

THE NHS LONG TERM PLAN

When I became Health Secretary in 2007 the NHS had completed three quarters of a ten-year plan.

The main architect of that plan in 2000 had been Alan Milburn, then Minister of State at the Department of Health but his principal assistant was a young Special Advisor at 10 Downing Street by the name of Simon Stephens.

Fast forward nineteen years and young Simon has acquired a knighthood on the way to producing another ten-year plan in his current role as chief Executive of NHS England.

The good news for everybody connected with the NHS is that this is no top down reorganisation à la the Health and Social Care Act 2012. Indeed, this "Long Term Plan" seems designed to undo the damage of that legislation, condemned now by politicians of all political persuasions.

The over-arching theme of this document, published in the first week of 2019, can be summed up in one word – 'integration'.

It recognises that the NHS should never be a collection of competing institutions driven by the invisible hand of the market. Sir Simon Stephens has been making it clear for some time that the NHS needs to co-operate rather than compete.

Hence the commitment in this plan to create Integrated Care Systems (ICS's) everywhere by April 2021 in order to deliver the "triple integration" of primary with specialist care, physical with mental health services and health with social care.

The really good news for Citycare/Shared Agenda is that besides integration (on which Hull CCG has led the way with the Jean Bishop Integrated Care Centre) the other main theme of this plan is community care.

GP practices will be funded to work together to deal with pressures on primary care and extend the range of convenient local services. Towards this end, investment in primary and community services will grow faster than the overall NHS budget.

I suspect that the key political arguments on the plan will be around finance rather than policy.

NHS England welcomes the average 3.4% annual increases in their budget. It will ease the pressures caused by the average 1.2% increases since 2010. But it's important to realise that it is below the average

annual increase since the NHS was created and only half of the increases under the last ten-year plan at the turn of the century.

Today the NHS treats a million people every 24 hours. Huge improvements in life expectancy and advances in medical science enables today's citizens to survive illnesses that would have killed their antecedents.

The hospital is no longer the focal point of the NHS as it was in 1948. Then there were 400,000 beds; today with a much greater population to care for, there are 120,000.

This report is an important step towards modernising healthcare, providing first-rate facilities closes to communities, in which integrated teams of clinicians can concentrate on keeping patients out of a hospital bed rather than propelling them towards one.