Labour Party health and social care policy: Summary of announcements at the party’s 2017 conference, Brighton

Jon Ashworth MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Health

In his speech during the health and social care plenary, Jon Ashworth MP highlighted the NHS’s origins as a comprehensive service, free at the point of use. He renewed Labour’s commitment to the cause and promised that a Corbyn government would reintegrate the NHS and reinstate the NHS as a universal system.

Jon highlighted waiting lists of 4 million, and 2.5 million people waiting over 4 hours in A&E. He also touched on the increasing severity of winter pressures.

Speaking on the disparity of health between rich and poor, Jon said that a person’s health should not be dictated by their wealth.

The shadow health secretary pledged to:

- give the NHS an extra £45bn
- establish a £500m fund for winter pressures
- bring back the student nurses bursary and scrap the public sector pay cap
- welcome migrants from Europe and beyond to the NHS.

Jon talked about the damage being done by ‘endless’ tendering of contracts to private providers, drawing on a recent case in Sussex where an ambulance contract was given to a company which didn’t own any ambulances. He explained how the company sub-contracted to two companies, one of which folded, leaving paramedics without pay for weeks.

He announced that a Labour government will reinstate the Secretary of State’s responsibility for universal care, end STPs, repeal the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and reintegrate the NHS to end what he described as a ‘Tory-manufactured crisis’ in the NHS.

He paid tribute to the NHS workforce, particularly hardworking ambulance drivers, and promised to scrap the public sector pay cap and bring back bursaries for student nurses. He also emphasised his strong desire to reassure NHS staff from the EU.

Jon paid particular attention to public health, proposing a new approach with a focus on preventing disease and ending the dismantling of public health services. He added that he would build decent homes and improve air quality. He committed to an ‘all out aussalt on child ill health’ which included investing in more health visitors and nurses for schools, an investment in dentistry, free school meals and banning junk food advertising on family television at night.

Arguably, the biggest cheers came from the audience when Jon spoke about mental health. He promised to end cuts to child and adolescent mental health in order to deliver true parity of esteem. He talked about £43m being slashed from drug and alcohol addiction services.
Reflecting on his personal experience of alcoholism, through his father, he announced that Labour would put in place the first ever national strategy for children of alcohol and drug addicts.

**Motions on transformation and social care**

Following Jon’s speech, the conference heard from Labour delegates who spoke about the contemporary composite motions put up for discussion on the Tuesday. These included a motion on the NHS, moved by the Socialist Health Association, that proposed putting a stop to much of the transformation that has taken place in the NHS in the last five years, and repealing the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

A motion on social care was also proposed, promising to create a national care service and increase the funding available for care, while a motion to prevent assaults to emergency workers was moved.

Given Labour MP Chris Bryant’s recently announced Private Members’ Bill on the same issue, this could be seen as a show of support for the Rhondda MP. All three motions were passed almost unanimously, and the NHS Confederation will be following them closely.

**Barbara Keeley MP, Shadow Minister for Mental Health and Social Care**

In her speech, Barbara Keeley outlined what she described as the failings of the current government to tackle social care. She highlighted the cases of hundreds of thousands of unpaid carers and drew attention to child and adolescent mental health. The shadow minister promised to:

- end inadequate care visits of 15 minutes or less
- provide an extra £8bn for social care in this Parliament, give the NHS £3bn per year and provide a £1bn injection this year for social care
- provide free counselling in all schools
- increase the child and adolescent mental health budget and ringfence mental health budgets.

Keeley ended with a commitment to act on a pledge made during the general election and promised to set up an independent expert panel to consult on social care while a national care service is established.

**For more information, please contact:** Matthew.Macnair-Smith@nhsconfed.org