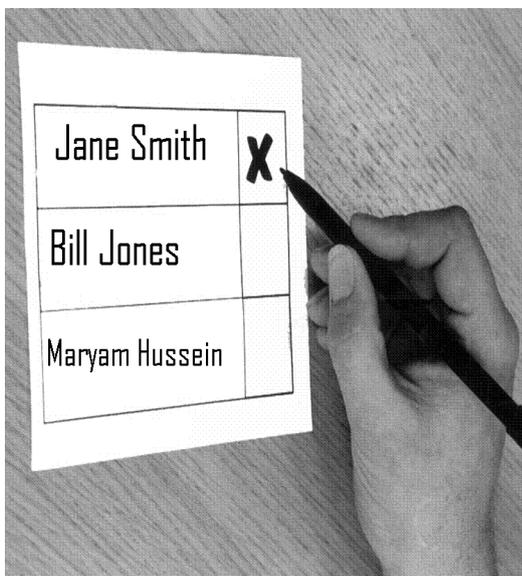


More democracy?

Two think tanks have recently published differing visions for local government reform in Scotland. Reform Scotland's latest campaign paper calls for a reduction in the number of local authorities. The Jimmy Reid Foundation's paper came to the opposite conclusion, their report says we don't have enough councillors. Both claim that the low turnout at the local government elections shows that we must reorganise our local government structures.

While Local Government Minister, Derek McKay, has ruled out restructuring in this parliament that doesn't mean there won't be change in some form. COSLA responded to the Reform Scotland report by pointing out that "any reading of history demonstrates that re-structuring public services is costly, high risk and frequently reduces rather than adds value. Since 1980 there have been at least 20 major structural reforms in the UK public sector. None of them have been delivered in the time-scales or the costs originally suggested. None of them have delivered the financial savings they were designed to, and all have diverted resources and energy during the period of change to such an extent that services moved backwards not forward". UNISON could have written that release.

The Reform report [Renewing Local Government](#) was none the less given widespread coverage in the media. This coverage focused on the impact on local government but health workers would also be affected by their plan. The proposal was not just to reduce the numbers of councils to 19. The new councils would also replace current health boards. Reform calls for the new bodies to be given a wider range of fiscal powers including full control of council tax and non-domestic rates. To counter claims that this will make local government less local their next plan is to devolve



greater responsibilities to community councils.

[The Silent Crisis](#) from the Jimmy Reid Foundation on the other hand claims that the solution lies in more not less councillors. They say that "wholesale reorganisation is not what's required to address the issue". The administration of local government is not in question, what is needed is a "more democratic means of informing the operation of local government." The report gives a lot of data on how many more elected politicians other countries have than Scotland (and the UK). It is less concrete on how this would work in practice. They are calling for a commission to find the way forward before the next set of local government elections take place. This appears unlikely.

Both think tanks are trying to galvanise the debate about the future of local services in Scotland. The voices of service users and those who deliver services is more important than think tanks so UNISON will work to ensure their voices are heard.

Three things to do today:

- [Check out councillor details](#)
- [Learn about Finnish school](#)
- [Ask a friend to join](#)

All change

The council elections are over and it's time to contact the leadership of your council. In some areas little has changed and for others the council will have a very new political complexion. UNISON has launched a [Local Government Network](#) for councillors and others with an interest in Scottish local government. We will be sending out a regular e-newsletter: Council Connections. Branches and organisers should be updating their contacts. Useful resources include the COSLA website where [details](#) of the political control of all councils have now been updated.

The Improvement Service website has good [interactive maps](#) which give details on political control of councils and breaks down individual councils showing councillors for each ward. Your council website will have contact details for all councillors and their surgeries. Council websites will also give you details of who sits on which committees. The Improvement Service also supports the induction of new councillors and ongoing training for councillors. Their [induction pack](#) for new councillors is useful for all interested in local government as it covers the roles and responsibilities of councillors and standards and ethics. It can be very helpful when you are lobbying councillors about their responsibilities.

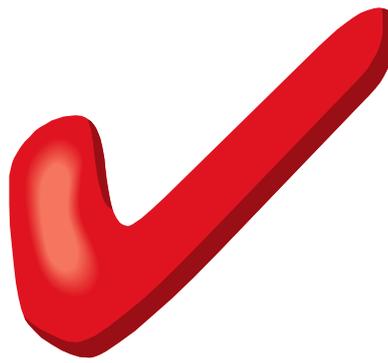
Getting it Right

A new book by John Sneddon [Delivering Public Services that Work](#) pulls together real stories of savings and improved services. Instead of the waste of privatisation and outsourcing services have been transformed. Not only have costs been reduced and services improved there are signs of happier staff. Case studies include:
 Police forces in Midland and Cheshire
 Fire and Rescue service in Staffordshire
 Development Control at Rugby Borough Council
 Food safety in Great Yarmouth
 Legal and Social Welfare problems (Advice UK)
 Health and Social Care (NHS Somerset)
 The care of stroke patients at Plymouth hospital

Key successes highlighted in the book include Cheshire police reducing the overall incidence of young people going missing from care homes by 75% and change at Plymouth Hospital saved £1000 per patient.

