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Letter from Westminster



SIX years ago, when I was first elected, I said the local NHS would be my top priority. That hasn't changed.

What has changed is the cost of drugs, an ageing population, the number of us now living with long-term conditions and above all, the consumerist view we as taxpayers take of the NHS.

Before the last election, the NHS published its own plan – the Five Year Forward View – and dared the two parties to fund it in full. I don't think its chief executive, Simon Stevens, expected either to say yes but the Conservatives did and an extra £10bn was pledged for the service shortly after the 2015 election.

The flip side of the investment was reform to ensure the NHS can meet every one of the four challenges I outlined and, above all, deliver world-class outcomes when we're sick. And it's in this context the NHS's Sustainability and Transformation Plans (STPs) must be seen. You can be forgiven for not ever having heard of them but you will, a lot, in coming months.

The NHS today helps more people with higher quality care than ever before. Each day, compared to 2010, the service is performing more operations, seeing more people in A&E within four hours and providing more people with access to mental health services.

We are employing record numbers of doctors and nurses and delivering innovative treatments (for instance, transformed cancer survival through earlier diagnosis) which would have been unimaginable only a decade ago.

Across Hampshire, commissioners, providers and local authorities have come together to decide how we will build on this to improve services in the medium and long term. STPs are not "secret" and they're not about "cuts". They're about making sure those increased resources, this time, lead directly to better care for patients.

I have been regularly briefed on the emerging Hampshire STP and from the end of October we can expect a more formal process of consultation to begin locally. There's a huge amount to welcome; from seven-day access to GPs, improving hospital care at weekends and world-class paediatric care on our doorstep.

The difficult parts will undoubtedly centre on the future of acute and emergency hospital care in mid-Hampshire as the debate resumes around what services sit between Winchester, Southampton and Basingstoke hospitals. It is here my focus, naturally, is greatest.

The NHS is complicated, its challenges don't fit into 140 characters for a tweet let alone a cheap three-word slogan on a political leaflet.

I promised the NHS would be my priority and that means properly understanding the issues we face and the clinical arguments keeping what's best for us, front of mind. Whatever else changes around us that will remain and I will always keep constituents updated.

Steve Brine
MP for Winchester & Chandler's
Ford