

National Health Action Party Constitution

14 May 2012 – 18 November 2017

A. Aims

The National Health Action party is a group of like-minded individuals, who strongly support the original principles of the National Health Service (NHS) and are shocked by the failure of the democratic process as demonstrated by the appearance and the passage through parliament of the Health and Social Care Bill. The resulting Act is now destroying the NHS in England as an effective, efficient health system fair to all citizens and patients. It will transform a cost-effective public system of health care into one that will be more expensive, wasteful and unequal, whilst diminishing levels of trust and corroding standards of ethical behaviour within the health system.

Quite apart from the direct effects on healthcare provision, the destruction of the NHS also marks the violation of important social values. The NHS was more than just a structure for the delivery of healthcare. It was also a social institution that reflected national solidarity; expressed the values of equity and universalism; and institutionalised the duty of government to care for all in society. The NHS marked out a space in society where the dictates of commerce and the market were held in check so as to give expression to socially directed goals, for individuals and society as a whole.

As a party, we reflect these principles and values of the original NHS and seek to apply them politically. In our view, all three main political parties in England have lost credibility in their stewardship of the NHS, and reflect the increasing capture of parliament and the democratic process by powerful but narrow interest groups and financial interests. In seeking to prevent the further destruction of the NHS, we recognise the need to improve the democratic and public interest credentials of parliament and have established this party as a platform for the election of MPs and local councilors who will first and foremost serve the public interest.

As a party, we subscribe to the World Health Organisation's declaration that within a society, "the highest standards of health should be within reach of all, without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition". Attaining the highest possible level of health is a vital national and world-wide goal whose realisation requires the action of many other social and economic sectors, as well as better and innovative approaches to governance and development.

These are the underlying purposes and values of our party, which we will translate into new policy proposals along the following lines.

As far as the health system is concerned, while the NHS has been outstandingly successful as a health service by international standards, it must continually respond to changing disease patterns, technological advances, demographic, economic, financial and environmental changes. We will promote evidence-based approaches to improving the safety, quality and efficiency of healthcare; and reducing inequalities in health. We will develop the NHS as a platform for the promotion of healthy communities and lifestyles, and not as a platform for the creation of profits and the commodification of disease and illness.

We will promote efficiency, innovation and a culture of striving for excellence through a system that is planned, organised, transparent and accountable. We will work to de-commercialise the health system and seek to abolish the purchaser/provider split in the NHS. We will avoid wasteful competition and excess capacity. We will remove perverse incentives both to over-treat and under-treat patients depending on their financial circumstances. We will increase patients', citizens' and health professionals' involvement and participation in the organisation and provision of health care. We will improve the integration of primary, secondary and tertiary care within the NHS, as well as between the NHS and social care. We will promote effective regulation, including recourse for whistle blowers, and the restoration of legal aid for those physically or psychologically damaged by medical negligence.

With the current financial constraints facing the country, we will demand that all possible measures for improving value for money and reducing unnecessary expense within the NHS have been applied before reductions in core services are considered. We will seek to maintain adequate and appropriate levels of public spending on health whilst opposing changes that will increase inefficiency, inequity, and expenditure from the NHS budget which does not go on service provision.

There are many challenges that arise from our ageing society. But the marketization of social care will only add to these challenges. As the Dilnot Commission pointed out, people are currently left exposed to potentially catastrophic care costs with no way to protect themselves. We agree with the principle that an "individual's lifetime contributions towards their social care costs – which are currently potentially unlimited – should be capped." Our proposals for social care will reform the current unfair, overly complex and unsustainable social care system.

We also see great value in promoting innovative public health approaches to health improvement. Much can be gained through the more effective regulation of damaging commercial activity: real patient and community empowerment; the reduction of social inequities; and the creation of a healthier environment. A progressive public health agenda would not only improve health, but also result in more efficient use of limited resources for health.

In order to sustain a fair, effective and efficient health care system as well as sound public health policies, we will also promote economic policies that are sustainable and just. Recognising the importance of the social and ecological determinants of health, and noting the serious environmental and financial threats facing society, we will advocate for new, alternative and sustainable approaches to development, which recognise the need to improve wellbeing within finite environmental boundaries. On the global stage we will strongly promote policies for universal access to affordable healthcare and to protect the global environment.

B. Governance

The governance of the party shall be by officers and an elected executive committee. The officers of the party will consist of two Co-leaders who will serve as Chair and Vice-chair of the executive committee, the Nominating Officer, Treasurer and Secretary.

The executive committee shall consist of the officers and up to 10 other elected members, all with full voting rights. The initial officers and committee will serve until endorsed or

changed by members at the first annual general meeting (AGM). Once elected, officers and committee members will serve for a maximum of three years, after which they may seek re-election by the AGM.

A quorum of the executive committee shall be a majority of those entitled to vote (i.e. eight).

Decisions shall usually be by consensus, but where a vote is taken that is tied, the Chair shall have a second and casting vote.

In the interim if decisions have to be made between meetings, the Co-Leaders shall be empowered to use their initiative in consultation with two other officers. Such decisions will be revisited at the next formal meeting of the executive committee.

