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Campaign News

A plan to beat the economic crisis

UNISON is calling for extra funding and investment for public services in this month's Budget.

- **£100m** would safeguard vital services provided by the community and voluntary sector
- **£150m** could bring school kitchen staffing up to levels needed to deliver new nutritional standards
- **£500m** could recruit 10,000 new social workers, reducing child protection caseloads
- **£1b** would pay for 30,000 more hospital cleaners, addressing staff shortages that led to MRSA
- **£1.5b** would ensure that every English council met the Decent Homes Standard this year
- **£2b** would give daily home care visits to 370,000 elderly people now denied the help they need
- **£2.8b** could deliver equal pay to hundreds of thousands of women working in local government
- **£5b** would let councils insulate 10 million homes, improving energy efficiency and easing fuel poverty
- **£12b** would allow councils and housing associations to build 80,000 new affordable homes

Altogether these measures would create around **300,000** new jobs and provide a stimulus to the economy of around **1.5%** of GDP.

The cost would be **£3.65b** a year in extra current spending, plus one-off capital investments totalling **£21.4b**. This could easily be paid for by a fairer taxation system and a crackdown on evasion and avoidance costing at least **£25b** every single year.

A new leaflet, "Putting you first", sets out UNISON's agenda for a strong economy and a fairer society. It stresses the importance of effective regulation, fair taxation, protection and support for the most vulnerable, and public investment in key services as well as hospitals, schools and housing. Visit <http://www.unison.org.uk/positivelypublic/peoplefirst.asp>

Positively Public fact of the month!!

£30b - approximate annual income of all council staff

£50b - approximate annual income of all NHS staff

£100b - approximate annual income of richest 1% of population, most of it made in the City of London

Staff back in-house at PFI hospital

250 cleaning and catering staff at Neath Port Talbot hospital have been brought back into NHS employment. The staff had been transferred to a private contractor as part of a PFI deal signed before devolution. Though UNISON had managed to ensure they were paid Agenda for Change rates, they had been denied access to the NHS pension scheme.



UNISON challenges Essex outsourcing

Essex County Council's plan to privatise £5.4b-worth of services, reported in previous issues of Positively Public Briefing, could be illegal.

UNISON is taking legal opinion on the Council's conduct, including its failure to consult, and has written to the district auditor to highlight its concerns.

For more information visit:

<http://www.unisonessex.org.uk/Outsourcing>

Credit Crunch update

The government has committed £13b of public money to make up for the failure of the Private Finance Initiative to secure finance for essential public infrastructure projects – yet the projects will remain in the private sector.

As reported in previous issues of Positively Public Briefing, numerous projects to replace or renovate schools, hospitals, waste facilities have been stalling due to the increased cost and complexity of PFI.

UNISON had argued that it would be quicker and cheaper for the public sector to take over the projects directly. But instead the government is stepping in to take the financial risk so that private PFI consortia can continue to make a profit.

Among the first projects to benefit are a £635m waste facility in Greater Manchester, and a £1.6b hospital development planned by North Bristol NHS Trust, for which Carillion has been named preferred bidder.

Criticising the announcement, UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis said: "Taxpayers are fed up of seeing their money used to bail out failures in the private sector with no return. Why doesn't the Government see sense by building and running major public works itself – for the benefit of the public, not to line the pockets of big business".

Privatisation News

Private homecare scandal

A shocking episode of BBC's Panorama has revealed the consequences of councils signing over homecare services to the cheapest bidder. "Britain's homecare scandal" revealed how poor training and excessive workloads made it impossible for staff working for private companies to deliver adequate care. Dame Joan Bakewell called the contracting process "immoral" and warned of "a society which is cutting care for the sake of making profit".

Schools transferred to new trust

School buildings and staff in the Truro area could be transferred from the local education authority to a new trust with the freedom to form partnerships with private firms. The National Union of Teachers has warned that the move will "open the door for private individuals and companies to skew the curriculum towards their interests". UNISON is also concerned that non-teaching staff will no longer be protected by nationally agreed terms and conditions.

Council won't consider in-house option

Bournemouth council leaders will proceed with plans to privatise IT-related services, refusing appeals to allow existing staff to submit an in-house bid. The outsourcing plan, previously reported in January's Positively Public Briefing, has been challenged by UNISON, the Association for Public Service Excellence, and backbench councillors.

Welfare privatisation in crisis

The government's plan to enhance the role of private companies providing employment services is in trouble. A leaked government report showed that private firms had performed far worse than the state-run job centres they are replacing.

Housing staff left without an employer

More than 200 housing repair workers have been left in limbo after Glasgow City Council transferred them to a private contractor which then changed its mind.

The staff were to have been transferred from council-controlled City Building to private maintenance firm Connaught after it won a contract from Glasgow Housing Association. But Connaught pulled out after deciding it didn't want to take on the pension liability.

