

Alex Cunningham MP

Stockton North



Tuesday, 08 October 2013

NURSE PROVISION IN PORT CLARENCE – AN OPEN LETTER

I am well aware of the waste of time and resources due to the Tory Government's reorganisation of the National Health Service but it should never have resulted in the withdrawal of a one day a week nurse from a clinic in one of our neediest communities – but sadly it has.

The people of Port Clarence in my Stockton North constituency saw their nurse, provided by one of the GP practices in Billingham, withdrawn because they are no longer paid to deliver the service.

It was originally funded by the former Primary Care Trust out of non-recurring funds but was never funded as a core service.

Sadly whilst lots of people in the Government's new GP-led commissioning services are talking to each other and people outside, no-one seems capable of making a decision to commission this vital service which I understand costs around £4,000 a year.

I am grateful to those trying to help, including the Director of Public Health at Stockton Borough Council and the Head of Commissioning and Delivery at the NHS Hartlepool & Stockton-on-Tees Clinical Commissioning Group, neither of whom are responsible for providing the service – but remain frustrated that no-one will deliver *now* for this needy community.

Despite the help, and a request to the NHS England Area Team who I understand are responsible for commissioning this service, nothing has happened. This failure has led to my decision to write this open letter to local, area and regional people and publish it in the hope that someone somewhere will accept responsibility and get this service reinstated.

I am aware that health professionals plan a review of health provision in the community at a meeting at Port Clarence on 16th October and I welcome that, but I hope action can be taken ahead of this meeting – and other services developed as a result of it.

Despite the Government's claims that their new arrangements would bring health care decisions closer to communities as they would be taken by GPs, the decision making couldn't be further from the people of Port Clarence.

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So last week I met with local people to hear first hand of the brilliant service now lost to them and the knock-on effect. Instead of nipping in to see the nurse for routine advice or procedures, they now have to take a £4.40 return trip to Billingham if and when the local bus runs – and that means more expense if taking a child who could lose a full half day from school. That is double trouble for local people – the expense few can afford and for the child a loss of vital education.

A GP from one of the Billingham practices operates one morning and one evening surgery a week at Port Clarence but, quite understandably, sees only patients from his own practice. He does his best seeing more people than is reasonable but now his time is taken up with issues normally dealt with by the nurse meaning less time for more serious health issues.

The people of Port Clarence need their nurse now.

If a solution is not found within the next couple of weeks, it is my intention to raise the issue on the floor of the House of Commons and encourage the Health Secretary to intervene to get someone to do the right thing.

Can you please tell me what you plan to do to provide our Port Clarence community with the service they need and correct this injustice.

I hope to hear from you by return.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Alex Cunningham', written in a cursive style.

Alex Cunningham MP

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