

UK: Campaigning for public services and against privatisation

(August 2013) ["We own it"](#) is a new campaigning group set up in the UK to argue for public services and challenge the idea that the private sector can do things more efficiently and effectively. A key element of the campaign is a call to introduce legislation - a Public Service Users Bill - to protect and promote high quality and accountable public services.

Why privatisation doesn't work

The "We own it" website provides a range of useful sources for arguments in favour of public services and [against privatisation](#). It reveals how privatisation:

- can reduce services quality,
- doesn't guarantee savings,
- reduces accountability,
- undermines workers' pay and conditions, and
- creates a situation that can be difficult to reverse.

Along with research sorted by these overall themes, visitors to the website will also find information indexed by service, including care, energy, water, health, libraries and prisons.

Public Service Users legislation

"We own it" is asking for support for its campaign to get legislation to protect public services and regulate and restrict privatisation.

The [draft legislation](#) would include the following elements:

- Public ownership would be prioritised as the default option that is looked at first, before contracting out (supported by 60% of the public). Local and national

government would always explore best practice public ownership, before turning to private companies.

- There would always be a realistic, thorough in-house bid from the public sector whenever a public service – local or national – is put out to tender (supported by 80% of the public).
- The public would be consulted before any service is privatised or outsourced (supported by 79% of the public).
- Organisations with a social purpose – the public sector and genuine cooperatives, mutuals, charities and social enterprises – would be prioritised in the tendering process (supported by 57% of the public).
- The public would have a ‘right to recall’ private companies who are doing a bad job (supported by 88% of the public).
- Private companies running public services would be transparent about their performance and financial data – as in the public sector (supported by 88% of the public).
- Private companies running public services would be subject to Freedom Of Information legislation – as in the public sector (48% of the public mistakenly believe this is already the case).
- The public would be properly consulted about the services they receive through public service contracts.

The campaign will try to build pressure on political parties to include a Public Service Users Bill in their election manifestos.

Trade union backing

The campaign received support from the UNISON annual conference in June and the union's head of local government, Heather Wakefield, is on the "We own it" [advisory group](#) along with Alice Hood, senior policy officer for public services at the TUC trade union confederation.

Dave Hall of PSIRU and Brendan Martin of Public World who both have longstanding connections with EPSU and PSI are also members of the advisory committee.

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