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Positively Public Briefing

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Campaign News

Campaign urges major boost for Scotland's public services

UNISON Scotland is calling on the political parties in Scotland to revitalise the country's public services.

In the run-up to the Scottish elections on 1 May, the union has launched a campaign and manifesto which represents "the most comprehensive and innovative look at public service renewal Scotland has seen."

Revitalise our Public Services sets out a series of principles which need to be adopted before public services can ever be delivered successfully.

The general thrust of the manifesto is that while many Scottish politicians have accepted the need to improve the country's public services, good intent has not been matched by action.

The manifesto is based on a public service ethos; on the principles of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, openness, accountability, competence and equality.

It also deals with specifics, outlining issues that affect Scotland's public services - from health care to the police, energy and transport - and the union's solutions.

UNISON rejects the funding of public services from the private sector and calls for resources to be made available to attract the necessary staff and to allow broader service delivery.

Low pay across the public services cannot continue.

UNISON welcomes recent deals in local government and health, in which we have fought to bring the lowest paid above the £5 per hour figure for the first time.

But now UNISON and Scotland's political parties must broaden this fight to include higher and further education and our community and voluntary sector, where low pay continues to be prevalent and affects a disproportionately high number of women.

"Nursery workers, too, are badly paid for the importance of the service they deliver," added Matt Smith, UNISON's Scottish Secretary.

"It is ironic that the people who are in the frontline at the start of the education of our future generation are not recognised for the contribution they make."

Two-tier Workforce

Support for new code of practice

Private contractors, including CBI members, have come forward to voice support for the new code of practice to end the two-tier workforce.

Martyn Vesey, of the Cleaning and Support Services Association, said his members would like to see the generous "no less favourable" formula, which UNISON clinched in local government, introduced

throughout the public sector. But he added that this would only be welcomed if the public sector avoided the temptation of recovering the extra costs by cutting corners elsewhere.

The CBI members have said that having a clear floor for pay and conditions would prevent “cowboy” competitors from cutting them out of the market through reducing costs irresponsibly.

Under the new code of practice guidance published on 13 March 2003, any contract tendered after this date by a local authority commits the contractor to provide pay and conditions to their new workers that are “no less favourable” than the pay and conditions of those who transferred from the authority.

Privatisation News

Developing countries fall prey to EU under GATS

The European Union (EU) has tabled requests aimed at 109 countries, covering a wide range of sector services under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), designed to liberalise trade in services and remove “barriers” to competition in the services sector.

In various policy statements since 2000, when the liberalisation process began, the EU and the UK have assured the public that services provided in the “exercise of governmental authority” will be exempt from GATS rules. The UK government has also assured the public that ‘in the case of the least developed countries, liberalisation requests will be limited to three to five sectors, with the sectors identified being those where liberalisation is most likely to contribute to development.’

However, new evidence shows that five of the twenty-nine least developed countries targeted have received requests in more than five sectors: Angola (7), Bangladesh (6), Madagascar (6), Mozambique (6) and Tanzania (7).

Furthermore, despite the claim that liberalisation requests will be made in line with levels of development, the evidence shows that of the 29 least developed countries, 20 have been targeted on financial services liberalisation, seven on environmental services (which includes water distribution), five on tourism and seventeen on transport.

This evidence shows that the EU is targeting the world’s poorest countries and GATS commitments are likely to affect government run public services. GATS will almost certainly lead to privatisation in countries where public service systems are in operation and will remove developing countries’ ability to regulate investment in the public interest.

More general information on GATS and UNISON’s view is available on

<http://www.unison.org.uk/campaigns/gats/index.asp>

Transfer of council homes to cost extra £1.3bn

John Prescott’s plan to transfer a million council homes to private or not-for-profit social landlords will cost the taxpayer an extra £1.3bn, the National Audit Office has revealed.

The proposals, in which council tenants vote for a private landlord to take over their homes in return for renovating their properties, has attracted £11.6bn of private money.

In a report entitled *Improving Social Housing Through Transfer*, the National Audit Office reveals that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister estimates that each home transferred will cost the taxpayer £1,300 more than the cost of renovating them directly using public money.

For the full report, see www.nao.gov.uk

NHS chiefs urged to abandon salary secrecy

Sir Nigel Crisp, chief executive of the NHS, will tell chief executives of 50 NHS trusts and other health bodies to voluntarily declare their remuneration.

Senior staff will be told to reveal their salaries for 2002-3 after 50 chief executives exercised their right to withhold the information under the Data Protection Act.

The demand for more openness over salaries follows mounting concern over the size of top health managers' pay rises in recent years, which contrasts sharply with the plight of the least well-paid in the health sector.

Privatisation Problems

Air traffic rescue

The government is set to bail out the troubled National Air Traffic Services (Nats) by injecting £65m in fresh capital. Nats, which was part-privatised in July 2001 but was left heavily in debt, has also clinched a £65m deal with BAA, the UK airport group, to match the injection of fresh funds from the government. Talks are also being held with banks to reduce Nats existing bank debt from £730m to £600m.

