



2015
**Northern Public
Services Alliance
Manifesto**

Introduction

In 2010 public service trade unions in the North East and Cumbria recognised the likely assault on public services that could follow the general election.

Since then the Northern Public Services Alliance of trade unions in the public sector has helped highlight the attacks on services in our region while arguing for clear economic alternatives to austerity.

Over the last five years the local Public Services Alliance (PSA) coalitions have met regularly and planned activities to build alliances in the community with people who use services, to support union industrial action and to make the case for a fairer and more effective alternative to the government's extreme economic policies. We have highlighted how savage cuts have disproportionately impacted on the North East and Cumbria and in particular on women in the region. Together we have created strong alliances within communities and engaged councillors and won the support of a number of MPs.

In January 2015 one hundred campaigners met to discuss the latest attacks on public services and design the response. As part of that, this 'manifesto' was formed from workshops and discussions - with the support of trade unions representing people working in public services. Its aim is to highlight the positive alternatives to government policies of recent years. If you agree then please add your name to support the Public Services Alliance Manifesto and join with us in campaigning to strengthen public services.

Challenging Austerity

Public sector workers did not cause the global financial crisis in 2008.

Spending increased following the crash to bail out the banks not health workers, teachers or firefighters. Despite this, opponents of public services and the welfare state have consistently used this crisis to attack public services, reduce spending and to privatise. In doing so they fail to appreciate the links between public spending, decent public services and a growing economy. Public services help provide the infrastructure, workforce and society we need to collectively meet our potential.

Deep cuts to public spending are often a false economy storing up bigger problems elsewhere. The recent crisis in Accident and Emergency Departments was worsened by the cuts to adult social care. With few places to be discharged to it meant patients stayed longer in hospital than necessary and occupied a greater number of beds for longer. Reduced public investment in our region's transport infrastructure, in the skills of our workforce and the industries of tomorrow makes it less likely that private sector investment will follow. Depressed wages means greater social problems and a higher benefits bill as poverty pay triggers higher spending on housing benefit and tax credits.

The Northern Public Services Alliance supports alternatives to austerity including:

- Ensuring the richest in society pay a fairer share of their wealth whether through higher income taxes
- Taxing multi-million pound properties
- Increasing investment in sectors that will generate a greater financial return
- Taxing the banks who caused the global financial crisis
- Helping create jobs in the public and private sector that pay enough to live off
- Ending exploitative zero hours contracts within public services

Pledge One: To challenge austerity and seek economic alternatives that will create a stronger social and economic future

Opposing Privatisation and Fragmentation

Over the last five years more and more public services have been fragmented or privatised. We believe this has reduced the quality, accountability and co-ordination of these services.

Whether it's the backdoor privatisation of the NHS, so-called 'free schools', academies, the sell-off of part of the Royal Mail and the East Coast Main Line or any of the other privatised public services - we believe there is a positive alternative that puts citizens before profit.

The public sector has a positive contribution to make in promoting economic growth and inclusion. The Conservative-led government's decision to abolish One North East and Government Office North East undermined regional efforts to co-ordinate economic development.

We support alternatives to privatisation and fragmentation including:

- **Bringing outsourced services back into public ownership through 'insourcing' where possible**
- **Ensuring that public services are transparent and accountable to the people they serve and not shareholders**
- **Supporting powers to bring Royal Mail and rail back into public ownership and for bus services to be under greater local democratic control**
- **Ensure that all private sector contractors delivering public services are covered by Freedom of Information Act requirements to the same extent as public sector organisations**
- **Recognising the strategic role of the public sector in addressing inequalities and stimulating inclusive economic growth**

Pledge Two: To oppose privatisation of services and ensure they are co-ordinated to meet the public interest

Fair Pay and Decent Jobs

Falling real terms pay under the Conservative-led government has squeezed the income and living standards of many public sector workers.

Years of pay freezes, pay cuts and below inflation pay deals has reduced spending power in local economies. Since the loss of major heavy industry in the 1980s our region has had a smaller private sector. Cutting real wages in the public sector has had a disproportionately negative economic impact on our region's disposable income and economy. It has increased the number of people experiencing financial hardship, particularly among those paid less than the living wage.

There are now 56,000 fewer public sector jobs in the North East and this has increased workloads and pressure on other public sector workers. The Conservative Party's attempts to introduce regional pay to the public sector would have lowered wages in our region further and made it harder to attract good quality public sector workers from around the country.

