



# briefing

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## Campaign News

### No time to cut public services

Last month's Budget revealed the damage done to our economy and our public finances by the greed and irresponsibility of the City speculators.

The government resisted calls from some to bring in immediate spending cuts, and directed some additional resources in key areas such as employment services. But many vital services remain woefully under-funded and under-staffed in the face of rising social needs.

Most worryingly the Chancellor pencilled in spending plans for 2011 onwards which could amount to real cuts to public services year after year.

One mechanism for achieving this was set out in the accompanying Efficiency Programme, which requires all public sector organisations with more than 1000 staff to carry out reviews of their "back office" systems with a view to making greater use of outsourcing and shared services. Shares in outsourcing specialists Serco and Capita leapt in value on budget day.

In coming months UNISON will be campaigning for a fairer society that puts social justice and public services before profits and tax cuts for the few.

For more information and to get involved visit [http://www.unison.org.uk/activists/pages\\_view.asp?did=8425](http://www.unison.org.uk/activists/pages_view.asp?did=8425)

### Positively Public facts of the month!!

The average household currently receives benefits and public services worth more than **£10,500** every year.

Most households **gain more** from public spending on benefits and services than they pay in tax.

Public spending cuts hit the poorest hardest – reducing the living standards of the bottom fifth by **ten times** as much as those of the top fifth.

*Source: Office for National Statistics*

### Campaigning for public libraries

UNISON is stepping up its campaigning for high quality, well funded, publicly run library services.

In Calderdale the local government branch is campaigning with local users and community groups against plans to demolish the Central Library, which provides lending and reference services, community meeting rooms and archive facilities.

And in the Wirral a vocal campaign against plans to close eleven libraries has resulted in the Culture Secretary ordering a government investigation into the effect the closures would have on local services.

Meanwhile at Westminster the union will be taking its message to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Libraries, which is conducting an inquiry into the state of library services in England.

More information on campaigning for libraries is at <http://www.unison.org.uk/localgov/library.asp>



## Park users support local employees

Park users and the local UNISON branch are highlighting the role of park patrols in Trafford.

The council has ended the regular patrols previously carried out by local authority staff. But parks' Friends groups say this has led to increased problems with broken glass, dog fouling and vandalism. UNISON branch secretary Paul McDermot agrees: "The parks are now filled with litter over the weekends... Our concerns are for the health and safety of the public".

Opposition Labour councillors are calling for a rethink. "Our parks are valued by local residents and are extensively used by families, bowlers, community groups, walkers and so forth" says Councillor Jane Baugh. "They should be clean, safe, well presented and a welcoming environment for users."

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## Protest against school closure

UNISON in Leicester is organising a local campaign against the City Council's plans to close Riverside Business and Enterprise College.

"The forecast is for many more pupils in Leicester in the next few years", said branch secretary Gary Garner. "They'll just end up having to build a new school". 91 UNISON members work at the college.

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## Protecting meat hygiene standards

UNISON members are writing to candidates in next month's elections to the European Parliament asking them to commit to supporting the essential work of public meat hygiene inspectors

The UK Food Standards Agency is trying to change European regulations to cut costs and allow self-regulation of abattoirs by the meat industry.

Anyone can download a model letter and full list of candidates from <http://tinyurl.com/p9bngc>

## Outsourcing plans postponed

Essex County Council has postponed and possibly scaled back privatisation plans which have been vigorously opposed by UNISON (see last month's Briefing).

A final decision on the plans has been postponed till after the June elections. And there are indications of a retreat from initial proposals to privatise "any or all of the council's services" in a deal worth up to £5.4bn. "What we now appear to be facing is a more limited exercise in which a commercial partner will be invited to advise on the configuration and running of back-office services", said UNISON branch secretary Mick Mahoney.

Meanwhile in Norfolk the finalisation of a deal to transfer Breckland Council's planning and building control department to Capita has been postponed to settle "outstanding contractual matters". Fifty council workers were due to be transferred under the deal.

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## Call for more hospital cleaners

UNISON's campaign for cleaner and safer hospitals continues.

A new report argues that contracting out of cleaning services has a severe impact on the quality of services and the incidence of infections like MRSA. Among evidence it highlights is the Health Commission's review which found that outsourced cleaning services were of poorer quality compared to in-house services.

Karen Jennings, UNISON Head of Health, said: "There has been genuine progress in cutting hospital acquired infections but it is time for the government to raise the bar on hospital cleaning by employing more cleaners. As the report makes clear, a properly resourced in-house cleaning service would make a real contribution to infection control."

You can download the report from here: <http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/14564.pdf>

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## Privatisation News

### Treasury announces PFI review

The Treasury is to undertake a six-month review of the private finance initiative (PFI).

The PFI programme has been hit by the credit crunch, exposing capital projects such as schools and hospital building programmes to the failures of the market. This has forced the government to bail out £13bn of PFI projects, which had stalled or were having problems raising private finance.

