

Report 9.3(ii)

A Political Response From the Ruling Labour Administration of Coventry to the National Coalition Government's White Paper consultation on 'Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS'

Coventry Labour Group does not support these proposals. From the detail now laid forth in the white paper itself, and the accompanying documents, it is evident that the National Coalition Government is intent on destroying the National Health Service. It has long been suspected that a future conservative government would seek to dismantle the NHS, and it now becomes evident that this is indeed the case, and that this government cannot and should not be trusted to protect the most vulnerable and needy in our society.

Instead, it is handing the NHS, the crown jewel of post war Britain, the core of the welfare state that demonstrates the best values in our society, to big business, profiteering, shareholders, and international banking. Instead of welfare, care quality & collective responsibility, we will find that profiteering & cutting corners will be the corner stones of the future, in the desperate hope that the market will deliver the cuts and savings it doesn't have the guts to make itself.

The National Coalition Government promised to protect the NHS from budget cuts, and provide above inflation rises, while at the same time asking it to make efficiencies of between £15 and £20 billion pounds over the next 4 years. This makes clear the sleight of hand and the misrepresentation contained within this white paper. It is well known that NHS inflation runs at 4% or 5 % ahead of regular inflation, to pay for new drugs, new technology, and our aging and increasingly sick population. This means that in real terms, if NHS budgets stay steady over the next four years, we will see a real cut in NHS funding of about 20 % - a fifth. In Coventry, the city's PCT are already projecting a deficit of £23 million pounds for next year – that's 4% of the budget, if they get this year's budget plus inflation.

This is the disgrace that is the National Coalition Government. Worse still, they're willing to see a generation of people go without the core health services they need – no longer a limit of 4 hours waiting in A&E, no more guaranteed referral to treatment in 18 weeks. Under these proposals, you can wait forever, and there's nobody to turn to, because the Secretary of State has passed the buck to an independent board. It won't be his fault, it'll be ours – because he'll have cut the budget back beyond the bone, handed over inadequate resources to local doctors, washed his hands, and turned off the lights as he's left the building.

As for the poor, the deprived and the dispossessed, the people that don't fit in, who need the NHS more than anyone, there's no hope for them. All the complex and specialised services that support these groups will be just too expensive to provide once a 20% cut has been made from the budget. If you happen to be rich, then you can buy whatever you need, but as for all the rest, not much hope at all. An inevitable consequence of the break-up of the NHS will be a "postcode lottery" health service, no national standards, with neighbours and family members getting different service - being sent to different hospitals because they happen to have a different GP. We don't believe that this National Coalition Government is serious about consultation. We know that as night follows day, these proposals will turn into a bill, and then an act, and then will be implemented. That doesn't mean that they're right, or fair, or responsible, and we cannot, and will not, support these proposals.

As the political administration responsible for Coventry, despite our clear objection to the implementation of the proposals in the white paper, we recognise the practicality of needing to do the best for the city, and for those who choose to visit, live and work in the city. Despite the white paper's fundamental flaws, we intend to work with the GP consortia, the people of the city, and local NHS organisations in order to develop the best possible structures for planning, commissioning and delivering the health and social care that our population need in a coherent and effective manner. We will do this founded on the values and principles of a publicly run and delivered NHS, with access for everyone to services based on clinical priority, and free at the point of delivery.

Cllr Jim O'Boyle, Cabinet Member Community Services
Coventry Labour Group - September 2010