Capita monopoly challenged

The Competition Commission has provisionally concluded that Capita has too much control over the supply of revenue and benefits software to councils.

The inquiry, reported in January's Positively Public Briefing, said the firm would "be able to take advantage of the lack of competition ... by increasing prices or reducing levels of service to its customers". As a result the firm may be forced to sell all or part of the business. Capita says it will contest the decision.

Private firm to provide GP services

Trinity Medical Group will run a new GP-led practice in South Shields from 1 May 2009. The contract was awarded by South Tyneside Primary Care Trust (PCT) using funding provided by the Department of Health to bring new providers into GP services.

UNISON has expressed concern over the transfer of staff and the effect on services of introducing competitive and commercial incentives.

Meanwhile the government has announced a new Express LIFT framework to allow PCTs to sign deals with one of seven named consortia without following normal EU procurement procedures.

UNISON's Fact Sheet on primary care privatisation is at <http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/A7071.pdf>

Schools inspections privatised

Concerns have been raised over the independence of OFSTED's inspections after it awarded major contracts to **Serco**, **CfBT Education Trust** and **Tribal**, all of whom have an interest in providing school and children's services. Jasmine Ali of the Local Government Information Unit said this created new opportunities for private sector operators to gain crucial market intelligence.

Civil servants wine and dine

Big players in the private "public service industry" feature prominently in a newly released dossier revealing details of hospitality received by senior civil servants at the hands of corporate lobbyists.

Private catering contractors **Compass** appear 5 times, including three lunches with the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Business in one year.

Dr Foster Intelligence, a private data-management firm who have helped to introduce choice and commissioning into the NHS, appear 5 times, including taking the Department of Health Director of Communications to dinner on 4 occasions.

Facilities management giant **Serco** appear 11 times, having bought lunch or dinner for officials at the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Home Office, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Justice, and Department for Transport in one year.

Consultants **Pricewaterhouse Coopers** appear 24 times, while **KPMG** account for 35 entries, including a trip to the Chelsea Flower Show with the Permanent Secretaries of the Home Office and Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform.

Full details are at http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/propriety_and_ethics/civil_service/hospitality.aspx

UNISON's report on the power and influence of the private "public services industry" is at <http://www.unison.org.uk/PositivelyPublic/psi.asp>

Reports

Councillors warned on outsourcing

Councils should carefully weigh the costs and benefits of outsourcing before signing away control of local services to the cheapest external bidder.

That's the message of a new pamphlet jointly published by UNISON, the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) and the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU). The pamphlet says "there is no reason why councillors should accept the conflation of commissioning with outsourcing", and warns that "extensive outsourcing marginalises the role and power of elected members and undermines local democracy".

"Think Twice: The role of elected members in commissioning" can be downloaded or ordered at <http://www.unison.org.uk/activists/procurement/>

There is an alternative

A new book published by the left pressure group Compass tells the exciting story of how UNISON members in Newcastle City Council developed a positive alternative to outsourcing.

In 2000 Newcastle City Council planned to outsource all its IT, back office and customer service staff. But UNISON campaigned for an in-house bid which successfully saw off competition from the private sector. Since then record-breaking savings and service improvements have been delivered on the basis of staff involvement and minimal compulsory redundancies.

The full story can be read in "Public Service Reform... But Not As We Know It", written by Hilary Wainwright with Mathew Little, and published by Compass, price £7.99. To order a copy at the special discount rate email Positivelypublic@unison.co.uk.

The book will be launched at the House of Commons on 5 May. To reserve a place email "public service reform" to info@compassonline.org.uk.

School meals staff delivering reform

School catering staff are working overtime to deliver better quality school meals, a new survey reveals. The UNISON report warns that school meal workers are not getting the training and support they need to deliver higher levels of service.

"Staff in charge of the kitchen are bearing the brunt of heavier workloads and exercising enormous good will", the report says. But it warns we may be nearing a "break point" that will undermine service quality.

Download the report in full at <http://www.unison.org.uk/file/A8398.pdf>.

Government's vision for public services

The Government has published a new paper setting out its "vision for the future shape of public services".

The document states a commitment to empowering service users and frontline staff. But it also advocates greater use of personal budgets and private and third sector providers. It also calls for "efficiency savings", arguing these can be achieved through "selling assets and sharing IT and other back office services between different organisations".

You can download the government's paper in full from <http://www.hmg.gov.uk/media/15556/workingtogether.pdf>

UNISON published its own "Vision for Public Services" last year. As well as emphasising user and staff empowerment, it stressed the importance of public provision and adequate funding. It is available at <http://www.unison.org.uk/PositivelyPublic/vision.asp>

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

www.unison.org.uk/positivelypublic