We support policies promoting fair pay and decent jobs including:

- **Opposing regional or localised pay which would undermine and disadvantage our region's public services**
- **Challenging the crude and divisive so-called 'performance related pay' arrangements which misunderstand the co-operation and collective ethos of public services**
- **Ensuring the necessary staffing of public services to deliver safe and good quality public services**
- **Lifting workers in public services out of poverty wages by supporting the nationally recognised living wage rates and ensuring private and third sector contractors and pay the living wage**
- **Backing decent apprenticeships that provide quality employment opportunities in the public sector**
- **Ensure public sector workers are fully involved in the design and commissioning of public services through their trade unions**
- **Valuing the role of public services and public sector workers to our region's quality of life and creation of a fairer society**

Pledge Three: To support fair pay and decent jobs for all and to value the importance of public services and workers to a good society

Investing in Young People and the Future

Levels of youth unemployment have reached alarming levels and are currently the worst for 20 years when compared to the overall figures of employment.

16-24 year olds are currently three times more likely to be unemployed than others. The Prince's Trust research into the experiences of long-term unemployed young people has found how 40% have experienced serious mental health issues directly as a result of unemployment including suicidal thoughts, self-loathing and panic attacks.

University student fees have increased significantly to £9,000 per year in most cases while funding for Further and Higher Education, children's and youth services have all been slashed. While the number of apprenticeships has increased, the quality has fallen and with the minimum wage for apprentices aged 16-18 at just £2.73 per hour it can often be a route for exploitation rather than opportunity. Young workers face further discrimination in the minimum wage with under-18s only guaranteed £3.79 per hour and just £5.13 for 18-20 year olds.

We believe it is essential that there is greater funding for young people and the future and that decent and fully-funded public services have a critical role to helping support the next generation. That is why we want to see:

- **Reduction in education fees and greater help for students through increased maintenance grants and a return of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) paid directly to students to help education continue post-16**
- **Improved quality of apprenticeships with the public sector playing a leading role both as an employer and through public procurement to ensure suppliers of services demonstrate genuine commitments to apprenticeships for their workforce.**
- **Significant rises to young people's rates through the minimum wage for apprentices and the youth rates of the minimum wage.**
- **Appreciation of the long-term damage of youth unemployment and the benefits of quality support and job guarantees for young people out of work**
- **A significant increase in investment in services for young people whether directly through council-funded services or indirectly through NHS mental health services**
- **Recognition that the planned cuts from the Conservatives and Liberal Democrat coalition threaten the survival of many non-statutory public services, particularly within local government and that greater investment is needed**

Pledge Four: Investing in young people and public services for the future

Social Security and a Caring Society

Austerity policies of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat government have attacked social security and deepened division in society.

There is increased scapegoating of vulnerable groups for society's ills while the rich and powerful who caused the crash and have profited from austerity are left unchallenged. In recent years we have seen reductions on translation support for immigrants meaning they cannot access services, unproven claims of 'hospital tourism', racist 'Go Home' vans from the Home Office, unemployed and disabled people facing an inhumane sanctions programme, crude and cruel welfare reforms that have contributed to 1 million people relying on emergency food bank support in the last year.

Cuts and privatisation within health and social care have undermined caring professions with some of the most vulnerable in society losing out. 15 minute home care visits, the increase in zero hours contracts among care providers and reductions on health and care workers have all made challenging situations worse for many public service workers.

We want to see politicians:

- Offer a vocal defence of the welfare state and social security as a humane response to the challenging circumstances people experience
- End sanction targets for the unemployed and disabled
- Oppose scapegoating of the vulnerable and instead show a concerted efforts to build a more inclusive and equal society
- Support ethical frameworks for care, fully funded services with investment in the workforce including training and a living wage.
- End the unproven assertion that private sector is 'good' and public sector is 'bad' at delivering public services. Instead we want a clear shift away from a privatisation and outsourcing agenda which weakens and fragments public services and reduces the quality and accountability for citizens.
- Value and respect public service workers and the trade unions that represent them

Pledge Five: Support social security and a caring society

Conclusion

The Northern Public Services Alliance believes that we need a new direction from the government policies of recent years.

There are many ways society and the economy could be fairer and more inclusive than at present and public services play a critical role within this. The stakes for people who use, value and work for public services could not be higher. The welfare state as we know it is also under threat.

We want people seeking public office to engage and support the priorities outlined in this Northern Public Services Alliance manifesto and with each of the individual trade unions. We are alarmed at what is happening in our region and our country and want to see a fairer and more inclusive society with social and economic justice at the core of future government policies. We believe public services are a force for good and want to see political representatives understand and value their role in the years to come.



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