

## Letter from Westminster



THE turn of the year saw widespread coverage of the winter pressures facing our NHS.

It was therefore, handy that early January saw my third ASKtheNHS

public meeting in Winchester. The Chronicle attended and was spot on in its coverage reporting 'no change is not an option'.

However, I am clear it must be evidence-based change that is focused on getting my constituents world-class treatment when they're very sick (hence the need for the new Critical Treatment Hospital) while recognising it's not all about hospital care and it's certainly not all about money. Before some exhale from that gasp of breath, let me clarify.

Over the last decade, NHS net expenditure has increased from £75bn to £117bn. That's a 56 per cent increase. If money were the sole solution we'd have NHS productivity outperforming the best health systems in the world and even Channel 4 News running stories featuring happy patients.

Before the last election, NHS England published its plan for the service and challenged the two main parties to fund it. We are committed to securing high quality free healthcare for all which is why we are giving the NHS in England the funding it said was needed, with an additional £10 billion by 2020.

So the money is there but it must go hand-in-hand with new models of care and that's why the Service & Transformation Plans are important. At my meeting we had a sensible, sober discussion about access to GPs, how we manage long-term chronic illnesses and the role public health should play in keeping people out of the most expensive hospital care.

Health policy is complicated, it cannot be tweeted in 140 characters and nor should it be. Our local Trust is experiencing unprecedented demand on its services but this is not simply about an increase in numbers of those attending A&E. The issue is far more complex in that those who attend are sicker, often elderly and frail with complex and multiple long-term conditions meaning they need to be admitted.

This complexity continues when they are medically fit to be discharged but not able to safely enter the social care system. Getting the right packages of care in place takes time and compounds the challenge for our hospitals. That is why a strong, and intact, Hampshire County is so important and they are right to levy the 2% social care precept this year to ease the financial pressure.

Finally, I was pleased to see the Prime Minister talk about the mental health challenge facing our children and young people. As a constituency MP, I hear for myself how these challenges can develop from a very young age so new support for every secondary school to increase awareness around mental health must be right.

26.1.17