

Simon Stevens: Could he keep his job under a Labour government?



When Simon Stevens was appointed head of the NHS in 2013, he sparked a row on his first day in the job by identifying private healthcare firms as key players in the service's battle for survival.

Unions representing NHS staff reacted angrily after Simon Stevens highlighted "[the innovation value of new providers](#)" in the provision of health services. He said failure to appreciate that value was one of a number of issues the NHS collectively had got wrong.

Little over a year later, the *Financial Times* [reported](#) that 'private sector groups have won a third of the contracts to provide NHS clinical services awarded in England since the coalition's health service shake-up last year'.

His second big aim was to cut costs, to force NHS hospitals to make £22 billion efficiency savings. His cuts to the NHS were so severe that even Andrew Lansley, the Conservative health secretary before Jeremy Hunt, [warned](#) that Stevens's cuts would take the NHS 'back in time'.

Then the Tories lost their majority in the recent election and Labour began its surge in the polls. In September, the Labour Party conference [voted](#) to reject 'the Tories Sustainability & Transformation Plans as vehicles for cuts in services'.

With the Tory government on its last legs and a radical Corbyn government in the offing, Simon Stevens has been talking less about efficiency savings and more about greater spending. At a conference in Birmingham in November, he was in full spending mode, [reminding the government](#) that: “The NHS wasn’t on the ballot paper, but it was on the battle bus. Vote Leave for a better funded health service – £350m a week.”

May responded to Stevens's tilt towards Labour by making him the fall guy if there's a crisis in the NHS this winter. According to the *Guardian*, “The prime minister made it very clear that Simon Stevens [was personally responsible](#) for and accountable for the NHS’s performance this winter.”

So Stevens has signalled his distance from Tory cuts he has championed since 2013. It remains to be seen if he will keep his job under a Labour government.