

## Real People Power

The Scottish Government's next stage of public sector reform is Community Empowerment. While UNISON is committed to ensuring that citizens have a real say in the design and delivery of services we have real concerns this model risks becoming a cover for privatisation and job losses. These will move services further away and make them less, not more, responsive to local people.

As with the recent Westminster Localism Bill, community groups asking to take over a service or asset will trigger the procurement process. This means that a range of private and voluntary sector bodies can then bid. It is our experience that markets for public services lead to a concentration of providers largely from the private sector moving services further away not closer to communities: see [Localism Threat or Opportunity TUC and National Coalition for Independent Action](#) for further information..

UNISON believes in genuine empowerment: listening to what citizens want. Fabian Society research shows that people want their services delivered in the public sector and they really want the staff who deliver to have a real say in the design and control of services. There is little evidence that people want to actually run those services themselves. The key findings from [For the Public Good](#): Natan Doron and Andrew Harrap are:

- 62% of people thought that public services should be provided mainly or only by government
- People were concerned about the practical implications of an enlarged role for non-state providers
- 64% agreed that public services should not be run like a business but depend on the values and ethos of public good



Communities are not homogenous. Even in small rural communities there will be differing needs and more and less powerful individuals. The public place a high priority on staff having more power to drive improvements:

- 59% thought giving staff more decision making power would improve services.
- 70% thought improved user voice would improve services.

People want to be able to be part of deciding what the problem is not just saying yes or no to proposals. The recent [2020 report](#) found that "overall the implication seems to be that people want public services delivered by the public sector but to private standards, especially around efficiency and flexibility" .

Our public services evolved because the hotchpotch of charities and private companies couldn't deliver. We can't return to the Victorian era services. Democratic control and direct delivery of services by a directly employed public sector workforce is the most effective route to community empowerment and efficient services.

Three things to do today:

- [Check out change at CoSLA](#)
- [Learn about the new procurement Bill](#)
- [Ask a friend to join](#)

### Private failure

G4S have lost their prison contract. Much to the disappointment of those companies lining up to take over prison services in England and Wales, the Government seems to be backing away from their privatisation programme.

Instead of announcing the short-list of bidders the Justice Minister Chris Grayling announced that four out of the nine prisons on the list for privatisation will stay in the public sector. The private bids did not represent best value for money. Plans for five other prisons have been put on hold. G4S was running Wolds Prison in Yorkshire but will have to hand it back to the prison service following a report by the prisons inspector which found "clear weaknesses" in their service provision.

Sadly it's not the complete end of prison privatisation: facilities management will still be outsourced while custodial services will remain in the public sector. Other companies bidding for contracts were Serco, G4S, Interserve and Geo

It is becoming increasingly clear, even to the Government, that the "private good public bad" mantra around efficient delivery of services doesn't hold up. G4S already highlighted this with their failure at the Olympics when the public sector had to come to their rescue.

# Broken Promises

Audit Scotland has produced a [report](#) on failures in managing ICT contracts in Scotland's public sector. Those charged with delivering the Government's ICT strategy will hopefully learn lessons from the problems highlighted in this report. UNISON believes that ICT can improve public services but sales pitches need to be treated as such not as free advice.

The public sector in Scotland (excluding the NHS) spent around £736million on purchasing ICT goods and services from the private sector in 2010/11. The history of ICT in the public sector has at best been mixed with a range of overspends, delays and projects failing to deliver on promised transformations. Following on from the McClelland Report the Scottish Government launched its plan [Scotland's Digital Future: Delivery of Public Services](#). The Scottish government believes that "digital first" will be a key driver of public services reform. The strategy has been developed with and will "guide the future actions" of

- The Scottish Government, all its agencies and NDPBs
- NHS Scotland
- Local government
- Police and Fire services
- Universities and colleges.

Staff from the Local Government ICT Board have now produced local government's own [strategy](#). This is not to be technology led but "about how ICT can enable local government to meet customer demands, reduce costs and address public sector reform". The strategy will have an impact on a range of jobs in local government not just those in ICT.

The Audit Scotland report focuses three projects: Crown Office and Procurator Fiscals Service (COPFS), Disclosure Scotland and Registers of Scotland (RoS) and what went wrong with their attempts to drive improvement through new technology..

Section one focuses on the management of the projects and section 2 on the current status and highlights opportunities for improving the oversight of this type of project.

