

# Building a Future-Ready Health and Care System: Priorities, Partnerships and Payback



Ed Smith - former chair NHS Improvement.

The recent health and care plans outline three essential themes: prevention, digitisation, and integrated community-based care. These are, in principle, the right pillars for reform. Many of us have argued for them in books, speeches and policy papers. But let's be honest... these are vast, complicated ambitions. Delivering them will take prioritisation, discipline, and a decade of relentless focus. It's a question of what, when, who, where, how, and, crucially, how much.

If I was to write to *The Times*, I'd ask some straightforward questions.

**First**, what do the other political parties make of this? Reform, Conservatives, LibDems, Greens.

What would they do differently?

Do they share these priorities? And, in an election season, what are they prepared to commit to now, not some vague promise for later?

**Next**, what role for local and regional government, and the vital third sector?

Councils, mayors, charities, and voluntary groups are on the frontline of "communityship". That delicate art of making change happen at a street-by-street level.

Are they equipped, willing, and resourced to drive this shift? Where would they start: neighbourhood wellness hubs, digital health outreach,

or tackling the social determinants of poor health? And what freedoms and funding do they need to get going?

**Then, of course**, there's the question of money. Can we be brave enough to propose a long-term, hypothecated Government Bond to fund the infrastructure, digital



...what will success look like?

upgrades, and workforce investment needed?

Could our vast pension funds, seeking steady, long-term returns, take a stake, earning, say, 4% over 20 years?

And, can the Treasury face down its instinctive aversion to ring-fencing debt, recognising that this is about investing in societal resilience, not simply spending?

Where do you start?

Digitisation is arguably the easiest first step. Britain has embraced the digital world in banking, retail, and entertainment; health and care must catch up.

But it must be inclusive: the digitally deprived cannot be left behind.

Prevention, meanwhile, is not a single department's responsibility.

It demands whole-of-government focus.

Wellness isn't a health department project; it's an economic, social, and cultural mission.

Are we aligned across Whitehall and beyond?

Will we see week-in, week-out prioritisation from Cabinet ministers, benign legislation to clear the way, public education to win support, and collaborative leadership to keep the show on the road?

And what will success look like? In one year, it's credible

local plans and real, early-stage digital improvements. In three years, measurable reductions in preventable illness and a healthier, more engaged local leadership.

In five years, a health and care system that is more accessible, more sustainable, and focused on keeping people well, not simply patching them up when they fall ill.

The plan is right in principle.

But the execution?

**That's the hard part. And the time to start is now.**

---