



# briefing

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## Campaign News

### Stop health privatisation, says UNISON

Dave Prentis, UNISON general secretary, led the NHS Together unions in top level talks with government ministers to force a rethink on NHS privatisation.

Health Secretary Andy Burnham gave assurances that the NHS was the preferred provider and that the government was not “ideologically wedded” to the private sector. Burnham also agreed to review Department of Health guidelines that favoured the private sector’s involvement.

Meanwhile in Hull, UNISON is mobilising staff and service users against plans by the Primary Care Trust (PCT) to shift all its community services to a social enterprise company. 1,500 district nurses, health visitors and other staff would be transferred, but have not been informed or consulted. On 28 July a protest was held outside an extraordinary meeting of the PCT board, held in secret for “commercial reasons”.

As part of the union’s Million Voices for Change campaign, UNISON has published a new Factsheet, “What’s happening to the NHS?”, which outlines our insistence that NHS privatisation be halted. You can download the fact sheet from <http://www.unison.org.uk/million/resources/>

**Positively Public quote of the month!!**

*“the blanket of ‘commercial confidentiality’ ... covers no end of outsourced services ... Here is the prospect of an expanding shadow state, whose soaking-up of the government’s traditional responsibilities has not only financial benefits, but can remove troublesome matters from scrutiny.”*

**John Harris, The Guardian**

### FOI: private companies escape scrutiny

The government’s consultation on extending the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act to all bodies undertaking public services has made little progress.

The government rejected a recommendation from the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee to bring privatised public services within the scope of the Act, after heavy lobbying from the CBI.

The public service industry is now a money-maker for the private sector with an annual turnover of nearly £80bn, and increasingly, private organisations are providing a wide range of public services, including health, education, social care, tax and benefit administration, prisons and environmental services.

UNISON believes that private bodies providing public services, and therefore in receipt of taxpayers money, should be subject to the same scrutiny and accountability checks as public sector bodies. The public also has a right to know about the costs and quality of a public service, irrespective of which body is providing it.



## Schools PPP will cost taxpayers

UNISON has rejected Scottish Government claims that its school building programme represents better value for money than previous PFI/PPP projects. The union warned that taxpayers will once again be over-charged for the Scottish Futures Trust that uses the so-called Non Profit Distributing (NPD) model.

Dave Watson, UNISON's Scottish Organiser, said: "It is clear to the general public that PFI/PPP has been an immensely costly way to build new schools and hospitals. At a time of financial crisis, when the UK Government has been forced into bailing out PFI/PPP schemes, the Scottish Government should be using far less costly conventional funding for schools, as it is doing with the new South Glasgow hospitals complex."

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## Campaigning for public libraries

Swindon Council's plans to close the Old Town Library have been scrapped, following an 18-month campaign by local residents.

The council's own library review has recommended that the doors stay open, although one person will lose their job.

Meanwhile, a further report commissioned by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), mirrors the recommendations in the council's own report. The MLA report recommends to Swindon Council that the libraries at Even Swindon, Old Town and Walcot remain open. It also endorsed the proposal that a mobile library service should be provided at Gorse Hill, to provide a more visible and flexible service.

More information on Swindon is at:  
<http://www.swindon.gov.uk/libraries>

More on UNISON's library campaign is at:  
<http://www.unison.org.uk/localgov/library.asp>

## Privatisation News

### Council faces privatisation threat

Trade unions have expressed concern over Northampton Council's plans to review services, which could see all services investigated and considered for privatisation.

Last month the council announced that it planned to invite "business and other organisations" to offer their expertise and propose how they could help the council deliver better services. The first areas to be looked at will be street sweeping and rubbish collection, but eventually every service provided by the authority would be investigated to see if private companies could run them better.

Councillor Keith Davies, leader of the council's Labour Group, said: "If we outsource everything, what are we doing here as a council? There would be nothing we would be left responsible for. We would just be secretaries sorting out contracts."

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### Private firm profits from PFI scheme

Carillion has sold its 30% stake in the Renfrewshire schools PFI project, which built ten primary and secondary schools before 2008, to HSBC Infrastructure Company for £6.8m.

Carillion also maintains PFI schools in Devon which have been dogged with heating and ventilation problems. One school – the West Exe Technology College – had to spend £28,000 of their own money to fix the problems.

Carillion also manages East Leake Leisure Centre for Rushcliffe Borough Council, and recently demanded an extra £285,000 a year to keep it open. The firm could use a clause in the 25-year contract, signed in 2002, to back out of its commitment unless a deal is reached. The council is already committed to paying £352,000 a year to cover the costs of the building and building services, including cleaning and security.

## Private prisons underperforming

New evidence shows that private prisons are performing worse than those managed by the state.

The data obtained under the Freedom of Information Act by More4 News show that four of the 10 private prisons scored the second lowest rating of 2, “requiring development”, and only one above an assessment of “serious concern”.