### Key learning

While each organisation did establish a business case they were of "variable" quality. In particular the benefits of the programmes were not always clearly defined.

Governance structures were agreed but the roles and responsibilities of partners were not always clear nor were procedures for raising issues with high level boards always followed. In COPFS and RoS financial control and progress reporting failed, programme managers provided insufficient detail to boards to support their decision making.

## Digital First

A key factor identified is the lack of specialist skills within the organisations leaving them over reliant on those selling the product for key decisions. The Scottish Government itself was unable to provide the three public bodies with the advice and support they sought. In response to the problems. COPFS has cancelled its ICT programme; RoS cancelled two projects writing off £6.7 million. Disclosure Scotland is moving forward having received almost £2million in compensation from the supplier to cover the additional costs incurred.

Audit Scotland recommends a range of changes. Managers must ensure that effective governance and risk management processes are in place. Detailed skills assessments need to be completed to ensure all staff are able to carry out their roles.

The Scottish Government also comes in for criticism. It is recommended that they ensure that there is a strategic review of ICT skills within central government. There has been a reduction in the number of ICT staff so that they are unable to provide appropriate support to public bodies to support their ICT projects. Audit Scotland is calling on the government to reconsider and weigh the costs of directly employed experts against the high costs of the failure to deliver.

Local Government branches should check how employers are responding to the new strategy.

## Taxing news

NIPSA has published a pamphlet looking "[Behind the Mask](#)" of the Taxpayers Alliance. NIPSA is the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance. The Taxpayers Alliance claims to speak up for ordinary taxpayers who are worried that their money is being wasted. Even a brief look at their campaigns shows that what they really want is to cut back public spending and reduce taxes.



This is the organisation that loves to campaign against public sector "non jobs" and more recently facility time for union activists. They are currently campaigning to get rid of National Insurance, which no doubt suits their wealthy backers but may be a bit more tricky for the rest of us.

This pamphlet looks at who funds the alliance and how they get their message into the media. Backers include: Tony Gallacher owner of Gallacher UK who has given £3million to the Conservatives since 2001; Christopher Kelly owner of Keltruck : Sir Anthony Bamford, of JCB who has also donated £1million to the Conservatives. and Stuart Wheeler who having previously donated £5million to the Conservatives has now endorsed UKIP. Hardly ordinary taxpayers.

The pamphlet also gives an overview of recent research into the funding and transparency of a range of UK think tanks. The Taxpayers Alliance, Adam Smith Institute and ResPublica are given an E rating while IPPR Compass and the new Economics foundations gaining an A rating. A being the most open.



# Devo-Max in Schools

The new [Guidelines for Devolved School Management \(DSM\)](#) are now available on the Improvement Service website. These were developed via CoSLA and agreed by the Cabinet Secretary in June.

DSM was introduced in 1993 and devolved 80% of schools' budgets to head teachers. The 2006 guidelines then recommended increasing this to 90%. The recent changes in both government, policy and finance led to a decision to update the guidance.

The key principles remain the same but the guidelines rather than defining percentages of budgets to be devolved are focused on principles.

These are subsidiarity and empowerment; partnership working; accountability and local flexibility. Partnership working in particular emphasises the multi agency approach needed to meet the needs of Scotland's children and young people.

Instead of detailing what should be devolved the guidance gives the few areas they feel should remain at authority level.

These are

- Capital expenditure
- Central support services
- School meals
- Bursaries, clothing and footwear grants
- Expenditure supported by central government specific grants
- Home to school transport
- Premature retirement costs
- Centrally funded additional support budgets
- Education Maintenance Allowance
- Council contracted work on managing the school estate
- School security running costs

There is also a DSM self evaluation toolkit and other



## The Joy of Sharing

Despite the many failures shared services are still the only game in town for those trying to save money in local government. If anything the substantial budget cuts and council tax freeze is increasing pressure to at least explore shared services. The Local Government Association (LGA) has produced another [paper](#) analysing the financial and non financial benefits.

They have ten key findings from looking at 5 projects. The key point is that they found clear financial savings through consolidating organisa-

- **High upfront costs**
- **Costs pushed to other departments**
- **Technology fails to deliver as promised**

tional structure, integrating IT, reducing accommodation and improving procurement. Point two gives the game away: early savings are made by reducing staff, removing duplication and management posts.

