



Conservatives cannot be trusted to run the NHS.

In the wake of the shocking Mid-Staffordshire report into the NHS released last week and the announcement that ULHT is to be investigated over its high death rates the Leader of the Lincolnshire Independents Marianne Overton has declared that ***'If elected in the May 2013 County Council elections we will, through the Health Scrutiny Committee, carry out a new and urgent review of the quality and safety of patient care in Lincolnshire and governance at ULHT. We have been shocked at the documents we have uncovered and that the Conservative led government has turned a blind eye to a cover up about concerns over patient care. Equally appalling is that nearly three years into a conservative led government we still have virtually the worst funded hospitals in England. Our conservative MPs and councillors appear to have done nothing - no doubt they do not want to annoy their party bosses in London.'***

The Lincolnshire Independents today released three letters (attached) which have not been made public before, which suggest that there have been clinical concerns about safety at ULHT. In the first a surgeon complains that he feels that he is being 'coerced' into doing things which are unsafe. The second refers to surgical lists being overcrowded in order to meet targets and refers to a patient death, with an implication that this overcrowding was a contributory cause, and the third from a clinical director warns the Chairman of the Trust, Paul Richardson that there has been a shift toward meeting targets at the expense of patient safety.

Chris Brewis the only independent on the current Health Scrutiny Committee said he was ***'shocked at the revelations in the letters'***. He continued ***'It is well-known that Lincolnshire's NHS is virtually the worst funded in the entire country and our hospitals have been and continue to be under huge pressure. We cannot allow the disgraceful culture highlighted in the Mid-Staffordshire report to put Lincolnshire patients at risk. I am appalled that we have looked at safety before as a Committee but these letters which were not made available to us at the time suggest that we have been misled. What else is being covered up? The national mortality data shows Lincolnshire's hospitals at the wrong end of the league table.'***

Phil Scarlet who is standing as an independent in South Holland and resigned from ULHT as a Non Executive Director over concerns about how Paul Richardson was running the Trust said ***'It is shocking that ULHT spent £0.5m on gagging its former Chief Executive who raised concerns about safety. He said if you put more pressure on the system it will be dangerous for patients. This money was intended for patient care but instead it is being used to suppress around 3000 pages of documents. How many others are there like these we have released today? These letters are some 9 months after Walker was forced out and show the new regime at the Trust putting targets before safety just what Walker tried to stop. The announcement this week that ULHT are to be the subject of a mortality review demonstrates the implications for that; high death rates which are shocking. We will have to look at this very carefully; it raises seriously questions about the governance of ULHT. Let's be absolutely clear the use of taxpayers' funds to conceal wrongdoings should be regarded very seriously and could even be misconduct in public office by misuse of public funds for a cover up. When a Trust spends such money on a cover up, how can we trust what they say? I call on Paul'***

Richardson, Chair of the Trust to account for the £0.5m and these letters which have been concealed. He should resign to restore patient confidence? We will also consider whether we need to go to court to challenge the legality of the suppression of documents from the public. It is shocking to have the suppression of around 3000 pages of documents when the Francis report on Mid Staffordshire talks about openness and transparency

Marianne Overton, Leader of the Independents, the second largest group on the County Council said ***'As Independents we will stand up for Lincolnshire.***

"On NHS Lincolnshire, we fought hard for improvements for people in hospital, with weekly meetings between senior staff and even having a special improvement board. But the NHS remains very centrally controlled, with finance and targets set under close government control. Conservative MP's knew what was going on, but the Conservative-led coalition has ploughed on with increasing privatisation and "reorganisation". Were MP's and local Councillors in fear of embarrassing their own government? Are these revelations the tip of an iceberg? Is the NHS safe in the current Conservative hands?"

In April, Lincolnshire County Council takes over responsibility for Public Health from the NHS. A new committee then oversees health in Lincolnshire, called the "Health and Wellbeing Board". In Lincolnshire, the only Councillors allowed on it are card-carrying national party members, making strong Conservative party control."

"Independents put Lincolnshire first and put patient safety first. An Independent-led Council will take our NHS and health seriously. We commit to investigate health issues thoroughly and seek essential improvements. It is not good enough to continually accept a higher level of risk, in order to cut costs."

ENDS

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Chris Brewis is available for comment and interview on 07951 365831

13th February 2013

Notes to editors

1 There have been a series of major governance failures at Lincolnshire's hospitals including a series of damning CQC reports, further financial problems, the withdrawal of nurse training etc.

2 Lincolnshire's hospitals have some of the worst mortality rates of anywhere in England as set out in the Good Hospital Guide available through the following web link

<http://dfosterintelligence.co.uk/thought-leadership/hospital-guide/>

ULHT is identified as one of only 12 Trusts that were higher than expected on two out of four mortality measures.