

# Your Views on the NHS

A SURVEY OF PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES IN SHROPSHIRE  
AND TELFORD AND WREKIN

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**A few weeks ago, Parliamentary candidates in Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin were put on the spot regarding the NHS. In each constituency, a supporter of Shropshire Defend Our NHS – living and registered to vote in the constituency – contacted all their local Parliamentary candidates asking them to respond to a structured survey on key local and national issues.**

Candidates were asked their views on the level of funding available for the NHS, locally and nationally, on privatisation of clinical services and NHS support services, and on what options for future A&E and hospital care they believe would be acceptable to voters in their constituency.

Evidence was made available to candidates about what's now happening to the NHS. We told them about the £18 million deficit in the budget of the organisation running the Royal Shrewsbury and Princess Royal Hospitals. We told them about the deliberate, planned and engineered £30 billion black hole in NHS finance nationally. We told them about the *impact* of declining investment in the NHS: the 76% of acute hospitals in debt, and the winter of A&E chaos that the NHS has just endured. We told candidates about escalating privatisation, describing some of the massive NHS contracts that are now being awarded to big business. We told them of the risks of having a single A&E in Shropshire, covering a patient population of 540,000 over 2000 square miles.

Why did we do the structured survey? This was a genuine and serious attempt to capture the breadth of views from our local candidates. Our supporters have been quite frustrated at times by letters from local politicians – especially when different MPs somehow write the same letter! This was why we wanted to present hard evidence to Parliamentary candidates on what's actually happening to the NHS. We hoped that candidates would look at the evidence and give straight answers to straight questions – providing their own evidence if they believed ours was wrong.

The questions were asked through a short electronic survey, which could be completed in a few minutes. Questions could – where wished – be completed with a Yes or No answer. All questions also provided space for respondents to provide their own answers (for example, instead of a Yes/No response, or to give additional information following a Yes/No response, or indeed to disagree with the facts and figures we used to illustrate some questions). We made no secret of our own position: strong opposition to cuts and privatisation, and support for the retention of both our A&Es and acute hospitals (i.e. the Princess Royal and the Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals). We understood how busy Parliamentary candidates are in the closing stages of an election, so we sent each of them a reminder in case the first request had been overlooked.

The results were fascinating, with clear differences between parties (and between constituencies too). We contacted 24 of the 25 candidates, as we were unable to find contact details for one. In total, 11 candidates completed the survey (in whole or in part). One of the 11 gave his name – but skipped every other question! Others clearly felt very passionate about the topic, and went to a great deal of trouble to give careful and considered responses. In addition to the 11 survey responses, we received two emails from candidates: one short email from a candidate giving her views on the NHS; the other telling us that he would not be replying. Two candidates completed the survey and also sent additional information by email.

Overall, 13 of the 24 candidates made some sort of response; ten of these replied to our survey. We were pleased with this – but also a little sad that so many candidates were unwilling to give their views on the NHS in response to direct questions asked by voters in their constituencies.

Many of those responding to the survey made detailed and informative comments to support their answers. The knowledge of some of our Parliamentary candidates, around quite complex issues of NHS finance and NHS privatisation, was genuinely impressive. In the summaries below, we give a flavour of these comments, but we do not attempt to reproduce them in full. We have tried to be fair and even-handed in the comments we have used.

## **Political Parties**

The **Green Party** candidates responded in each of the five constituencies (Janet Phillips, Ludlow; Duncan Kerr, North Shropshire; Emma Bullard, Shrewsbury and Atcham; Peter Hawkins, Telford; Cath Edwards, The Wrekin).

We received three responses from **Labour Party** candidates (Graeme Currie, North Shropshire; Laura Davies, Shrewsbury and Atcham; Katrina Gilman, The Wrekin). We received no response from Simon Slater, Ludlow or David Wright, Telford.