The report claims that initial benefits are typically delivered rapidly with strong top down leadership. They also claim that set up and integration costs are modest with less than a two year pay back.

This report will encourage public bodies to push ahead with their plans so it is important that we continue to highlight the many problems that have been encountered through this type of top down ICT led solu-

tion. Previous editions of [Futures and Revitalise](#) cover a range of programme failures.

Most recently the Times Educational Supplement reported on the UK research council's Shared Services centre 's problems. The centre, set up to deliver HR finance IT and grant allocations for all the research councils services, is significantly below the expected standard. Bill payments have been particularly problematic resulting in a courier refusing to deliver priceless Moon rocks from NASA and bailiffs attempting to claim property from the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology.

For those interested this [blog](#) details a range of the issues and some useful shared services news and a long list of [failed projects](#).

Key failures listed on the blog support UNISON's view that shared services won't deliver because of

- High up front costs
- Length of time to achieve savings if they materialise (approx 5 years)
- Technology fails to deliver what's promised
- Costs and work often pushed onto other departments
- Large numbers of mistakes
- Loss of control and accountability

Despite the evidence shared services employers are continuing to push ahead with plans.

# No public cash for tax cheats

Tax dodging companies should not be allowed to bid for public contracts. That's one of the proposals UNISON Scotland has made for new procurement legislation. The Scottish Government's forthcoming Procurement Reform Bill is an opportunity to tackle tax dodging in innovative ways. It can also be used to extend the Living Wage to contractors, to strengthen labour rights and to contribute to climate change targets.

UNISON has pointed to examples in a number of European cities to show that it is possible to act against companies that use tax havens and other forms of tax dodging.

Scottish Organiser Dave Watson said: "It is entirely wrong that companies seeking to avoid paying their fair share of tax should be awarded public contracts.

"Public bodies in Scotland spend nearly £11 billion annually through procurement. This Bill offers ways to use that spending to deliver local social, economic and environmental benefits.

"We think this is an important opportunity to do what some European cities such as Helsinki and Paris are already doing, in acting against companies using tax havens.

"The Scottish Government should adopt a tax justice approach, finding ways, with appropriate legal advice, to bar companies involved in tax dodging from being eligible to bid."



Recently public outrage has focused on companies like Google, Amazon and Starbucks paying miniscule amounts of tax. Many companies investing in PPP/PFI projects are registered in tax havens.

UNISON believes that community benefit clauses could be used to argue that the community will benefit from companies paying proper levels of taxes.

UNISON's response to the consultation said the Bill should promote workforce protections such as the two tier workforce provisions and compliance with the Equality Act and Freedom of Information rights must follow the public pound.

## New Faces at CoSLA

The Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities ([CoSLA](#)) brings together representatives from all Scotland's local authorities and "represents the collective national interests of local government in Scotland". It also acts as the employers association for the 32 councils.

The new CoSLA President is Cllr David O'Neill (Labour) from North Ayrshire Council; the Vice Chair is Cllr Michael Cook (Independent) Scottish Borders.

The CoSLA Convention contains representatives from all councils and political groups across Scottish local government. The main decision making body is made up of the [Council Leaders](#) from the 32 Authorities.

The political group leaders are Cllr Jim McCabe (Labour) North Lanarkshire Council, Cllr Drew Hendry (SNP) Highland, Cllr Ivor Hyslop (Conservative) Dumfries and Galloway, Cllr Martin Kitts-Hays (Liberal Democrats) Aberdeenshire,

Cllr David Parker (Independent) Scottish Borders and Cllr Maggie Chapman (Greens) City of Edinburgh.

**Spokesmen (no women):** These are the members responsible for policy development.

- Community Well-being and Safety: Cllr Harry McGuigan North Lanarkshire Labour
- Education and Young People: Cllr Douglas Chapman Fife SNP
- Health and Well Being: Cllr Peter Johnson West Lothian SNP
- Regeneration and Sustainable Development: Cllr Stephen Hagan Orkney Independent
- Resources and Capacity Cllr Kevin Keenan Dundee City Labour
- Strategic Human Resource Management: Cllr Billy Hendry East Dunbartonshire Conservative

Details for all councillors including their Register of Interests are available on their council websites. A link to all councils can be found [here](#).

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](mailto:k.sillars@unison.co.uk)

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