backbone of the NHS, and without it, hospitals and health services simply can't cope. This isn't sustainable.

In 2026, Wales needs a better funding settlement for councils to protect jobs, value the workforce, keep services alive, and make sure care is about dignity, not just survival. The people who rely on care, and those of us who provide it, cannot wait any longer. We need action now.

Lianne Dallimore
Branch Secretary,
Caerphilly UNISON

I've worked for the local authority for over twenty years and in that time have seen some major changes in the way local government has been funded, but also in terms of expectations. The breadth of services delivered by local government is truly vast – try and think of a service not provided by your local council? It's really hard, isn't it?

Local Government is the backbone of our communities and with proper funding it can help to create high quality jobs, attract inward investment and lead the way in building resilient, inclusive and environmentally responsible communities for the future.



Sarah Williams

Equality Advisor, Equality Counts

I care about fairness and inclusion, and in my work, I focus on helping people make better decisions and create inclusive impact. I do this by shaping fairer policies, processes, and spaces in workplaces, research, and health. I believe people should feel safe to show up as they are and belong. My background includes inclusive leadership, equality standards, and national advisory roles.

Since moving from Cardiff to Pembrokeshire, I've seen and experienced how different rural life can be, and how this can affect wellbeing. Access to services, transport, and opportunities varies so widely, and that's why properly funded local government matters. Councils know their communities best, and when decisions are shaped through listening and fair consultation, funding goes where it's needed most.

A good example of this is the Pembrokeshire Period Dignity Grant, funded by Welsh Government but delivered locally. It shows how national funding works best when councils can adapt it to local needs. In our county, that includes a postal option for rural residents who can't easily reach collection points. Initiatives like this help reduce inequalities in practice and protect dignity in everyday life, where even menstruation is made to matter.



Fair and thoughtful Council decisions, from transport to toilets, help people feel confident, connected, and supported, especially in rural communities where no assumptions can be made about need.

Every decision we make now to make everyday life fairer will shape how easily future generations can live well, work, and belong. This matters even more for people with additional needs for getting around, where access and design can make the difference between isolation and inclusion.

Rachael Eagles

Chief Executive Officer,
Area 43

At Area 43, we provide counselling in schools and communities, safe and welcoming youth-led hubs, and tailored support with wellbeing, volunteering and employability.

Together, these services reach thousands of children and young people every year across Dyfed-Powys. None of this would be possible without properly funded local government. Councils are the backbone of community life and they ensure that young people can access trusted support, opportunities to grow, and a safety net when life feels overwhelming.

For us, well-funded local government is about fairness, resilience and hope, protecting vital services today and securing opportunities for future generations.

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Derek Walker

Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

As Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, I warn how the climate and nature crisis is a threat to the well-being of our children and grandchildren. Without action, we are on track for an unrecognisable future, where the choices we have before us today are taken away, or made more difficult than we could ever imagine.

Local government is on the frontline of efforts to limit climate change and restore

nature. But without proper investment, our councils will not be able to take the urgent action necessary to safeguard the planet for future generations.

The need for proper investment in public services is a point I made strongly in my Future Generations report in April 2025 available at: <https://futuregenerations.wales/cym/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Future-Generations-Report-2025.pdf>

Evelyn Williams

Social Worker

I am a Social Worker based within a Fostering Team. I have worked for my local council since September 1999, within a childcare setting working with families and children. Assessment has been an essential part of my role, and I have had the privilege of being allowed to enter people's lives at a time when they are at their most vulnerable and trusted to act on their behalf. I have been employed in my current role since January 2019, making 2025 my 26th year of employment with the council.

Upon reflection of my experiences as a child-care social worker, I think little has changed in terms of the challenges I have needed to navigate and these challenges include, insufficient timescales, unmanageable caseloads, staffing and recruitment difficulties, cuts to budgets/services, working with families in crisis to name a few.

A fully funded social care system would in my opinion be one with an emphasis on social safety nets, where support is universal and one where social workers are well compensated for the valuable work they do. Services would be tailored and adept to diverse cultures, languages, genders, sexuality and disability. It would be a system that shifts from being a reactive/crisis driven model to a proactive, preventative and rights-based approach. Support would be co-ordinated addressing all dimensions of people's lives and would not be a 'lottery' based on where you live or what class you are.

