

Simon Stevens
Chief Executive
NHS England

24 November 2017

Dear Simon

The Budget, NHS England and ‘difficult decisions’

This is an open letter on behalf of our wide membership of voluntary organisations in health and care. Wednesday’s Budget did not deliver the funding increases that health and social care need. Several senior NHS England figures have publicly voiced their concerns and suggested the need for tough decisions about what can be afforded by and expected of the NHS.

We are concerned about these statements.

On the one hand, we recognise that NHS England and local commissioners will have to make some very difficult budgeting decisions.

On the other hand, NHS England and local commissioners arguably have no mandate to make significant reductions to the NHS offer. This is properly a matter for ministers and Parliament. No political party proposed such reductions in their general election manifesto and nobody voted for such.

We recognise that it will be very difficult to square this circle. Already our members are reporting instances of barriers being put in place to restrict people’s access to treatments and services. Without a different approach, we think the most likely scenario will be a wave of piecemeal, short-termist rationing decisions, taken behind closed doors, with people not listened to, and outcomes which may be unfair, cause harm, or reinforce existing injustices and inequalities.

Any acceptable way through this will require decision making processes that are open, transparent, fully engaged with people and communities, and accountable. In our assessment these conditions do not apply and the arrangements for patient and

public involvement in shaping commissioning are not fit for purpose in the current, very testing circumstances.

We urge you to give priority to an upgrade in the processes of citizen involvement in commissioning decisions both in NHS England itself and in the wider commissioning system, drawing on the help and expertise of partners. The new Empowering People and Communities Taskforce, which meets for the first time next month, could be a forum for developing the overall approach – which will also support the goals of the Five Year Forward View.

The prize on offer is better and fairer decisions, made openly and accountably, commanding greater confidence, within the constraints set by ministers. This does not mean giving up on a proper, long term funding settlement for health and social care in the round. That is still needed, and the case for it must continue to be made.

With best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeremy Taylor". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jeremy Taylor

Chief Executive