

## Health Hustings 14<sup>th</sup> April – Meeting Notes

KONP Durham held a 'Health Hustings' at Durham Town Hall on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> April from 6.30 to 8.00 pm.

### Panel members

Chair: Nigel Speight, KONP Durham  
Carole Reeves, KONP Durham  
Roberta Blackman-Woods (Labour Candidate)  
Rebecca Coulson (Conservative Candidate)  
Jonathan Elmer (Green Candidate)  
John Marshall (Independent Candidate)  
Craig Martin (Liberal Democrat Candidate)  
Apologies were received from Liam Clark the UKIP Candidate

The following notes comprise brief summaries of the questions asked and the candidates' answers. For further details of the health policies of the political parties check out the following links:

Labour Party 2015 Manifesto <http://www.labour.org.uk/manifesto>

Conservative Party 2015 Manifesto <https://www.conservatives.com/manifesto>

Green Party 2015 Manifesto <https://www.greenparty.org.uk/we-stand-for/2015-manifesto.html>

Liberal Democrat Party 2015 Manifesto <http://www.libdems.org.uk/manifesto>

UKIP 2015 Manifesto <http://www.ukip.org/manifesto2015>

Kings Fund General election 2015 "Analysis and commentary on the key issues in health and social care and coverage of what the parties are pledging in the run-up to the general election" <http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/topics/general-election-2015>

### Opening Remarks

#### ***Roberta Blackman-Woods (Labour Candidate)***

The NHS is dear to my heart. I have been the MP for Durham City since 2005. Labour pledges to: save the NHS; provide more front line staff paid for by a mansion tax; guarantee a GP appointment within 48 hours, or on the same day if needed; guarantee a 1 week wait for a cancer diagnosis; join up health and social care.

#### ***Rebecca Coulson (Conservative Candidate)***

I was born here, and live and work here. The NHS is important to me, and vitally needed by all of us. We have got the economy back on track, and this will enable a well-funded NHS: we are promising to spend an extra £8 billion by 2020.

#### ***John Marshall (Independent Candidate)***

I was born in Ferryhill from a working class background. I set up the successful business 'Durham Pine'. The NHS is badly run; not enough staff have been recruited and trained. The promised fixes are all managerial. Throwing money at a bad service is not helpful; you need to fix the service first.

#### ***Jonathan Elmer (Green Candidate)***

I have lived and worked in the area for many years and my children attend local schools. I have worked for both the Durham City and Durham County Councils, and am now self-employed. Social, economic and environmental issues all impact on our health. The Green Party would remove the market from the NHS. The market has failed. International figures

show that the US, with a private healthcare system, spends much more on health care than European countries but achieves a much poorer quality service.

***Craig Martin (Liberal Democrat Candidate)***

I was born and live here: I work as a teacher. The Liberal Democrats pledge to: offer mental health services on a parity with physical health services; link funding for the NHS with the growth of the economy; deliver an extra £8 billion by 2020.

**Question: Do the candidates support the NHS Reinstatement Bill, including returning responsibility for the health service back to the Health Secretary?**

***Craig Martin (Liberal Democrat Candidate)***

The NHS needs local decision making and local commissioning, not to be run from the centre.

***Jonathan Elmer (Green Candidate)***

Caroline Lucas, the Green MP, presented this bill. The abdication of government responsibility for the health service was to enable increasing the market within the NHS: the Government could therefore not be held responsible for the actions of the organisations and companies involved. This needs to be reversed.

***John Marshall (Independent Candidate)***

The NHS needs to be free at the point of use. It should not be controlled by central government: this creates inefficiencies. There is a funding crisis, but cases of people suing the NHS are on the increase with doctors being paid to be expert witnesses.

***Rebecca Coulson (Conservative Candidate)***

We need a good, transparent, well-funded NHS. I believe in a small state, with transparency and accountability. The mid Staffordshire scandal was under the last Labour government. We need to get rid of managers and increase the numbers of doctors and nurses. Devolving responsibility for health services to local councils in Manchester is a pilot for delivering the service locally.

