

People are lying in hospital corridors and Theresa May doesn't care

Today The Times has reported that within two years, more than five million people could be waiting for NHS treatment. The paper obtained this information from confidential documents.

I am personally appalled by this prediction, but sadly not surprised. This disgraceful situation is further evidence that the NHS is facing impossible challenges as a direct result of Tory stewardship.

Those with little money must suffer the inadequacies' of our health system: people are lying on trollies in hospital corridors and Theresa May doesn't care.

Those with a lot of money will pay to go private, and who can blame them?

The result is a disastrously unequal two-tier system, based not on people's level of need, but on their ability to pay.

Only the Liberal Democrats can steer the NHS onto a fairer course. Only we are prepared to make the bold decisions that will protect our NHS forever.

Liberal Democrats hit highest ever membership on eve of local elections

The Liberal Democrats have hit their highest ever number of members, eclipsing the high watermark of 101,768 set in 1994.

The landmark comes as Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron heads to Oxford to rally activists for the party's final push of the local election campaign.

More than 14,000 new members have joined the Liberal Democrats in the two weeks since the General Election was called. More than 50,000 members have joined since last year's European referendum and nearly 70,000 since the 2015 General Election.

Tim Farron pledged to build the party to 100,000 members by the end of the parliament as a key pledge during his 2015 leadership campaign – but at that point everyone expected the end of the parliament to be 2020.

Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron said: "We are going into these local elections bigger than ever before, with a clear message and a growing sense of momentum."

[Join the Liberal Democrats](#)

“In many of the counties where these elections are taking place it is the Liberal Democrats who are the main challengers to the Conservatives. Liberal Democrat councillors are the strong opposition to the Conservatives across the country, standing up to them on cuts to schools and elderly care.

“You don’t need to agree with us on everything to agree that Britain needs a strong opposition to fight for you and your communities against Tory cuts to our schools, our NHS and our social care services. In county halls just as in Westminster, Liberal Democrats are that strong opposition that Britain needs.”

[Brexit should be a democracy – Nick Clegg’s speech outlining our position on Britain and the EU](#)

Nick began by setting out his key points...

My argument today is simple: our country cannot thrive without a strong economy.

And a strong economy is incompatible with a hard Brexit.

The pound has been falling since the prospect of the referendum was announced in mid-2015, and with average earnings growth set to stall later this year, consumers are inevitably going to feel the Brexit squeeze.

When prices go up and wages do not, millions of people are going to be poorer.

A lot poorer.

The average household is likely to be £500 worse off in 2017 compared to 2016 – and that’s before the Brexit negotiations have even started in earnest.

...and explaining the impact of Brexit on our public services...

Over a five-year period, Brexit will have dented the public finances by £59bn.

Money that could have been used to cut waiting times in A&E, keep beds open, and pay for vital medicines.

Money that could have been used to ease the intense pressure on local care services for our ageing population.

Money that could have been used to stop the shameful cuts to school budgets.

The government has effectively maxed out its credit card on Brexit.

Leaving you to pick up the cost.

Nick went on to describe how Brexit could affect our businesses...

The Brexit squeeze is already being felt in the world of business, through higher import prices, a shortage of EU workers, and reduced investment.

Some companies that rely on imported ingredients are already trying to disguise the impacts through creative repackaging, as we've seen with the reduced chocolate in Toblerone.

Others are struggling to find staff: the food and drink industry is more reliant on EU workers than any other sector in the UK. Around 29% of our food and drink manufacturing workforce are EU nationals.

The fall in the value of the pound is already causing some EU workers to consider leaving the UK, as their wages are now worth significantly less back home.

In some cases jobs have already been lost, including 300 in Newcastle and York, following Nestle's decision to move production to Poland.

So the immediate impacts of the referendum have been much worse than the Conservatives want you to think.

...then turned his attention to Brexit's long-term impacts...

Make no mistake: our economic future is hanging in the balance.

Theresa May could have chosen to remain in the Single Market, as have three other EU countries: Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

She could have chosen to be in the Customs Union. One non-EU country, Turkey, has done so.

She could have tried to persuade the EU to reform the free movement rules to re-focus them on work, instead of giving up without a fight.

Instead, she shunned all of these, elevating immigration over the long-term needs of millions of hard pressed families.

...and the Tories' specious justifications...

This can only be understood as a political decision based on the pressures from the Conservatives' right wing and the Brexit press.