UNISON has campaigned against PFI due to its high costs, poor value for money and inflexibility. UNISON will soon be publishing a new report which outlines our proposals to replace PFI with a publicly run and funded set of building programmes.

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### Scottish Water buys out PFI plants

Scottish Water is considering buying out nine PFI contracts inherited from other quangos when it was set up in 2002. The public body has borrowing facilities which means it could “acquire any underperforming PFI contracts that may be available”.

SNP MSP John Wilson said “There should be no hesitation in taking PFI contracts in-house when it is in the public interest and there is value for money.”

Dave Watson, UNISON’s Scottish organiser, said: “This confirms our long-standing view that these PFI contracts should have been funded through conventional procurement methods. The problem with buy-outs is the consortia has you over a barrel.”

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### Failed PFI scheme costs £13m

A failed plan to sell and lease back government office buildings in Northern Ireland will cost taxpayers almost £13m. The scheme was abandoned when falling property prices cut into expected profits. But millions had already been spent on lawyers and consultants.

### Liverpool-BT deal investigated

A joint venture between Liverpool Council and BT has been investigated after fears of poor value for money.

The deal began in 2001 with customer services but expanded to take in IT, HR, and revenue and benefits, reaching an annual cost of £78m. The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) raised concerns about the contract and the costs of terminating it.

More concerns were raised by revelations that thousands of calls to the Careline service were going unanswered, putting vulnerable children and adults at risk. A local MP said it should be taken back in-house.

Deputy Labour leader Paul Brant said council officers had “failed to properly manage this contract”.

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### Stoke-on-Trent SSP under fire

City Councillors at Stoke on Trent have attacked attempts to rush through a major privatisation.

The Strategic Services Partnership (SSP) is worth £250m over 10 years. The transfer of 800 workers, originally to have been staged over two years, will now take place by next June.

Opposition councillors are concerned at the absence of safeguards if the partnership doesn’t deliver. UNISON branch secretary Colin Watson warned the council would not have enough time between stages “to review the process and make sure it was working”, leaving it in a “sink-or-swim position”.

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### Buckinghamshire homecare targeted

Buckinghamshire County Council is considering proposals to externalise all its homecare services.

Need for care has risen 46% over the past four years, much of which has been met by agencies. According to an official report the in-house service “receives high levels of user satisfaction and provides high quality care”, but private providers have “cheaper unit costs”.

## Academies – a crisis in leadership?

The government's flagship academy school initiative has come under the spotlight again.

A national survey, funded by the government, found that 11 out of 27 academies polled across the country had seen a change in leadership, "often within the first 12 months of opening".

Academies are semi-independent state funded schools sponsored by wealthy individuals or organisations. They were introduced to turn around failing schools in deprived areas but have been heavily criticised over educational attainment and failing to engage with neighbouring local communities.

Critics have warned that sponsors were treating headteachers like "football managers" by putting them under excessive pressure to achieve instant results. In the past 3 months two heads have quit flagship London schools in Walthamstow and Paddington.

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## Good Practice

### NHS workers delivering improvement

New data from the Office for National Statistics shows value for money in the NHS is improving. A pound of public money put into the NHS gets turned into more and better treatment every year.

There is also good news from a new survey showing a sharp improvement in public satisfaction with the NHS in London. The phone poll by Ipsos MORI for NHS London of around 3,000 residents showed 79% strongly agreed or tended to agree that the NHS in London provided them with a good service. That's an increase of 11% from 68% when a similar poll was carried out for the strategic health authority in 2006.

But the latest survey of NHS staff shows that although 90% feel they make a difference to patients, they don't have enough time or people to do their jobs properly – with 66% working overtime.

## Reports

### BSF – value for money?

A National Audit Office (NAO) report on the government's building schools for the future programme (BSF), raises questions about whether the programme can achieve value for money.

The programme aims to refurbish or rebuild 3,500 English secondary schools over 15 years by 2020 through a combination of traditional procurement and private finance. But the report finds that:

- Costs have soared by about 23% to £55bn
- Local Education Partnerships (LEPs) - joint ventures between public and private partners - which have to be set up for BSF projects have proved very expensive and costly to run.
- The programme has been beset by delays. By 2008 only 42 out of a planned 200 schools had been delivered.

You can download the report from: [http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/0809/schools\\_for\\_the\\_future.aspx](http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/0809/schools_for_the_future.aspx)

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### Transforming Community Services: Social Enterprises

UNISON has published a Fact Sheet on social enterprises to support branches in dealing with the Transforming Community Services programme. It outlines the impact on staff who are transferred to social enterprises, including risks to pensions, NHS benefits, job security and NHS terms and conditions.

You can download the Fact Sheet from: <http://www.unison.org.uk/file/A8542.pdf>

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### SEND US YOUR STORIES!!

We want to hear from you about what's happening in your area – new campaigns, successes to celebrate, problems to highlight. Contact the team on **020 7551 1759** or email [Positivelypublic@unison.co.uk](mailto:Positivelypublic@unison.co.uk)

[www.unison.org.uk/positivelypublic](http://www.unison.org.uk/positivelypublic)