The rescue package, to be announced by the Civil Aviation Authority, follows 18 months of embarrassment for the government, after the part-privatised Nats plunged into financial debt.

NHS PFI hospital faces closures

A leading hospital is facing closure due to blunders with the government's private finance scheme for NHS investment.

Western Eye Hospital in Paddington faces closure because of a £360m PFI scheme to build a massive hospital which has failed to provide enough space for eye services. The PFI scheme failed to take into account new design rules over the space between beds, meaning that there was insufficient room.

Leading doctors at the hospital are mounting a public campaign to save the hospital, if a review meeting due at the end of the month threatens closure.

School PFI firm's 'dirty' record

Kajima Construction Corporation has been named by Camden Council as the "preferred bidder" to finance, build and run Haverstock School for the next 27 years. Yet the firm has a "dirty" human rights record for employing slaves who worked in a mine the corporation ran during World War II - the relatives of the slaves have since received payment of £4.6million.

At a scrutiny commission meeting held by the Council, Roz Cullinan, anti-PFI campaigner and former parent governor at Haverstock said: "Kajima and Camden's consultants PricewaterhouseCoopers, are on a 'dirty list' of companies held by Amnesty International. They both have an office in Burma and have contracts with the military dictatorship there."

She also criticised Kajima's bid, saying "Ofsted have said the school has atrocious sports facilities." Other critics have reaffirmed this view. Deputy leader Councillor Phil Turner raised concerns about Kajima's bid which had fewer sports facilities than the other three on offer.

Councillor Andrew Mennear said: "Kajima's appointment was a disaster for the council. It would not have been hard for the council to find out about Kajima's past."

Speaking on the choice of construction firm, the Assistant Education Director, Yvette Stanley, told the meeting: "Under the law governing PFI contracts it is not lawful for councils to take non-commercial information into account when selecting bidders. We would not have considered the previous trading relationships of any consortia or business bidding for the contract." She further added that:

"Investigating the parent company, or other branches of the same company was off limits. The choice of contract must be based on the bid itself. We had no doubt in our minds that Kajima was considerably better than the other two."

Labour Councillor Raj Chad concurred with Yvette Stanley's view. He said: "It is not in our power to look into the ethical past of a company. It is with great regret that we cannot act unlawfully. This legal nonsense is indicative of PFI schemes."

Good Practice

NHS gets clean bill of health

A recent report by the NHS Modernisation Board, shows that while the NHS is facing major challenges in meeting government targets and public expectation, significant progress has been achieved over the past three years.

The report shows big progress in cutting waiting lists. There was a 61% fall in the number waiting more than 12 months for inpatient treatment, and almost none waited more than 15 months.

Deaths from cancer and heart disease are falling and waiting times are shortening. For example, in specialities such as heart disease, good progress has been made and the numbers waiting for more than 6 months have come down by 75% since 2000.

The report also commented on new innovative working practices adopted by the NHS, which have helped to bring about significant changes, particularly in the past year. There is now an increase in staff and beds, a fall in the number of operations cancelled on the day and a big increase in patient choice.

Curing the health service – what has been achieved:

- Heart disease deaths down by 14% since 1997
- Cancer deaths in under-75s down 6.5% in three years
- Nurses increased by 4.3%
- Consultants increased by 5.7%
- 12 month-plus waits down 61%
- 84% of patients seen by GP within two working days

New Report

Foundation Hospitals and the NHS Plan

A new UNISON report *Foundation Hospitals and the NHS Plan* examines the problems with Foundation Hospitals and sets out the consequences of the government's market-based policies in the NHS for quality of care and equality of access. In particular, the report highlights the following concerns:

- The freedoms to set wage levels may lead to Foundation Trusts drawing scarce staff away from other hospitals
- The government's proposed framework will reintroduce damaging competition into the NHS and repeat many of the mistakes of the previous internal market
- Foundation Trusts will lead to increased charging and will encourage further private sector involvement in the NHS
- Foundation Hospitals will undermine the provision of an integrated and planned health service and will reinforce inequities in access to health care

Foundation Hospitals will have an extremely negative impact on the NHS and on staff. UNISON will be continuing its campaign against the introduction of Foundation Hospitals.

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www.unison.org.uk/resources/publicity.asp

If your branch is registered with Communications for telephone ordering, you can just phone 08701 555568 to order direct.

Internet Link of the Month- www.catalystforum.org.uk

Catalyst is the new campaigning think tank for the labour movement and the left, committed to developing and promoting practical policies for the redistribution of wealth, power and opportunity. Catalyst recently produced a working paper on Foundation Hospitals entitled *Reconciling Equity and Choice?* You can find out more information at www.catalystforum.org.uk/pubs/pub9.html

For further information on privatisation and campaigning against it go to www.unison.org.uk/positivelypublic

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