***Roberta Blackman-Woods (Labour Candidate)***

The Health and Social Care act was not wanted and it was not necessary. Labour voted against it. We will repeal it. Prior to this Act we had local commissioning of services through the Primary Care Trusts. The new Act has brought in massive privatisation. Examples of this are not so common in Durham, but are common elsewhere in the country. MPs when dealing with private healthcare companies have great difficulties raising cases on behalf of their constituents. Privatisation fragments the health service.

**Question: The internal market absorbs 20% of the running costs of the NHS. Will the candidates abolish the internal market and use the savings for direct patient care?**

***Roberta Blackman-Woods (Labour Candidate)***

When repealing the health and Social Care Act, Labour will retain a small % able to be privatised to provide flexibility for local needs. Andy Burnham (Shadow Secretary of State for Health) pledges that Labour will keep the NIS in the public sector and remove the current market principle.

***Rebecca Coulson (Conservative Candidate)***

We are not selling off the NHS. The percentage of private services within the NHS was ~4/5% under Labour and has only increased to ~6%. What matters is using the right organisation to provide the best possible service. The NHS will always be free at the point of

delivery under a Conservative government. A strong economy produces a strong NHS. No, we would not abolish the internal market.

***John Marshall (Independent Candidate)***

A mix between public and private providers is healthy. Labour did more to privatise the NHS than the Conservatives. Management in the NHS is top heavy with too many managers getting high salaries. Not enough staff were trained which is why foreign staff are being brought in to work in the NHS.

***Jonathan Elmer (Green Candidate)***

Yes I would. The market does not work: there is evidence to show it is less efficient. When a health service is run as a public service its primary motivation is to deliver high quality care on the basis of need. When a health service is run as a market its primary motivation is profit. Competition causes duplication and fragmentation. Whole person care is lost. A personal example: when hospital cleaning staff were outsourced the quality of cleaning dropped and infections increased. This is because of the race to the bottom to offer the lowest tender. To do this the firm gives its staff low wages, creating many vacancies as staff leave.

***Craig Martin (Liberal Democrat Candidate)***

Yes, personally. The cost of the bidding process outweighs the savings from improvements. We would encourage collaborative arrangements between neighbouring trusts.

***Comment from the floor***

If the difference in % of private services between Labour and Conservative is so low, according to the Conservative Candidate, what was the point of the Coalition government spending so much money and effort over reorganising the NHS, and setting up Monitor with the purpose of opening up the NHS to private healthcare companies.

**Question. Hinchingsbrooke Hospital was privatised under the Coalition Government and it failed. Not all types of services are attractive to private healthcare providers, but community services are. 70% of community services that have come up for retendering have gone to the independent sector. Health services have been devolved to Manchester Councils, at a cost of £6 billion pounds, with no public consultation. If this pattern is repeated across England we will end up with 6 to 8 'regional' NHSes under local authority control. Is this a good idea?**

***Rebecca Coulson (Conservative Candidate)***

Local experts and local clinical experts are the people in Manchester who know best. Privatisation is the wrong use of the word: there are many different uses of the word 'private'. GPs are private, so are dentists. Always been elements of 'private' in the NHS. It's not the same as privatisation if services are run by private healthcare companies if that is the best way to provide the service.

**Question: Labour policy: What are the details re the 5% profit cap on private health contracts?**

Questioner concerned that as a community pharmacists – pharmacists are private companies – the cost of drugs are so high that their turnover looks high even though their profits are low. Pharmacists have helped to drive down the cost of drugs within the NHS.

***Roberta Blackman-Woods (Labour Candidate)***

Not sure of the answer to such a specific circumstance. Will contact the questioner after the meeting.

**Question: Foundation Trusts are allowed to conduct up to 49% of their work in the private sector. Would the candidates continue this practice?**

Questioner notes that her experiences of Belgium, where individuals have to take out health insurance, is that the level of care people can get depends on what they can afford.

***Craig Martin (Liberal Democrat Candidate)***

I don't know why this was included in the Health and Social Care Act. To encourage entrepreneurial spirit?

