



# Save school crossing patrols

### When you come to the end of a lollipop... POP goes children's safety.

Some local authorities are closing or reducing school crossing patrols in a bid to cut spending. Even though the service undoubtedly saves children's lives, it is not required by law and some authorities are banking on schools themselves or volunteers to provide them.

UNISON believes that school crossing patrollers, often called lollipop people, provide a vital service to the community. Cutting their short hour low paid jobs (average £3,000 p.a.) is a false economy, especially when young lives are at stake.

### A long history of protecting school children

There are examples of school crossing patrols from a hundred years ago. In 1953 the School Crossing Patrol Act was passed and the police were required to provide patrols near schools; the responsibility later passed to councils. The Road Traffic Act 1984 requires drivers to stop at lollipop signs and to comply with the instructions of the patroller who must be in government-approved clothing. In 2001 the law was amended to allow patrols to assist adults who are crossing the road.

### Why lollipop cuts make no sense

- School crossing patrols are sited using Department for Transport guidelines based on traffic flow, speed and pedestrian numbers for identifying dangerous places near schools. That means that services are being cut at nationally recognised trouble spots.
- Government policy and that of many councils, including Transport for London support safe and healthy journeys to school; reducing car usage and the impact of the school run and promoting children's health. School crossings are essential to this policy.
- Savings will not be as great as authorities may wish. Volunteers would still need to be equipped, trained and supervised and the service administrated, with cover provided.
- A school crossing patrol is backed by law and ignoring it is an offence which carries penalties. Using volunteers as patrollers downgrades the responsibility of this skilled and potentially dangerous role. It is also unclear whether volunteers have the legal right to stop traffic.

## Campaign to save the service

There are examples already of parents, unions and communities fighting to keep particular crossings or authority-wide services from closure. There is a campaign based in the South West with a website (see below) and a Facebook group. There is also a Kids Cross Safely Campaign and a Child Accident Prevention Trust.

Any campaign will want to challenge council proposals, asking if they have carried out risk assessments or considered the impact of cutting the service in terms of child safety, traffic congestion and the environment. They should also be asked to explain how the proposals meet their general duty to promote road safety through specific measures.

The support of local MPs is very useful as they can raise the issue with the authority and in the House of Commons. Two Dorset MPs (Lib-Dem and Conservative) spoke in the House after their authority announced its intention to make school crossing patrol staff redundant. The spokesman for the government, Norman Baker, replied that it was up to councils to decide how to meet their duties, but went on to say: *I believe that she (Annette Brooke MP) has put together a compelling case, and hope that Dorset county council will reflect very carefully indeed on her remarks and those of the hon. Gentleman (Richard Drax MP).*

During the debate the government suggested that they knew of no other school crossing patrol services under threat. MPs in service-threatened areas should be asked to inform the Secretary of State for Transport, Phillip Hammond.

UNISON is collecting information on proposed cuts to school crossing patrol services. We know of campaigns in some of our branches, for example:

- **Stockport** – where 31 out of 103 patrollers are under threat and where the travel allowance has been cut.
- **South Tyneside** – where 67 out of 91 jobs are threatened as the lunchtime patrol is cut. The UNISON branch has asked for a review of high use crossings which will be lost.

Saving the school crossing patrol service is a matter for everyone. Parents have the right to ask for an assessment against national guidelines to establish crossings. They certainly have the right to question their removal. One of the ‘outs’ that councils are using is that getting children to school safely is ultimately a parental responsibility. But parents can’t stop the traffic and like to rely on someone who can.

## Add your voice

We need as many people as possible to add their voice to our campaign:

- talk to your friends, family, co-workers and neighbours
- raise your concerns with your employer, local media, and political candidates
- take the campaign to workplace or community meetings – or organise your own – we can help with materials and speakers
- visit <http://save-lollipop-people.blogspot.com/> and [www.unison.org.uk/million](http://www.unison.org.uk/million) for more info and campaign ideas
- email [education@unison.co.uk](mailto:education@unison.co.uk) and tell us what you’ve been doing

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