

# UNISON IN TOUCH

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# FIGHT FOR OUR HOSPITALS!

It was the worst kept secret in the sixty four year history of the NHS.

On Wednesday 9th May a group of NHS and Local Authority bureaucrats and "professionals" met behind closed doors, and in a sick parody of Strictly Come Dancing held up their score cards and voted on which hospital in South West London should be condemned to lose its maternity and emergency services.

This farcical and rigged procedure had been loaded against St Helier from the start. The idea that this was a "People's Panel" taking a democratic decision was a joke.

Not a single trade unionist, grassroots health worker or community or campaign leader was involved.

This self-selected bunch were accountable to nobody except the wider London NHS bureaucracy and the government.

### Disgraceful

The outcome could have been written before the disgraceful charade of 'Better Services Better Value' was ever launched. UNISON believes that it probably was.

So at teatime that day, choreographed to try and avoid media coverage, the decision was announced and St Helier was shunted on to Death Row – just as UNISON has said it would be, and just as the powers that be behind this process had always intended.

UNISON had been attacked by those same faceless NHS bureaucrats for repeatedly warning the public and staff that our hospital was under clear and present danger. All the signs were there – the accumulated debts run up by the



Trust Board, the failed "last ditch" merger with St George's and the constant delays thrown up around the smokescreen of our "new £219 million hospital".

Be in no doubt, this decision is about cash-led cuts. This Government has demanded that £370

million has to be axed from health budgets in South West London – 24% of the current acute budget – and it is those cuts, not clinical need or the safety of the public, that have driven the 'Better Services Better Value' process that culminated in the assault on St Helier.

Staff are rightly both worried and angry. You should be. Even after the decision on the 9th May, some staff were being told that any changes would be years away.

Don't believe it. The local NHS is under government pressure to make the massive financial cuts

within the next three years and these closure plans are inextricably bound up in that timescale.

The public consultation will take place over the summer months and will be compressed to meet the demands of the accountants and pen-pushers – nothing else. We would be fools to think that we have any breathing space.

Yes, it's bad news but we have been here before. This is not the first time services at Epsom and St Helier have been put in the firing line, and we have a track record of fighting back, mobilising the general public and stopping the bureaucratic juggernaut. We now have to stand and fight again.

### Minister on the hook

This time we have the added political dimension of a government health minister, Mr Paul Burstow, in our back yard, and we have no intention of letting him, his party and his Government off the hook.

If St Helier's services close both Burstow and his pal Tom Brake in Carshalton are political history. We will see to that.

The suggestion that Ministers have no involvement in this kind of major NHS reorganisation affecting will over a million people will fool nobody. Burstow is up to his neck in this one.

There is still everything to fight for. If the front line services at St Helier are allowed to close it will mean tortuous journeys through the busy streets of South London for nearly a hundred thousand people seeking emergency and maternity care.

This fight really is a matter of life or death.



# COMMENT

Kevin O'Brien, Epsom/St Helier  
UNISON Branch Secretary

## The fight is on!

I'm not just talking about the fight to save the core services at St Helier, I am talking about the fight to stop Epsom being swallowed up and spat out in its shotgun merger, and, yes, I am talking about the fight to save NHS services right across the South West London area.

At this point in time there is nothing that those who seek the destruction of services in the name of quick cash savings would like more than to have individual hospitals slugging it out in a dog eat dog battle for survival where the winner takes it all.

That is why they constructed the decision making process in the way that they did – a gladiatorial contest where thumbs up or a thumbs down from the gallery is the difference between death or survival. That is no way to run a modern, caring health service.

### WE NEED ALL OUR HOSPITALS

Let me make this clear, South West London cannot afford to lose any of its current hospital capacity. Do these bureaucrats really expect us to believe that the maternity unit at Kingston has spare capacity to take on the births from St Helier and possibly, at some point in the future, Epsom?

Are we to believe that staff in A&E at Croydon are standing around waiting on a Friday night for an injured patient to turn up? Of course they are not.

Here's the fact that Better Services Better Value has chosen in its wisdom to ignore – ALL of our hospitals are busy ALL of the time. There is no slack in the system. There is no buffer against the peaks of demand and there is a chronic shortage of staff right across the board. All of this has been ignored by those who have pushed on with their ill-conceived and ill-informed decision making.

That is why they would like nothing better than for Croydon to argue for closing St Helier, for Kingston to take pot shots at St George's and for all comers to hover over Epsom like vultures to see what they might be able to strip from the carcass.

UNISON will not play that

game. If we do we can guarantee that our hospitals will lose, and that as a consequence everyone else will lose as well. Because make no mistake, if the thousands of patients displaced by our proposed closures end up piling into the neighbouring Trusts and swelling the queues there, even the people who live on the doorstep of those hospitals will find it difficult to get swift and safe treatment.

