

## **LIBERAL PARTY – HEALTH & WELLBEING POLICY**

**Presented at the day Health & Wellbeing Special Assembly on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2015.**

### **1. Introduction**

- A. Liberals pioneered many of the concepts and practices that underpin the National Health Service in the UK, and are appalled at the present state of affairs that has resulted from empirical reforms inflicted by successive governments since the inception of what should be a national treasure.
- B. Furthermore, Liberals believe that the current management of the National Health Service is being driven by target setting which has more to do with the health of political reputations than the health and wellbeing of the nation; we deplore the wasting of money on repetitive public consultation surveys that do not lead to effective change, and the increasing emphasis on private health care provision that we believe undermines the confidence of patients and health workers in the NHS.
- C. Liberals say that the National Health Service should be firmly established on the Liberal principle of public funding sufficient to meet the health needs of the nation, with the private sector being available as an additional choice for those who wish to pay over and above their taxation contribution to the NHS, and subject to VAT where appropriate, and not as an alternative form of health care that detracts from this national resource.

### **2. Health & Wellbeing as a personal, community and national wealth**

- A. The objective of Liberal Health & Wellbeing (H&W) policy is the promotion of positive health, both physical and mental, with the NHS as the primary provider of medical care when this is needed, and with evidence-based advice available to all to promote and maintain H&W.
- B. Therefore, Liberals will maintain their H&W policies by up-to-date knowledge of those Health & Social Sciences-related factors that should inform political strategy and policy, such as Evidence-Based Medicine. These latter considerations include health psychology; social political and sociological influences; health economics; the influence of media and various marketing strategies and environmental considerations such as housing, infrastructure and income.

- C. In order to do this, The Liberal Party believes that we should maintain an expertlevel knowledge of those publication outputs that are derived from governmental, academic and third-sector agencies in the UK, and also ensure that such knowledge is maintained in the international and global perspective.

### **3. The determinants of Health & Wellbeing are multifactorial**

- A. Liberals recognise that the determinants of individual/persons H&W are complex, and are influenced by genetic, physical, psychological, social, economic and environmental factors. It is widely held that to prevent illness makes economic sense; a healthy person/population is more productive, and requires less support financially in terms of treatments and social care. However, Liberals also recognise that although the H&W characteristics of the individual can have an impact on their family; their community; their borough; their region and their nation; the converse is also important to consider.
- B. Liberals believe that, as an example, although healthy eating, as supported by initiatives such as the MEND programme, is a vital step in a long line of public health initiatives that have included the provision of pure water; sewage treatment; clean air and vaccination, other lifestyle influences and pressures must be better understood by our peoples in the context of local planning and initiatives. These include life-long learning about H&W, so that everyone can play a part in optimising H&W at the personal; community and borough; regional and national levels.
- C. Therefore, Liberals recognise and understand the division between the cure of illness and the promotion of good health; the necessity of inclusion of all people in these processes from policy concept and into service delivery; and that lessons that can be learned from other countries and their varying health and social care systems. Inequalities and lack of opportunity must be addressed in parallel with efforts to improve our national statistics for overall- and healthy-life expectancies, and to reduce the Global Burden of Disease for all of our people at all stages of the life journey.

### **4. Health & Wellbeing needs long-term planning**

- A. Liberals are committed to the concept that health and social care inequalities must be reduced and minimised, and to achieve this an integration of health and social care expertise, knowledge and practice is needed. Liberals believe that we should take a long-term view; that local 'mission command' is vital.
- B. Liberals believe that we must evolve our evidence base for public health initiatives alongside of our efforts to cure and rehabilitate people of illness and disease, or help them to live as effectively and productively as they can, and away from prejudice in the face of long-term illness or conditions that impact on H&W. The Liberal Party believes that the H&W of our nation is a concern for all, and should not be subject to the influences of short-term political planning or expediency.

## **5. Life-long learning and Health & Wellbeing**

- A. Liberals believe that, in general and as part of the ageing process, a proactive attitude is needed to maintain H&W; that prevention is better than cure, and the Liberal Party will continue to encourage research that can help to explain both the barriers to, and facilitators of, H&W for all of our peoples. Examples of this are to be found with the complex interplays of diet, activity, lifestyle and illnesses such as depression, cancer and diabetes, and conditions such as obesity.
- B. Finally, Liberals recognise that H&W of people is fundamentally influenced by their education, work, home circumstances and prospects, their local environment and resources and that any H&W policies and strategies cannot exist in isolation from such social and economic considerations.