Despite the many challenges, social work remains a rewarding experience, and I continue to feel that social workers can and are making a positive difference.





Molly Fenton BCAh

I am a 23-year-old health campaigner and founder of the *'Love Your Period'* campaign, advocating for genuine youth voice to be included in the services we use in society, especially around health.

When local services are properly funded and are truly inclusive, young people have the spaces, support, and opportunities they deserve to build and belong. We have the

power to shape our own futures, to spark passion to create change.

Young people would then know that their voice really, actually, matters.

Investing in that shouldn't just be seen as good policy, but a necessary act of hope for the kind of nation we want to be for generations to come.

Tilly Fenton

Young Carer

I spent my whole teenage years looking after my sister, not going out and playing and socialising like all my other friends.

I felt very isolated and alone sometimes.

Having the funding for carers means we can all come together and do activities, making friends with people you relate to.

Having this funding would also feel very rewarding as being a young carer is challenging and it is nice to be seen.



Logan Toy

I work within Caerphilly Council within the cleansing department. My job is to ensure my community is clean, tidy and waste disposed of as it should be with my crew and colleagues.

I believe that this work, as well as the work of a number of other departments within local government, is something that will never not be needed and this needs to be reflected in the resources and funding we receive to do our jobs properly.

A properly funded local government is important to myself, and my community to ensure that the services provided by our local council are run more efficiently and at a higher standard across the board.



Cllr Jane Gebbie

Deputy Leader, Bridgend
County Borough Council

Local government in Wales is not just a service provider, it's the lifeblood of our communities. From safeguarding our most vulnerable to educating our children, keeping our streets clean, and supporting local economies, councils are the frontline of public service. Yet year after year, they're expected to do more with less, stretching budgets to breaking point while demand surges and costs soar.

This is not sustainable. It's not fair. And it's not what the people of Wales deserve.

We need a funding settlement that reflects the true value of local government, a settlement that recognises the essential role councils play in tackling poverty, inequality, and climate change.

Westminster must stop treating Welsh councils as an afterthought. Better funding isn't a luxury, it's a necessity for a just, resilient, and thriving Wales.

Investing in local government is investing in the future of our communities.

It's time to stand up, speak out, and demand the fair deal Wales deserves.

Amanda Price

Teaching Assistant

I am a teaching assistant in Ysgol Bae Baglan. I support the hearing impaired using BSL (British sign Language). I am also the ALN fundraiser. Our funding is considerably lower than previous years and we were unsuccessful in our appeal. This affects us massively as a department as we have had to change the way we organise trips, just looking for the cheapest method in a bid to keep costs down for parents or guardians.

We have a uniform bank and a prom attire section to help all those in need. Where this normally wouldn't be a council issue we always try our best to help pupils and the wider community. We live in a poor community, and we would normally supply pens and pencils etc but our budget does not allow us to do this. We have Christmas and Easter raffles, and a fund raiser in the summer which still does not cover the costs. We are low on books and other things.

More importantly we are low on staff. Some of our classes have no support because there is no money despite there being a real need for this. The classes that have support are now oversubscribed. I find that, as the fund raiser, I am asked more frequently to help raise funds. We used to have petty cash for emergencies, but this is no longer affordable.

Also, things like ingredients for cooking and equipment for the technology departments where pupils create things and take them home. We ask for a small donation to cover the cost but as you can imagine it doesn't come near to the final cost.

We have also had a lot of good staff leaving because of the low wage.



Denise Owen

Branch Secretary,
Ceredigion UNISON

As a union representative, I speak to our members every single day – people who care deeply about their jobs and their communities. They're the care workers supporting vulnerable residents, the teaching assistants making sure children get the best start in life, the refuse and cleansing teams who keep our towns and villages clean and safe. They are the beating heart of local services in Ceredigion.

I see first-hand the dedication of these workers. Many of them go the extra mile, often working under huge pressure, because they believe in what they do.

But passion alone doesn't keep services running, proper investment does.

Right now, our members are being asked to do more with less, and communities are feeling the impact.

The way Wales is funded through the Barnett formula is outdated and unfair. It doesn't reflect the real cost of delivering services in rural counties like ours. And the funding settlement passed down to local authorities simply isn't enough to meet growing pressures, especially in social care, where demand is rising and services are stretched to the limit.