One **Liberal Democrat** candidate made a detailed response to the survey (Charlotte Barnes, Ludlow). A second (Rod Keyes, The Wrekin) replied by email explaining that he would not complete the survey as ‘too often formalised responses are misrepresented by special interest groups’. We received no response from Tom Thornhill, North Shropshire or Christine Tinker, Shrewsbury and Atcham. We were unable to find contact details for Ian Croll, Telford.

Of the five **Conservative Party** candidates, one (Owen Paterson, North Shropshire) gave his name but skipped all survey questions relating to the NHS. A second Conservative candidate (Lucy Allan, Telford) did not complete the survey but sent a short email outlining her views on the NHS. We received no response from Philip Dunne, Ludlow; Daniel Kawczynski, Shrewsbury and Atcham or Mark Pritchard, The Wrekin.

One **UKIP** candidate (Andrea Allen, North Shropshire) completed the survey. We received no response from David Kelly, Ludlow; Suzanne Evans, Shrewsbury and Atcham; Denis Allen, Telford or Jill Seymour, The Wrekin.

## **Constituencies**

### **Ludlow**

In Ludlow, we received detailed responses from Janet Philips, Green Party and Charlotte Barnes, Liberal Democrats. Janet has also supported the Shropshire Defend Our NHS manifesto and attended Shropshire Defend Our NHS meetings; Charlotte attended a recent showing of the campaign film ‘Sell Off’ organised by Shropshire Defend Our NHS. We did not receive a response from Philip Dunne, Conservative Party; Simon Slater, Labour Party or David Kelly, UKIP.

Janet and Charlotte both believe that that Shropshire's NHS is under-funded, and that the NHS nationally does not receive enough money. Both outlined policies for increasing funding. Both described the importance of social care. Both are opposed to privatisation of the NHS, with Janet describing it as 'deplorable' and stating 'There is no place for private profit in our health service'. Charlotte described PFIs as disgraceful and noted the 'lack of accountability... and lack of working together' that go with privatisation. Janet opposed TTIP, commenting that the privatisation of NHS services would be 'virtually irreversible' under TTIP, while Charlotte viewed TTIP with caution but welcomed the safeguards secured by Vince Cable.

Janet wanted both our hospitals – the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital and the Princess Royal Hospital – to remain as District General Hospitals with consultant-led A&E care. She said, 'We reject any down grading of services and any increase in journey times to hospitals. Future Fit is being sold as an opportunity, but it appears only to be a cost cutting exercise. We are not being told what budgets are planned, and what minimum costs will be. South Shropshire residents would be hugely disadvantaged if RSH were to close or be downgraded'.

Charlotte preferred the option of retaining both hospitals, but believed Shrewsbury is better located if one hospital is closed. She said 'In an ideal world we would keep both hospitals. However if it comes down to it I really think the Shrewsbury Hospital is far better located for the majority of people in Shropshire. The difficulty I know a lot of people face at the moment is which hospital they should go to for their needs. In a case of emergency and accessing A&E you often don't know what's wrong, if it was a stroke for example you are best placed to go to Telford but you need to diagnose yourself first. We can't continue like this. We also need Urgent Care Centres in Ludlow, Bridgnorth and a Rural Urgent Care Model in Bishops Castle. We need good medical treatment that we can access close to home'.

We obviously can't comment in detail on the views of other candidates, but we know from hustings meetings that Philip Dunne is the only one of the five who is unable to oppose closure of the A&E at the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital. This has caused considerable anger.

### **North Shropshire**

In North Shropshire, Owen Paterson, Conservative candidate, left us his name. We received completed survey responses from Duncan Kerr, Green Party; Graeme Currie, Labour Party and Andrea Allen, UKIP. Duncan has supported the Shropshire Defend Our NHS manifesto and attended meetings of Shropshire Defend Our NHS; Graeme emailed additional information to support his survey responses.

We did not receive a response from Tom Thornhill, Liberal Democrats.

