

Health



What we stand for

- A health policy based on promoting health for all and preventing illness.
- We believe public health should be promoted through policies designed to secure a healthy urban and rural environment. This should include healthy workplaces and friendly supportive local communities; healthy local food; a transport system which promotes clean air and regular exercise; the best possible formal and informal facilities for sports and culture; an education system which promotes healthy lifestyles and a local economy which provides access to fulfilling work for all. Green Party policies across the board promote preventative health.
- However, anyone can get ill and need treatment. When prevention has failed, the Green Party believes that the National Health Service (NHS) should be a national and comprehensive service, free at the point of entry and funded by taxation.
- The NHS has been under-funded for many years and the Green Party believes it now requires a sustained increase in resources targeted at front-line care. At the national level we advocate the introduction of an NHS Tax, (a tax levied on private healthcare companies benefiting from NHS trained staff and earmarked to increase direct funding of the NHS).
- In the longer term, a health policy which prioritises prevention (rather than a competition to treat as much illness as possible) should result in the need for less healthcare funding.
- In the meantime we believe in an NHS which is fully funded and properly managed by government (national and local) without the disastrous involvement of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). We believe the NHS should remain a public service and should not be replaced by a contracted-out and semi-privatised US-style system, where anything from GP services to acute hospital services are provided by private profit-making companies. For this reason we oppose Foundation Hospitals and PFI contracts. Neither offers a good deal in the longer term for patients and taxpayers.
- An NHS in which all services, including treatment, are free at the point of use. This includes free dental care, eye tests and the abolition of prescription charges.
- Where appropriate healthcare should be provided at home or in community-based facilities as close to the patient's home as possible.

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- A drugs safety policy based on effective modern research methods in which animal experimentation plays no part.
- The gradual inclusion of complementary therapies within NHS provision so that patients have access to all available and appropriate treatments. Complementary therapies can often prevent the situation worsening and thus save resources.

What's happening now

The NHS spends a small part of its overall budget on disease prevention and most of the budget is spent on dealing with the failure of this prevention.

The NHS was £512 million in debt in 2005/6. It is estimated that 15,000 jobs have been lost, wards have been closed and operations have been cancelled as a result of these debts. York and Selby Primary Care Trust (PCT) was £23 million in debt.

These debts have been caused in part by the Private Finance Initiative which uses private money to build NHS hospitals. The NHS then rents these hospitals from the private company. Some private companies may be making money even when facilities have been vastly delayed or not built at all. The National Audit Office says that PFI offers 'poor value for money'.

In this situation services have become patchy, staff are demoralised and patients are losing confidence in the standards of care they can expect. In December 2006 the PCT announced the rationing of healthcare in order to try and balance its books. The suspension of a wide range of treatments for 'minor' complaints including backache and chronic pain(!) was the exact opposite of preventative health care.

Many people in York are unable to find a NHS dentist and go without dental care or are forced to pay for private dentistry.

What we will do

- Lobby central government for increased funding for local health services to ensure that all necessary treatments remain available. Funds should be available for early intervention where necessary and appropriate to alleviate suffering, enabling everyone to live their lives to the full and save money in the longer run.
- Lobby for the provision of NHS dentistry for all. We would press for government policy where the NHS provides all treatment free at the point of use, including free dental care, eye tests and the abolition of prescription charges.
- In local government, we would support and develop the work of health promotion services within the Council, encouraging a joined-up approach to health through our other policies on pollution reduction, education and social services and healthy lifestyles. This would include increased provision of locally based leisure facilities.

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- We would promote partnership working with the North Yorkshire and York Primary Care Trust and the York Hospitals NHS Trust and other bodies with the aim of bringing our principles on preventative health and community-based services into practice. It is vital that there is as much 'joined-up thinking' as possible in the provision of services to the elderly, children and families and other vulnerable groups.
- We would promote healthy eating in Council owned premises including York's schools.
- We would continue to work as a 'critical friend' to the Primary Care Trust and the York Hospitals NHS Trust through the York Council Social Services and Health Scrutiny Board.
- Treat services providing support to people addicted to drugs and alcohol as a funding priority (whether the services are provided by the council, PCT or voluntary sector). Whilst these people are unlikely to speak up for themselves and an easy target for cuts, drug and alcohol addiction fuels a great deal of crime in York. A 'joined-up' strategy for tackling crime must prioritise reducing addiction. (See *Crime & Social Services* chapters).