

Just one billion more

If putting more money into the NHS solved its problems we should see much reduced difficulties now. Record amounts and large increases in cash have been provided since 2019.

The truth as Labour acknowledges is you need reform, improvement in how it is spent, as well as extra money.

In this election various parties offer a few billions here and there to solve problems in the NHS or other public services. They offer to “pay” for this with tax hikes that they hope will just hit the rich, leaving most voters unaffected. It is nonsense to suppose these modest sums in relation to the total will make much difference.

In order to properly fund the NHS we need large sums, tens of billions, to pay the big bills. In recent years there has been plenty of wasteful spending.

The government paid a large sum to provide Nightingale hospitals, then scarcely used them. If they had been used for COVID the main hospitals could have done other work, providing more timely treatment and keeping waiting lists down.

The government spent a lot on taking over the capacity of many private hospitals. The NHS then failed to use all that capacity for non COVID cases, wasting much of the spend. Worse still the private sector couldn't perform operations in its own hospitals, adding further to waiting lists.

PPE was in short supply worldwide. Taxpayers had to pay large sums to get PPE from worldwide suppliers where they could. Why didn't the NHx have bigger stockpiles? Why didn't the NHS have flexible contracts with long term suppliers that allowed bigger deliveries in a crisis?

The NHS has been underpaying some medics. As a result expensively trained staff have got medical jobs abroad where pay is higher or have left for other occupations. The NHS hires staff back as contract staff at much higher rates.

There is no easy answer to improving management. I am not proposing another expensive reorganisation, What we immediately need is to make key managers more accountable and to get to tackle the staff, property and supply problems which are still widespread.