



briefing

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Campaign News

Million Voices ready for action

The general election result may have been inconclusive, but one thing is clear – there was no popular support for the public service cuts that some tried to persuade us was inevitable.

Politicians of all parties offered warm words about fairness, holding the bankers to account, and protecting public services – but it will be up to us to organise and campaign if we really want to see it.

Next month the new government will publish an Emergency Budget in which it hopes to identify immediate spending cuts worth £6bn. It claims this can be done through painless “efficiency savings” but these are likely to include severe reductions in staffing and accelerated privatisation of key services.

This will offer just a foretaste of the autumn Spending Review which is expected to lay out even deeper cuts to public service funding for the next three years.

This will need to be challenged every step of the way. Luckily UNISON’s Million Voices campaign has already laid the foundations. For ideas, resources and updates visit <http://www.unison.org.uk/million/branches.php>

Positively Public quote of the month!!

“This is a staggering conflict of interest which completely undermines the Tories’ claim that the NHS would be safe in their hands.”

Liberal Democrats (before the election) on revelations that Andrew Lansley’s office was being funded by private health firm Care UK

Privatisers looking to profit from crisis

The private “public services industry” is hoping it will gain from a new wave of cost-cutting privatisation.

Before the election Carillion boss John McDonagh said he was “excited” by the prospect of cuts. Contract catering firm Compass said: “there are opportunities out there that we intend to exploit.” And Serco’s CEO noted that “central and local governments are looking harder at shared services”. Market analysts reported that “services firms so far appear to be the winner ahead of the May 6 UK election”, having “advanced over the last six weeks on hopes they will be able to capture more outsourcing revenue from a British government looking to chop costs”.

But private sector confidence took a knock when the election did not deliver the clear cuts mandate they had hoped for. The morning after the poll, investment advisors warned that the hung parliament would hit prospects for outsourcers “because of the difficult political wrangling and ethos involved in transferring management responsibility to the private sector against a back drop of tough union opposition.” Shares in Capita, Serco, Carillion and Balfour Beatty all fell.

Edinburgh privatisation challenged

UNISON has launched a campaign against “reckless” council plans to outsource services and over 3,000 jobs in Edinburgh.

The plans by Edinburgh City Council are likely to affect a wide range of services, including bin collections, street cleaning, school meals and customer services. The council has appointed external advisers to draw up more details on “alternative business models” for outsourcing services, including strategic partnerships with private firms and joint ventures.

UNISON lead negotiator Kevin Duguid, said: “The union has stressed that it is always ready to fully engage with the council on better and more efficient ways of delivering quality services. However, the refusal to seriously look at in-house options means there is no real attempt to look at improving services, just a headlong drive to privatise”.

More at www.unison-edinburgh.org.uk/citynotforsale/

Cleveland police campaign stepped up

UNISON is delivering a “Stop Cleveland Police 999 Service Privatisation” card to Teesside homes. It calls on residents to send the card to Councillor Dave McLuckie, Cleveland Policy Authority Chairman, to show their support for the campaign to stop the privatisation.

As reported in previous PP briefings, Cleveland Police has started to privatise its control room and IT functions.

The privatisation plans come at a time when an independent audit reveals that the Cleveland Police control room is the second best in the country. If the privatisation plans go ahead, up to 700 civilian staff could be transferred to the private sector.

More information about the campaign from: <http://www.unison-cpa.org.uk/outourcing.htm>

UNISON campaigning for care homes

Care homes in all parts of the UK are under threat from budget cuts and pressures to privatise, but UNISON is fighting to defend them.

In Lincolnshire the County Council plans to close the last eight public care homes for older people. UNISON members wrote to all parliamentary candidates in advance of the elections to ask for their views. Branch Secretary John Sharman says, “We all know that care is a huge challenge for the future and we all support developing services. But shutting the excellent homes that the council provides now and replacing them with private sector provision that’s run to make a profit is not the answer.”

In Carmathenshire 100 protestors marched through the streets of Llanelli in opposition to the closure of two council-run care homes in the town. 110 vulnerable people would be evicted and 110 staff would lose their jobs. UNISON’s Jeff Baker said staff were ready to occupy the care homes in order to keep them open. They were supported by Nia Griffith, Labour’s parliamentary candidate, who said “officer-driven programmes to push all sorts of services into private hands” were “not the best way forward”.

Meanwhile in Neath and Port Talbot UNISON organised a demonstration against the Council’s plans to close seven of its eight residential homes and replace them with three privately financed “super-homes”. Regular respite guest Eunice Williams, aged 89, took a lead role. UNISON’s Karen Howells said: “We are not saying that we don’t want investment or improvement, this is about keeping services public.”

In North Somerset last month UNISON members protested alongside residents and carers against council plans to shut Poppyfields residential care home for dementia sufferers. The council voted to push through the closure but campaigners now say they are looking at making a legal challenge.