## **6. Access to Health & Well-being**

- A. Some H&W needs, and the influences for these, can vary for men and women, and are also different for people at each stage of the life journey from conception; through pregnancy; through birth and childhood; into young adult life and beyond and to include end-of-life issues, whether these be related to age, accident, lifestyle or illness.
- B. Liberals support the concept of care in the community where this is appropriate, and care in large institutions such as hospitals when this is needed, but it is vital that any such care is adequately resourced, particularly in the context of planning the transition of care from the hospital to the community. In keeping with this, Liberals support the development of alternative and innovative forms of

workforce such as nurse practitioners and physicians assistant posts. In addition, adequate funding is required for vulnerable members of our society such as children; the elderly; people with physical limitations, and those who are mentally ill.

- C. UK healthcare spending is below many other OECD countries. Liberals recognise the increasing demands that are being placed on our national resources by issues of society such alcohol and drug intake; obesity and overweight; cancer; lung diseases, high blood pressure, heart attacks and stroke; and for an increasing challenge of mental and psychological health faced by many people, regardless of gender, ethnicity or income. This is particularly true as our national demography changes with time and life expectancy increases.

## **7. The importance of value for money**

- A. The financial resources that can be committed to supporting the H&W of our peoples are, by definition of our productivity as a nation, very finite. This means that difficult decisions sometimes have to be made about priorities. In any case, throwing money indiscriminately at health provision can obscure good practice or be an excuse for avoiding important questions on medical ethics and effectiveness. An extension of the limited list for prescribing could, for example, benefit patients and save money.
- B. Public health, prevention and basic care services that benefit the many must generally take priority over technological advances which at best can help only the few. However, the NHS should be a full partner in pioneering work that offers potential future benefits alongside wider research institutions and charities.

## **8. The NHS Constitution (2013)**

- A. The Liberal Party supports the themes and commitments that are described in the NHS Constitution and the outcome domains of the current NHS England plan. However, Liberals also recognise the philosophy of the Institute for Healthcare

Improvement, in that there should be no excess deaths or unwanted suffering; there should be no helplessness for either the sufferer or carer; there should be no unwanted waiting and there should be no waste. The Liberal Party believes that the current state of H&W and work efficiency of the frontline workforce of the NHS is a high priority and in need of improvement, especially in the secondary/tertiary and some community and social care sectors of the NHS.

## **9. The Health and Social Care Act 2012**

- A. Furthermore, Liberals believe that we must explore change in terms of the training of clinicians and managers in the NHS; that process should be the domain of those with experience and expertise to deliver on this, and that quality for all concerned is paramount. The individual patient must be kept at the centre of decision-making, and also be a partner in such processes.
- B. The Liberal Party is committed to the concept that all paid and voluntary roles in the NHS should make a known contribution to NHS Outcomes, and by doing this to the H&W of our people. The changes introduced by the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party over many years, have led to a massive and unnecessary increase in bureaucracy that can impair the working efficiency of frontline NHS workers.

## **10. Health Promotion & The Life Journey**

- A. Liberals envisage that a dramatic improvement in the nation's health and a corresponding saving in NHS expenditure will result if the Government were to introduce a comprehensive and fully funded allergy testing service as part of the NHS primary care system, comprising a training scheme for allergy specialists, regional allergy centres and local allergy clinics.
- B. Greater use should be made of the media in the promotion of a better understanding of health and diet matters, thereby relieving the workload of the NHS. The basis on which pharmacists are paid should be changed, in order to fully recognise their important front-line role in the provision of health advice.
- C. Liberals call for a complete ban on all promotion of tobacco products and regular increases in duties to discourage consumption.

## **11. Involvement of people in all processes that inform health and social care strategic planning, operational delivery and integration**

