

Position Statement on Health & Social Care

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By Cllr Phil Davies
Leader of Wirral Council



As a Labour administration committed to protecting the most-needy and vulnerable in our communities, we have to look at ways to meet these rising needs, tackle the underlying challenges our residents face and identify new ways to deliver sustainable services. One area where demand is rising while funding is falling is health and social care.

The NHS is Labour's greatest gift to the country. It is our responsibility and duty to protect it for generations to come. Wirral Labour Group is determined to do this.

As a fellow Labour Party member, I know the guiding principles of our precious NHS go to the core of our shared beliefs and why we are part of the Labour family. That's why, as Leader of Wirral Council, I can say we are absolutely opposed to the outsourcing of health and social care services to American-style health care providers, and we will use all of the tools at our disposal to ensure this does not happen. We will also fight against any plans by this Tory Government to sign up to an Accountable Care Organisation or Accountable Care System.

Recent allegations that the Council's leadership is 'racing to introduce a 'sustainability and transformation partnership' and an 'accountable care system' which will 'slash, trash and privatise' our NHS are not only totally untrue but they are an insult to hard working Labour Councillors who are proud of the NHS and have fought to defend the principle of a publicly funded National Health Service which is free at the point of use.

The challenges facing our hospitals are well known. Last year, more than 2.5million people waited more than 4 hours in A&E, walk-in centres have closed and nurses and junior doctors are leaving their posts in ever greater numbers. The well-respected independent charity, The King's Fund, forecast the NHS needs an extra £4billion a year just to adequately fund current demand for services. We also know there is a crisis in social care. Three independent think tanks have estimated that there will be a funding gap of £2.9bn by 2019.

Tory Cuts Threaten NHS Closures And Hospital Mergers

Unwilling or unable to provide these extra funds, this Tory Government has spent a lot of time and resources looking for ways to restructure and reshape the organisations which provide health and care services. But health care professionals, campaigners and service providers are weary of endless reorganisations and are frustrated by the misguided belief that market competition is the answer.

While it is clear that simply working our current hospital-based model of care harder won't be the answer to rising demand for services from an ageing population, many would agree the NHS needs to work differently by providing more care in people's homes and the community, and breaking down the barriers between these services and their providers.

For Wirral, financial pressure on how we deliver our health and social services coupled with increasing demand because of our ageing population means we have to find ways to not only make savings but also improve the service we provide to residents.

**To achieve this reform
must mean cooperation not competition.**

We have already taken the first steps in trying to improve the outcomes our health and social care services provide.

Like Labour Councils the length and breadth of the country, Wirral Labour Group is strongly opposed to the Sustainability and Transformation Plans (STPs) demanded by this government and we welcome the U-turn announced by the Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt recently.

"A shared requirement for single commissioning, partnership arrangements, pooled budgets and joint working arrangements" Labour Manifesto 2017.

Indeed, at the meeting of the Council on the 19th December 2016, Council passed a motion, moved by the Labour Group, calling on the government to withdraw STPs immediately with a view to holding urgent discussions with key partners, including local Councils, on how good quality health and social care services can be provided going forward based on continuing a National Health Service which is properly funded and free at the point of need. Along with MPs and Labour Party members, we have campaigned against the closure or merger of local hospitals and medical centres as a cost-cutting measure.

But as Labour's 2017 General Election Manifestospelled out, we support moves towards a National Care Service alongside the NHS, "with a shared requirement for single commissioning, partnership arrangements, pooled budgets and joint working arrangements."

We have started to integrate our adult social care functions with Wirral NHS partners and are working with multiple agencies to try and tackle the wider risk factors, such as obesity and alcohol and drug misuse, needed to change lifestyles and behaviours that contribute to the borough's stark health inequalities. We see advantages in the various NHS trusts in Wirral and across Liverpool City Region working more closely together. As part of the ongoing debate over devolution, I am convinced Health and Social Care is one area where City Region collaboration can be advantageous.

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