

Statement to Cabinet, 26 May 2022 Cllr Dr Eleanor Jackson.

Thank you, Cabinet. I should point out that I am not a medical doctor, but I am qualified to teach ethics at university level, and, I would like to think, something of an expert on matters of conscience and faith. You may believe that councillors' statements need vetting because those who disagree with you are, according to the quotation in the Bath Chronicle, 'all liars', but I would request that you listen with an open mind and grant that our residents deserve a health and social care service which is efficient, cost effective and humane. It should also be open to scrutiny by all the democratically elected representatives of our community.

I believe I speak for our residents when I say that the situation with regard to the S.W. Ambulance service is intolerable. Last month, on 25 April, I counted 15 ambulances lined up outside A and E at the RUH, and a resident contacted me about her husband's six hour wait in an ambulance to be admitted even though he could not speak and appeared to have had a stroke. The situation is blamed on the 111 service sending ambulances where they are not necessary, and the lack of GP home visits so people present at A and E unnecessarily, but from what my residents tell me, it is due to lack of beds caused by so called 'bed blocking', long delays in getting home assessments (one resident of mine, a retired hospital matron, discharged herself in exasperation at the waiting) and inadequate 'care in the community'. This was the case in 2015, when I was on the health scrutiny panel. It has simply got worse, with cost-cutting disguised as 'efficiencies'. Virgin failed – and its much-vaunted IT system in 2017 left RUH staff unpaid and penniless for months. At that point the contract should have been cancelled, so we would not be in the position we are now.

When council debated the original contract, I pointed out its business plan was hopeless. Holding prices for seven years was impossible – and we were not aware of the mayhem covid-19 and Brexit (with the return home of so many key workers) would cause. I also questioned the 'not for profit' lollipop Virgin offered the council. Christian ethics tell me that such beneficence is a delusion. I find it deeply offensive that a hedge fund (in fact there are many) should be making money out of people's health needs. Today we have a damning report about outsourced Children's Services. Can you, Cabinet, not learn from these situations?

I do not believe that an inefficient outfit, whoever owns it, should be rewarded by an extension of contract. Bath and North East Somerset Council's residents deserve the best, and throwing good money after bad is simply wasting taxpayers' money, which in times like these especially, the council should not be doing.

Everyone has a right to humane and respectful treatment, I myself attended twice outsourced clinics where the person I encountered simply had a list of questions she had to verify I had been asked – and I received no information whatsoever which was not available at a GP surgery, and the person involved could not answer my questions.

So, I would follow Cllr Moss in arguing that the options as presented are unethical. The best option would be to bring everything back 'in house', consult residents on what sort of services they want to see, and save approximately 30% of costs which represent private providers' profits.