

Claire Haughey MSP
Convenor
Health, Social Care & Sport Committee

Dear Claire

I am writing ahead of the Committee's meeting on 27 January to highlight UNISON's concerns regarding SSI 2025/405 The Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Integration Joint Boards) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2025.

We shared these with civil servants when consulted at short notice at the beginning of December 2025, just prior to the SSI being laid before Parliament.

While we strongly support the intention of strengthening the input and participation of service users and carers in decisions around the planning, design, evaluation and improvement of services, we think the extension of voting rights raises thorny issues which are not easily resolved and have not been addressed. The SSI's accompanying Policy Note references some of these concerns but does not engage with or provide a solution to these.

However our key concerns are wider than this and include the extension of voting rights to third sector organisations.

Conflicts of interest

- There is a clear conflict of interest in third sector organisations exercising voting rights in decisions about the commissioning and procurement of services given their role as contractors.
- We are particularly concerned that the SSI opens the door to future private sector representation and voting rights on IJBs if it goes ahead. There is no logical reason to resist demands from that quarter for equal treatment given the considerable role of the private sector in adult social care and the lobbying resources at its disposal.

Local democratic accountability

It is an important principle that public services are subject to local democratic decision-making and accountable to the communities they serve via elected representatives.

- The 2014 Act undermined this principle when it provided local authority elected members with half of the voting rights on IJBs ([the 2014 Public Bodies Order](#)).
- The impact of the SSI is to further dilute local democratic input and accountability to the electorate over social care services by placing local elected representatives in a minority position on IJBs.

- We are concerned that the SSI introduces power without responsibility and blurs lines of accountability.

We think there are strong reasons why voting rights on IJBs should remain with the statutory partners who bear the duties for service provision.

Accountability

Currently there is a problem of inconsistent standards of accountability and representation across the membership of IJBs. The clarity of arrangements for local authority and trade union representatives is not matched by other communities of interest.

- UNISON raised this issue in its response to the initial 2021 consultation on a National Care Service, when we recommended that the nomination, appointment, and community accountability standards for IJB participation need to be looked at and minimum, verifiable standards for democratic representation established.
- Unless these difficult issues of representation and accountability are resolved then voting rights, as a measure, may not deliver the type of change desired by communities of interest.
- The difficulties should not be underestimated. Almost every citizen, children and adults, are users of services of one kind or another delegated to IJBs.
- We urge the Committee to investigate this as part of its scrutiny of the SSI. On whose behalf and in whose interests will voting rights be exercised? What are the mechanisms for 'representation' and 'accountability'? The Policy Note provides little reassurance on these points.

Yours sincerely

Lilian Macer
Scottish Secretary, UNISON