Public service trade unions have been taking up a wide range of issues in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic. While concerns about the health and safety of health and social care staff are to the fore, the unions want to ensure that public authorities and employers recognise the risks facing many other public service workers.

**Personal protective equipment (PPE)**
Lack of adequate PPE has been raised repeatedly by public service trade unions including:

**UNISON**:
Promises of protective equipment alone won’t keep people safe, says UNISON
Care workers put at risk by lack of face masks and basic safety kit, says UNISON
Protection equipment for care workers is essential, says UNISON

**Unite**:
Social care workers must be provided with full protective equipment during coronavirus crisis

**GMB**:
Lack of PPE ‘national crisis’ as more than 4,000 ambulance workers self isolate
Care workers left with no PPE, no childcare and poverty sick pay

**Royal College of Nursing**: Prime minister must intervene to ensure enough protective equipment for nursing staff

**Royal College of Midwives** expresses concern at supply of personal protection equipment for midwives

**Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA)** wrote to Minister for Health:

The question of PPE and health and safety is also affecting other workers, including those in waste services, as highlighted by the **Unite** trade union.

Refuse workers not being protected from coronavirus

**Staffing shortages**
This has been a long-running challenge in health and social care and has worsened significantly with the COVID-19 crisis as many workers have been infected or are self-isolating.
The **GMB** warns about the scale of the problem:
Staffing crisis looms

Three trade unions (**UNISON, RCN** and **Unite**) have negotiated a scheme covering nursing students who volunteer to be able to help their NHS colleagues where they can, be paid and have this work count towards their learning.

The impact of self-isolation and the lack of testing is also having an impact on the fire service, as raised by the **FBU**:

**Outsourcing**
The widespread use private contractors across the public services raises the question of ensuring that policies to deal with COVID-19 issues are consistent with those applied by public authorities. The **GMB** reports some progress with major contractors but highlights the risks created by outsourcing.
Coronavirus: GMB win as Medirest latest NHS firm to give full pay in self isolation
Coronavirus exposes the dangers of outsourcing in the NHS

**Civil Service**
The **PCS** union has been active in negotiating policies with the government covering the civil service and agencies and has called for more resources to help the DWP department which has faced massive surge in claims for unemployment benefit and social security payments.
Coronavirus: PCS agrees significant HR policy changes with Cabinet Office
Calls for more funding and resources for DWP
https://www.pcs.org.uk/news/calls-for-more-funding-and-resources-for-dwp

**Health and Safety Executive (HSE)**
The **PCS, Prospect** and **FDA** trade unions who represent staff at the HSE have called on it to push the government to take more steps to ensure that employers only ask essential employees to go to work

**Energy sector**
The **Prospect** trade union representing research and technical staff among others has been involved in ensuring safety in the energy industry but also highlighting concerns that the sector is not fully prepared for the impact of the crisis.

**Justice sector**
The POA prison staff union welcomed the decision to impose a lock-down across the prisons system: https://www.poauk.org.uk/index.php?press-releases&newsdetail=20200324-10_poa-praise-sensible-decision-to-lock-down-prisons

The FDA senior civil servants’ union has called for more to be done to ensure safety in the courts: https://www.fda.org.uk/home/Newsandmedia/News/Coronavirus-urgent-risk-assessments-needed-to-ensure-safety-of-courts.aspx

Model COVID-19 agreement

UNISON has drafted a model agreement for use by workplace reps. It covers procedures for staff experiencing symptoms or in a household experiencing symptoms, home working, protection measures to be implemented, procedure for staff with underlying health conditions, including disabled workers, and for pregnant workers, dealing with staff shortages, procedure for staff with caring responsibilities, protecting other staff groups and maintaining records.