

NHS 10-Year Plan: The Corporate Capture Continues

Private equity investment in Europe's primary care sector - A call for research and policy action

There are many aspects of the NHS 10-Year Plan (The NHS10YP) to consider. Here, we will focus on the capital investment needed in primary and community care- and the NHS10YP proposal to adopt a "Public Private Partnership" (PPP) approach to provide infrastructure for primary care. We draw on work we have done in the SHA regarding NHS structure and privatisation, and primary care services.

The real economy

According to the post-WWII political philosophy of the welfare state, it is the Government's job to ensure that people have the essential public services they need, including housing, health and social care, education, water, energy and a transport infrastructure.

Whereas the private businesses formerly in charge of these areas were limited in their social role by their need to make profit, the Government's actual limits are set only by its own goals, by the real resources available in the economy - the labour, skills, energy and materials it can bring to use - and by managing any inflationary pressures that might arise should spending exceed those real capacities.

The Treasury rules that constrain us

Rooted in the anti-welfare state philosophy that shaped governments from the mid-1970s, associated with Margaret Thatcher, the 2024 fiscal rules include the investment rule - "to reduce public debt" - defined as public sector net financial liabilities (PSNFL) as a share of the economy. This is why public sector capital investment is constrained as it is - despite the clear need for infrastructure investment. Spending on public sector capital formation less depreciation (net fixed capital formation) is presently only 1% - whereas overall capital investment in the economy is 15-20% of GDP.

The Government debt target (PSNFL) is a political choice and self-imposed. It can and should be challenged.

If we have the real resources to build infrastructure, we don't need private capital to do it. In fact, we can do what private capital cannot.

10-Year Infrastructure Strategy June 2025

In June 2025 the Government published its 10-year Infrastructure Strategy. This announced plans to sign more partnerships with the private sector for the delivery of UK public services - including health and education - despite the criticism and failure of the Blair Government PFI schemes. In the strategy it says it wants to "evolve our infrastructure finance models and will consider the use of Public Private Partnerships (PPP) in projects and sectors where there is a revenue stream, *appropriate risk-transfer can be achieved*, and value for money for taxpayers can be secured." (our emphasis).

In line with this intention, the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA) have published a preliminary market engagement notice for what they call "Project Wings" and which concerns "certain types of primary and community health infrastructure projects." The total value of the project is estimated at £1.2bn (including VAT), running for 30 years from June 2027. Investors have been invited to design, build and manage up to 200 neighbourhood health centres (NHCs), with contracts for between 25 and 30 years. It is expected that a final decision on the approach will be announced in the Autumn Budget on 26th November.

The Return of PPP/PFI

The 10-year Infrastructure strategy underpins the investment plans in the NHS10YP and the return to PPP.

The context to this is that (from the Infrastructure Strategy): "Capital investment in the NHS has lagged international peers for over a decade, with the UK sitting amongst the lowest in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicators for capital investment. This has led to a c.£37 billion infrastructure gap, highlighted by the Darzi Report, which has left the NHS with outdated, inefficient, and ill-suited infrastructure."

Despite the very low number of hospital beds in the UK across the OECD (see chart below), shifting patient care out of hospitals and into the community remains one of three core themes of the 10-year health plan.

(Financial Times, 24th November 2025)