***Jonathan Elmer (Green Candidate)***

Would not have Foundation Trusts. Should not have privatisation and therefore competition between hospitals: they should be working together. 49% was a notional ceiling. In response to question about Devo Manc: the money provided was reduced; and now the local authorities are responsible they can be blamed rather than the government.

***John Marshall (Independent Candidate)***

Foundation trusts are not working; waste of money; money misspent in wrong areas. The key point for the NHS is to break it down into smaller units. The Devo Manc experiment is worthwhile. NPfIT [National programme for IP] was a failure. In Sunderland, 165 managers earn more than £100,000 p.a. Money should be spent on the front line.

***Rebecca Coulson (Conservative Candidate)***

We do pay for our healthcare, through taxes. Private insurance is different. Happy with Foundation Trusts, when they work well. They are local.

***Roberta Blackman-Woods (Labour Candidate)***

This is a terrible idea; it should be stopped. Without the Lib Dems voting for the Health and Social Care Act it would have been stopped. They should be held accountable. We need to look at Foundation Trusts. A lot of them are in deficit.

**Question: What would they do about TTIP and how will it affect the NHS?**

[TTIP = the US/EU Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership]

***Roberta Blackman-Woods (Labour Candidate)***

All public services should be exempt from TTIP. There is a vote in Europe on TTIP in May.

***Rebecca Coulson (Conservative Candidate)***

The EU Commission has made assurances that TTIP would not affect the NHS.

**Comment from floor:** Leaked information is that it would affect the NHS

**Rebecca:** We have a categorical assurance that TTIP would not affect the NHS.

***John Marshall (Independent Candidate)***

We should not be in Europe. We should be for open free trade, and part of NATO. We enforce EU regulations that other EU countries ignore. Europe doesn't work.

***Jonathan Elmer (Green Candidate)***

TTIP will have a huge effect on sovereign legislative power. Under the rules of the treaty, countries can be sued by global organisations [under investor-state dispute settlement litigation procedures]. In New Zealand [Australia] Philip Morris is suing the government over plain packaging of cigarettes. Small companies need an equal playing field to be able to compete: TTIP would not allow this. TTIP would have an enormous effect on the NHS: how would international providers be kept out? There is a lack of vigilance and lack of media reporting on this issue. TTIP will have a bigger effect on national sovereignty than Europe. Vince Cable is negotiating about TTIP on behalf of the UK. He has written to MPS to say there is nothing to be concerned about.

***Craig Martin (Liberal Democrat Candidate)***

This is scaremongering. There is a line in TTIP about utilities which say we can do what we want and can't be sued. TTIP will give a lot of small and medium companies access to the US market. There are other treaties in existence which have not affected the NHS, and we have not been sued.

***Comment from the Chair***

As a doctor in the NHS in the past, I had the freedom to provide my patients with the care they needed. Under a privatised service, doctors would be forced to offer unnecessary tests and procedures; incurring additional costs and therefore additional income for the private providers.

***Comment from the floor***

When I needed a colonoscopy in Belgium, I was warned by my family doctor that I would also be pressurised to accept additional, unnecessary tests and procedures by my consultant. And this is what happened.

***Rebecca Coulson (Conservative Candidate)***

The NHS is free at the point of delivery.

**Question: The current GP contract did not require GPs to provide 24 hour care, therefore many local GPs withdrew from out of hours services. Would the candidates renegotiate this contract?**

***Roberta Blackman-Woods (Labour Candidate)***

We pledge for GP surgeries to be open much longer and at weekends. Out of hours services is a problem. The 111 service is not working. My personal view is that we should give 111 another chance and collect evidence about how it is working. If the evidence shows it is not working, then we should renegotiate the contract.

***Rebecca Coulson (Conservative Candidate)***

We pledge 7 days a week care by 2020. We need innovative ways to provide care with GP shortages and an ageing population. We need to renegotiate the working hours directive with the EU.

**Chairs comment:** The question is not about the number of hours individual GPs work, but about out of hours services.

***John Marshall (Independent Candidate)***

Renegotiate because of the pressure on A&E services.

***Jonathan Elmer (Green Candidate)***

Yes. It has impacted A&E and affected continuity of care. One change can affect other aspects of the service. We need investment in primary care, prevention, health living, screening, health checks by community nurses. A more integrated service.