The people of Wandsworth, Kingston and Croydon must understand that this isn't just an issue about St Helier, it's about £370 million of cuts, a quarter of the total health budget in South West London, being bulldozed through with horrific consequences for everyone.

### OUR FIGHT IS YOUR FIGHT

Yes, journey times from our area will rocket: but that also means that ambulances will be taken out of the system and left struggling to get through the busy streets to the nearest unit with spare capacity – so anyone else dialling an ambulance will be left hanging on the telephone. These are consequences from these actions that have not been factored in.

So we are meeting with union colleagues at the other hospitals, we are meeting with trade unionists and trades councils across the surrounding area, and we are sending out the message loud

and clear that OUR FIGHT IS YOUR FIGHT.

We already know that there are plans afoot to strip paediatrics out of not only St Helier but also Kingston and Croydon – and to "centralise" those services at St George's. Where will that salami-slicing end up, and what will be next – women's health?

Is this part and parcel of the rumoured "super-trust" that will see all of us merged into one separate foundation Trust with St George's at the hub and the rest of the hospitals serving as satellites running greatly reduced services? We have a right to know what other secret plans are being cooked up behind closed doors.

I am sick to the back teeth of opportunist politicians exploiting this situation for their own ends. UNISON will work with anyone and everyone to save our services, but we will not be paraded around like a stage army for local MPs whose government has a controlling hand on this reorganisation and who were claiming just a few months ago that St Helier had been saved.

### MINISTER AND LOCAL MP SHAMED

No one believes the claims from Paul Burstow as a Government health minister that this is simply a minor local issue. The NHS is just that – a NATIONAL health service. It isn't run by elected local councils, it is run by local and regional bureaucrats who are directly accountable to the Department of Health – the Department where Paul Burstow is a minister.

What is being proposed here is a massive change of services affecting more than a million people in a densely populated swathe of the capital city: don't try telling me that the Department of Health, which micro-manages so much of what goes on here with its surveys and commissions, has no controlling interest in this huge



Is Burstow trying to saving St Helier – or his own political career?

issue which is being covered by the national press. That kind of garbage won't wash.

Paul Burstow has a simple choice here. What comes first? His local electorate or his ministerial salary, perks and status?

Staff who work in the hospital, and the public who use it, are not stupid. If he calls this one wrong, he his history – and the same goes for the Carshalton MP Tom Brake. We will not be fooled by anyone posturing that they support the hospital and services while remaining part of Government whose policies are driving the cuts.

So, this is battle on for us once again. We've been here before and we have fought and won. The one thing that is guaranteed is that if we don't all stand up and be counted, not only will we see our services kicked from under us but potentially thousands of jobs will be under threat as well – a massive blow for the local economy when jobs are hard to come by in both the public and private sector.

I am up for this, UNISON is up for it and the rest of the staff unions are up for it as well. We have nothing to lose and everything to gain. I hope that you will join with us shoulder to shoulder in the battle ahead and we will, of course, keep you informed of all campaign developments.



High flyer: one of the BSBV team is snapped checking out travel times to nearby hospitals

## Closure plans based on "fictional" journey times

UNISON has described the assessment of additional journey times for patients forced to travel across south London in the wake of the planned St Helier closures as a "complete work of fiction."

According to Better Services Better Value

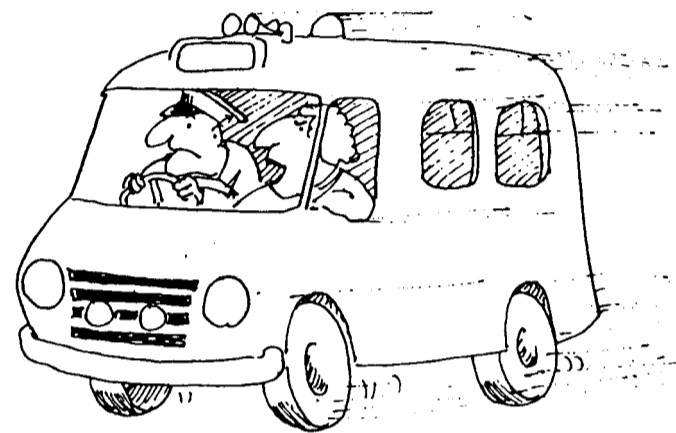
■ Patients who would have used St Helier's A&E or maternity services would face up to six minutes further "blue light" emergency travel time in an ambulance to a different hospital.

■ The predicted average increase in emergency travel time would be 3.3 minutes.