When councils are underfunded, it isn't just services that suffer – it's people. The workers who deliver these services deserve fair pay, decent conditions, and the resources they need to do their jobs properly. The communities they serve deserve reliable, properly funded services that meet real needs. This is about fairness, dignity and respect. If we want strong, resilient communities in Wales, then we must invest in local government and in the workers who keep it going.

Vikki Giles
Higher Level
Teaching Assistant

I have worked in Caerphilly county's only Special School and resource centre, Trinity Fields since 2002. I started as a midday assistant moving to level 1 TA progressing to level 3 TA and during the covid pandemic I qualified as a HLTA!

I absolutely love my job and that's what brings me through the door each day because the wage is certainly no motivator. Each day I walk through the doors and the happy little faces that greet me are the reason I have stayed in my role for the length of time that I have. I'm very fortunate to work with amazing pupils and equally amazing colleagues.

Any progress that any child makes is absolutely massive, whether it be learning to zip up their coat independently or sitting a GCSE exam, they are equally as outstanding as each and I am proud to be a part of that.

As lovely as our jobs are it doesn't come without challenge and heartbreak. We work with children with very complex learning and medical needs and we are often physically challenged by children and young adults who struggle to understand the world around them.

I am not just a TA, I am a nurse, a carer, a behavioural specialist, a therapist... but regardless of the ever-increasing work load my love for the young people, and the pride I feel when they achieve, spurs me on each and every day. Cutbacks are detrimental, and in the 23 years I have worked in



school it has changed so much as a result. We have less staff but more children on roll and the needs of the children and young people are changing with the times. It's a massive concern that schools are facing and experiencing budget reductions and will result in enforced staff cuts. We don't deserve this and our children and students certainly don't.

Times are changing, the cost of living is rising. We as support staff do what we do because we are passionate and we want to help our students grow but we certainly deserve recognition for what we do, all for a wage that just about gets us through the month, leaving our own families struggling to get by. Any future with predicted cutbacks is very daunting.



Jan Davies

Chair,
UNISON Cymru Local Government Committee

Local Authority finances are under strain like never before. The pressure on council budgets is mounting, whilst the demand for services continues to rise.

Local Authorities provide essential services such as waste management, local planning, maintaining public spaces like parks and libraries, social care, public health, transport infrastructure, along with managing schools, issuing licenses, and maintaining public safety. All these services are delivered either directly by the council, in partnership with

other organisations, or by commissioning them from third parties in order to meet the specific needs of our local communities.

A high percentage of people are unaware of the level and range of the services the local Authority provides until you need them.

Local Government needs to be fully funded in order to meet the needs of the communities they serve. We cannot afford to lose any more of our services.



Gwawr Eilian

Branch Secretary,
UNISON Gwynedd, Môn a Prifysgol Bangor

As a society, we all depend on local government services. It would be very difficult, if not impossible, for us to live our daily lives without the huge variety of services they provide us.

The residents of our county deserve, and expect, the highest quality from local government and the staff they employ are doing their very best to ensure that. They take care of everyone, including our most vulnerable. But there is a cost to all of this, and if we are to employ and retain the best

staff, we must ensure that all of this is funded fairly and correctly, showing respect for those who often carry out very difficult jobs.

By funding local government correctly, we all stand to gain as a society.

Karen Garland

Care Home Worker
Newport City Council

I have worked in residential and EMI care homes since 1987. I have worked across three homes and I love looking after my clients and supporting their families.

Working for a local authority for 38 years I have seen how local authority homes support families by caring for their loved ones.

With many staff working continuously in the same environments it offers consistency and high levels of professionalism and compassion.

Some staff have looked after more than one generation of families who we have built relationships with.



NEWPORT
CITY COUNCIL

CYNGOR DINAS
CASNEWYDD

Aled Lewis

Director at the Cymru
Football Foundation

The Cymru Football Foundation (CFF) is the charitable arm of the Football Association of Wales, and has an ambitious target of establishing high-quality football facilities within every community in Wales, prioritising those who need it the most.

The CFF has been working in partnership with a number of local authorities across Wales and has already invested £20million directly into the development of facilities, with an additional £15million leveraged in partnership funding, which includes a large proportion from Local Authorities.

