



NO to NHS Cuts!
NO to NHS Privatisation!
NO to Selling-Off NHS Sites!

Creeping Privatisation in the NHS - Questions for the Council

The privatisation of the NHS has been a steady and insidious process over several years, with private companies hiding behind the NHS logo and the term outsourcing being used to mask the realities of the market.

Privatisation is not being achieved in one fell swoop but rather by steadily chipping away at services. In the North East the local CCGs are awarding more and more health contracts to private sector organisations, taking nursing, medical and other direct health care away from the NHS and putting it into the hands of profit-making companies.

For example, *Vocare Ltd.* is a private limited company which over the last four years has steadily increased in size. It now provides Urgent Care Centres at most of the hospitals across the North East, including South Tyneside Hospital and Pallion Health Centre – whilst all the time displaying the NHS logo in its promotional material.

Unfortunately, the pandemic has provided an opportunity for even more health funding to be channelled to big business by this Government– *Serco* has been awarded a contract for track and trace, *Deloitte* has the contract for Covid-19 testing sites, and questionable contracts relating to NHS data are being made with tech companies such as *Palantir*, *Google* and *Microsoft*. It is clear that the sudden onset of the virus has provided cover for many private contracts to be awarded without scrutiny or competition, and there remains a danger that these quick fix solutions will remain. It is no surprise that, these private companies have been a disaster, with less than a third of patients being tested and traced with too few tests being available locally. The delays in the provision of results clearly reduces the effectiveness of the process. A local “Find, Test, Trace, Isolate and Support” system organised by our Public Health Department, as recommended by the Independent Sage, would be much more efficient.

Recently, North Tyneside CCG has awarded a contract to a private Swedish Company called *Livi* to undertake virtual consultations in Primary Care across North Tyneside. This would enable GP patients to get video appointments provided they had a Smart phone or laptop with the correct software.

Whilst this is claimed to be a pilot scheme and an addition to the usual GP work, it is undoubtedly part of a very slippery privatisation slope. *Livi* claim to be Europe’s largest digital healthcare provider and we anticipate that it may only be a matter of time before their services are more widely commissioned by other CCGs in the North East.

It is a matter of great concern to us, that the North Tyneside CCG did not inform North Tyneside Councillors of this development. There is no public information about the costs; what the Governance arrangements are; how patient confidentiality will be maintained; how vulnerable patients without a smart phone or laptop will be treated; or how patients will be able to complain or seek redress if there are problems. The documentation produced by Livi does not mention it being a pilot or that it has yet to be inspected by the Care Quality Commission although it carries their logo as well as the NHS logo.

KONP would ask why the funding being provided to Livi is not being invested in local, existing primary care services? KONP supports innovation and new ways of working but this is clearly a cost-cutting exercise which will increase macro privatisation, undermine localised provision and exacerbate health inequalities. It wastes taxpayers' money by contracting out to private, profit making companies with shareholders.

See KONP North East's report at: <https://konpnortheast.com/privatisation/primary-care/>

This creeping privatisation could escalate further within the new "Integrated Care System" (ICS) which will extend from Cumbria across to the North East and down to Whitby and will prove extremely attractive to multinational corporations whose whole purpose is profit for the shareholders.

At present, the elected members of Sunderland Council, are jointly responsible with the CCGs for the ICS plan. The unelected CCG members receive their instructions from NHS England which means that all Sunderland Councillors, especially those on the "Health and Wellbeing Board" and the "Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee" provide the only democratic accountability.

We know that many councillors support a publicly funded and publicly provided NHS and are especially grateful for the support they have given KONP in past campaigns to safeguard local services. However, now, more than ever in the current circumstances, we all need to be vigilant against inadvertently colluding with the political decision to dismantle our NHS.

We would urge all members to take action wherever possible - to stand up and stop privatisation.

In light of all of the above, KONP Sunderland and District has asked that the following question be put to the next Council meeting on 23rd September

"What is Sunderland Council doing to prevent the steady and insidious NHS privatisation process and how will you ensure that the local "Integrated Care System" involves changes based on health and social need rather than being driven by financial considerations that lead to further outsourcing to the private sector?"