A Million Voices Factsheet on care for the elderly is available at www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/18880.pdf

Privatisation News

Private firms running more GP services

An investigation by *Pulse* has revealed that private companies have won more Darzi GP-led health centre contracts than local GP practices in the latest round of tenders. *Pulse* analysed 55 contracts and found that 40% went to the private sector, compared to 24% in the previous round. Firms such as Assura, Virgin and Care UK, are expanding their role.

School meal privatisation

City of York Council has approved the appointment of ISS Facility Services to provide school meals for pupils on an initial five year contract, starting from autumn. The new firm will take over services from North Yorkshire County Council.

UNISON campaigned against the outsourcing of the school meals service. UNISON senior steward, Ben Drake, said: "We believe that the outsourcing weakens democratic control and stability of these services and the track record is not that great in terms of delivery."

UNISON also asked for assurances that transferred staff would keep their existing pay and conditions, which the council has confirmed.

Care UK wins new contract

Care UK has won a contract to run a new NHS walk-in centre and GP practice in Battersea, London. Under the new contract, Care UK will operate the health centre seven days a week and will be supported by six locally trained GPs.

The contract comes after Care UK has been under the spotlight for losing a number of NHS contracts due to poor service delivery – see previous issues of *Positively Public Briefing*.

TfL buy out underground ticketing PFI

Transport for London (TfL) has purchased the Oyster brand from TranSys Consortium for £1m. According to TfL, buying out the capital's Oyster ticketing PFI has brought about millions of pounds of savings.

The move means that: "TfL now has complete control and ownership of the Oyster brand and will be able to investigate the future potential for Oyster to be extended to new and existing technologies."

Council jobs at risk in Buckinghamshire

Plans by Buckinghamshire County Council to outsource key services could lead to job cuts.

Services including property, facilities management and ICT could be privatised if the council goes ahead with its privatisation plans. Other services, including HR and finance could be privatised too. The move to privatise is aimed at making savings to plug a major squeeze on government spending.

The decision comes after the controversial collapse of the first stage of the "Pathfinder programme" which was aimed at saving cash by sharing services between county and district councils and the fire authority.

Wokingham looks to outsource jobs

Wokingham Borough Council plans to cut 150 jobs over the next three years as part of its Transformation Programme. UNISON is concerned about the council's plans to investigate more outsourcing and shared working with other local authorities in a bid to save money.

UNISON Branch Secretary, Paul Bee, said: "There have been no discussions between the council and UNISON and as far as we are concerned we intend to robustly defend public services against privatisation through using common sense arguments."

Privatisation risk to youth services

New children's minister Tim Loughton has said privatisation will be on a Tory government's agenda. "We need to have local authorities contracting out far more to outside organisations", he said earlier this year. "Why would the world fall in if a local authority contracted out the whole youth services department?"

But a report in *Children and Young People Now* suggests these plans could hinder rather than help the voluntary sector, according to groups in areas where it is already happening.

Conservative-controlled Northamptonshire County Council was one of the first to outsource its youth service to voluntary and private organisations in 2007. But according to the director of an organisation supporting 25 youth clubs in the area, this had created problems. "We've become a very fragmented voluntary sector, competing for the same contracts. It has made us very business-oriented and cutthroat", said Debbie Goodfellow. She added that there were not enough full-time qualified youth workers and fewer training opportunities.

Gloucestershire County Council contracted out the management of its youth service in 2008 to Prospects Services. Diana Organ, former chief executive of charity Young Gloucestershire, said this had created an "unfair situation where the commissioner is also a provider".

In Buckinghamshire nearly half of the youth team could be made redundant under plans to outsource parts of the service. A council consultation paper warns that generic services such as youth clubs could be outsourced to private and voluntary sector organisations. Full time staff either have to take voluntary redundancy or express an interest in a role under the new structure. UNISON's Buckinghamshire Branch Secretary, Penny Gray, said that: "Private firms are lining up to take on contracts, but they want to make a profit – but the current service is not concerned with profit".

Reports

Recession and the voluntary sector

Serious problems in the UK's voluntary sector are laid bare in an independent report released by UNISON.

At a time when vulnerable Britons need charities more than ever, voluntary sector workers are reporting a huge range of problems, leading to sinking morale throughout the sector. Findings show many workers are turning their backs on their careers to stack shelves in supermarkets, forced out by poor pay, increased stress and falling standards.

Massive cuts in funding are also affecting the public, as organisations fail to keep up with the demands of the public services they provide and struggle to compete with private sector contractors.

The report shows that the recession has seriously speeded up the problems, which stemmed from the Government's push for low-cost competition. Findings include cost pressures affecting pay and conditions, with staff saying the charity sector is seen as a cut-price answer to larger economic problems. Due to the short-term nature of funding, insecurity is rife in the voluntary sector.

Dave Prentis, UNISON's General Secretary, said: "The third sector should be properly funded and appreciated. It should not be a cut-price alternative."

The report can be downloaded for free from <http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/18938.pdf>

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