The CFF and FAW has also recently announced plans to create 22 local football facility plans**, working in collaboration with all 22 local authorities in Wales to identify the type of facilities required across all areas of Wales.

These plans will help prioritise investment into communities in most need to ensure children, young people and adults to have access to high-quality facilities that will lead to improved physical and mental wellbeing. It is imperative that sufficient funding is made available to develop this infrastructure.

** <https://faw.cymru/cff/news/local-football-facility-plans/>



Chris James

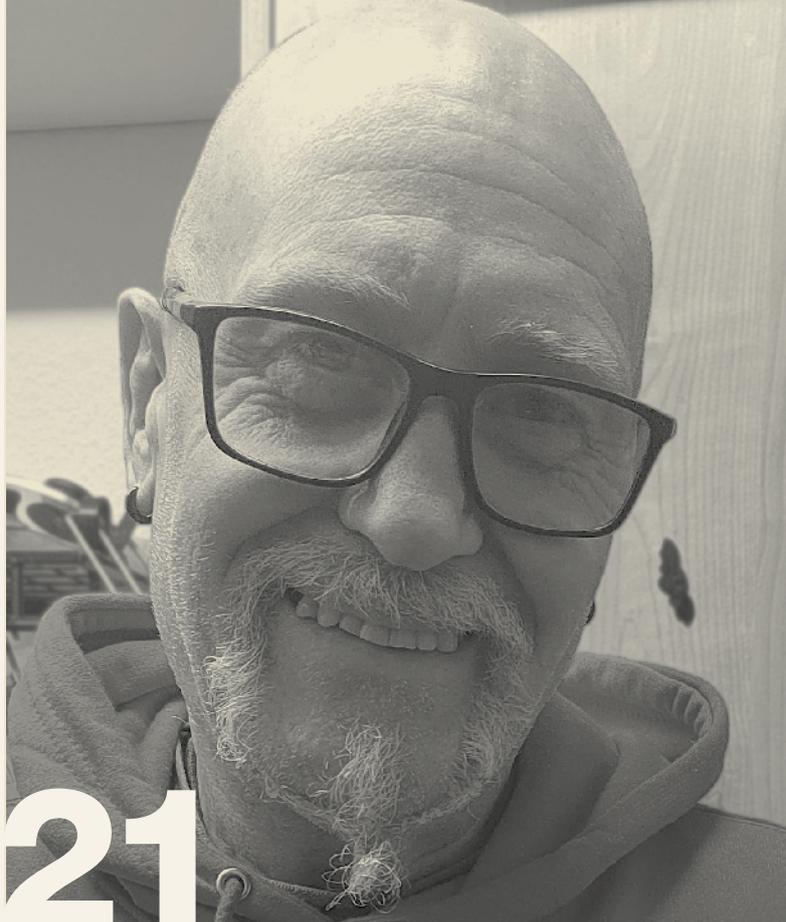
Carer, Monmouthshire

I care for a family member and I felt very isolated. That was when I contacted Monmouthshire County Council.

I was then referred to Adferiad by Zoe Fisher of Monmouthshire Council's Social Services.

I wouldn't have known about Adferiad and of the help it gives without Zoe's referral.

The carer support I have since been given by Adferiad has been incredible.



Service Users – Adferiad and Diverse Cymru

Adferiad and Diverse Cymru is a not for profit service delivery and campaigning organisation in Wales that provides over 150 services that offer tailored, specialist support for people with complex needs who are facing challenging circumstances, as well as promoting a nation without prejudice or discrimination. Local Authorities in Wales are key funders who play an integral part in helping to deliver Adferiad's mission, including Early Intervention in Psychosis (EIP) and community connector services.

"I was under the local EIP team and accessed Tŷ Amman through my occupational therapist. This referral was really crucial. I probably wouldn't have found the service without it. I've found the self-management sessions really helpful and have even run a few sessions myself, the support I've had has been invaluable" – Alex

"I had lost my job of over 20 years and was struggling due to the menopause and felt like nobody could help me. I found Adferiad through my local foodbank, finding this service has meant everything to my recovery. The support has been phenomenal, Adferiad saved me." – Andrea

Community Connector Service Users

'The staff I spoke to didn't only understand, but did not rush me.'

'This service is incredible; I went from being very low to looking forward to having a future. I am doing online courses and going to start peer mentor training after Christmas, I really can't wait.'