“handling planning applications in Rugby has speeded up dramatically with a current saving of £175,000 per year”

Staff in the food safety Department **Great Yarmouth** found themselves facing the double challenges of being bogged down in reactive work and so unable to be proactive in promoting prevention and were facing budget cuts. This meant there was little possibility of employing new staff to deal with the growing workload. Key to the vanguard method is listening to services users and workers about what they want from the services. Key learning from the process was that the team was spending a lot of time replying to members of the public who did not want a reply and that there were a 184 steps to the food inspection



process, 116 of these steps came about because officers had to return to the office to sign off work. This led to work being handed off to 11 different sections just to get a letter sent off to a food business. Inspectors also focused on meeting inspection targets rather than the core of their jobs which they agreed was “to ensure food for public consumption is safe”. The new ways of working mean that officers spend less time in the office. They are out working rather than filling in forms. They are using photographs of problems highlighted to inform businesses rather than checklists. Consultants don't make millions from these type of ideas but listening to workers about their jobs bring real cost effective solutions. The second section of the book looks at hidden demand, the role of geography and the problem of treating people as customers.

Despite the success of these bottom up solutions the command and control solutions continue unabated. Workers will be forced to commute hundreds of miles in Northern Ireland as shared services are introduced to the health service. The payroll function will be in Belfast, payment transactions will be in Ballymena, income transactions in Omagh and Armagh will cover recruitment and selection.

Savings of £120million over ten years are promised but as we know don't often materialise. This means staff will be forced to relocate, commute hundreds of miles or lose their jobs. A worker quoted in the Belfast Telegraph says that as its impossible to sell his house in the current market he is facing a four hour round trip every day.

What crisis?

If the Tories are to be believed we all have to tighten our belts to get over the crisis. To fall for this you have to believe that that money is in short supply and that there is nothing else that can be done. What we know is that there is actually plenty of money. Its just concentrated in very few hands. Sales of luxury goods have not slumped in this crisis.



Danny Dorling makes [The Case for Austerity Among the Rich](#).

Instead of cutting public services, jobs and pay what if 90% of tax payers became better off but income differentials returned to 1970s levels? Almost £200 billion a year would be saved in a return to 1970 inequality levels even if 90% of people became 1% better off.

The government is determined to protect the rich from the consequences of the crisis. They keep repeating their mantra that tax cuts in the 80s meant the rich paid more tax as they stopped avoiding it. Tax income went up because they started paying themselves more money so owed more tax.

We don't say its OK to steal to reduce the incidence of crime. Tax avoidance/evasion needs to be tackled. This includes income and other taxes on wealth including registering property ownership in companies to avoid stamp duty as reported in the Independent.

The Scottish Government's plans to reform stamp duty must deal with this loophole otherwise ordinary people will pay their dues and the rich will not. We all benefit from good public services. We should all therefore pay our fair share towards them.

Lies, Damn Lies and statistics

Yet another report, this time from [Audit Scotland](#) shows that predicted savings from public sector reform initiatives have not materialised. This report looked at nine mergers of public bodies. The four mergers that they concentrated on involved costs of £42million rather than the £30million initially predicted.

This report adds to the growing evidence that predicted savings figures do not receive enough scrutiny when politicians and senior staff want to drive through change.

There has been some controversy recently regarding controversial research by Opera Solutions which claimed councils could save £10billion a year. Their report received widespread coverage, particularly from those who like to claim that there is lots of waste in local government. It turns out they got to this giant figure through multiplying savings across three small areas of council spend across three councils and multiplying it across all areas of spending across all councils.

So by finding out that staff in some councils were not on the most cost effective mobile phone tariff and that about 10-20% of the £600,000 spent on phones could be saved they then took that to mean you could also save the same percentage of the schools budget. Eric Pickles department signed off this "research as "new cutting edge analysis of council spending data by procurement experts Opera Solutions".

[Bad Science](#) has more details on these dodgy stats. Sadly when these and similarly inflated savings predictions don't materialise its usually the ordinary workers who get the blame for being inefficient rather than the snake oil salesmen who got it wrong in the first place.



Finnish Lessons

[Pasi Sahlberg](#) visited Scotland recently to promote his book **Finnish Lessons** which gives his insight into why Finnish schools are the best in the world. The Finnish method also has lessons for wider public service delivery. Finnish schools top the world rankings not only for achievement but also for equity. Sahlberg, who started as a teacher and then moved into teacher training before joining a range of international bodies such as UNESCO as an education expert, believes that the key to Finnish success can be summed up as **Equity First**.

