

## Theresa May commits the NHS to listening to local people

At PM's Question Time on 7 Sept 2016, a Conservative backbench MP drew from the Prime Minister the clearest commitment yet that local NHS Sustainability & Transformation plans (STPs) will take account of local people's views. Whether this necessarily means a traditional-style set-piece public consultation remains to be seen, but anything short of this will lead many Parliamentarians to claim that the PM would have gone back on her word.

In truth, NHS England and the other agencies involved in STPs have always claimed that the process will involve public and patients, but opponents of plans have been arguing that they have seen precious little engagement so far.

Here is the text of the relevant exchange in the House of Commons on 7 September 2016:

### **Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con)**

Q9. *"Will the Prime Minister assure me that the sustainability and transformation plans for Bedfordshire and elsewhere, to be released by NHS England, will be subject to proper local accountability and full local decision authority?"*

### **The Prime Minister**

*"It is absolutely the point of these plans that they are locally driven. They will be considered locally and should be taking into account the concerns and interests locally, not just those of the clinical commissioning groups, but those of the local authorities and of the public. These plans must be driven from the locality, so I give my hon. Friend that assurance."*

### **Where next?**

NHS England will publish some helpful Guidance very shortly, and at the Consultation Institute we expect to assist some of the 44 Footprint areas to quality assure their engagement processes. Surely one of the major challenges is that if, as is intended the STP discussions involve the many relevant organisations in the 'footprint' areas (CCGs, Hospital Trusts, Local Authorities etc.) they inherit a range of public engagement processes and commitments which will be hard to accommodate. Many Councils have well-established mechanisms of what Richard Fuller called "*local accountability*". They will be most unlikely to forego this, just because the NHS is, right now, in a big hurry to agree these plans as soon as possible.

Hopefully, the Prime Minister's words will clarify the commitment and remind senior NHS Managers and others that cutting corners on the public engagement and consultation will certainly lead to political trouble.

The subject of STPs will be discussed at the Institute's [Health Special Interest Group](#) in Birmingham on 27 September (free to members – but places limited) and in our [Managing Significant Change in Health & Social Care](#) masterclass on 15 November in York.