***Craig Martin (Liberal Democrat Candidate)***

Labour renegotiated this contract, increased salaries but GPs did not have to provide out of hours services. Increase in demand on GPs and A&E. Local people and GPs are unhappy: need a common solution. But GPs are independent providers so hard to do.

**Question; NHS staff are being transferred to local authorities: what effect will this have on the NHS and primary care services?**

***Craig Martin (Liberal Democrat Candidate)***

Transfer to local authority power over health in the Health and social Care Act, with the aim of them working together more and better. Not a complicated reorganisation.

**Jonathan Elmer (Green Candidate)**

Social and health needs are holistic and better that they are considered together. But is this change a stalking horse for budget reduction? Local authorities are democratically accountable via voting for councillors. However, you would need a clinical lead for decision making. Needs to be carefully managed.

**John Marshall (Independent Candidate)**

Don't know. We need a 25 year plan for the NHS. It shouldn't be political: we need cross party agreement. For example problem of obesity in young people, where we need people to life healthily throughout their life.

**Rebecca Coulson (Conservative Candidate)**

We brought in more expenditure on social care in local authorities in 2010. But doctors and nurses need to be in control, not managers or local politicians.

**Roberta Blackman-Woods (Labour Candidate)**

Labour pledges to integrate health and social care. This is long overdue. Whole person care services, bringing in mental health. Better integration of 111, ambulance services and out of hours services. At the moment lack this consistency. The Better Care Fund was not ringfenced. In Durham the council budget has been cut by  $\frac{1}{3}$ . By 2019 we will lose  $\frac{1}{2}$  of funding. This compares to far lower cuts than in Wokingham [a Conservative controlled council]. The coalition doesn't care about the NE or poor people. Public health – it makes sense to give this to local authorities – housing, environment, leisure all impact on health – but if decimate funding to local authorities what will happen to public health?

**Rebecca Coulson (Conservative Candidate)**

Don't believe in negative politics. We have improved the economic situation. And Osborne has recently announced an economic plan for the North East. We brought Hitachi to Durham.

**Roberta Blackman-Woods (Labour Candidate)**

The Hitachi development was an initiative of the last Labour government. The Coalition government changed the funding formula - for every £250 pounds that goes to London, the North East gets £1.

**Comment from Chair:** This debate is about health, not the economy.

**Comment from floor:** Do what people want; work together, keep the NHS. Collective working with health and social care, managed properly.

**Comment from floor:** Dementia care has moved from health into social care and now it has to be personally paid for.

**Question. What effect has the coalition's welfare benefits policies had on people's health?**

**Craig Martin (Liberal Democrat Candidate)**

Has had an effect. Sort out the economy: with a balanced economy we will be able to afford benefits. Mental health issues: suicide is one of the biggest causes of death for males under 50. We will spend more money on mental health.

**Jonathan Elmer (Green Candidate)**

We need to look at things in a connected way. Poverty, food banks, disabled and chronically ill people facing fit-to-work tests (run by Atos). Suicides have occurred when peoples' benefits have been withdrawn. Poverty affects mental health. Redundancy affects mental health. Bedroom tax effects mental health. Holistic. It affects primary care.

***John Marshall (Independent Candidate)***

Cuts cause anxiety.

***Rebecca Coulson (Conservative Candidate)***

Difficult decision but we needed to get the economy back on track. Use of words again: not cuts but benefits reform. Getting people back into work increases their self-worth and therefore their mental health.

***Roberta Blackman-Woods (Labour Candidate)***

I care about this really deeply. The coalition chose to deal with the deficit by benefit cuts, not by tackling bankers, and gave tax cuts to the wealthy. My last surgery lasted over 4 hours as I dealt with desperate people whose benefits had been cut/sanctioned for no reason. Older people, with health complaints, affected by the bedroom tax and moved into unsuitable accommodation. And it does not even save money! Disabled people, people with mental health benefits, have their benefits cut. There has been a demonization of welfare. We should go back to the original name, social security, a safety net for those who can't work.

***Chair***

Called meeting to end, and thanked the candidates.