- A. Liberals believe that, as a general principle, decision-making should be devolved to the most local practical level, i.e. the concept of ‘mission command’ and the freedom to be flexible in the short-term and without losing sight of longer-term objectives is a very important one. Local decision-making allows communities to have a real say, avoids the errors that are so often caused by remote management, and may reduce unnecessary bureaucracy. The Liberal Party therefore calls for:
- 1) The work of Clinical Commissioning Groups and their evolving Support and Operational Structures, Public Health England; Clinical Senates & Networks; Hospitals and Community Health and Ambulance Trusts should interface very effectively with Health & Wellbeing Boards and Safeguarding Boards.
  - 2) Local Health & Wellbeing Boards and Safeguarding Boards should be replicated at Regional Level; and both should include elected as well as Statutory membership, and at all levels must ensure adequate clinical and Health & Social Sciences expertise to ensure their informed decision-making.
  - 3) Regional government, if established, to have a coordinating role in all of the above.
  - 4) The fullest possible co-operation within local authorities between health, social services, education, employment and housing/environment, in order to provide a “seamless” and integrated service. The Scandinavian countries and The Netherlands have more than a decade of integrated care that they are now reporting; and NHS Scotland devolved from ‘market driven’ healthcare and ‘payment by results’ a decade ago also.
  - 5) Training programmes to reflect the need for close co-operation between different professions and mutual understanding of their respective roles.
  - 6) Continuing local consultations between health service professionals and the public on the manner in which services are provided. However, an equal emphasis must also be placed on the participation of all stakeholders in the decision-making processes also.

- 7) Protected terms and conditions of employment for all staff both directly and indirectly employed by the NHS.
  - 8) A supportive working environment for people working in the health service which we believe is more likely to achieve high standards than the present culture which seeks to apportion blame in certain institutions and organisations.
- B. Liberals support greater partnership arrangements with the voluntary sector, which can sometimes provide more diverse and flexible opportunities for individuals needing residential and day care. Liberals also recognise that needs will vary from one community to another, and that the best approach will involve a partnership of the statutory and voluntary groups to achieve care in the community. Looking after elderly, frail and disabled people in their own homes is the civilized, rather than the cheap, option - a lack of funding in this area is perhaps worse than institutionalisation, especially for those volunteers and relatives doing the caring.
- C. Liberals support a Carers' Charter in recognition of the invaluable work done by carers. Such a Charter should specify the extent of community and backup support, including home help, meals on wheels and health services. Local Authorities should act to underpin individual and community effort that should not be substitutes for voluntary activity. Nor should people be abandoned to the crudity of market forces.
- D. In addition, Liberals call for:
- i. Citizens who are elderly or disabled and resident in homes, or in receipt of day care to have access to independent advocates with access to legal advice.
  - ii. Resource led, caring and efficient social services able to respond to individual needs and restore dignity to the individual.
  - iii. Inspections of such facilities by organisations that have representation from the local community.

## **12. NHS Estates & Assets**

- A. It is perhaps overlooked that the physical infrastructures, and much of the equipment of the NHS, have grown and evolved through investment of the public

purpose. This is also true for the clinical staffs that have graduated from UK training institutions, where the taxpayer meets the major cost of a University Degree. The Liberal Party is committed to the concept that the facilities and estates of the NHS must be fit for purpose, and maintained, developed and maintained at a regional-level of coordination. For NHS Staff however, we propose that national terms and conditions apply, and that national structures that ensure training, support, quality and accountability should have representation at local and regional levels of administration.

### **13. Funding Health & Social Care**

- B. Liberals recognise that the continuing development of medical technology is putting a great strain on the financial resources of the NHS, often at the expense of less newsworthy and less high-tech forms of medical treatment. We believe that such a moral dilemma is unlikely to be tackled by political parties, and therefore call for the setting up of a Royal Commission to investigate the impact of medical technology on ethics and medical funding.
  
- C. Liberals also recognise that other countries that have a higher rating of international performance for national H&W have evolved different ways to fund health and social care. Liberals believe that H&W should be encouraged, both financially and through education and positive and non-discriminatory marketing.

### **14. Health metrics and predictive analyses**

- A. The Liberal Party recognizes the importance of health and social care outcomes and metrics and their appropriate evaluation as an objective discipline, but also in the importance of qualitative narrative from health- and social care workers, carers and the cared for. All of these measures should be factored into informed decision-making; a requirement that can be helped by the predictive analytics of mathematics and decision support in some circumstances.



## **15.Liberal Party Core Values for Health & Well-being**

- A. Liberals call for the preservation of a free at the point of need NHS; an emphasis of prevention before the need to cure; the protection of the vulnerable; reforms of training; a real partnership working with service users and third sector organisations; integration of health and social care; establishment of local and regional assemblies and structures with statutory, informed and elected membership, which would include health powers and would bring local health provision into government. This would help to develop more effective public health strategies and greatly improve the rights of patients and other users within the health service. These Liberal measures represent a radical transformation of the NHS and Social Care in the UK.