Duncan, Graeme and Andrea all agreed that the NHS in Shropshire is under-funded. Duncan and Graeme believed the NHS nationally does not receive enough money. Duncan noted that 'Mental Health services are particularly under-funded and no priority is being given to health promotion and prevention of ill-health'. Graeme wrote about the impact on local services of central government cuts: '£80M over 3 years at Shropshire Council, is devastating. Over £23 Million cuts in adult social

care have seen the closure of valued day services, reductions in necessary services and the inevitable consequence of massively increased pressure on our two hospital. Delayed discharge figures have increased by over 400% since 2010'. Andrea did not give a Yes or No response to the question on whether or not the NHS nationally has enough money. She felt that there was a lot of waste in the NHS e.g. that 'some trusts employ diversity officers and energy managers'.

Duncan, Graeme and Andrea all opposed privatisation of clinical services in the NHS. Duncan and Graeme also opposed privatisation of non-clinical services, including highly skilled scientific services. Duncan explicitly opposed PFI and TTIP, and said 'The profit motive has no place in the NHS'. Graeme said 'Labour will end the drive towards privatisation by repealing the Health and Social Care Act. We will restore proper democratic accountability for the NHS, scrap David Cameron's market framework and ensure that private patients are not prioritised ahead of NHS patients'. He added that Labour will replace the competition regime with an 'NHS Preferred Provider' framework, to ensure that the NHS is not needlessly destabilised by market competition. Andrea said UKIP wanted to encourage trusts to buy out their PFI contracts where this is affordable, and felt that getting out of the EU was the solution to TTIP. Andrea did not give a Yes or No response to the question on privatisation of non-clinical NHS services, but said 'I believe that cleaning is better kept in house where there is accountability'.

The three candidates who replied to us were also in agreement in wanting both our hospitals – the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital and the Princess Royal Hospital – to remain as District General Hospitals with consultant-led A&E care. Duncan noted that 'We need improved community services and the retention of both these hospitals'. Graeme said 'The proposed reconfiguration of health provision needs a strong local voice to press for Urgent Care Centres in Oswestry and Whitchurch. We must defend and expand the much needed and highly valued Whitchurch Community Hospital. I have stated publicly that I will fight to defend the NHS and retain access to the local A&E services at the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital that saved my daughter's life'. He argued. 'The NHS... embodies our belief that by the strength of our common endeavour, we achieve more than we achieve alone. But with the Conservatives the future of the NHS is under threat'. Andrea noted 'North Shropshire is such a wide spread rural constituency that journey times are long and roads not very good. We also have to factor in that many people in Wales are actually nearer to the RSH than to a Welsh hospital'.

We can't comment on the views of the Liberal Democrat candidate, nor meaningfully on the views of the Conservative candidate.

### **Shrewsbury and Atcham**

The pattern of responses here mirrored Ludlow. We received survey responses from Emma Bullard, Green Party and Laura Davies, Labour Party. We did not hear from Daniel Kawczynski, Conservative; Christine Tinker, Liberal Democrat; or Suzanne Evans, UKIP.

Emma and Laura agreed that the local NHS is under-funded, and that the national NHS does not receive enough money. Both candidates flagged up concerns around cuts to social care, and the impact on health. Emma raised the issue of local government spending cuts, noting 'Shropshire Council has made unnecessarily harsh cuts in social care and refuses to consider even a small council

tax rise to benefit people who need these services'. She argued for public control of allocation of local funds. Laura said 'Cuts in social care have led to more pressure on hospitals'. On national funding, Emma reported Green Party policy of investing £12bn annually in the NHS to ensure that the market no longer plays any role in it. She said 'Social care would be free for over 65s and more well-paid jobs created to raise the level and standards of care provided' and argued for staff to be 'trained, rewarded and retained'.

Both Emma and Laura opposed privatisation of the NHS. Emma explicitly opposed TTIP, and raised the possibility of buying back PFI deals. Emma said 'We would scrap the Health and Social Care Act' (also Labour Party policy). Emma stated her support for the manifesto of Shropshire Defend Our NHS.