'I would have gone downhill fast and maybe ended up in a mental health hospital without this service.'

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John Lane

Dementia Care Worker
Newport City Council

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I have worked within Local government for over 30 years in various areas of social care.

I have seen the lengths the authorities have gone to, to ensure training and delivery of services has remained cutting edge and accessing the best and latest information based on the leading practitioners in their fields of expertise.

We continue to question and improve our service provision and to be able to provide a modern effective service to all our service users at all times.

I am a care and support worker in dementia care.



Bryan Davies

Leader of Ceredigion County Council

Here in Ceredigion, our communities are close-knit and resilient. We look out for one another, and local government services are at the heart of that. Whether it's a carer visiting someone in their home, a teacher inspiring the next generation, or a team working hard to keep our public spaces welcoming, these services make a real difference to people's lives every single day.

We have an ageing population and growing demand for care and support. I see first-hand the dedication of our care workers – people who go above and beyond, often quietly, to make sure older people can live with dignity, families get the support they need, and individuals with additional needs can live full and independent lives. That commitment deserves to be matched by fair and sustainable funding.

I also want to recognise the important role our town and community councils play. Their support in maintaining parks, green spaces, public toilets and other valued local facilities is a huge help and reflects the spirit of partnership that keeps our communities strong. But they, too, need fair funding to continue that work.

The reality is that the current funding settlement for local government in Wales simply isn't enough to meet the real pressures we face. The way funding flows into Wales through the Barnett formula is



outdated and unfair. It doesn't reflect the true costs of delivering services, particularly in rural areas like Ceredigion, or the increasing demand we see every day.

Councils are doing everything we can to protect vital services, but there's a limit to what can be achieved without proper investment. A fairer funding settlement from Welsh Government, and a serious rethink of Barnett, would give us the tools to support our communities in the way they deserve.

This isn't about party politics – it's about fairness. It's about ensuring people in Ceredigion and across Wales continue to receive the care, support and opportunities that strong local government provides. Investing in local services is investing in people, in communities, and in the future of Wales.

John Byrne
Branch Secretary,
Powys County UNISON

I have lived in Powys and worked for Powys County Council for over 21 years. Council workers support everyone in our communities from the cradle to the grave.

It seems such a short time ago that council workers were covid heroes, keeping everything working in Powys whilst so many others were able to work from home. Our fleet of gritters covered over 1,400km of roads in all hours and all weathers, none of which could have been done from behind a laptop, just like our school staff workers who turned up every day. Likewise, waste and recycling, social care, grave diggers and a multitude of other workers who manage services in a changing world and a changing climate.

There is much talk about social partnership, but many council workers in Powys feel 'out of sight, out of mind' and the poor relation for funding as a large, rural county.

We need an open, honest and transparent conversation around funding, with discussion around preventative value and not just cost.

In Powys, where we do not have a district general hospital, more needs to be done to keep people at home and cared for in their local communities, whether that is via primary care services and pharmacies or via the enormous potential of services



provided by Powys County Council, such as the incredible Community Connector service, leisure, housing, counselling and care, to name a few.

Austerity is a political choice. But in Local Government, it is also one of enormous self-harm. Council preventative services not only support residents today but can block off the need for far more expensive reactive interventions down the line such as our heavily pressured NHS Wales, the criminal justice system and economic inactivity.

These funding choices cannot continue to be kicked, like a can, down the 1,300 miles of roads in Powys. They need courageous, mature decisions and that must start now.

UNISON Cymru

With over 35,000 members, UNISON Cymru is the largest and most influential trade union within Local Government and schools in Wales.

Our members work in schools, social care, social services, finance, waste and recycling, HR, planning, engineering, democratic services, building control, procurement, environmental health, legal, housing, commissioning, fostering and adoption, libraries, museums, property, leisure, benefit support, parking and sustainability, to name just a few.

By working in partnership with employers and Welsh Government, we make sure

the needs and rights of workers in local government, and the public services they provide, are recognised, promoted and defended.

A campaigning trade union, rooted in our communities, UNISON Cymru believes that the vital local services our communities depend on and our members provide, must be delivered without profit.

We believe that these services are best delivered by high performing, well-funded, democratically accountable local authorities with exemplar employment standards that can recruit and retain the best staff needed to run them.

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