

Keep Our NHS Public's response to today's King's Speech (7th November 2023)

“This move from ‘clapping to sacking’ is a cynical attempt to draw attention from the malign effects of disastrous policies and transfer the blame to the very workers who are struggling to keep services there for the public.”

There was nothing new and little that was helpful for the NHS or its workforce in today's Kings Speech where His Majesty set out government policy for the year ahead. King Charles spoke about his government imposing minimum service levels on NHS staff during strikes, but made no reference to engaging with health workers to amicably end pay disputes and in doing so help to guarantee the longevity of the health service. There was a reference to bringing down NHS waiting lists but no detail given as to how other than a reliance on the NHS Long Term Plan, which is an something that will take many years to implement.

Dr John Puntis, Co-Chair of the campaign group *Keep Our NHS Public* [1] and retired consultant paediatrician said:

"As NHS waiting lists increase and underfunding and a lack of staffing continue to wreak immense damage, the big idea reiterated was the Minimum Service Levels bill (aka 'sack key workers bill') strongly opposed by trade unions as an attack on the fundamental right of workers to withdraw their labour. Health workers (among others) will find themselves in the situation where they have democratically and legally voted to strike but are then forced to work or be sacked if they don't comply. This is supposed to protect patients but raises the question as to where is such concern shown by government in terms of its health policies and the dire effect this is having on patient care? (for example the findings by the Royal College of Emergency Medicine of 500 deaths a week with patients stuck in emergency departments, or the 500 deaths last year from ambulance delays)?

Like so much from this government, this move from ‘clapping to sacking’ is a cynical attempt to draw attention from the malign effects of its disastrous policies and transfer the blame to the very workers who are struggling to keep services there for the public. A published impact assessment has already cautioned that minimum service levels could poison industrial relations, leading to more frequent and prolonged industrial action.

The phasing out of smoking through restriction on sale of cigarettes is a welcome acknowledgement that public health is not a matter of individual responsibility but requires government action. An additional priority should be to end unrestricted sale of vapes and the promotion of newer nicotine and tobacco products, seen by the tobacco industry as a way of securing its long-term future."

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Spokespeople are available for broadcast interview. Contact Samantha Wathen, Press Officer for Keep Our NHS Public press@keepournhspublic.com or Call/WhatsApp: 0777 6047472

Notes to editors

1. Keep Our NHS Public is an independent organisation campaigning for a properly funded and fully publicly owned NHS: www.keepournhspublic.com