More collaboration

Less competition

Less standardisation

More responsibility and trust less accountability and control

In Finland they ensure: fair funding for all schools; school readiness through universal childcare and pre-school; focus on individual's well being in schools and prevention rather than repair.

While most countries have recently focused on more testing, extra hours in class and more school choice Finland has taken the opposite route. Children have less school hours, less homework and less testing than most other countries. Children go to their local state school. There is no "choice". Finland focuses instead on collaboration, personalisation, equity and trust based professionalism.

Both teachers and students spend less time in class than in other countries. Teachers have 60 minutes a week less class time than Scottish teachers. They use this time to plan and implement improvements and design individual programmes for their students.

Sahlberg places a great deal of emphasis on the role of high calibre teachers in Finland's success. The reform of Finnish education has been teacher led rather than imposed on them. Teachers are well educated themselves and are trusted to lead schools. They and their students are not constantly tested and inspected: wasting hours on form filling and exam prep. There are very few exams. Schools are not in completion. Finnish children do consistently well in all schools. His four lessons for Scotland are:

- More collaboration
- Less competition
- Less standardisation
- More responsibility and trust less accountability and control

While the book's focus is on schools, it offers insights on improvement for all public services. Public service workers know that if they were allowed to get on with their jobs, were trusted to make decisions and didn't have to spend hours filling in forms to meet targets or to meet auditors and inspection dates that they would be able to get a lot more work done and focus on the real needs of service users. All of Scotland's public service reformers could learn something from the Finnish approach.

Scottish Futures Trust wins PPP award

An industry awards scheme has confirmed UNISON's assessment of the Scottish Futures Trust as a major promoter of PPP/PFI. Despite the Scottish Government's claims that the SFT is an alternative to PFI, it has been named as the 'Best Central/Regional Government PPP Promoter'.

UNISON Scotland's Dave Watson urged Infrastructure and Capital Investment Secretary Alex Neil to come clean about the true role of the SFT and say whether he is proud of the Partnerships Bulletin Award.

The award judges said the SFT had made "huge headway" delivering several initiatives "in the face of strong political scepticism regarding the use of private finance in public projects." Yet back in October 2007, during First Minister's Questions, Alex Salmond advised then Scottish Labour leader Wendy Alexander to read a UNISON report that "excellently set out the failings of PFI and Public Private Partnership schemes." He added: "We will match the previous Executive's commitments brick for brick. We will do so not through the hyper-expensive funding mechanism of PFI and PPP but through people's investment—do not line the pockets of private enterprise, invest in the people's priorities."

Following the award Dave Watson said : Everyone knows that PPP/PFI is more expensive than con-



ventional funding of schools and hospitals. Instead it is actively promoting PPP through the SFT. When the chief exec of the body that the Scottish Government said would put an end to PFI is winning awards for promoting it, there is something seriously wrong."

On 14 June Lothian Labour MSP Neil Findlay asked Mr Neil in the Scottish Parliament to accept "what everyone else knows—that SFT schemes are just Public Private Partnership schemes under another name?" In responding, the Cabinet Secretary criticised Labour over PFI and said that the SFT was delivering for the people of Scotland.

More detail can be found UNISON Scotland's latest [briefing](#).

The future could be bright

With a growing elderly population, governments across Europe are grappling with projections for funding the costs of care for the elderly in years to come. The Scottish Government's recently issued consultation paper on Health and Social Care Integration proposes statutory Health and Social Care Partnerships in each Local Authority Area. A Jointly Accountable Officer will run the joint budget to achieve nationally agreed outcomes. The proposals also provide for a model of delegation between partners, such as that currently being implemented in Highland.

There are two main drivers for the current emphasis on care of the elderly: budget cuts and demographic change. Many claim that the fact that we are living longer will inevitably increase the demand for services.

Budget cuts have had a drastic effect on the social care sector with service reductions and job losses, cuts in pay and conditions for the workers in-

involved. It has also increased privatisation in the sector and the Social Care (Self Directed Support) (Scotland) Bill, is likely to see these problems increase. However, many [current studies](#) suggest its not all doom and gloom. There is evidence that the elderly population is also getting healthier. Therefore they will not need current levels of treatment and care.

Concentrating resources on increasing health and well-being as part of the public health strategy by promoting healthy ageing, supporting social participation and reducing loneliness will be a better investment than the current Tory strategy of making people work until they are too ill to carry on and then live in poverty due to reduced pensions. This strategy almost guarantees that people will indeed need expensive medical treatment and care in later life. Investing in decent pensions and healthy ageing strategies now will save a great deal of money in the long run.

If you would like more information on any of the articles in this newsletter or have information you would like to share in the next issue please contact: [Kay Sillars](#) in the Bargaining and Campaigns team on 0141 342 2819 k.sillars@unison.co.uk



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