The executive committee shall:

1. Meet formally at least 4 times per year to transact business. Its members will receive at least 10 days' notice of such a meeting.
2. Have power to co-opt, as appropriate, non-voting members for specific periods; for specific functions; or to represent other allied and involved groups deemed helpful to the objectives of the party. .
3. Set up such sub-committees/working parties as are deemed appropriate, providing at least one officer is present at meetings and that all recommendations are made to the main committee for endorsement/modification/approval.
4. Authorise, where deemed appropriate, the setting up of local party organisations to operate under the direction of the executive committee; and also have authority to disband such local organisations when deemed appropriate.
5. Arrange that all meetings are minuted, with such minutes being available at meetings.
6. Replace by invitation, ratified by the executive committee, at a routine meeting, and until the next AGM, any member who resigns or misses three consecutive meetings properly called without special dispensation from the committee's senior officers.
7. Call an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) within 14 days when requested to do so by:
 - i. Majority vote of the executive committee itself.
 - ii. Any 100 members of the party.
 - iii. Either requests, in i and ii above, to be submitted in writing, stating the reason(s), and signed by each member making the request. Such an EGM will have no minutes read and will deal only with the business of the request.
 - iv. The constitution may be changed only by a two-thirds majority at AGM or at a meeting called especially for the purpose if the matter is of exceptional urgency.

8. From time to time decide suitable membership fees and membership details contained in a separate set of specific rules and conditions.
9. Oversee any fund-raising activities, accept any correctly donated voluntary finance, bank with a retail bank, disbursing funds by cheques signed by any two of three named members.
10. Direct the Treasurer to keep accounts in accordance with Electoral Commission guidance, which will be available to officers on request and presented to members at each AGM.
11. Have full discretionary powers over dispersal of any funds vested with the treasurer in general pursuance of the party's aims save that:
 - i. should dissolution occur, all assets remaining after satisfying outstanding debts and liabilities shall be allocated to nominated charities concerned with contemporary health matters.
 - ii. no individual member(s) of the party shall benefit personally from any cash distribution.
12. Consider any matter not provided for in this constitution, making any decisions deemed necessary which shall be regarded as final and binding.

C. Membership

1. Associate Members

Associate membership of the party is open to all who share its aims. Associate members may attend and speak at meetings of the party, but do not have the right to vote at the AGM.

2. Full Voting Members

Full membership of the party is open to all who share its aims, subject to a subscription that has been decided by the executive committee. Full members may attend and speak at meetings of the party and also have the right to vote at the AGM.

3. A list of members will be maintained by an officer of the party, appointed by the executive committee.

4. The executive committee has the authority to deny membership, or expel from membership, anyone who, in the opinion of the committee, is acting against the interests of the party or bringing the party into disrepute.

D. The Annual General Meeting.

1. The AGM shall take place on a date determined by the executive committee at intervals of not more than 14 months. The purpose shall be to receive appropriate reports on activity and finance, to elect the executive committee and to transact other appropriate business previously notified to members, not less than 14 days before the meeting in a formal agenda.

2. Attendance at the meeting is open to all members of the party. Voting at the meeting is open to all who have been full members of the party for at least 30 days before the meeting. The results of votes will be decided by a simple majority.

E. Political Activity

1. The party will field candidates, acceptable to the executive committee, at such elections as deemed appropriate by the executive committee.

2. All candidates should support the party's aims as defined in this constitution and should confirm that their membership of any other political party does not conflict with the beliefs and aims of the party.

3. Each candidate will be responsible for raising funds for their own election expenses with help, where possible, from the party's central funds. The disbursement of this fund will be at the discretion of the executive committee. Full accounts of election income and expenses must be sent to the party treasurer at least two weeks before the final date after the election for onward submission to the Electoral Commission. The executive committee will provide guidance on election procedure and an outline leaflet for candidates to develop, procure and deliver.

4. Whilst free to express personal opinions and act for their constituencies, all named candidates will always consider the appropriateness of their actions and not do anything to bring the good name of the party into question or disrepute.

5. The party's elected representatives will not be subject to a party whip. However the aim is to maintain consensus about the NHS, social care and related matters amongst elected members. In areas of policy where the party has a collective position, detailed evidence-based briefing to inform decision-making will be provided before key votes. This may indicate the party's preferred course(s) of action, but members will ultimately be free to vote according to their considered opinion and their conscience in the interests of their constituencies as a whole, if they consider that these diverge from the executive committee's view. They are, however, urged to discuss the grounds for their dissent with the executive committee so that the party may achieve a representative stance through the democratic process.

6. Whilst all elected members will be free to express personal or party opinion through the media, when indicating that they are from the party, the executive committee should be advised of such opinions and resulting broadcasts or publications so that consistency of policy is protected in all statements attributable to the party.

7. Commercial, investment, familial or habitual relationships with persons or institutions which create conflicts of interest with the stated aims of the party must be declared, and may be considered grounds for rejection for candidacy or for de-selection if in the view of the executive committee they would bring the party into disrepute or appear to influence the exercise of decision-making powers. Concealment of conflicts of interest is prima facie grounds for immediate ejection from the party and de-selection upon discovery.