

If Dr Sarah Wollaston loses the Health Select Committee chair, we may lose a Parliamentary champion of consultation

February 22, 2019 by Rhion Jones

It is probably too early to tell if Government whips will try to remove Tory defector, Sarah Wollaston from being chair of the Health and Social Care Select Committee. She is also chair of the powerful Liaison Committee. Becoming one of the Independent MPs will not necessarily lower her profile but may of course diminish her influence on Government.

Over the years she has been one of Parliament's most effective champions of public consultation, being especially vocal about the need for the NHS to engage better with the public over major service re-configurations. Indeed, when the ineptly-labelled *Sustainability and Transformation Plans* (STPs) emerged in 2016, she was among those who argued that they should have been subject to consultation. We particularly liked her quote "*We should not see genuine local consultation and engagement as an inconvenience but as something that improves the eventual plans.*"

Previously she had been a critic of consultations about closing community hospitals, and, as a GP herself, carried some weight in her analysis. She argued that the NHS was prone only to reveal partial information to the public, and once spoke in the House of Commons about the need for more honesty in consultation documents. To the extent that NHS consultations have improved in recent years, she can take credit for having consistently reminded Simon Stevens in NHS England and his Ministerial bosses of the need to take public engagement seriously.

Generally speaking, too few Select Committees have paid sufficient attention to public consultation, so we hope Dr Wollaston retains her role. One of their most important Inquiries at the moment is on the **NHS long-term plan for England** which forecasts dramatic changes in service delivery in the coming years. Whilst much of the debate right now is about money, those areas where rationalisation of hospitals or other access-related issues become controversial will soon be launching public consultations.

We need Parliamentarians to keep the focus on the rights of NHS patients and those who represent them to have their say, and to defend those rights at all times.

Judges are very willing to intervene if they think the NHS rides roughshod over *consultee* rights; a good example was the case of *Buckingham V Corby CCG* last year. But it should not be necessary for campaigners to go to Court to demand a proper public consultation. That's why we need prominent politicians to bang the drum for more effective dialogue over public services and much else.

https://www.consultationinstitute.org/if-dr-sarah-wollaston-loses-the-health-select-committee-chair-we-may-lose-a-parliamentary-champion-of-consultation/?_cldee=cnV0aEBteWZvcnQua2Fyb28uY28udWs%3d&recipientid=contact-86494c52816ce61180f15065f38b2531-1fc1899b6780454db950c98b2531df3e&esid=0b405eb9-ad36-e911-a96a-000d3ab426fc