The data also shows that there are disparities in the number of complaints upheld in private and state-run prisons. Rye Hill Prison, a private prison run by G4S, which has been heavily criticised since it opened in 2001, saw a total of 22 complaints, well above the average in both prison sectors.

The evidence contradicts the government’s claim that the greater use of private prisons has driven up standards. Despite this Serco has been awarded a £600m contract to operate two new prisons at Belmarsh West in London and Maghull in Liverpool.

## Keep transport services public

UNISON and UNITE are calling on North Somerset Council to put a stop to plans to privatise transport services, warning that outsourcing could put vulnerable young children at risk.

Drivers currently undergo vigorous testing to ensure they are capable of driving disabled young people across the region. Tests include driver training, eye sight tests, understanding the meaning of disabilities and frequent driver assessments. Unions believe the privatisation of the service will mean these stringent measures will be lost.

In a joint letter to the chief executive the unions accused the council of failing to undertake a proper consultation or a business risk assessment over outsourcing, due to take place in January 2010.

## Privatisation Problems

### Academy school – staff face redundancy

More than 15 members of staff at the Oasis Lord’s Hill Academy in Southampton face redundancy because the school attracted fewer pupils than anticipated and has been told by the government to cut its budget.

The staff affected are former employees of the LEA, who were transferred to the academy school when it opened in September last year – some had worked for the council for 20 years. They include two members of the senior teaching team, teaching assistants, mentors, technicians and IT workers.

UNISON wants the council to redeploy the staff. Regional organiser, Andy Straker, said: “The council decided to transfer these people, many of whom didn’t want to be transferred and certainly didn’t volunteer for it, out of their employment.”

## Good Practice

### UNISON “Living Library”

UNISON has launched a series of innovative “living” library events designed to boost community cohesion and highlight the value of public libraries.

People can “borrow” a person, who has a unique story to tell, instead of a book. It is hoped that the initiative will attract more people to use their libraries, as well as encourage people from different backgrounds to talk to each other.

UNISON's first living library event took place last month at Swinton Library, Salford. Further events are planned for Oldham Library on 29 September and Blackburn Library on 7 October 2009. The events will primarily take place in libraries across the North West, but may be extended into workplaces.

More information about the initiative from here:  
[www.unisonnw.org.uk/news/newsitem.asp?ID=91](http://www.unisonnw.org.uk/news/newsitem.asp?ID=91)

## How union involvement benefits NHS

A website to support trade union involvement in the health service has been launched by the NHS Social Partnership Forum (SPF), which brings together the Department of Health, NHS employers and health unions led by UNISON.

The website provides advice and materials to encourage partnership working, including details on how NHS organisations can apply for the new NHS Partnership Fund. The site also features case studies, including:

- how UNISON worked with community organisations and health trusts in West Belfast and Greater Shankill to tackle health inequalities
- how UNISON established a voice for London Ambulance Service staff in strategic discussions and the resolution of day-to-day issues
- how frontline staff at South Downs NHS Trust were involved in developing new ways of working so that more time could be spent with patients
- how unions worked with Coventry Primary Care Trust to improve information and communication flows between managers and staff
- how partnership working at Knowsley Primary Care Trust improved integrated working, skills development and staff morale
- how staff took a leading role in developing new consultation arrangements at Sandwell Mental Health and Social Care Trust
- how unions and managers found ways of saving money by reducing reliance on agency staff at Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre hospitals
- how unions at Wolverhampton City Primary Care Trust ensured staff were fully involved in reviewing routines to improve productivity
- how effective union representation at Nottinghamshire NHS Trust helped improve morale and reduce staff turnover

<http://www.socialpartnershipforum.org/Pages/home.aspx>

## Reports

### Putting the public back into PFI

A new UNISON report “Reclaiming the Initiative - putting the public back into PFI” looks at how billions of public money has become locked into financing massively expensive PFI schemes.

The report warns that the Government has committed taxpayers to a bill of more than £217bn worth of repayments between now and 2033/34 on just £64bn of PFI projects. PFI’s reliance on the private sector was supposed to give public building programmes more rigour and strength but, as the report shows, in reality it has exposed them to greater hazards and weaknesses.

The report outlines the union’s policy to replace PFI with a publicly run and funded set of building programmes, which will ensure a more efficient, more flexible and ultimately more valuable way of building schools and hospitals that we as a public need. The key elements of this reform are:

- Halt all planned new PFI projects, and replace them with publicly funded design and build schemes
- Remove soft services – such as cleaning and catering – from existing PFI deals
- Gradually bring existing PFI contracts into public ownership

You can download the report from:

<http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/18461.pdf>

### SEND US YOUR STORIES!!

Contact the Briefing editorial team on **020 7551 1759** or email **Positivelypublic@unison.co.uk**

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