■ People who would normally drive to St Helier to use the services would face up to 12.4 minutes extra travel time, while people using public transport face a longer journey of up to 27 minutes.

Anyone who knows the local area would know that these additional journey times are rubbish. Even at four o'clock on a Sunday morning you would struggle to get from St Helier to St George's or Mayday in these times let alone during a morning or afternoon rush hour. If you were forced to travel to Kingston you would need a high-powered jet pack to get anywhere need these numbers.

Selling the proposals on the basis of this kind of pure fiction



Hurry up, George, before they close another A&E

exposes the whole exercise for what it is, a complete and utter stitch-up.

The influential Health Service Journal spoke to members of the scoring panel off the record. They blew apart the lie that the process leading to the recommendation to close the St Helier services has been evidence based:

"Sources close to the cluster scoring process said they were already expecting a judicial review of the decision.

"One told HSJ most of the participants expected this result and the decision had been "pragmatic rather than purely evidence-based". The source said there was not a lot of evidence available on many of the issues.

"But they added that St

Helier served the smallest population and its location meant it was the best candidate for downgrading."

There you have it, this decision had been set up in advance and is based on pure expediency with quality and impact ignored and the panel simply rubber-stamping what everyone knew months ago was the intended outcome.

Numbers and travelling times have been made up to fit the process, key evidence is missing and evidence that does matter, like the growing demand for accident and emergency and maternity services at St Helier, has been completely ignored.

These are the facts we need to get across to the public as we fight to save our hospital.

## Children's services next for the axe

When Queen Mary's Carshalton was closed down, the local community in Sutton were given absolute assurances that the dedicated Queen Mary's facilities at St Helier would be protected at all costs.

Now, those promises, like so many others that have been churned out by the NHS bureaucracy's propaganda machine, are also on the point of turning to dust.

The recommendations from the BBSV working group on children's services propose that inpatient paediatric care be closed down at St Helier, Kingston and Croydon and be transferred in its entirety to St George's.

Not only that, but St Helier, as part of this on-going cuts process, would also lose paediatric A&E, effectively wiping out paediatric services on the site and raising the question "what next?"

This salami-slicing of services is an exact mirror of what



happened at Queen Mary's Hospital in Roehampton back in the early 1990s. Piece by piece the key elements that go in to making a district general hospital were hacked away, with each block removed from the package triggering others to fall – like some giant game of NHS Jenga.

That is what is happening now at St Helier.

With A&E goes paed, HDU, ITU and Coronary Care. With maternity goes women's care. Each element takes a range of supporting services with it until the hospital is allowed to wither away. That is the cynical process that we are now facing at St Helier and we have to send out that warning before it is too late.

The talk of a new hospital is now just political rhetoric. There is no money for a new hospital, despite all the promises: there is not even a business case for one, and even the minor enabling works have been slammed firmly into reverse.

Fantasy visions of "jam tomorrow" are off the agenda. The fight to defend services for the sick children in our community, the expectant mums and those needing emergency care are where we are at and that means once again raising the banner to save Queen Mary's Hospital for Children.



# Man on the edge: health minister & local MP Paul Burstow



Ministerial casualty waiting to happen: Paul Burstow in opposition postures with Tom Brake, suffers 'premature congratulation' on funding for a new hospital at St Helier, pretends concern for our A&E – and catches up on the facts from our newspaper. We're watching his next steps.

## Threat still hangs over Epsom

With the spotlight shining firmly on St Helier you might have thought that we have taken our eye off the ball on what's going on at Epsom – not a bit of it.

Things may have gone quiet as the merger with Ashford and St Peters is stitched together, but the important guarantees that UNISON has sought from the outset are still as valid as they were on day one:

- Retention of the full range of services on the Epsom site, including maternity and accident and emergency.

- Retention of SWLEOC as a wholly owned and run part of the NHS.

- No privatisation or sell-off of Epsom Hospital's facilities or services.

- Maintenance of current staffing levels.

The stitch-up at St Helier serves as a timely reminder that Epsom could still be next on the hit list. Nobody appears to know for certain what shape services will take after the Ash-

ford and St Peters merger is bundled through early next year, and we should not forget that it was only a few months ago that we were being promised that services at St Helier were safe. That questions the validity of any promises that come from the mouths of the NHS bureaucracy.

If health bosses were to wheel out the same criteria that they used in the St Helier scoring at Epsom it would throw the whole future into doubt, and we are right to be wary as both the casualty and maternity units deal with smaller caseloads than the figures that led to the assassin's bullet at St Helier.

UNISON is watching developments at Epsom closely and we are ready to get back into campaigning mode to defend jobs and services once the details of the planned merger process are fleshed out and we certainly will not tolerate a situation where staff are kept in the dark.