But the Brexit squeeze won't be felt by the Prime Minister and her supporters

in the right-wing media; it will be paid for by ordinary people out of their wages, by sick people needing treatment on the NHS, by elderly people needing care, and by children who won't receive the education they deserve.

At this election, the Liberal Democrats are the only major national party that is sounding the alarm against hard Brexit.

...Nick also outlined two Lib Dem manifesto commitments...

Labour's disastrous failure to do the most basic job of an opposition party: holding the government to account, has given the Conservatives a clear run at their extreme version of Brexit.

We will do what Labour have failed to do, and hold the Conservatives' feet to the fire.

Today, we make a commitment to do two things:

First: to fight to secure terms which retain as many of the benefits of EU membership as possible.

Second, to secure a referendum on the final agreement, so that the people can decide the future for the country.

That referendum will offer two choices; accept the deal, or remain in the EU.

Liberal Democrats will campaign for a remain vote.

And reflected on the dishonesties of the Conservative Brexit campaign...

Hard Brexit is the latest in a series of con tricks.

The Conservatives were tricking you when they said there would be £350m a week for the NHS.

They're tricking you by pretending there's no Brexit squeeze.

And they're tricking you when they claim they can secure a deal with the exact same benefits as EU membership.

This trickery is the personal responsibility of Theresa May.

She deserves remorseless, unforgiving scrutiny for the decisions she is seeking to impose upon the country.

... Before launching into his closing statement...

By choosing to be careless with your future, the Conservatives have placed party before country, themselves before all else, politics before the nation.

Don't let the Conservatives get away with making this happen.

Don't let Labour get away with letting this happen.

Britain needs an effective opposition to hard Brexit.

That is why I urge you to vote for a real opposition – the Liberal Democrats.

[Liberal Democrats commit to ending rough sleeping in Britain](#)

The Liberal Democrats have committed to ending the scandal of rough sleeping in Britain, as the Homelessness Reduction Bill enters into force today.

Following a campaign visit to the Hundred Houses Society, a charitable housing association in Cambridge, Tim Farron announced a series of measures the party would put in place to help end rough sleeping.

These include introducing a Housing First provider in each local authority, to put long-term homeless people straight into independent homes rather than emergency shelters. Other policies include increasing funding for local councils for homelessness prevention, reinstating housing benefit for under-21s and reversing planned cuts to Local Housing Allowance rates.

The number of people sleeping rough rose to 4,134 in 2016, up 16% on the previous year. The Government has estimated that homelessness costs the state up to £1 billion a year.

The news comes as a coalition of charities, including Centrepoint, Crisis, Homeless Link, Shelter and St Mungo's, have called on political parties to commit to end rough sleeping in Britain.

Liberal Democrat Leader Tim Farron said: "It is a national scandal that so many people are sleeping on the streets in 21st century Britain.

"By increasing support for homelessness prevention and properly funding emergency accommodation, we can end rough sleeping across the country.

"We will also ensure each local authority has at least one provider of Housing First services, to allow long-term homeless people to live independently in their own homes.

"The evidence suggests that supporting people and giving them long-term, stable places to stay is far more successful in tackling homelessness than constantly moving them to different temporary accommodation.

"Under this government, homelessness has soared and the stripping of young people of housing benefit threatens to make matters even worse.

"This election is a chance to change the direction of this country and stand up for a Britain that is open, tolerant and united."

Benefit cuts and Brexit squeeze to leave 3 million families £2,500 worse off

Planned benefit cuts by the Conservative government combined with soaring inflation will leave nearly 3 million working households an average of £2,500 a year worse off, according to analysis by the Institute of Fiscal Studies.

Low inflation over the last two years has meant the government's freeze on most working-age benefits has only amounted to a 1% real cut so far.

But rising inflation from the falling pound is now set to reduce the value of these benefits by 5% between now and 2020, with total cuts of over £5 billion a year in the long run.

Liberal Democrat Shadow Chancellor Susan Kramer commented: "Theresa May's plans for a divisive Hard Brexit and savage cuts to benefits will leave millions of working families worse off.

"Three million households will be hit to the tune of £2,500 a year as a result of cuts to tax credits, rising prices and the falling pound.

"The Brexit squeeze will hit people in the pocket across the country, with the poorest families hit hardest.

"This election is a chance to change Britain's future and stop a disastrous hard Brexit that will leave us all poorer.

"Every Liberal Democrat MP elected is a challenge to Theresa May's Hard Brexit agenda."