Emma wished to see both hospitals – the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital and the Princess Royal Hospital – remain as District General Hospitals with consultant-led A&E care. She noted that Telford and Shrewsbury were both growing, and therefore 'we need both hospitals'. Laura said that acceptable options were either a newly built hospital between Shrewsbury and Telford or the retention of our two existing hospitals and A&Es.

### **Telford**

Telford loses the contest here, with only one of the five candidates getting around to completing the survey. This was Peter Hawkins from the Green Party. He said that Shropshire's NHS was under-funded, and the NHS nationally did not receive the money it needed. He commented, quite correctly, that 'Spending on health per head is lower in the UK than most Western European nations'. He opposed privatisation, and wished to see both hospitals – the Royal Shrewsbury and the Princess Royal - as District General Hospitals with consultant-led A&E care.

We also received an email from Lucy Allan, Conservative candidate. We had made it clear to candidates that we were asking specific questions for a reason; stressing – politely – that we wanted to put them on the spot. We had hoped that candidates would be willing to answer direct questions, and to read and consider the evidence we provided to them of an escalating crisis in the NHS. It was disappointing that Lucy wasn't able to complete the survey, but nevertheless courteous of her to respond.

Her email said '100% champion the NHS and the clinicians who lead it'. She said that no party was proposing to sell off the NHS, and welcomed the 'new investment into the NHS by 2020'. She was not opposed to 'external contractors, like GPs providing services to the NHS as long as they are the best value and best for patient care'. However, Lucy did not complete the survey and therefore may not have read the detailed evidence we gave in our introductions to questions. She may remain unaware of the financial squeeze of the NHS that has taken place since 2010, the planned £30 billion financial shortfall by 2020, and the wholesale (and costly) privatisation that is now taking place. Press reports and Twitter feeds suggest that Lucy wants to see a single A&E and super-hospital in Shropshire and believes this should be in Telford.

The other candidates (David Wright, Labour and Denis Allen, UKIP) did not respond.

## **The Wrekin**

Here, we had replies from the Green Party candidate (Cath Edwards) and the Labour Party candidate (Katrina Gilman). We also received an email from the Liberal Democrats.

Cath and Katrina both believed the NHS was under-funded, both in Shropshire and at national level. They both stated their opposition to privatisation. On privatisation, Katrina said 'I believe our NHS should be publicly run. I have been running a petition against TTIP which I believe could risk up opening the floodgates to further privatisation. I believe that those services which have been privatised should be brought back into public control at the earliest opportunity'. She also noted that privatisation of non-clinical services in the NHS leads to fragmentation, neither saving money nor improving services.

Rod Keyes, the candidate for the Liberal Democrats, sent us an email saying that he would not complete the survey as 'too often formalised responses are misrepresented by special interest groups'. We received no response from Mark Pritchard, Conservative or Jill Seymour, UKIP.

## **Was this worth doing?**

Yes, undoubtedly.

Shropshire Defend Our NHS is not a party political organisation – but we do understand that decisions on the future of the NHS are made by politicians. We think it's right for voters to expect our politicians to represent them and be accountable to them, especially on a fundamentally important issue like the NHS.

We were genuinely impressed with the knowledge of almost all of those who responded to the survey. It was reassuring that a good proportion of our Parliamentary candidates in Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin understand the NHS, and seem to be willing to fight for the NHS.

It is so interesting that the candidates who oppose NHS cuts are willing to talk to us. The ones who oppose closing down one of our A&Es and hospitals here in Shropshire are happy to say so. The ones who oppose the terrifying sell off of the NHS that's happening now will be upfront and honest about their opposition.

What about the rest, though? Twenty four candidates were asked tough questions on the NHS by voters in their constituency – and fourteen of them weren't willing to give straight answers to those straight questions. That has to send some warning messages about accountability.

Shropshire Defend Our NHS gives our sincere thanks to Janet Phillips, Duncan Kerr, Emma Bullard, Peter Hawkins, Cath Edwards, Graeme Currie, Laura Davies, Katrina Gilman, Charlotte Barnes and Andrea Allen.

**27<sup>th</sup> April 2015**