## Unison wins justice for union activist Julie Blows

Julie Blows Medical Secretary and Unison Steward has won her Employment Tribunal case for Constructive Dismissal against her employer Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust by unanimous verdict.

Kevin O'Brien, Unison Branch Secretary, who represented Julie at the hearing in Croydon, said 'Cases of Constructive Dismissal are very difficult to win and the Trust's behaviour over this case has been shocking to say the least. The Trust appealed and they failed on every point of law. It was a total waste of NHS and tax payers' money.'

Julie's case was based on issues of bullying and harassment and in particular the Trust's failure to provide a Duty of Care to Julie so that she could continue working for the Trust. Julie was forced to resign by the Trust's behaviour towards her, and she has been compensated for that as result of this important victory.

As a Unison Steward and Medical Secretary, Julie worked tirelessly over the campaign to stop the "down banding" of Medical Secretaries under Agenda for Change, and although it took a number of years, 98% were eventually re-banded on appeal

from 3 to 4 and were awarded their back pay as result of Julie's hard work.

Kevin O'Brien added: "This is an important result for UNISON here in the Trust and shows that we will not allow our members and reps to be bullied and intimidated for standing up for their rights and the rights of their colleagues."

"Julie has gone to pastures new and we thank her for all of her hard work on behalf of the Branch. We congratulate her on achieving justice and wish her well in the future."

This case has also illustrated once again how important it is that staff who feel that they are being bullied and harassed, and who feel that the employer is not delivering on the duty of care, keep a diary and fully itemised records.

That detailed information is crucial in delivering the kind of justice UNISON has secured for Julie.



# Why we are backing the Unison St Helier Campaign

## Kingston Hospital

"Despite the attempts to play hospital off against hospital we need to make sure all staff in South West London realise that we are all in this together."

"The idea that we have spare capacity anywhere in the system to pick up the fall out from the St Helier closure plans is ridiculous. We all stand to lose from these cash led cuts."

**Helen Martin – UNISON Kingston Hospital**

## Wandsworth

"The so called 'Better Services Better Value' review has created chaos in our local NHS."

The Review has nothing to do with good clinical practice and everything to do with financial constraints.

St Helier hospital has become one of the fall guys. Vulnerable because already Merton and Sutton PCT have been cutting back on patient referrals, now the plan is to strip even more services from the hospital.

This will have a disastrous effect on other local hospitals.

St George's, already short of beds and with over a thousand vacant posts being kept open to save money, will buckle under the strain of extra A&E patients.

St Helier must be kept open with a comprehensive range of services for local people.

Any attempt to close down its departments will be a disaster and will have a crippling impact on NHS services throughout SW London.

**Mike Squires – Wandsworth and SW London Keep Our NHS Public**

## Croydon TUC

"Croydon has nothing to gain from these savage cuts plans. Not only do we stand to lose our children's ward as part of these proposals but we also know that the process won't end there."

"This is all about money and nails the Government lie that the NHS is protected from their cuts programme. We have to stand together in a united campaign to save the health service from this all-out assault."

**Roy Aird – President Croydon TUC**

**LV= Frizzell is offering each UNISON member a pair of free tickets to the county game of their choice**

Last year's LV= County Championship was a closely fought contest with Lancashire narrowly denying Warwickshire the title and keeping outside challengers Durham from stealing the glory as the competition went right to the final day of the season.

The new season kicks off on the 5th April with the final round of games scheduled for the 11th September. With Lancashire intent on keeping their title after such a long wait, it is sure to be another exhilarating summer of cricket.

LV= Frizzell is delighted to offer each UNISON member a pair of free tickets to the county of their choice to watch one day of a LV= County Championship match during the 2012 season. All you have to do is fill in and return the response voucher on this page, stating in order of preference the three counties you would most like to visit in 2012. **Subject to availability** you will receive two ticket vouchers for a county of your choice valid for one day of a LV= County Championship match. The vouchers are valid only for matches played at the First Class County Ground (see list) – festival and secondary grounds are NOT included in this promotion. All fixtures can be found at: [www.LV.com/cricket](http://www.LV.com/cricket)

Please allow 28 days for receipt of your tickets, and note that tickets are **subject to availability** and it may not be possible to fulfil your first choice in all cases.

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  - Hove, Sussex CCC
  - Leicester, Leicestershire CCC
  - Lord's Cricket Ground, London, Middlesex CCC
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  - The Brit Oval, London, Surrey CCC
  - The Rose Bowl, Southampton, Hampshire CCC
  - Trent Bridge, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire CCC
  - Worcester, Worcestershire CCC





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