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 where 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.

Minster 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.

FIGHT FOR OUR HOSPITALS!
The fight
on!

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

I’m not just talking about the fight to save the core services at St Helier Hospital, but the fight to stop Epsom being swallowed up and spewed into a 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 boroughs dropping it out in a dog eat dog battle for survival where the winners take all.

That is why they constructed the decision making process in the way that they did – a gladiatorial contest where a 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 OUR HOSPITALS

Let me make this clear, South West London cannot afford to lose any of its current hospital capacity and it is aoubted right across the board that the Department of Health and the Department of Health, which micro-manages so much of what happens, is 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 country, and it is what Paul Burstow is calling me that the Depart-
ment of Health, which micro-manages so much of what happens, is directly accountable to the Department of Health – the Department where Paul Burstow is a minister.

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 accountable to the Department of Health – the Department where Paul Burstow is a minister.

Here’s the better belief 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.

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 at any time.

Here’s the need to believe that people in a densely populated swathe of the country, and it is what Paul Burstow is calling me that the Depart-

Here’s that which 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 away.

UNISON will not play that game. If we do we can guarantee that our hos-
pitals 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, 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 is about 1.3 million a year, 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: that in patient paediatric care will be an exact mirror of what happens: there is not even a busi-
ness case for it, and even the people who live on the doorstep of those hospitals will find it difficult to get swift and safe treatment.

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

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 and maintained.

Now, those promises, like so many others that have been chummed out by the NHS bu-
rreacracys propaganda ma-

Children’s services next for the axe

With A&E goes paediatrics, 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 fac-
ing 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 prom-
ises: there is not even a busi-

The fight to defend services for the sick children in our commu-
nity, 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.

UNISON has described the assessment of additional journey times for patients forced to travel across south London as part 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 and mater-
nity services would face up to six minutes further “blue light” emergency travel time in an ambulance to a different hos-
pital.

• The predicted average in-
crease in emergency travel time would be 3.3 minutes.

• People who would nor-

The influential Health Ser-

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den...
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. This is an important case as the merger with Ashford and St Peters is stitched together, but the important guarantees that UNISON has fought for are still at risk.

Unison wins justice for union activist Julie Blows

Julie Blows Medical Secretary and Unison Steward has won her Employment Tribunal case 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. They have appealed and then appealed again and we were very taken aback to see that the Employment Tribunal was the fifth body they had been to in an attempt to stop Ms Blows continuing her work.

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

In this case, the review has created a detailed information that is crucial in delivering the kind of justice UNISON has secured for Julie 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."

The case was therefore brought to an end on the 1st April with the final round of games scheduled for the 13th September. With Lancashire intent on keeping their title for such a long time, it is sure to be another exhilarating summer of cricket. Unison is delighted to cover 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 entry form 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 day of your choice.
SAVE St HELIER SERVICES!

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